

MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN, CIVIC VIRTUE AND IDENTITY:  
LEEDS AND THE WEST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE,  
*c. 1830 - c. 1860*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses women's contribution to the development of a progressive middle-class identity in the period 1830 to 1860. Using Leeds as a case study, it argues that the ideals of civic virtue, service and the 'civilising mission' lying at the heart of this identity played an important role in the lives of women as well as men. The study begins by summarising the historiographical debates over women and the middle class, and the importance of gender in the construction of the 'public sphere'. Chapter Two sets out the historical background within the town of Leeds itself, concentrating on the emergence of 'middle-class' institutions and identifying the particular groups who were the driving force behind them. The remaining chapters systematically explore the activities of middle-class women in the public life of their town, concentrating on the subjects of education, philanthropy, politics and civic culture. Chapter Three looks at the idealisation of women's social and public roles in educational literature, before considering women's relationship to educational and cultural institutions. Chapters Four and Five reconsider philanthropy as an arena in which class and gender identities were constructed and played out, and through which civic-minded women could find an outlet for reforming impulses. In particular, chapter five analyses the importance of women's committees in the creation of independent space for female initiatives, despite male attempts at containment. Chapter Six examines women's activities in local and national politics, analysing the key role of the press in the interpretation of female political activities. Chapter Seven looks at the way in which elite women were able to claim public space as part of the audience at public rituals and ceremonies, returning to the importance of press explanations of this participation through the use of chivalric metaphors which portrayed women as the guardians of civic virtue.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>BFASS:</b>	<b>British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.</b>
<b>BFTS:</b>	<b>British and Foreign Temperance Society.</b>
<b>BLSC:</b>	<b>Brotherton Library Special Collections.</b>
<b>WRUMI:</b>	<b>West Riding Union of Mechanics' Institutes.</b>
<b>WYAS:</b>	<b>West Yorkshire Archive Service.</b>
<b>YUMI:</b>	<b>Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes.</b>

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction: Class, Women and the 'Public Sphere'

The domain of woman is the horizon where heaven and earth meet - a sort of land debatable between the confines where positive institutions end and intellectual supremacy begins.<sup>1</sup>

The social position of women in the mid-nineteenth century was surrounded by ambiguity and uncertainty; an ambivalence increasingly acknowledged by historians brought up on the certainties of the Victorian 'Angel in the House'. This thesis contributes to the ongoing re-evaluation of the identities and opportunities available to respectable middle-class women in the period preceding the emergence of a feminist political movement from the late 1850s onwards.

Among those calling for such a re-appraisal has been the historian Linda Colley. Colley has argued that women as well as men were affected by the emergence of a 'British' national identity over the period 1750-1850, based around loyalty to Parliament and the monarchy.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the same factors which encouraged the development of 'Britishness', notably the intermittent yet sustained conflict with France, gave women unprecedented opportunities to demonstrate their loyalty to the British state and its institutions. For instance, during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, women proved their patriotism by presenting flags and banners to militia groups, or by donating clothes to regiments of the line. In Colley's opinion:

By extending their solicitude to the nation's armed forces, men who were not in the main related to them by blood or marriage, women demonstrated that their domestic virtues possessed a public as well as a private relevance.

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<sup>1</sup> J. G. Phillimore, 'Woman's Rights and Duties', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 54 (1843), 373-97, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), esp. chapter 6. Colley's book has encouraged a growing literature on the question of national identity in the British Isles, especially the extent to which an overarching 'British' identity merely overlay a confused and conflicting multiplicity of alternative identifications. See L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (eds.), *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles 1750-1850* (Manchester University Press, 1997); A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (eds.), *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth Century Britain: Integration and Diversity* (Oxford University Press, 1988).



Consciously or not, these female patriots were staking out a civic role for themselves.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis builds on Colley's insights by developing the idea of a 'civic role' for women, concentrating on women of the urban middle classes. In particular, it examines the extent to which women participated in the development and expression of middle-class identity in a local context. It argues that although contemporary ideologies of gender effectively justified the exclusion of women from full citizenship on grounds such as lack of financial and emotional independence or inferiority of intellect, women contributed in substantial ways to associations and projects that historians have seen as key to the construction of middle-class identity during the period. Moreover, they also developed their own institutions and methods of organisation, laying the foundations for the organised feminism of the latter half of the century based around issues of education, employment opportunities and political rights. The main aim of this project is to assess how far these activities enabled women to develop identities centred around civic virtue and public service, despite the increasingly strident articulation of a domestic ideology which theoretically limited their activities to a domestic sphere.

The study explores the civic and urban aspects of middle-class identity, focussing on Leeds and the West Riding of Yorkshire. The nineteenth-century middle class was an overwhelmingly urban phenomenon, whose identities were constructed and played out through urban spaces and institutions. Actual and imaginative interaction with the wider life of the nation or the state usually occurred through local or regional associations. With the notable exceptions of the Poor Law authorities and the Methodist church, local institutions were centred on the town as the basic administrative unit. Even when the nation became a dominant focus, during times of national peril or triumph for instance, or when politics was dominated by a single divisive issue such as the Reform Act, the basis of popular mobilisation remained the town or county. The pattern of religious, political, social and economic networks within urban centres impinged more tangibly on daily life than the 'imagined community' of the nation. Provincial towns were also gaining greater national importance from the late eighteenth century onwards. Economic change, urbanisation and the reforms of local and national government all contributed to this process, as did the increasing importance of extra-parliamentary politics in the first half of the nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp. 260-1.

century, a phenomenon linked increasingly with the provinces in general and urban centres in particular.<sup>4</sup> Finally, it has been convincingly argued that the creation of the town as a social entity was in itself very much a middle-class project.<sup>5</sup> Along with many men, women were therefore more likely to have developed and expressed civic identities at a local than on a national level. This is especially true given the relatively restricted opportunities available to most women for making national contacts through business, education and politics.

The period chosen in which to explore women's civic roles and identities stretches from the reform agitation to the end of the 1850s. During this period, urban and class identities were heavily contested and, in many senses, reinvented. By 1860, a decade of relative social calm had seen Victorian civic pride approach its zenith, while the emergence of a national women's politics, centred around the campaigns for suffrage and education reform, called for a recasting of the debate over female citizenship and identity. It therefore makes sense to study women's contributions to these contests and changes, in order to establish the extent to which women played a positive and visible role in the 'making' of the nineteenth-century urban middle class.

The following introduction is split into four parts. The first three position the thesis in relation to a number of important and overlapping historical debates: in particular those regarding the existence, nature and origins of a nineteenth-century 'middle class'; the controversies over the conceptual categories of women's history as they have been applied to middle-class women in this period (especially the 'separate spheres' debate); and finally the debate around the 'public sphere', especially with regard to Jürgen Habermas' formulation of the 'bourgeois public sphere'.<sup>6</sup> A final section describes the sources and

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<sup>4</sup> Donald Read, *The English Provinces, c. 1760-1960: A Study in Influence* (London: Edward Arnold, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> R. J. Morris, 'The Middle Class and British Towns and Cities of the Industrial Revolution, 1780-1870', in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 286-306.

<sup>6</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989). A useful summary of Habermas' argument may be found in the introduction to Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), 1-48.

methods used in order to explore these themes.

### 1.1: The 'Middle Class'.

Most historians would agree that the mere existence of a group sharing a similar economic basis is not enough to constitute a 'class' in any historically meaningful sense. Instead, to form a useful analytical category that class must evince some signs of a 'class consciousness'.<sup>7</sup> According to the Marxist paradigm, rapid industrialisation gave rise to two great and antagonistic classes in England, the capitalist bourgeoisie and the industrial proletariat. However, the historical significance of these groups resulted from their perception of themselves as distinct groups, whose identities sprang from conflicts with other social classes over control of the state and the means of production. Hence the bourgeoisie gained its identity from conflict with a landed aristocracy, while the proletariat forged theirs through conflict with the bourgeoisie.

The most sophisticated articulation of the Marxist perspective was provided by Edward Thompson in his seminal masterpiece *The Making of the English Working Class*.<sup>8</sup> In this account, the crucial force behind working class resistance was not the factory hand, but the struggling artisan whose status and way of life was threatened by the rise of factory production. Thompson rescued the Marxist paradigm from accusations of economic determinism by returning to Marx's emphasis on the role of *experience* in the formation of identity. According to Thompson, 'The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born - or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms'.<sup>9</sup> In the English case, the crucial shared experiences were those of exploitation and downward social mobility resulting from the

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., 'Class is a valid theoretical concept only where there is evidence of a sense of class consciousness, and an indication that because of this consciousness the class is engaged in activity that promotes its collective interests'. Stana Nenadic, 'The Rise of the Urban Middle Class', in T. M. Devine and R. Mitchison (eds.), *People and Society in Scotland, vol. 1: 1760-1830* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 109-126, pp. 110-111.

<sup>8</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

advance of industrial capitalism. However, the type of class consciousness which emerged from these experiences was shaped by specific cultural and political traditions, ensuring the historical specificity of class formation. For example, Thompson brought out the importance of radical political traditions and eighteenth-century ideals, such as the 'moral economy' and the 'freeborn Englishman', in the formation of English working class identity in the nineteenth century.

However, Marxist accounts of class formation have been placed under increasing pressure in the decades since Thompson wrote this work. The scale and speed of industrial transformation have been questioned, with the emphasis now on the slow and uneven growth of industry.<sup>10</sup> With this has come a new appreciation of occupational diversity within the two industrial 'classes', implying that common workplace experiences may have been a less important factor in the emergence of class identity than originally thought.<sup>11</sup> As a corollary to this, assumptions about the nature and extent of 'class-conflict', especially in the workplace, have also undergone extensive revision.

Vitriolic debates have raged over the amount of conflict there actually was between the factory owners and the operative classes, largely sparked by Patrick Joyce's claim that labour relations continued to be shaped by traditional forms of paternalism and deference.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Raphael Samuel has demonstrated the persistence of older forms of industrial organisation, particularly workshops and outworking, right through to the twentieth century. Raphael Samuel, 'The Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, III, Spring (1977), 6-72. Recently, attempts have been made to reintroduce a model of sudden change by isolating the output figures for particularly dynamic sectors in the economy, with the implication that certain portions of the workforce did undergo a revolutionary experience. See for example Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> See Nenadic, 'The Rise of the Urban Middle Class'. Nenadic demonstrates the relative insignificance of large scale industrialists, both socially and economically. Instead, she identifies four main bourgeois occupational groups based around source of income. For the difficulties posed by the kinds of sources Nenadic uses, see John Seed, 'From "Middling Sort" to Middle Class in Late Eighteenth-Century and Early Nineteenth-Century England', in M. L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe Since 1500* (London: Longman, 1992), 114-35.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Work Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980). For some of the responses to Joyce's work see H. I. Dutton and J. E. King, 'The Limits of

The relationship between the middle classes and the aristocracy has proved to be even more complex. In fact, the absence of open middle-class conflict with the aristocracy from the fifth decade of the nineteenth century onwards, has led to much ink being spilt on the idea of the 'failure' of the middle class to pursue the initiatives won in the previous two decades by asserting its primacy at the heart of the state.<sup>13</sup> Various arguments have been put forward to explain this state of affairs. These range from the analysis of religious and economic differences within the class, which prevented effective mobilisation in opposition to the state, to the argument that the successful achievement of bourgeois hegemony forced the aristocratic political parties to reorientate themselves around platforms broadly encompassing middle-class ideals. This meant that the middle classes could be absorbed into the existing party system, without having to develop a distinct politics of their own.<sup>14</sup> However, both explanations assume the existence of significant divides *within* the middle class, whether religious, party-political or economic, rather than focussing on class solidarity in pursuit of widely shared class aims in the political sphere. For example, Derek Fraser has described the shattering of the liberal free-trade consensus in Leeds during the 1848 West Riding election as a result of the bitter sectarian divisions caused by the debate over voluntary education.<sup>15</sup> This is not to imply that it is no longer possible to write histories of class formation in which conflict plays a role in creating cohesion. However, it is useful to bear in mind Peter Stearns' points that the concept remains useful only if one is conscious

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Paternalism: The Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-54', *Social History*, 7, 1 (1982), 59-74; Michael Huberman, 'The Economic Origins of Paternalism: Lancashire Cotton Spinning in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *Social History*, 12, 2 (1987), 177-92; Alice Russel 'Local Elites and the Working-Class Response in the North-West, 1870-1895: Paternalism and Deference Reconsidered', *Northern History*, 23 (1987), 153-73.

<sup>13</sup> See Simon Gunn, 'The "Failure" of the Victorian Middle Class: A Critique' in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 17-43.

<sup>14</sup> For example J. Garrard, 'The Middle Classes and Nineteenth-Century National and Local Politics' in J. Garrard *et al*, *The Middle Class in Politics* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1978), 35-66.

<sup>15</sup> Derek Fraser, 'Voluntaryism and West Riding Politics in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Northern History*, 13 (1977), 199-231.

that not all sections of a class may have been in conflict all of the time, or even at all.<sup>16</sup>

In response to these apparent threats to the usefulness of class as an analytical category, a large body of scholarship has appeared which concentrates not so much on the things which divided the middle classes from the workers or the aristocracy, as what united such an economically, religiously and politically disparate group. The mainstay of this approach is one which Stearns recommended in the 1970s: the concentration on culture, values, and institutions. The recent emphasis on cultural history has in some ways added fuel to the critiques of the categories and chronology of class formation, sparked by the de-centring of industrial revolution as the midwife of class and of open conflict as its primary expression. Chronologically, evidence of a dynamic middle-class culture has been discovered by historians of the eighteenth century, fuelled by commerce and the growth of the state, which played a role in the emergence of professional and bureaucratic groups.<sup>17</sup> More seriously, attempts to locate class structurally, as a consequence of economic conflict, or culturally in the cultural forms and expressions of particular groups, have been challenged by historians who call into question the very nature of 'experience' itself.

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<sup>16</sup> P. Stearns, 'The Middle Class: Towards a Precise Definition', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21 (1979), 377-96, pp. 380-382. For example, Koditscheck's book on class formation in Bradford still has a key place for the conflict between the 'new' middle class of manufacturers and the old oligarchy of Tory merchants, as well as for the necessity of dealing with a restless working class: Theodore Koditscheck, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: Class Formation in English Society, 1830-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford University Press, 1989), chapter 3; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* (London: Unwin, 1989). See also Jonathan Barry, 'The State and the Middle Classes in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 4, 1 (1991), 75-86. The debate on whether the eighteenth-century 'middling sorts' can best be understood in class terms has been reopened by the publication of Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550 - 1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994). See also Barry's critique of accounts which place the formation of a middle class firmly in the nineteenth century: J. Barry, 'The Making of the Middle Class?', review article, *Past and Present*, 145 (1994), 194-208. This work is supported by that of John Smail, who identifies a vibrant middle-class culture in eighteenth-century Halifax based around voluntary associations: John Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire, 1660-1780* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

While historians such as Thompson have understood cultural sites as arenas in which the experiences of economic change could be articulated, post-structuralists have argued that they were themselves spaces *constitutive* of experience.<sup>18</sup> Foremost amongst those who have challenged the primacy of experience in shaping identity have been Patrick Joyce and Dror Wahrman. Joyce claims that it is possible to present economic relationships in ‘countless ways, conditioned by culture and circumstance’, and not just as a relationship of conflict (i.e. of class). Similarly, simply because social constituencies express certain values, that does not make the values themselves ones of class - otherwise almost any cultural manifestation could be interpreted in class terms. He also attacks the idea, implicit in many definitions of consciousness, that certain identifiable ‘interests’ may be associated with class, and that the pursuit of these fostered a common identity. Instead, Joyce’s assertion that language is the primary determinant of identity goes hand in hand with an assumption that identity conditions the sense of what constitutes ‘interest’. The focus of his book is therefore on culture as accessed through language, rather than on a search for expressions of chimerical class ‘interests’, or for the location of class conflict. This account, he claims, emphasises the fact that class language and identities coexisted with broader identifications with entities such as ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’ - identifications which were more universal and inclusive than the socially exclusive connotations given to class by Marxist historians.<sup>19</sup>

Joyce’s reminder that not all cultural manifestations may be traced to class is salutary. It is clear that religious, regional, civic and national identities were also important, *pace* Colley’s work on the emergence of a British national identity transcending class.<sup>20</sup> Corollaries in the nineteenth-century town may be found in the attempts by elite groups to create an inclusive civic identity, displayed and forged on occasions such as the opening of Leeds Town Hall in 1858.<sup>21</sup> On this occasion, huge crowds lined the streets to welcome the

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<sup>18</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Colley, *Britons*.

<sup>21</sup> For an account of this ceremony see Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams, 1963), chapter 4.

Queen to the unveiling ceremony in a display of popular loyalty, civic and national pride.<sup>22</sup> However, as Joyce admits, in certain historical circumstances, ostensibly populist vocabularies could act as signifiers of class. For example, he accepts that references to the 'People' in the 1830s and 1840s essentially meant 'working-class people'.<sup>23</sup> Similar claims may also be plausibly made for middle-class rhetoric about the 'nation', when the nation was itself essentially identified with the middle classes. Moreover, although historians must be aware of the existence of more inclusive identities, these often masked inherent class divisions. Returning to the opening of Leeds Town Hall, the commonality were excluded from the greater part of the ceremonial, which took place inside the building with an elite audience composed overwhelmingly of middle-class men and women.

An alternative approach to the problem of class identity has come from Dror Wahrman, who attempts to answer the question of how the idea of a society centred around a self-conscious 'middle class' came to dominate contemporary descriptions of nineteenth century society and the analyses of subsequent historians. In his book *Imagining the Middle Class*, Wahrman charts the changing rhetorical use of the concept of the 'middle class', from the debates of the 1790s over the war with France to those over the Great Reform Act of 1832. However, in Wahrman's view, neither social experience nor language is sufficient to explain the emergence of class consciousness. His book is therefore in part a corrective to those who have simply put language in the place of experience as the primary determinant of identity. Instead, he contends that it is possible to recover the agency of individuals and the contingency of events by concentrating on the political arena, where individuals are forced to identify their position *vis a vis* opposing ideologies, often involving a choice between conflicting representations of social 'reality'.<sup>24</sup> Wahrman argues that such a choice, between a 'middle class'-centred or a 'middle class'-less view of society, confronted political actors in his chosen period, and charts the triumph of the former view over other possible representations of society in political rhetoric by 1832. These debates took place in what is described as 'the space between social reality and its representation'. This is a

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<sup>22</sup> The importance of civic culture in the formation of social and political identities has been addressed by James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 6-7.



space ignored by other accounts obsessed with the supposed 'failure' of the middle class to complete its seizure of power during the nineteenth century, or by the problems posed by the existence of similar 'middling' groups in pre-industrial society which lacked the politicised consciousness of their nineteenth-century counterparts. It was therefore the political process which provided a self-identity for the middling groups which had slowly been emerging in urban society since the early eighteenth century, although before 1832 it was by no means a foregone conclusion that those groups would come to define themselves in such a way.<sup>25</sup>

While these critiques provide interesting insights for the historian of identity, their failure to appreciate the material developments shaping urban life in the eighteenth and nineteenth century renders them fundamentally unsatisfying in relation to specific contexts. However, these problems are not insurmountable when approached at the level of a local study. John Smail's analysis of class in eighteenth-century Halifax combines the cultural and political emphases of Joyce and Warhman respectively, whilst still insisting on a concrete grounding in the actual social and economic changes which Warhman in particular underplays. Smail instead propounds a 'theory of practice', whereby class experience and consciousness result from the same process, by which a collectivity 'at once construes and constructs its socio-economic reality'. The class experience is therefore what emerges 'as a group *construes* their economic and social relations rather than as [a consequence of] the relations themselves'.<sup>26</sup> This analysis restores the importance of structural changes in the economies of towns such as Halifax in the emergence of distinctively 'middle-class' groups, as opposed to the 'middling sort' of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

At this point, it would be instructive to return to E. P. Thompson's warning that class should be conceived as a relationship, and not a thing.<sup>27</sup> Class therefore emerges in unique historical contexts, and class identity varies from place to place and over time. A 'middle-class' way of life may have emerged in the eighteenth century, and even have brought a sense of shared community and civic identity. This does not make the nineteenth-century middle class any less unique, though it does emphasise the responsibility of historians to exercise precision in their language and cautions against mono-causal explanations of the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. Introduction.

<sup>26</sup> Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 10.

rise of class which rely on a paradigm of rapid industrialisation. Moreover, explanations for the emergence of the particular identity of this class maintain a social and economic component. In particular, the rapid growth of urban centres was central, as the limitations of 'middling' status effectively restricted the geographical reach of individual influence and access to the society of the national elite. Bourgeois civil society, instrumental in the formation of the middle class's sense of its own importance, was only possible in the urban context, as it depended on easy access to cultural media and on the collective exercise of power through association. As Smail has pointed out, demographic change within towns, especially the increasing segregation of rich and poor districts, increased the middle-class sense of occupying a special place in urban society, whilst 'the advent of the consumer society and the centrality of gender divisions to the middle-class world view provided new ways of measuring social distance'.<sup>28</sup>

## 1.2: Women, Gender and Class.

Smail's use of the concept of gender in this context is suggestive of the impact of women's and gender history on the work of some (though not all) historians of the middle class in recent years. The general tenor of this work has been to point out the valuable work women did in reproducing middle-class values through the ordering of the household, the raising of children and the cementing of social support networks. In doing so, it has tended to emphasise the role of 'domestic ideology' in limiting the world of women to a private or domestic sphere, separate from the public sphere occupied by their husbands and fathers. The emergence of 'separate spheres' as a social reality in the lives of the middle classes, traced to a progressive separation of the home and the workplace during the eighteenth century, has been identified as a key part of middle-class identity.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture*, pp. 106-113.

<sup>29</sup> This approach forms the basis of the following works: Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1795-1865* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); Martha Vicinus (ed.), *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972). For a survey of the historiography of 'separate spheres' see Linda Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds. Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *Journal of American History*, 75, 1 (June 1988), 9-39. Reprinted in Linda Kerber,

However, historians of women have increasingly come to emphasise the inconsistencies and possibilities inherent in discourses of domesticity, and the way that women were able to exploit them in order to expand their role. This shift in emphasis is hinted at in the later work of Martha Vicinus, and is fully developed in Davidoff and Hall's classic study *Family Fortunes*.<sup>30</sup> Davidoff and Hall present a more nuanced account, arguing that the ideal of separate spheres often fell short of the reality, and that the boundaries between them were continually being tested and re-negotiated. In particular, they demonstrate that the public success of middle-class men was rooted in the private sphere, underpinned as it was by a network of familial and female support.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, they maintain the basic framework of the separate spheres by arguing that these divisions became more rigid across the period 1780 to 1850, due to a combination of economic change, the emergence of a middle-class 'public' and the influence of evangelical religion. These developments helped to strengthen the ideological and institutional foundations of the separation of the spheres, which Hall claims as 'one of the fundamental organizing characteristics of middle-class society in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England'.<sup>32</sup>

However, this confidence in the analytical power of the 'separate spheres' concept has come under scrutiny in the period since the publication of *Family Fortunes*. Dror Wahrman has attempted to deconstruct some of the basic assumptions behind the theory by questioning the essential nature of a link between the idea of a 'middle-class' and the ideology of domestic virtue.<sup>33</sup> His argument, drawing on Joyce's insight into the contingency of the connection between 'class' and 'values', is that this ideology only came

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*Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 159-99.

<sup>30</sup> Martha Vicinus (ed.), *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 - 1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Catherine Hall, 'Gender Divisions and Class Formation in the Birmingham Middle Class, 1780-1850', reprinted in C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle-class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 94-107, p. 106.

<sup>33</sup> Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, Chapter 11.

to be considered as quintessentially 'middle-class' after the Reform Bill of 1832 had purged that concept of its divisive party political overtones. Prior to this, the idea of middle-class domesticity had existed only within prescriptive literature, which tended to assume that the leisured existence of 'middle-class' women actually rendered them more susceptible to vice, rather than paragons of virtue. Instead, Wahrman claims that the monopoly of 'public' virtue which came to be associated with a 'middle-class' after 1832, led to a corresponding assumption of a monopoly over 'private' virtue.

Wahrman's account does not deny that there *was* a divide between the public and private along gender lines. However, it questions whether such a divide may be seen as a primary constituent of middle-class consciousness *before* the Reform Bill, in the same way that the term 'middle-class' was not perceived as descriptive of a widely recognised social group before this date. If we accept that the ideal of the purely domestic woman was closer to reality for middling groups from the late eighteenth century than for other classes of society, particularly those lower down the social scale, then this view does not necessarily compromise the importance of that divide for those historians attempting to trace the emergence of a 'middle-class' life-style during this period. It does, however, remind us of the basically artificial and heuristic nature of categories such as class, and that the lifestyle and values which are being traced are actually lifestyles which *came to be recognised* as essentially 'middle-class' only as the result of other, contingent, processes.

However, historians have recently begun to question the implicit assumptions behind the chronology of a separation of the spheres and the continued analytical usefulness of the concept *per se*, especially in the light of empirical research into women's activities outside the home. Amanda Vickery, for example, has criticised the grounding of the chronology for the disassociation of public and private in now discredited models of rapid and universal economic change. Furthermore, she contends that the argument of *Family Fortunes* rests on the assumption that women enjoyed a greater degree of freedom in the period before 1780, whereas the explosion in 'separate spheres' literature in the early nineteenth century could equally well have been a conservative reaction to a perceived *expansion* of women's activities in the public realm.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 383-401; also Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place'; Cf. Linda Colley's statement that 'those who argue that this period

Leonore Davidoff has responded positively to this criticism of her work by attempting to trace the historical construction of key ideas behind the assumption of a public and private divide.<sup>35</sup> Her argument is that a conception of the individual as a rational being emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, which became the core of an ideal of the independent 'citizen'. This rational individual was also inherently masculine, as only men were perceived to inhabit the disembodied realm of the intellect. Women, meanwhile, were too closely connected to the physical world as a result of their reproductive functions. Given that the rational individual was constructed as male, it quickly becomes apparent that the exclusion of women was central to the incarnation of the public, as women did not fulfill the criteria of rational and individual beings.<sup>36</sup> This is an intriguing and compelling argument. However, it fails to explain how women were able to gain access to the public sphere, or to address alternative ways in which they and others could interpret such experiences. The following section will consider women's relationship to the public sphere in more detail.

### 1.3: Women and the 'Public Sphere'.

At this point it would be useful to address the conception of the 'bourgeois public sphere' as it has been developed through the work of Jürgen Habermas. According to Habermas this sphere emerged from the sixteenth century onwards and reached its apogee in the eighteenth, facilitated by the spread of literacy and the printed word in the wake of trade. This created a reading community and encouraged the creation of debating societies, often connected with salons and coffee houses of various descriptions. Here, educated men (and women in the salons) would gather to debate the issues of the day. The main criterion for participation was the ability to engage in the discourse of reason and 'common sense'. By

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witnessed an actual contraction in women's public role in Britain as elsewhere and an unprecedented confinement of women to the private sphere confuse, it seems to me, angry polemic and symbolic gestures with what was happening in fact', Colley, *Britons*, p. 250.

<sup>35</sup> Leonore Davidoff, 'Regarding Some "Old Husbands' Tales": Public and Private in Feminist History', in L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), 227-76.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

the early nineteenth century, this sphere of 'civil society' had become appropriated in large measure by the urban middle classes, who in England had won themselves the franchise in 1832 on the basis of a supposed monopoly of good sense. As a result, members of this group were considered as the main constituents of 'public opinion'.<sup>37</sup>

Even before the wide dissemination of Habermas' work, historians have thought of the development of public opinion and civil society as important constituents of middle-class identity. For instance, S. Blumin has argued that civil society was one of the primary components of a middle-class way of life, which supposedly emerged in the urban American context during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Similar insights have informed recent additions to the historiography of the middle class in the British Isles. For example, R. J. Morris' book on Leeds attempts to explain the emergence of a common middle-class identity in a town where party and religious divisions were bitter and acrimonious. He locates the answer to this problem in the existence of voluntary associations, which provided a forum where men of all religious beliefs and political orientations could gather to discourse on neutral subjects and to work for the common good. In Morris' view, these societies were the primary location for the articulation and reproduction of middle-class norms and culture, providing two crucial ingredients for the formation of the Victorian middle class. Firstly, they began the task of building an unquestioned sense of always being right. Secondly, they encouraged the belief that the middle class not only possessed superior cultural values, but its members also had the right and obligation to bring those values to their social inferiors.<sup>39</sup> Morris claims that voluntary societies were the favoured middle-class response

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<sup>37</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, introduction.

<sup>38</sup> S. M. Blumin, 'The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals', *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), 299-338.

<sup>39</sup> R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820-1850* (Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 178. See also Alan Paul White, 'Formation and Development of Middle-Class Urban Culture and Politics: Sheffield 1825-1880' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1990); Simon Gunn, 'The Manchester Middle Class, 1850-1880' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1992), esp. chapter 2. Martin Hewitt also emphasises the importance of middle-class institutions in providing the basis of an 'intellectual matrix' through which social identities were fashioned: Martin Hewitt, *The Emergence of Stability in the Industrial City: Manchester, 1832-67* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

to the challenges of urban life as they were flexible, they avoided difficult questions about the relationships of 'out' groups, such as dissenters, to the state, and they allowed the middle classes to deal with urban deprivation without confronting the basic contradiction between their philanthropic Christian beliefs and their position as an exploitative group.<sup>40</sup>

Like Habermas, these historians tend to portray the public sphere as more or less monolithic and as uniformly masculine. The question of gender is either ignored, or merely raised in order to confirm that women were safely confined in a domestic sphere, thus making them safely irrelevant. However, critiques of Habermas' conception of the public sphere have challenged such assumptions on a number of levels, in ways which have opened up space for discussion of gender in this context. For instance, Geoff Eley has confirmed the importance of associational forms in the shaping of bourgeois identities in both England and Germany, while questioning the extent to which the public sphere can be seen as a monopoly of the middle classes. Instead, he argues that the public sphere in fact originated simultaneously at different levels of society, thus becoming available to non-bourgeois subaltern groups.<sup>41</sup> He also emphasises the need to recognise the importance of competing publics at every stage, arguing that:

the public sphere makes more sense as the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place, rather than as the spontaneous and class-specific achievement of the bourgeoisie in some sufficient sense.<sup>42</sup>

However, this critique does not preclude the existence of a hegemonic middle-class public sphere. In Leeds, for instance, this was roughly defined by the readership of the two mainstream middle-class newspapers, the *Leeds Mercury* and *Leeds Intelligencer*, particularly after the reforms of the 1820s and early 1830s brought the important liberal-dissenting groups within the 'official' political public of the borough. These groups had hitherto formed a distinctive 'counter-public', with their own institutions and press.

From a similar perspective, Mary Ryan has identified the existence and importance of

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<sup>40</sup> R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *Historical Journal*, 26, 1 (1983), 95-118, pp. 112-113.

<sup>41</sup> Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 289-339.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

such radical counter-publics as spaces where women could organise and express themselves. Ryan's empirical work concentrates on the changing nature of women's access to public spaces, from being mere spectators at parades and events where allegorical females were employed as unifying and neutral symbols, to active participation in public political demonstrations. Agreeing with Eley, her analysis offers a picture of a variety of counter-publics consisting of groups excluded on grounds of race, ethnicity and gender, which competed for cultural and political space with the 'official' public sphere.<sup>43</sup> However, even the middle-class public sphere itself cannot be taken as a monolithic entity. In Leeds, important divisions persisted between Whigs, Tories and radicals, as well as between dissenters and Anglicans, even after legal disabilities on some of these groups were removed. Competition between and within these communities provided opportunities for women to play a role. For example, Kathryn Gleadle has identified the existence of an important radical Unitarian counter-public in the early nineteenth century, which campaigned for women's suffrage amongst other things.<sup>44</sup>

Work on individual radical campaigns has also revealed the importance of women in political life, despite official and social disabilities. Take for instance Clare Midgley's work on women in British Anti-Slavery. Women were central to these campaigns, being instrumental in persuading their male colleagues of the need for immediate emancipation as opposed to a gradualist approach. They were extremely active in organising, fundraising and leading campaigns of abstention from slave-grown sugar, communicating their aims by means of printed tracts and pamphlets and thus contributing materially to the formation of public opinion on the matter.<sup>45</sup> Propaganda focussed on the effect of slavery in breaking up families, aiming to evoke sympathy from women in their role as mothers. Alex Tyrrell has also examined the way evangelical rhetoric facilitated the participation of women in the agitations against the corn laws, amongst other causes, on the grounds that the provision

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Ryan, *'Women in Public': Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (John Hopkins University Press, 1990). This work is developed into a critique of Habermas in Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 259-88.

<sup>44</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780 - 1870* (London etc.: Routledge, 1992).



of cheap bread for the starving masses was part of 'Woman's Mission' to stand up for Christian morality and to protect the poor.<sup>46</sup>

In order to explain such activities, historians have therefore suggested that women in public were not perceived as rational individuals, but instead as representatives of the category 'woman' or 'women'. As a result, women's public activities were circumscribed by the fear of overstepping the bounds of acceptable behaviour, which would jeopardise the claims to moral superiority and virtue which this collective identity gave them. The historical development of these collective feminine categories has been charted by Denise Riley, who contends that the idea of 'woman' became more firmly grounded in physical difference from the eighteenth century, thus supporting Davidoff's explanation of women's exclusion from the 'public' as defined by the eighteenth-century intelligentsia.<sup>47</sup> However, this may also explain how women were able to find a niche in movements which were themselves stretching the boundaries of bourgeois respectability, such as the Anti-Corn Law League, or were completely beyond it, such as the radical working-class movements of the 1830s and 1840s. Women's involvement in political campaigns tested, or even breached, the boundaries of public and private, suggesting that supposedly limiting domestic ideologies could potentially be a springboard for women's activities far beyond the realm of the household. This realisation calls into question the value of a 'separate-spheres' model as an accurate representation of 'reality' for middle-class men and women, prompting historians such as Davidoff and Jane Rendall to call for a re-evaluation of the public sphere that takes these activities into account.<sup>48</sup>

One avenue which has promised to be particularly rewarding is the investigation of the 'social sphere', as an arena where women could play a central role outside the home while maintaining their essential femininity. Mary Poovey has described the development of this concept through the writings of social investigators such as Kay-Shuttleworth in

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<sup>46</sup> Alex Tyrrell, 'Woman's Mission' and Pressure Group Politics in Britain, 1825-60', *Bulletin of the John Ryland's University Library*, 63, 1 (1980), 194-230.

<sup>47</sup> Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> See Jane Rendall, 'Nineteenth-Century Feminism and the Separation of Spheres: Reflections on the Public/Private Dichotomy' in T. Andreasen et. al., *Moving On: New Perspectives on the Women's Movement* (Aarhus University Press, 1991), 17-37.

Manchester. Such work legitimised intervention by the state or bourgeois associations in realms originally conceived of as private and autonomous, such as the homes and families of the working-classes. Poovey has suggested that this sphere emerged from the discourses of political economy, which concentrated on the ideal of the free exchange of goods, services and labour in the marketplace.<sup>49</sup> When removed from this market place because of sickness or incapacity, workers and their families found themselves the objects of investigation and possible regulation. Moreover, women increasingly found themselves lumped together with children as dependents and *ipso facto* excluded from the operations of the market; thus working-class women became a subject of concern and investigation both inside and outside of the home, while their work could theoretically be regulated by law without interfering in the free working of the economy.<sup>50</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, this concern with working-class family life actually benefited middle-class women by allowing them to claim the territory as their own, as it meant that social work could be justified as a natural extension of woman's domestic habits and duties.<sup>51</sup>

Women's philanthropic activities have long been known about. However, the extent to which such activities contributed to the formation of middle-class identity has rarely been addressed. Eileen Yeo has argued that the emergence of a scientific discourse of poverty contributed to the emergence of a cohesive middle-class identity from the 1830s onwards based around the ideal of voluntary service to the poor.<sup>52</sup> Particularly after the passage of the Great Reform Act, coinciding as it did with a frightening epidemic of Asiatic Cholera, 'service to the local working class now became an important part of the bourgeois claim to moral and political authority in contrast to the classes above and in relation to those below.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: English Cultural Formation, 1830-1860* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> Davidoff, 'Regarding Some "Old Husbands' Tales"', p. 244.

<sup>51</sup> Riley, 'Am I That Name?', pp. 50-51. The effects of this obsession with working-class morality in shaping the kinds of questions asked by investigators are described in Eileen Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), p. 69.

<sup>52</sup> Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Philanthropic societies therefore became important locations where the members of the local middle classes could put differences of sect and party aside and meet in a common cause.<sup>54</sup> In the case of Leeds this process of class formation has been well documented by R. J. Morris, whose account balances that of Yeo by bringing out the centrifugal tendencies which continually threatened to destroy the fragile class consensus throughout the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>55</sup> Morris demonstrates that middle-class voluntary societies, including visiting and medical charities alongside periodic subscriptions for the relief of the poor during epidemics or economic crises, were key sites where class relations were maintained.<sup>56</sup> However, he provides no framework for a separate consideration of the role of women in these societies. This is an important omission given their evident importance across the whole range of philanthropic activity, with much of the day to day work of charity in large urban centres being in the hands of women.<sup>57</sup>

Yeo concludes that this 'social' sphere was a location where divisions between the 'public' and 'private', which she believes were becoming dominant in other areas of women's lives, could become blurred and contested.<sup>58</sup> However, it has already been noted that the model of separate spheres is appearing increasingly suspect as a way of conceptualising middle-class life in the period. By using it to underpin her thesis, Yeo is in danger of substituting a tripartite division of women's experience for the binary opposition of public and private. Worse still is the prospect of the social sphere simply becoming an alternative location of private or domestic experience. It remains important to distinguish between ideology and the way in which women themselves interpreted their experiences.

The arbitrary parcelling up of women's experiences has been most forthrightly challenged by Amanda Vickery, who has demonstrated the limitations of the public-private dichotomy in reaching an understanding of the lives of provincial women in the late

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii and 68.

<sup>55</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, esp. chapter 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. chapters 7-12.

<sup>57</sup> F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, p. 59.

eighteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Instead of defining themselves with relation to separate spheres, Vickery argues that women 'In so far as they categorised their lives ... singled out their social and emotional roles: kinswoman, wife, mother, housekeeper, consumer, hostess and member of polite society.' It is one of the contentions of this thesis that the nineteenth-century urban equivalent of Vickery's 'polite society' was one of the main solvents acting on idealised contemporary accounts which segregated women in the private domestic sphere. Society moved into the spaces created by the institutions of the public sphere, whether they were concerned primarily with the creation and diffusion of a middle-class 'culture', with politics, or with the relationship of that class with its poorer neighbours through philanthropic enterprise. While Yeo explores the role played by social science in the redefinition of some of Vickery's 'social roles', particularly that of motherhood, Vickery approaches the subject from a less abstract point of view, claiming that:

during the late eighteenth century there was a proliferation of charitable institutions through which women could garner a new kind of public standing and radiate something of that public spirit revered by their brothers. The institutionalization of fashionable benevolence constructed altogether new areas for the expression of female conviviality and officiousness.<sup>60</sup>

Having set out the historiographical background, it is necessary to draw some conclusions from the foregoing discussions in order to clarify the position occupied by this thesis. Two basic assumptions underpin the work: firstly, the importance of understanding class through the study of culture; and secondly the need to place women in this cultural context alongside men. If it is accepted that the middle class came to be seen as the chief exponents of an ideology of public and social improvement during the early nineteenth century, it is therefore vital to understand the role of women in relation to this ideology. As Davidoff and Hall have argued, the fundamental fitness of the middle class for the task of social leadership was seen to have its basis in a feminised domestic space. The importance of this space was perceived to lie in its guarantee of masculine independence in the realm of society and politics. However, it is clear that women played a much more active role than this in the construction of middle-class identity, for which they increasingly demanded recognition.

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<sup>59</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Unfortunately, thinking on this matter has been limited by the model of 'separate spheres'. In the light of empirical evidence about women's activities, it has become necessary to provide a more subtle analysis of the relationship between ideology and practice in order to bring out the nuances and variations in both. The collection of beliefs and dogmas subsumed under the heading of 'domestic ideology' was by no means monolithic. Moreover, in many circumstances, the boundaries between the so-called 'spheres' were so confused as to become meaningless. Social practices and the very ideology of female domestic virtue ensured that crossover would take place, notably in the burgeoning world of the philanthropic association. In order to explain and encourage such activities, it was convenient and even necessary to develop theories which addressed women's importance in social and national life. Respectable middle-class women therefore became identified as custodians of civic and national virtue.<sup>61</sup> Increasingly it was argued that women had a duty to spread this beneficial influence throughout the nation and the empire, through their roles as wives and mothers. However, many also contended that women's duties went beyond this, to include an obligation to care for the poor and less fortunate. By their very nature, such arguments eventually led women to engage in political controversies over issues perceived as affecting the moral and material welfare of the nation, such as slavery, peace and the corn laws.

Consequently, there was a need to explain and neutralise female actions which challenged the public subordination of women. Even where this did not take the form of straightforward reaction, it often led to women's activities being constructed in innately conservative ways. In particular, there was a tension between the desire to encourage female actions which were considered as socially beneficial, while limiting any aspirations women might have to exercise more formal rights. It will be argued that this found expression in a crucial distinction between a masculine *citizenship*, centred around the possession of certain legal and political rights, and *civic virtue*, which involved a predisposition towards the public good but which did not lay claim to any *a priori* rights in the public sphere. Thus neutralised, civic virtue and its corollary, civic pride, could be construed as suitably modest and feminine attributes.

The concept of civic virtue has a long history. It has been argued that over the course

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<sup>61</sup> Exemplified in the popular series of books by Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England*, (1838); *The Daughters of England*, (1842); *The Wives of England*, (1843); and *The Mothers of England*, (1843).

of the eighteenth century such ideals were reformulated as society became increasingly centred around commercial relationships, which in classical political thought were believed to be inherently corrupting. This gave rise to alternative ideas about virtue that stressed the advantages of property in bestowing independence and allowing the cultivation of manners.<sup>62</sup> However, older ideals that located virtue in social and family relationships outside the realm of exchange persisted, not least in evangelical critiques of commercial society. Moreover, the republican discourse of 'natural rights', developed during the French Revolution, presented a challenge to the basis of inequality on which commercial society rested.<sup>63</sup> Such alternative and conflicting discourses persisted into the nineteenth century, and were therefore available to contemporaries searching for a means of explaining and containing women's appearance in public political spaces. In particular, the old idea that men's activities in the public arena left them open to corrupting influences was used as a way of countenancing the presence of women at its margins, as they were seen as representing the pure, unsullied nature of domestic virtue. However, it also provided a way of excluding women from a more active role, as they would lose their special status and become corrupted should they try to participate themselves.<sup>64</sup>

This idea that women exercised a 'civilising influence' was not new. It originated in eighteenth century conjectural histories, which measured the progress of a society in terms of how it treated its womenfolk.<sup>65</sup> In such narratives, the chivalric code of the later middle

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<sup>62</sup> See J. G. A. Pocock, 'Virtues, Rights and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought', in J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37-50.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory Claeys, 'The French Revolution Debate and British Political Thought', *History of Political Thought*, IX, 1, Spring (1990), 58-80.

<sup>64</sup> An alternative model was the 'Republican' ideal of public virtue described by Mary Ryan and Leonore Davidoff, which argued that women's presence in the public sphere would actually compromise the virtue of male senators. See Ryan, *Women in Public*, pp. 27-8; Davidoff, 'Regarding Some "Old Husbands' Tales"', p. 230. However, this seems more appropriate to the American context of universal suffrage than that of the British mixed constitution.

<sup>65</sup> See for example Mary Catherine Moran, "'The Commerce of the Sexes': Civil Society and Polite Society in Scottish Enlightenment Historiography', unpublished paper for the colloquium 'Women and the Civilising Process' at York, 8 May 1999.

ages was often held up as a key moment, both in relations between the sexes and in the history of civilisation. The continuing influence of these narratives in the early nineteenth century is demonstrated through the use of a discourse of chivalry, which was supposedly the medium by which female influence made itself felt on the public stage. In other words, women selected champions from among public men who would then fight their causes for them, just as medieval women were thought to have bestowed favours on knights who defended their virtue in battle. This should come as no surprise during a period when all levels of society were permeated by 'medievalism'.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the fact that historians have often identified such ideologies as fundamentally negative forces, the investiture of women with the custodianship of public virtue had many practical and liberating connotations. Granted, the 'public sphere' was primarily identified as the sphere of 'masculine' rationality and intellect, as opposed to the 'feminine' sphere of the emotions. However, the very scale of the problems facing those who would promulgate ideals of self-improvement in the filth and squalor of the new industrial cities gave women an opportunity to participate in the great works of social and political reform that were so central to the middle-class self image. Women were seen as having greater resources of time to devote to activities like fund raising and district visiting, while the tradition of the aristocratic 'lady bountiful' bestowing charity on the local poor was soon adapted to an urban setting through the foundation of voluntary societies to distribute religious literature and charity among the poverty stricken.

Moreover, the multiple nature of the 'public sphere' itself created avenues by which women could participate more overtly. Although identified with a broad and diverse socio-economic group, the values commonly associated with the middle class were usually promulgated by coterie of progressive industrial magnates, merchants, influential journalists and a variety of professional people who formed the civic elite. These relatively small groups found it impossible to monopolise virtue, with challenges being posed by radicals,

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<sup>66</sup> This 'medievalism' was actually often located in the 'Olden Time' of the Tudors and Stuarts. See Peter Mandler, "'In the Olden Time': Romantic History and English National Identity, 1820-50' in Brockliss and Eastwood (eds.), *A Union of Multiple Identities*, 78-92; see also *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 31-6. For the influence of chivalric ideals of masculinity on elite society in the nineteenth century, see Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

both progressive and conservative, who were critical of the urban-industrial future associated with this middle-class vision. Such groups were able to develop their own versions of the public sphere, with their own traditions and identities.

The victory of the middle-class elite in asserting their right to urban leadership was therefore partial and contingent, with challenges coming not only from without, but also from divisions within the class stemming from economic diversity, religion and politics. Not the least important of these divisions was the divide between the upper middle-class elite, and the lower middle class of tradesmen, shopkeepers and clerks. This thesis is mainly concerned with the former group, particularly those leisured women who were most active in cultural, philanthropic and political activity. However, the activities of lower middle-class women also figure from time to time, as the elite's failure to impose a uniform vision of social progress left social and discursive spaces which they could exploit in order to develop their own civic identities, especially through counter-cultures such as Chartism or temperance.

In contrast, elite women often acted as agents of the dominant culture's struggle for hegemony through activities such as district visiting, missionary and rescue work, or by participating in the cultural societies which supported middle-class claims to be educated and 'advanced'. These activities were a constant source of conflict between those who believed that women could play a positive role in spreading middle-class values throughout society, and those who believed that exposing women's actions to the public gaze undermined the whole basis of feminine virtue, thus threatening the whole project of the 'civilising mission'. In studying these conflicts, it must be remembered that women were not struggling to gain entry to a public sphere which had reached maturity in their absence. Adapting one of Eley's insights, it can be argued that women were one of those groups who contested access to the public sphere at every stage in its development.

Finally, it is important to re-emphasise the role of class in shaping women's experiences of civil society, and of the urban spaces in which it had its being. For example, in a recent study of political culture in England, James Vernon has described a narrative by which politics progressively moved out of the popular domain over the course of the nineteenth century, leaving political organisation in the hands of a professionalised minority.<sup>67</sup> He sees women in general as victims of this process, and rarely attempts to

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<sup>67</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, *passim*.



differentiate between the experiences of lower class women and those of the elites. While there is a strong case for arguing that both groups were marginalised over the long nineteenth century, this is no less true of the majority of men. Vernon himself admits that middle and upper class women may actually have benefited (at least in the short to medium term) from exclusionary developments such as the ticketing of meetings.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, he completely misses the importance of women in campaigns which took place outside the normal mechanisms of formal politics, from anti-slavery to the Contagious Diseases Acts. These failings, in a work that is extremely valuable in other respects, are reminders that it is rarely helpful to group women's experiences together in such a diverse and hierarchical society as that of the nineteenth century.

#### **1.4: Aims, Methods and Structure.**

The aim of this thesis is to examine the role that women played in the development and articulation of middle-class ideals of civic virtue and social progress in the period from the reform agitation to the emergence of a self-conscious women's politics from the late 1850s onwards. The concern with women's relationship to civil society is reflected in the four main questions that it addresses. First, how did women contribute to the creation of a shared civic identity in the face of political and religious divisions within the Leeds middle class? To what extent did women develop their own public spaces through informal social networks or more formal organisations, and how far did this encourage the development of a distinctively female collective identity? How were these activities received and interpreted by observers, particularly the press? Finally, how far could women capitalise on or mount challenges to these interpretations in order to expand or maintain their role and duties within middle-class society, whilst preserving their respectability as members of that society? It is hoped that this preoccupation with civil society will not mean losing sight of the importance of women's domestic experiences. However, values of domesticity will be dealt with only insofar as they were employed to encourage, obstruct or defend women's participation in activities *beyond* the home.

Local newspapers provide an invaluable resource for answering questions of this nature. This is largely because the tension between the social reality of women's public

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 226-7, 229.

activities and the way in which they were represented is most apparent in the press. Newspapers reported and encouraged women's public activities, often appealing to virtues and identities such as patriotism, heroism and civic pride. However, the mainstream press in particular tended to interpret women's activities in ways which did not threaten popular ideals of female behaviour. Inevitably, this led to an emphasis on describing feminine and domestic traits associated with respectability, especially modesty and cleanliness. Women themselves rarely found a voice in such accounts. The main newspaper used for this study was the *Leeds Mercury*, for substantially the same reasons as it provided the main source for Morris' study: viz, its fuller accounts of public meetings and its wider circulation relative to its rival, the *Intelligencer*, and its position as the main standard bearer of the ideology of 'improvement'. Where necessary, other papers have been used for comparison or to fill in gaps, notably the *Intelligencer*, the *Leeds Times* and the *Northern Star*.

While newspapers are an important source for discovering how women's activities were interpreted and perceived, it has been necessary to go elsewhere to find out how women actually constructed their own experiences. In the case of Leeds, the problem is further hampered by the relative scarcity of personal papers relating to women in this period. However, those which have survived give great insight into parts of women's lives which took them out of the domestic circle and into the mainstream of middle-class existence. Finally, the reports and manuscripts relating to local voluntary associations have clearly demonstrated the opportunities for women to exercise a direct influence on public institutions, and the scope this gave them to develop identities centred around ideals of public usefulness.

With the historiographical background in place, the next chapter will provide the historical grounding. This includes an account of demographic and economic development in Leeds from the late eighteenth century, and the challenges which these posed to the nascent middle class. The chapter will then proceed to trace the development of the ideal of a reforming middle-class from its beginnings in the counter-culture of religious and political dissent, to its establishment in the mainstream of civic life in the decades after the reform bill. This period witnessed the expansion of the middle-class 'public sphere' itself, from early beginnings centred around informal discussion groups, to maturity as a broad community informed by two major newspapers, the *Leeds Mercury* and *Leeds Intelligencer*, and centred socially around institutions such as the Philosophical and Literary Society. Particular attention will be paid to the expansion of the industrial, professional and

bureaucratic groups which constituted the educated elite, and their role in the development of middle-class institutions and philosophies. The final part of the chapter will briefly consider the construction of an ideal of masculine citizenship through the biography of Edward Baines, editor of the *Leeds Mercury*, before posing the question of how far women had the opportunity to develop or acquire comparable virtues and identities.

The remainder of the thesis will evaluate the success of women in achieving this status. Chapter Three examines the relationship of women to the institutions at the heart of the cultural formation of the middle class. It opens by demonstrating that the wider social role of women outside the household was a central part of the debate over women's education, before going on to consider the educational opportunities available to middle-class girls in Leeds. The final section looks at the opportunities available to women to participate in middle-class cultural institutions and values through the patronage of art, attending lectures on improving subjects, and through financial and social contributions to cultural organisations.

Chapter Four examines the role of women in mediating relations with the lower classes through their work for philanthropic organisations. In particular, it explores the tensions between domestic ideology, which supposedly confined women to the household, and the fact that their vital contribution in this area gave them access to a wider world in which boundaries between public and private space were hopelessly blurred, despite periodic attempts to draw them more firmly. In turn, this allowed a rhetoric of pride in public service to develop, especially as a means of encouraging more women to take up charitable work. Meanwhile, ideals of femininity were redefined around the concept of the 'social sphere', where women could usefully employ their domestic talents and skills in providing a virtuous example to the lower classes. The final section consists of two case studies, centred around the campaign against drink and the movement for the reform of prostitutes. The latter draws out the construction of middle-class women as being superior in virtue to the lower classes, while emphasising that male middle-class control of activities in this area effectively denied women real responsibility for policy making within the movement, despite their crucial contribution to the day-to-day running of reform asylums. The former case study examines the challenges to the idea of middle-class superiority which grew out of the teetotal movement during the 1830s. In particular, the idea that middle-class women were natural repositories of virtue and moral sense was contested by this movement. However, the disruption of middle-class control over the temperance movement actually allowed

women to take a more public role in its activities, such as addressing meetings, publishing tracts and taking part in galas and processions.

Chapter Five takes some of these themes further by looking at female modes of organisation and their implications for the masculine ideal of the 'subscriber democracy', which, as Morris has demonstrated, lay at the heart of middle-class voluntary association during the period. It also considers the roles of certain key female figures within the community, whose contributions to such organisations challenges the idea that their lives can really be conceptualised in terms of a dichotomy between public and private experience. Finally, a case study explores the extent to which women, when organised, could appropriate the rhetoric of civic pride and virtue in order to defend their public activities from male ignorance and interference.

Chapter Six explores women's relationship to the world of local and national politics during the period. Attention is drawn to the way in which those activities were represented by the mainstream press as public extensions of women's private virtue, while the possibilities for the development of more radical public political identities are explored through reference to the campaigns against slavery and the corn laws. The themes raised here feed directly into Chapter Seven, which elaborates on how far women's public activities were constantly challenging accepted ideas about their roles, thus prompting male observers to redefine and reinterpret both the activities and the ideals themselves. This is achieved by looking at the way in which gendered narratives were constructed around the presence of women at political events and civic rituals. It is argued that the desire of women to express their civic pride and belief in the middle-class claim to social and political leadership brought them into public celebrations and rituals as privileged observers; a space which was interpreted as confirming their status as the ultimate arbiters of civic virtue, while symbolically separating them from the arena in which actual and potential citizenship was celebrated and affirmed. However, it will be emphasised that women did not accept this role uncritically, and that some at least believed that women should take a more active and responsible role in public life.

## CHAPTER 2

### The development of a public sphere in Leeds, c.1770 - c.1860

Over the period 1770-1860, something approaching Habermas' version of the 'public sphere' developed in Leeds as the town grew and diversified economically and socially. The increasing size and wealth of middling groups, coupled with increasingly bitter political and sectarian conflicts, created a demand for cultural and political institutions where a common identity could take shape. This identity was based on ideals of active citizenship: civic duty, leadership and a wider responsibility to the urban community. It was championed by particular sections of the middle classes, especially those connected with Unitarianism, evangelicalism, liberal radicalism and the emerging professions. However, this vision of a liberal and progressive middle class was rarely uncontested. In the 1830s and 1840s it was subject to radical lower-class critiques and hamstrung by religious and political conflict. By the 1850s, sectarian and party animosity had been largely replaced by divisions between progressives of all political hues, and more conservative elements on the town council. These men interpreted their civic duty in terms of limiting the burden on ratepayers, rather than as using the civic administration to support prestige projects such as the building of the new town hall.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the liberal ideal of citizenship was inherently masculine. Contemporaries generally failed to conceptualise a corresponding ideal of feminine citizenship, except at extraordinary junctures. Despite this, women *were* active in public life before and after 1830, in ways which will be explored in subsequent chapters.

#### 2.1: Economic and Social Change and the Development of a Public Sphere in Leeds, c.1770-c.1860.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the West Riding of Yorkshire had established itself as the leading region of the British wool spinning industry, its share of British output rising from 30% in 1772 to 60% in 1800.<sup>2</sup> Leeds was the chief finishing and

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<sup>1</sup> See Asa Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall: A Study in Victorian Civic Pride', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, XLVI, 3 (1961), 275-302; and *Victorian Cities*, chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 28.

distribution centre for this industry, playing a role for wool analogous to that which Manchester was to play for cotton in the nineteenth century. The late eighteenth century had seen the introduction of mechanised spinning in the wool trade, whilst John Marshall had begun to experiment with mechanised flax spinning in 1788.<sup>3</sup> Such developments, and the presence of large and famous manufacturing firms such as Marshall's and Benjamin Gott and Sons, has given Leeds the reputation of being a factory town, based around textiles. However, by 1841, only around a quarter of the workforce were employed in factories, whilst fewer than one in ten firms used steam driven machinery. This left 30-37,000 workers who did not work in the mills at all. Meanwhile, the proportion of the town's inhabitants directly involved in the woollen industry declined from around 80% in 1740 as the town's economic structure diversified and new industries, such as chemicals and engineering, sprang up to service the textile trade. Other industries, such as dressmaking, shoemaking, building, retailing, printing, pottery and woodworking, gained in relative importance, though without undergoing the kind of organisational transformation experienced in textiles.<sup>4</sup> The textile industry itself became more diverse, with a move away from woollen cloth production to flax spinning and worsted stuff manufacture.<sup>5</sup> By 1834, roughly 17% of the population were involved in manufacturing industries, whilst 28.2% were in craft occupations and 23.6% were involved in distribution.<sup>6</sup>

The labour force for this economic expansion was provided by a demographic revolution of stupendous proportions, an event which by all accounts had a far greater impact on life in the town than the move to factory production in some sectors of the economy. It has been estimated that the population of Leeds increased by twenty times in the period 1700-1841.<sup>7</sup> When Joseph Priestley took a census of the town in 1771, he

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<sup>3</sup> W. G. Rimmer, *The Marshalls of Leeds, Flax Spinners, 1788-1886* (Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> W. G. Rimmer, 'The Industrial Profile of Leeds, 1740-1840', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, Vol. L, Part II (1967), 130-57. Further information may be found in E. J. Connell and M. Ward, 'Industrial Development, 1780-1914', in Derek Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester University Press, 1980), 142-76.

<sup>5</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 28-32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Rimmer, 'The Industrial Profile of Leeds', p. 131.

arrived at a figure of 16,380 for the total population. By 1801, this had risen to 53,276, an average annual growth rate of 2.2%. Growth rates peaked at 3.9% between 1821 and 1831, by which date the town's population stood at 123,548. The principal reason for this increase was in-migration, as men and women from across Yorkshire and beyond flocked to Leeds to work in the factories and workshops, or in the rapidly expanding service sector. This stands in contrast to the second half of the nineteenth century, when growth rates slowed and natural increase accounted for three quarters of the rise.<sup>8</sup>

This increase in the size and economic importance of Leeds was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the size of 'middling' groups: merchants, retailers, master manufacturers, doctors, lawyers and clergymen. R. J. Morris has examined the relative proportions of different occupation groups within the middle classes of Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow in the years 1830 and 1832. He discovered that the three groups which made up the highest proportion of the Leeds middle classes were tradesmen (28.2%), shopkeepers (23.6%) and manufacturers (17%). Manufacturers were therefore much more important than in Glasgow, where they made up only 9.8% of the middle class, although they were not as important as in Manchester, where they accounted for 30%. Conversely, professional groups made up only 2.3% of the middle class in Leeds, compared with 6% in Manchester, and 10.8% in Glasgow.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it will be argued that these groups came to exercise a social and political importance in the town which far outweighed their numbers and proportion to the whole.

These figures give an idea of the relative occupational composition of the middle classes, but the categories used gloss over huge differences in disposable income, lifestyle and experience. Such groups represented the raw material from which an educated and civically minded 'middle class' was to be formed in the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. However, even setting aside economic differences, a common middle-class identity had to be established in the face of the deep religious and political divisions which were a feature of life in Leeds for the whole of the first half of the century.

Given the importance of these divisions, it is important to have an idea of the complex confessional geography of the town. The following account of the development of the

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<sup>8</sup> C. J. Morgan, 'Demographic Change, 1771-1911', in Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 46-71, pp. 48-51.

<sup>9</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 26.

major religious communities in Leeds provides this, demonstrating the failure of the Anglican Church to hold its own before 1830. By the end of the eighteenth century, there were four Anglican churches in the township of Leeds itself, all within Leeds Parish. In addition, there were dependent chapelries in nine of the nearby villages. Between 1826 and 1830 three new churches were built in Leeds, including that of St Mark at Woodhouse. In 1830, the church of St Stephen was opened at Kirkstall. These last two churches were given their own parishes. However, when Walter Farquhar Hook was elected to the Vicarage of Leeds in 1837, he arrived to find that church provision was still inadequate, with sittings available for only one in 6,000 of the population. Moreover, dissent was rife and Methodism was the *de facto* established religion amongst the poor.<sup>10</sup> The main dissenting communities by this date included the Unitarian Chapel at Mill Hill, and the Congregationalists at Queen Street (1825) and Salem Chapel (1790). The Baptists had established a chapel at Bramley in 1777, and in Leeds itself in 1779. The latter community built South Parade chapel in 1826, where the congregation included Sir George Goodman and Sir John Barran, both of whom went on to represent Leeds in Parliament. Finally, there were 418 Quakers meeting in the town in 1839.<sup>11</sup> The Directory of 1830 lists eight Anglican churches compared with twenty three dissenting chapels, including the chapel of the Female Revivalists, the first stone of which was laid in 1825.

The dissenting congregations tended to be small, but socially influential. This influence compensated for the fact that the majority of the town's population rarely attended either church or chapel, as it ensured that religious institutions maintained their importance in public life.<sup>12</sup> Focussing on Unitarian communities, John Seed has described their importance as social institutions, and as a nexus of power relations.<sup>13</sup> The Leeds

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<sup>10</sup> See Hook to Samuel Wilberforce, July 1837 and Hook to T. H. Tragett, 21 August 1837, both reprinted in W. R. W. Stephens, *The Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition (London, 1885), pp. 239-40 and 242-3.

<sup>11</sup> Nigel Yates, 'The Religious Life of Victorian Leeds', in Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 250-69, pp. 250-1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266-7.

<sup>13</sup> John Seed, 'Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800-1850', in R. J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester University Press, 1986), 107-56.



congregation supports this conclusion, as it included families such as the Marshalls, as well as affluent wool merchants such as the Luptons and Luccocks.<sup>14</sup> Shunned for their beliefs by other dissenters, Unitarians tended to develop particularly strong kinship ties, with regional and national networks of support. The importance of these networks in the emergence of middle-class civic identities, particularly as manifested in liberal reformism, is now part of historical orthodoxy. As Seed notes, 'the discourses of Unitarianism voiced the aspirations of those who assembled in its chapels, legitimized their social position, provided a language in which some of their experiences were represented and, most important of all perhaps, promised ways of "improving" the world'.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the structure of the dissenting chapels, which were essentially run by their congregations who paid for the upkeep of the building and its incumbent, provided the basic framework of the 'subscriber democracy' which was to become a feature of more secular middle-class institutions throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> This idea that power and influence increased in proportion to one's financial contributions was a powerful one, which guided the opinions of many of the middle classes on how the town and its institutions should be governed.

The town's religious divisions were embittered and politicised by the fact that the established church continued to play a pivotal role in the government of Leeds, particularly before 1835. The two centres of local power before that date were the corporation, which was a self-selecting oligarchy of largely Anglican merchants which also dictated the composition of the magistracy, and the vestry. The importance of the vestry in local government made the parish church a symbol of the political exclusion of a large and influential section of the Leeds middle class up to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, and the reform of Leeds Corporation in 1835. The parochial system of local government, as well as being more suited to the administration of a small village than a large industrial town, gave the Church a role in local affairs which was increasingly out of step with the religious composition of the most thriving and dynamic elements of its economic

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<sup>14</sup> See William Schroeder, *Mill Hill Chapel Leeds, 1674-1924: Sketch of its history; with some account of the development of the congregational life and of the men who have served as ministers* (Hull: Elsom Press, 1924).

<sup>15</sup> Seed, 'Theologies of Power', p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, esp. chapter 8.

elite. Such groups, including wealthy professionals and entrepreneurs, found the doctrines of self-help and self-discipline preached in the dissenting chapels more congenial to their needs and aspirations. It is therefore unsurprising that the bitter local conflicts for control over public resources often took on a sectarian character.

During the eighteenth century, the strength of the Tory monopoly of local power meant that Leeds had been largely undisturbed by the various national campaigns for political reform. Leeds had no Parliamentary representation until 1832 and therefore lacked a focus for political dissent. The extent of Tory influence and political apathy in the town was demonstrated by the failure of Leeds to figure significantly in the campaigns of the Yorkshire Association, led by Sir George Saville and Christopher Wyvill, which pressed for economical reform, triennial parliaments and an increase in county representation. These campaigns excited a great deal of political debate in Yorkshire and beyond. Indeed, the Association movement has been cited by Donald Read as marking the beginning of a provincial dominance in reformist politics that was to last well into the following century.<sup>17</sup> The interest generated in parliamentary politics by the campaign was such that Sir George Saville could boast 'Hitherto I have been elected in Lord Rockingham's drawing-room. Now I am returned by my constituents'.<sup>18</sup> In 1785 there was an extensive petitioning campaign in Yorkshire in favour of Pitt's reform proposals, but the interest demonstrated in boroughs such as York was not reflected in Leeds.

However, in the opening decades of the century the social and economic power of the old oligarchy began to wane, as old merchant families left the town or diversified into manufacturing. R. G. Wilson has identified four main factors behind this change. First, the increasing relative importance of a transatlantic trade in woollen cloth worked against established merchants whose markets had traditionally lain in Europe. Secondly, local manufacturers deliberately attempted to outpace merchants in all markets by price-cutting and providing extended credit. Thirdly, the market for woollen broadcloths declined, as fancy cloths and light worsteds from Huddersfield and Bradford became more fashionable, and Leeds merchants again found themselves out-manoeuvred in the crucial New World markets. Finally, woollen merchants were increasingly left behind by the changes in the

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<sup>17</sup> Read, *The English Provinces*, pp. 11-17.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in A. S. Turberville and Frank Beckwith, 'Leeds and Parliamentary Reform, 1820-1832', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, XLI (1954), 1-81, p. 4.

West Riding economy outlined above.<sup>19</sup>

This decline in social and economic power was mirrored by the corporation's increasing vulnerability to the challenge posed by radical dissenting groups. The dissenters responded to their exclusion from the formal political institutions of the town by creating alternative sites of public discourse, through which they pursued their claims to a social and political status commensurate with their increasing economic importance. These men, largely drawn from the major dissenting communities at Mill Hill and Salem Chapel, began by starting to exert their influence on the county representation, culminating in the return of John Marshall for the West Riding in 1826. This led to attacks in the Tory press on the country Whigs who had let themselves be bullied by a group of tradesmen from the city. After this success, the Leeds reformers launched a concerted assault on Tory dominance of local politics through the organs of local government, and by supporting a number of reform issues in the country at large. These included Corn Law Repeal, for which a petition bearing 5,000 signatures was sent up to Parliament in 1826, and Catholic Emancipation. The disputes over the latter were particularly bitter, with petitions for and against being sent from the town in 1828. At a meeting of November 10th that year a Brunswick Club was formed to oppose the measure, the first meeting being chaired by the Mayor and featuring speeches by Aldermen Hall and Sadler and the Vicar of Leeds, the Reverend Richard Fawcett.<sup>20</sup>

However, the conflict reached its height in disputes over control of local government institutions, particularly the vestry. Although this may not sound like the stuff of high political drama, Derek Fraser has pointed out that given the absence of alternative avenues to power in pre-reform Leeds, dissenters were willing to go to extreme lengths to have themselves elected as church wardens.<sup>21</sup> The vestry was the one institution of local government which could be accurately described as democratic, with elections being open

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<sup>19</sup> R. G. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants: The Merchant Community in Leeds, 1700-1830* (Manchester University Press, 1971), pp. 115-6.

<sup>20</sup> Turberville and Beckwith, 'Leeds and Parliamentary Reform', pp. 20-24; see also *Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Leeds Brunswick Constitutional Association, Monday November 10, 1828* (Leeds, 1828). Leeds Central Library.

<sup>21</sup> Derek Fraser, 'The Leeds Church Wardens, 1828-1850', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LIII, 1 (1971), 1-22.

to all rate payers, including women. This meant that victory in church wardens' elections would inevitably strengthen demands for democratic reform in other areas of administration. Moreover, the office of church warden carried with it a high degree of status. As the wardens held the balance of power between the Liberal Trustees and the Tory Overseers on the Workhouse Board, having a majority of church wardens would give the dissenting interest a great deal of influence over poor relief - an important area of public expenditure. Such a majority was in fact obtained by the early 1830s, leading to desperate attempts by the Tories to wrest back control. This is just one way in which the bitter sectarian and party divisions within the Leeds middle class led to a high degree of politicisation of even the lower echelons of local government. These conflicts have been exhaustively documented elsewhere, their main significance in this context being the effect which they had of generating and maintaining political controversy in the town in the first half of the century.<sup>22</sup>

The flames of these controversies were fanned, or even ignited, in the pages of the two main Leeds newspapers: the *Leeds Mercury*, and the *Leeds Intelligencer*. The former had been acquired by Edward Baines in 1801 with the help of a group of Mill Hill Unitarians, including John Marshall and the wool merchant Thomas Bischoff. Under Baines' proprietorship, the *Mercury* went from being a mild Tory publication to being a strident advocate of liberal reform views. Baines was at best a lukewarm dissenter, but his liberal credentials and journalistic qualifications were impeccable. Not content simply to report events, Baines followed the pioneering example of the *Sheffield Register* by using editorials in order to shape public opinion on particular issues. Through a judicious blend of items with local and national interest, Baines made the *Mercury* into the most widely distributed and influential provincial newspaper of its day, and an important site of the rational debate vital to the functioning of the 'public sphere'. From a circulation of 7-800 copies per week in March 1801, the *Mercury* was selling 2-3,000 in September 1807. By January 1831, the paper could boast a weekly circulation of 5,600, which rose to a high point of 9,744 from January to April 1841.<sup>23</sup> Although these figures sound small by modern

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*; See also Derek Fraser, 'Poor Law Politics in Leeds 1833-1855', 'The Politics of Leeds Water' and 'Improvements in Early Victorian Leeds', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LIII, 1 (1971), 23-49, 50-70 and 71-81.

<sup>23</sup> This paragraph is based on information in Donald Read, *Press and People, 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), esp. p. 210.

day standards, it must be remembered that the circulation did not reflect the actual readership, as many more people would read such newspapers in taverns, bookshops, coffee shops or newsrooms. In 1842, Samuel Smiles declared that the *Mercury* was 'looked upon by many almost as oracular ... On almost all the great questions which have agitated the public mind during the last twenty years, the fiat of the *Leeds Mercury*, in the populous districts where it circulates, has generally been considered as satisfactory and decisive'.<sup>24</sup> However, this readership was almost exclusively middle-class, as the paper's *laissez-faire* credentials tended to alienate potential readers amongst the working class and petit bourgeoisie.

Baines used the *Mercury* to good effect in campaigns for local government reform. His first major target was the issue of the churchwardens' accounts. These were of particular interest to Dissenters, who felt that they should not have to pay into the coffers of the established church, although the general lack of public accountability at all levels of local government irked ratepayers of all religious persuasions. From 1819 to 1822 the *Mercury* led a campaign calling for their publication as a way of curbing unnecessary expenditure. This campaign had general support from rate payers, owing to the increased burden on the rates resulting from the erection of three parliamentary churches in the parish.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from the influence of the press, this transformation in the political situation demands explanation. By the 1800s, a number of factors were combining to give 'public opinion' a greater prominence and cohesion in the provinces, particularly around major commercial centres such as Leeds. The social problems brought by increasingly rapid urban expansion created a need for an improved infrastructure, while improvements in communications to the new industrial centres allowed ideas and people, as well as goods, to be transported to and from the provinces more freely. Finally, as we have already seen, the presence of important nonconformist communities in the industrial towns had an important effect on the development of the public sphere, as a result of their generally high levels of education and their position as an 'out' group in local and national affairs at the start of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the dissenters formed a classic and

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> Fraser, 'The Leeds Churchwardens', p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Read, *The English Provinces*, pp. 4-22.

dynamic counter-public.

Before 1830, there were few formal institutions for public information and discussion in the township of Leeds, and few public buildings of any note to engender a feeling of civic pride in the inhabitants. Those that did exist tended to reflect the town's commercial preoccupations, especially the dominance of the textile trade. For example, two of the largest buildings were the Coloured and White Cloth Halls. These temples to commerce also doubled as meeting houses for the town. The meeting in favour of Catholic Emancipation in December 1828 was held in the yard of the Coloured Cloth Hall, while the voting in the first Leeds election began there on 10 December 1832. Smaller public meetings were often held in the Court House whilst the Music Hall provided a larger indoor venue, and the only one which reflected the broader cultural aspirations of the eighteenth-century elite.

However, commerce itself created a powerful demand for information, on prices, duties, government policies and foreign affairs as well as local events. Leeds' position as the commercial centre of the West Riding meant that it also served as a conduit to the outside world for the other towns in the region. In conformity with Habermas' model, the development of a 'public sphere' therefore went hand in hand with the development and diversification of the town's commercial activity. Every week, traders and manufacturers from the towns and villages round about would flock to the cloth markets eager to exchange news and gossip. Early nineteenth-century trade directories carried the names of these men, along with the name of the particular tavern each frequented whilst in Leeds. Some of these, such as the Griffin Inn or the Three Legs of Man on Briggate, kept periodicals and gained a reputation as places to go for commercial information. A newsroom had also been established on Briggate in 1768, the same year as the first subscription library was opened in the town.<sup>27</sup> A second subscription library opened in 1793. By 1817, the information needs of visitors and residents alike were catered for by the Commercial Newsroom on Briggate, with a subscription of 25 shillings per annum, whilst the 'gentry, and principal inhabitants of the town' frequented the Coffee Room (also on Briggate), with an annual subscription of one and a half guineas.<sup>28</sup> In these newsrooms, commercial information could

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<sup>27</sup> Kevin Grady, 'Commercial, Marketing and Retailing Amenities, 1700-1914,' in Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 177-99, pp. 182-3.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Baines, *Directory, General and Commercial, of the Town and Borough of Leeds for 1817* (Leeds, 1817), p. 30.

be obtained, along with recent copies of the London newspapers, thus keeping the merchants and manufacturers abreast of broader developments in the political life of the nation.

Higher levels of literacy, and the increasing availability of printed literature of all kinds, were of immeasurable importance in the emergence of a politically aware 'public' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Every new controversy precipitated a veritable barrage of pamphlets, whilst the number of local and national newspapers circulating in the provinces had increased dramatically. By the 1820s, the two main newspapers had been joined by a (short-lived) radical paper, the *Patriot*, whose readership tended to be found among the lower-middle class, and more educated portions of the working class. It was the *Mercury* and the *Intelligencer*, however, which between them carved up the territory of the respectable middle-class 'public'. This was particularly true after the Reform Act of 1832 established the boundaries of that territory more firmly than ever before, helping to consign working-class radicalism firmly to a region considered beyond the pale of mature debate. However, the lack of censorship in Britain, Stamp Acts notwithstanding, meant that a radical counter-public continued to have ready access to printed material throughout the period.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.2: A Cultural Sphere.

The development of a politicised 'public' provided a sense of common citizenship between political antagonists; however, it also demonstrated the need for the middle class to develop cultural and social links across party lines. For this, we must look to those institutions which cut across divisions of sect and party, allowing men united by a common social status to originate and articulate a common identity as leading citizens of the town. Charitable provision was one area where the nascent middle class could combine in recognising a common duty to the poor and is discussed below. It proved more difficult to establish and maintain institutions of a more cultural nature. Between 1769 and 1775, the scientist and Unitarian minister Joseph Priestley had organised an informal discussion group, including the engineer John Smeaton and the surgeon William Hey. There was also a small

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<sup>29</sup> Turberville and Beckwith, 'Leeds and Parliamentary Reform', pp. 26-30.

philosophical society which met from 1783-86.<sup>30</sup> In his directory of 1817, Edward Baines recorded that there had been three attempts to form a literary and philosophical discussion group since 1793, all of which had failed.<sup>31</sup> The rationalist and libertarian rhetoric of the French Revolution provided an initial boost to such groups, but many fell foul of government paranoia as the revolution became more violent. Even Baines was suspected of seditious activities at one point.<sup>32</sup> On a more prosaic level, lack of interest proved just as insuperable a barrier to success as state interference. Take for example the fate of the Fine Art Exhibitions of 1808-1811 in Leeds, which were discontinued due to lack of support.<sup>33</sup> With regard to the failure to establish a Literary and Philosophical Society in the town, Baines complained that 'with the exception of those arts which have an immediate reference to Commerce and Manufactures, Philosophical researches are not much cultivated in Leeds; still less do Literary pursuits engage the attention of its inhabitants.'<sup>34</sup>

This is not to say that Leeds was utterly bereft of mental nourishment. There were the subscription libraries for instance, which included the Methodist Library in Low Street by 1817. That on Commercial Street had opened a news room in 1809. By 1837, the number of subscription libraries (i.e. those that required an annual fee and therefore catered for the wealthier classes) had risen to eight, with a further seven circulating libraries. The major bookshops of the town also provided an important place where educated men could meet to discuss the latest books or controversies:

Whilst the taverns furnished a rendezvous for the local politicians, the booksellers' shops were the recognised gathering places of those who were inclined towards literature. It was here that the clergy met on Monday morning, to discuss together perchance the sermons of the previous day, more probably the last pamphlet from London, or the contents of the new number of 'The Gentleman's Magazine'. It was here, too, that they found that rare article a daily newspaper, not more than three or four days old, and giving news of events in Paris which had happened so recently as a fortnight back.

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<sup>30</sup> R. J. Morris, 'Middle-Class Culture, 1700-1914', in Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 200-22, p. 203; *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 235.

<sup>31</sup> Baines, *Directory* (1817), p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Baines Jr., *The Life of Edward Baines, Late MP for the Borough of Leeds* (Leeds and London, 1851), p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> Morris, 'Middle-Class Culture', p. 208.

<sup>34</sup> Baines, *Directory*, (1817), p. 41. Quoted in Morris, 'Middle-Class Culture', p. 203.



So wrote T. Wemyss Reid in 1883 of the bookshop of John Heaton, father of the distinguished Leeds surgeon John Deakin Heaton. Reid went on to claim that such shops 'supplied in a great degree the lack of those institutions which have since been established in all directions for the promotion of social intercourse and of literary and scientific inquiry in every conceivable mode'.<sup>35</sup>

The Directory for the year 1798 lists seven booksellers in the town, including John Heaton's predecessor, John Binns; Henry Holmes, who was also listed as a breeches maker; and Mary Robinson at the Old Library on Kirkgate. In addition, there were three firms of printers, again including Binns and Brown of Briggate, whose business was later taken over by Edward Baines. The number of booksellers and stationers listed in the town's directories increased to thirteen in 1817, nineteen in 1822, and twenty-nine by 1830. By 1857, more or less the end of our period, there were a total of forty-five booksellers and stationers and nineteen newsagents. Between 1830 and 1857, the number of letter press printers listed rose from eleven to thirty-four.

It is tempting to get carried away by the accounts of Reid and Baines, which portray in whiggish fashion Leeds' progression from an eighteenth-century dark age to the glorious enlightenment of the second half of the nineteenth century. However, this would be a slight on the attempts of individuals such as Joseph Priestley to keep the torch of intellect burning, instilling a tradition of philosophical endeavour in the thriving Unitarian congregation he left behind him. It also risks taking an anachronistic view of eighteenth-century Leeds. After all, the Leeds of 1770 was a much smaller place than that of 1883, or even 1821. There were fewer wealthy citizens to pay for the upkeep of philosophical halls, and perhaps the need for such formal institutions was not as acute, given the smaller size of an educated community which could probably fit (unrecorded) around one dinner table, or indeed into the local bookshop. Moreover, the relative political unity of the eighteenth-century elite meant that apolitical institutions for forging unity were not as necessary. We should therefore be careful not to confuse a lack of formal institutions with a lack of vigour. Having said this, formal institutions figure largely in the following account, as their development was a key feature of middle-class civic identity in the nineteenth century; and because, unlike more transient and informal entities, they kept records which have been preserved.

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<sup>35</sup> T. Wemyss Reid (ed.), *Memoir of J. D. Heaton MD* (London, 1883), pp. 32-3.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, it became increasingly important to the residents of a town to be able to point to impressive local institutions and public buildings as proof of their own civilisation and cultural achievements. As the commercial and professional attractions of Leeds brought educated men to the town, many of whom had travelled widely and witnessed the glorious architectural and artistic heritage of continental cities, pressure grew to create a city which reflected visually and intellectually the great economic wealth being created there. The following discussion looks at the origins and importance of one such institution, the Philosophical and Literary Society, which became a major focus of civic pride and identity for the middle-class elite for much of the century.<sup>36</sup>

Edward Baines' comments in the 1817 Directory were an obvious attempt to try and shame the educated members of the middle class into a more sustained attempt to create a society for philosophical and literary discussion. Baines also used the *Mercury* to good effect in an attempt to mould a reading public which was culturally, as well as politically, aware. The paper aspired to be the standard bearer of civic pride, though it was not above using this to score political points, and encouraged cultural endeavour and the spirit of civic improvement wherever it was to be found. It is therefore unsurprising that the successful establishment of a Philosophical and Literary Society in the town should originate with a letter to the paper, and that its author was reputed to be one Edward Baines Junior. The successful establishment of a society after so many previous failures is proof of the extent to which a 'public sphere' had emerged, or, at the very least, been reformulated in Leeds since the last decades of the eighteenth century. In particular, the existence of two major newspapers serving the town and its district had done much to engender a shared civic consciousness and civic pride among the educated citizens of the town. Moreover, this educated community was now much larger than it had been in previous decades, making a venue where all could meet and exchange views and ideas more desirable.

Many of these men were manufacturers and traders who had developed aspirations beyond the mere accumulation of wealth for its own sake, and were anxious to acquire social status and respect in the eyes of their peers. Again, the absence of opportunities on the magistrates bench, the traditional route to respect and local standing, meant that dissenters in particular were keenly aware of the potential benefits of supporting such

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<sup>36</sup> For more information on this society, see Edwin Kitson Clark, *The History of 100 Years of Life of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* (Leeds: Jowett and Sowry, 1924); Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, chapter 9.

institutions, benefits that went beyond mental improvement, although that in itself was to become a source of status in the nineteenth century. There was also a civic-minded desire to show the world that Leeds was not just a city of smoke and toil, but that it was capable of competing with the metropolis in art and science, as well as industry. It was therefore appropriate that the first president of the new Philosophical and Literary Society should be none other than John Marshall, a self-made manufacturer of immense wealth and a Unitarian to boot.

Given the deep political divisions of the town, there was also an urgent need for a non-partisan forum where the middle classes could meet on neutral ground. Strict guidelines were put in place banning papers and discussions on politically and religiously divisive subjects, and although these guidelines were often stretched to their limit, they were successful in keeping the society aloof from the most virulent party-political controversies which convulsed Leeds during its history.<sup>37</sup> In 1823, the Society's annual report claimed that one of its benefits to the community lay in the fact that it did much 'to remove the asperities of party feeling, whether arising from religious distinctions or political differences'.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the Philosophical Society, and contemporaries such as the Leeds Literary Society (1826), could also be used as a platform for 'educating' the citizens of Leeds on particular issues in order to promote consensus on difficult issues. This was true for example over issues such as public health and sanitation. From 1838, the Society boasted a statistical section whose achievements included Robert Baker's survey of the sanitary conditions of the town, which formed the basis of his evidence to Chadwick's inquiry published in 1842.<sup>39</sup> By the 1850s, when party and religious animosities had declined appreciably, the 'chief local societies' were being used alongside the press to outflank the so-called 'Philistines' in the local council in the controversy over the building of a new Town Hall for the borough. In January 1854 for instance, Dr. Heaton delivered

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<sup>37</sup> The Philosophical Society managed to avoid the accusations of political bias which dogged the Leeds Library in the early 1840s. See R. J. Morris, 'Organisation and Aims of the Principal Secular Voluntary Organizations of the Leeds Middle Class, 1830-1851' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1971), pp. 331-3; *Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 264-5.

<sup>38</sup> Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, *Annual Report 1822-3*.

<sup>39</sup> *Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population. Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Inquiry*, Parliamentary Papers xxvii, 1842, pp. 348-409.

a lecture to the Philosophical and Literary Society on the subject of Town Halls which concentrated on their uplifting moral and cultural influence.<sup>40</sup>



Map 1: Central Leeds, from a map of the town of Leeds and its vicinity (Leeds: W. Brierley, [1872]). The principal buildings of the town are shown in black.

40 Reid, J. D. Heaton, pp.121-4.

The Philosophical Society, along with similar institutions established in subsequent years, therefore represented an important development in the institutional basis of the public sphere in Leeds during the early-nineteenth century. The success of these societies demonstrates the existence of a constituency of actual and potential members, who were prepared to give and attend lectures and chair discussions. The subscription fees charged by such societies ensured that their memberships were drawn exclusively from the middle and higher classes, who possessed a high level of disposable income. Moreover, as Morris himself has pointed out it tended to be the elite members of this group who provided the backbone of the town's cultural and philanthropic activities.<sup>41</sup> Wealth was a major factor in qualification for this elite, hence the importance of families such as the Gotts, Luptons and Marshalls who had made their fortunes in the commercial and industrial activities of the town. Increasingly, however, the possession of a good education and membership of a respectable profession became important platforms on which great public reputations could be built. The following discussion will analyse the contribution made by certain professional groups to the formation of middle-class civic identity over the period, suggesting ways in which that identity in turn helped to reinforce professional standards and aspirations within such groups.

One group of people who had traditionally enjoyed a high reputation for learning, and had always been looked on as potential community leaders, were the clergy. Clergymen tended to be the most highly educated men in provincial centres such as Leeds in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Through the authorship of theological tracts they had the opportunity to tap into an intellectual community way beyond the confines of their particular parish, whilst their sermons gave them direct access, in theory, to the hearts and minds of their congregations. This was true of dissenting ministers as well as the clergy of the established church, despite the bars on the former from attending the two ancient universities. Moreover, religious controversy remained at the heart of the public sphere in Leeds through the debates on the Church rates in the 1830s and the disputes over Tractarianism at St. Saviour's and voluntary education in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, esp. pp. 219-22.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the dispute over voluntary education, see D. Fraser, 'Voluntaryism and West Riding Politics'. For the tractarian controversy see Nigel Yates, *Leeds and the Oxford Movement: A Study of 'High Church' Activity in the Rural Deaneries of Allerton, Armley, Headingley and Whitkirk in the Diocese*

The increasing number of churches and chapels in Leeds of all denominations, meant that the number of clergymen resident in the town was increasing over the period, and these men found public outlets for their talents on the committees of charitable and cultural societies. The typically middle-class assumption of moral superiority was a reflection of the influence of ministers and religion generally in the life of their town. Time and again this spurred the activities of social and political reformers such as the younger Baines, who believed that the improvement of the physical and cultural environment of the town was a necessary precondition to an improvement in the moral condition of its inhabitants.

Another educated group expanding in numbers and increasing in cultural importance in Leeds during this period were medical practitioners. There were a great variety of these, who carried different titles depending on their qualifications (or lack of them) and preferred line of work. The Leeds Directory for 1798 contains a list of 32 physicians, apothecaries, surgeons, chemists and druggists. By 1817, there was a more systematic division between physicians and surgeons. The early nineteenth century saw the increasing professionalisation of these groups. The table below gives the number of physicians and surgeons listed in this and subsequent Leeds Directories to 1857.

Table 1 shows that the dramatic expansion in the population of Leeds was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the size of its medical community until the 1840s, with the number of doctors and surgeons listed in the directories more than doubling in the twenty years from 1822. This expansion may be explained by the increasing size of the middle class, with its attendant demand for medical care and propensity for erecting hospitals which required the services of medical men. These hospitals provide an alternative and highly visible index of the increasing importance of such men in the life of the town. By 1830, there were five medical institutions in Leeds: the Infirmary (1771); the House of Recovery (1802); the General Eye and Ear Infirmary (1821); the Lying-in Hospital (1824); and the Dispensary (1824).<sup>43</sup> The activity of the early 1820s reflected the increasing desire amongst the nascent middle classes of the town to do something to alleviate some of the problems of urban living. Each of these institutions employed the services of local physicians and surgeons, who usually kept their private practices going at the same time.

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*of Ripon 1836-1934* (Leeds: Thoresby Society, 1975).

<sup>43</sup> W. Parsons and W. White, *Directory of the Borough of Leeds, the City of York and the Clothing Districts of Yorkshire* (Leeds, 1830), p. 203.

They were run by committees of local worthies and were paid for through subscriptions and fundraising.

Table 1: Number of Physicians and Surgeons listed in Leeds Trade Directories, 1798-1857

Year	Physicians	Surgeons	Total
1798	-	-	32*
1817	5	34	39
1822	5	30	35
1830	7	47	54
1837	7	64	71
1842	12	69	81
1847	12	62	74
1853	12	65	77
1857	11	60	71

\*includes all listed medical practitioners in the town of any title.

By 1830, the civic leaders amongst the Leeds middle class had formed a mutually beneficial relationship with the medical community. Physicians and surgeons became necessary to middle-class projects of charity and social reform in a number of ways. Their claims to the possession of particular areas of expertise, backed up by formal qualifications, meant that they brought legitimacy to such projects, which could be said to be more beneficial because of the collaboration of 'experts' with specialized knowledge of health care and sanitation.<sup>44</sup> However, the rudimentary state of contemporary medicine meant that they were of more practical use in weeding out malingerers, therefore ensuring that the charitable funds of the prudent middle classes went to 'deserving' cases. It was for this

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<sup>44</sup> See for example Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, p. xii; Robert Gray, 'The Platform and the Pulpit: Cultural Networks and Civic Identities in Industrial Towns, c. 1850-70', in Kidd and Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class? Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 130-47, p. 138.

reason that friendly societies and other associations made use of their services. For the doctors themselves, posts such as physician to the Infirmary brought a high degree of social status. As well as giving them access to a pool of potential middle-class patients and patrons, a public appointment could also provide a springboard to a more active involvement in public life *per se*.

It should be noted that not all doctors had equal access to such benefits. Despite Ian Inkster's hypothesis that public institutions provided a social ladder for otherwise 'marginal men', it is clear that many of the most successful Leeds physicians came from families already established in the borough.<sup>45</sup> John Deakin Heaton, the son of the well-known bookseller, was a case in point. Far from struggling to make his way in his chosen profession, Heaton was able to move into a comfortable house on East Parade provided by his father and had ready access to his fathers' connections in the Leeds elite.<sup>46</sup> There was also the Hey dynasty, three generations of which filled many of the important public medical appointments in Leeds. Such a closed community could breed resentment amongst those who felt that they were not getting the recognition they deserved. Charles Thackrah for instance, appointed to the lowly post of Town's Surgeon responsible for poor law patients in 1817, found himself ostracised by his colleagues when he fathered an illegitimate son in 1823. He later found himself leading a faction of the medical community in a dispute with senior members of the Infirmary staff, when he made allegations of nepotism in public medical appointments.<sup>47</sup> It was also true that specialist hospitals were often founded by those on the fringes of the medical establishment who wished to make a name for themselves.<sup>48</sup> It seems that the foundation of the Eye Dispensary in Leeds in 1822 (later the Eye and Ear Infirmary) was the consequence of an earlier dispute between the junior doctors

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<sup>45</sup> Ian Inkster, 'Marginal Men: Aspects of the Social Role of the Medical Community in Sheffield, 1790-1850', in John Woodward and David Richards (eds.), *Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 128-63.

<sup>46</sup> Reid, *J. D. Heaton*, p. 82. The same point has recently been made about Heaton in John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 134.

<sup>47</sup> See A. Meiklejohn, *The Life, Work and Times of Charles Turner Thackrah* (Canton, Mass.: Watson Publishing International, 1985), p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> See Brian Abel-Smith, *The Hospitals 1800-1948: A Study in Social Administration in England and Wales* (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 31.



at the Infirmary and their senior colleagues, who were seen as out of touch with current medical practice and opinion. As a result, the new hospital 'was founded under a cloud of professional disapproval'.<sup>49</sup>

The usual medical training, often involving study in the Universities of London, Edinburgh or Leiden, followed by hospital practice in one of the big London hospitals, meant that doctors could develop a sense of professional community with their counterparts from other areas of the British Isles, making medics almost unique amongst the professions of the early nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> This connection to a broader learned community increased their status in the eyes of their contemporaries, as did the fact that they were often well travelled, although doubts as to their actual ability to cure lingered, not without justification.<sup>51</sup> By the 1830s, the growth in the size and status of the medical community in Leeds persuaded a number of distinguished practitioners of the desirability of forming a medical school in the town. This initially involved James Williamson, Samuel Smith, Thomas Pridgin Teale, Adam Hunter, William Hey II, and Joseph Prince Garlick. Thackrah, who had run a controversial school of anatomy in the town for a number of years, was invited to participate soon after.<sup>52</sup> This scheme had the practical result of relieving would-be surgeons of the difficulty and expense of attending medical school in the metropolis, though they would still have to spend some time practising in the big metropolitan teaching hospitals. In addition, the existence of a medical school enhanced the reputation of Leeds in the broader world of medicine and science.

The middle classes of Leeds were therefore prepared to listen to their doctors, if not for the good of their health, then at least for the broader cultural and scientific knowledge they had to offer. Hence the active involvement of many medical men in the cultural side

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<sup>49</sup> George Black, 'The Leeds Eye Dispensary', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LIV, 2 (1979), 99-105.

<sup>50</sup> Laurence Brockliss 'The Professions and National Identity' in Brockliss and Eastwood (eds.), *A Union of Multiple Identities*, 9-28, pp. 18-22.

<sup>51</sup> For an example of contemporary scepticism about the abilities of medical men, see the characterisation of the doctor in Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (1848: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 330-2.

<sup>52</sup> For the origins and history of this institution see S. T. Anning and W. K. J. Walls, *A History of the Leeds School of Medicine: One and a Half Centuries, 1831-1981* (Leeds University Press, 1982).

of the town's affairs, particularly the Philosophical and Literary Society. By the time that Heaton became president of the Society in 1868-72, it had been a long established tradition that the President should either be a doctor or a clergyman. The increased demands of business meant that the head of a philosophical society could no longer afford to be a gentleman amateur like John Marshall, or so the theory went.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of professionals in the formation of middle-class identity and the promotion of civic pride is nowhere more graphically illustrated than in the Reverend R. V. Taylor's *Biographia Leodiensis*.<sup>54</sup> Of 117 worthies listed who had died in the period 1800-1860, no less than fifty of them could be described as professionals of one sort or another. Of these, there were twenty-eight ministers, ten medical men and eleven legal professionals. Moreover, breaking this sample down into blocks of twenty years reveals an interesting picture. From 1800 to 1819 there are references for nine ministers, one physician, one surgeon and one barrister. Over the next twenty years, we find entries for twelve ministers, three surgeons and three barristers. However, over the final two decades of the period, there are only seven entries for ministers, compared to five medical men (including four doctors) and six legal practitioners.

Although this is a relatively small sample, these findings suggest that such groups were becoming increasingly important in the civic life of the town. Of the barristers, most had some political involvement. For instance, Matthew Talbot Baines (1799-1860), Robert Hall (1801-1857) and John Hardy (1773-1855) had all sat in Parliament. Others, such as Thomas William Tottie, the only solicitor to get an entry, had filled offices in local government. The 1840s and 1850s also saw the passing away of a generation of doctors who had shaped the emergence of the medical profession in the town through their work for the medical school and the town's hospitals, but who had also contributed enormously to the various scientific and literary institutions. These men included James Williamson M.D. (1797-1845), Robert Disney Thorp M.D. (1780-1853), William Hey II (1771-1844) and Adam Hunter M.D. (1794-1843).

Medical men played one final and important role in shaping the outlook of the Leeds middle class, by decoding and interpreting for the rest of that class the mysteries of the new

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<sup>53</sup> Reid, *J. D. Heaton*, p. 166.

<sup>54</sup> Rev. R. V. Taylor, *Biographia Leodiensis; or Biographical Sketches of the Worthies of Leeds and Neighbourhood from the Norman Conquest to the Present Time* (Leeds, 1865).

urban society that was springing up all around them. For an enterprising young doctor with a bent for social investigation, the slums, factories and workshops of a town like Leeds were a place where theories could be developed and tested and reputations made. These reputations could spread well beyond the medical community itself. Early Victorian fears about the moral and physical dangers of factories and slums ensured a large and eager audience, ready to be titillated, frightened or angered by descriptions of the world of urban depravity on their doorsteps. Moreover, outbreaks of epidemic diseases, such as the cholera of 1832, made such investigations of the link between dirt and disease an urgent necessity.

In Leeds, the work of two men in particular stands out. Charles Turner Thackrah produced an important work on occupational diseases and disorders, inspired by the structural changes in the Leeds economy, such as the increase in factory employment. However, his work ranged far more widely than this, taking in the health of the middle classes and women too. The increasing regularisation of work by the clock and the more purely administrative role of the employer which necessitated long hours working at the desk, were as interesting to him as causes of physical disorder as long hours of physical toil.<sup>55</sup>

The other defining features of the nineteenth-century industrial town, namely the effects of poor sanitation and urban overcrowding, were investigated in Leeds by Robert Baker. Baker also had an interest in occupational health, having given up his medical practice for work as a factory surgeon after suffering from a dose of cholera in 1832. He was later to become the first medical man to serve as a Factory Inspector.<sup>56</sup> However, the work that made his name, in Leeds at least, was that on the cholera outbreak of 1832, and his subsequent writings on the sanitary condition of the town. More than any other single work, Baker's report, which showed the distribution of cholera cases in the 1832 epidemic, defined the way in which Leeds was perceived by outsiders for two decades or more.<sup>57</sup> When James Williamson gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Health of Towns in

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Turner Thackrah, *The Effects of Arts Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living on Health and Longevity*, second edition (1832; Canton, Mass.: Watson Publishing International, 1985), esp. pp. 166-70 and 173-86.

<sup>56</sup> W. R. Lee, 'Robert Baker: The First Doctor in the Factory Department, Part I, 1803-1858', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 85, 21 (1964), 85-93.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Baker, *Report of the Leeds Board of Health, 1833* (Leeds, 1833).

1840, many of the questions he was asked and the answers he gave were set within the terms and limitations of Baker's work.<sup>58</sup>

Morris has pointed out that Baker's work was crucial in reinforcing the perception that there existed in Leeds, and urban society generally, two distinct 'nations'.<sup>59</sup> According to this view, rich and poor were increasingly separated from one another physically, as well as morally, mentally and economically. Such a conclusion was based on Baker's mapping of the distribution of cholera cases in Leeds, which showed a clear division between the east of the town, with a relatively high incidence of the disease, and the west, where cases were relatively uncommon. Given Baker's linking of cholera cases to poor sanitation, the map appeared to demonstrate the gulf between the middle and upper classes and the lower classes in the starkest terms. Subsequent research by historians has questioned the validity of this conclusion. David Ward, for instance, has argued that industrial development in the West of the town actually disrupted a process of social segregation that had begun in the late eighteenth century, and that most districts of the town remained socially mixed throughout the period.<sup>60</sup> However, as Ward admits, the very elite commercial and professional groups who shaped public opinion in Leeds *were* becoming segregated into districts with a low proportion of the working classes, such as the area around Park Square which became dominated by the professions, or were vacating the town centre altogether and heading for leafy suburbs such as Headingley. For them, Baker's report simply reinforced the evidence of their own experiences. Small wonder that much of the effort of social reformers was aimed at bridging this gulf, or that the history of class relations in Leeds was characterised by misunderstanding and an absence of communication.

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<sup>58</sup> Evidence of Dr James Williamson, *Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns*, Parliamentary Papers, 1840, xl, pp. 96-106 and 112-18.

<sup>59</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> David Ward, 'Environs and Neighbours in the "Two Nations": Residential Differentiation in Mid Nineteenth-Century Leeds', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 6, 2 (1980), 133-62; Maurice Beresford, *East End, West End: The Face of Leeds During Urbanisation 1684-1842* (Leeds: Thoresby Society, 1985-6), esp. chapters 12-13. See also Maurice Beresford, 'The Face of Leeds, 1780-1914', in Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 72-112.

### 1.3: Conclusion: Gender and Citizenship.

The public sphere in Leeds was therefore grounded in a variety of political, cultural and philanthropic institutions, of both a formal and an informal nature. These institutions were dominated by middle-class groups and provided sites for the development and articulation of a common cultural and civic identity for that class. A key component of that identity was an emergent ideal of public citizenship, which encouraged and legitimised the self-image of the middle class as being the location of 'public opinion', and as the natural leaders of urban society. The actions and opinions of this middle-class community were shaped and reported in the press, which effectively set the parameters of the 'respectable' public and defined the community's response to threats from more marginalised groups. These included radical working and lower middle-class elements who periodically attempted to introduce their own agenda into public debates.

This concept of citizenship was furthered by the activities of a number of people who, from a sense of religious conviction, political principle, or professional duty, devoted themselves to the improvement of the physical, and cultural environment of their borough. These same men were also active in public life beyond Leeds, according to their means. However, the ideals of active citizenship which they stood for, and which provided their main source of motivation, had been forged and honed through participation in the civic life of their native town. This ideal can be seen at its apogee in the biography of Edward Baines, written by Edward Baines Junior in 1853. The volume was written with a self-consciously didactic aim, and its popularity suggests that it expressed widely held notions of the ideal of the public man. It was also intended as a history of the political development of Leeds and the county of Yorkshire in general, and although Baines does not use the language of the 'public sphere', it is clear that the developments he traces were not far removed from those which have formed the subject of this chapter.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout the biography, Baines portrayed his father as the model middle-class citizen. Dror Wahrman contends that this concept would probably have been an unfamiliar one to Baines Senior for much of his active public life, as before 1832 the association of

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<sup>61</sup> Baines, *Life of Edward Baines*. For more about the origin and intention of this work see Derek Fraser, 'The Life of Edward Baines: A Filial Biography of "The Great Liar of the North"', *Northern History*, 31 (1995), 208-22.

citizenship almost exclusively with the middle class was by no means automatic.<sup>62</sup> However, in the period covered by this thesis, such an assumption was largely second nature, despite attempts by groups such as the Chartists to evolve a more inclusive ideal of citizenship. Baines junior was very clear about the qualities required by the ideal middle-class citizen, declaring in the introduction that:

An example of energy, prudence, and integrity in business, of earnest patriotism in a political career, of benevolent zeal for all social improvement, of the qualities that adorn society and sweeten domestic life ... is one which every man may study to advantage. It may be especially useful to the young to set before them a character of remarkable symmetry, in which great virtues are not neutralised by great failings, but in which every feature is well proportioned, and all conduce to a result of masculine beauty.<sup>63</sup>

The perfect middle-class citizen was therefore a man of business and thus separated from the leisured aristocrat, who lacked such a training ground in which to develop the virtues of 'energy, prudence and integrity'.<sup>64</sup> He was also patriotic and benevolent, always ready to take an active part in the political and social life of his town and nation.<sup>65</sup> He was also civilised, able to enrich the society in which he moved and to fulfill the offices of a husband and father, so providing the perfect example to another generation of active citizens. Finally, he was, implicitly but emphatically, a man. To Baines the business of being a good citizen was the exclusive preserve of the male sex, although this is not to say that individual women did not play some part in the story.

The one failing which Baines Junior admitted in his father was a lack of religious intensity. In the Baines household it was Edward's wife, Charlotte, who was the major religious influence. Although Charlotte's own public role and activities are unmentioned, it is clear that she was a woman of some character, as her son does record that she led the exodus from Call Lane Independent Chapel when the minister there adopted Arian views.<sup>66</sup> Her influence also manifested itself in the active piety of her son, which may be contrasted

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<sup>62</sup> Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class* pp. 400-401.

<sup>63</sup> Baines, *Life of Edward Baines*, p. iv.

<sup>64</sup> Business here taken to include the professions, as discussed earlier.

<sup>65</sup> The political activities of Baines Junior are explored in Derek Fraser, 'Edward Baines', in P. Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), 183-209.

<sup>66</sup> Baines, *Life of Edward Baines*, p. 32.

with the more worldly definition of 'citizenship' personified by her husband. However, in the narrative of Baines' role in the political and social awakening of the great city of Leeds, Charlotte's part is the ancillary one of providing emotional and spiritual support for the great public man; and in later life preparing the way for his religious conversion. For instance, Baines Junior recorded that 'He took a greatly increased interest in the religious readings and conversation of his wife and daughters on the Sabbath, and he listened with a humility that surprised them when intelligible allusions were made to the importance of his own interest in the saviour'.<sup>67</sup>

What is striking about Baines' account of his father, however, is the way in which his virtues are not bounded by any *a priori* conception of a division between the 'public' and 'private'. Baines' active citizenship has its mainspring in 'the qualities that adorn society and sweeten domestic life'. There was thus an intimate relationship between his social, domestic and political personas. If this could be true of a man, why should it not also be the case for women? It has been said by the exponents of the 'separate spheres' that men were allowed to move at will between the two, while women's lives were effectively limited to the sphere of the household.<sup>68</sup> The following chapters explore and challenge this assumption, demonstrating that women could and did come to possess characters 'of remarkable symmetry'.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290. For the influence of religion on the social and political outlook of the Baines family see Clyde Binfield, *So Down To Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920* (London: Dent, 1977), chapter 4.

<sup>68</sup> See the debate in Chapter 1.

## CHAPTER 3

### Education and Culture

This chapter will examine the construction of female public and civic identities through the realms of education and culture. Educational theory was an important site of conflict over the social construction of individuals and groups, and the terrain was contested by commentators from a variety of religious and political backgrounds. Here, critiques of society were developed and remedies sought for 'social' problems and threats ranging from the rise of republicanism, to socialism and the 'Condition of England' question. A large number of works on the subject were inspired by the evangelical movement, although most of these stressed abnegation of the self as the ultimate aim of female education. More positive views of women's intellectual powers were held by Unitarians and other proponents of 'rational dissent'.<sup>1</sup> However, many authors strove to provide a thorough analysis of woman's place and influence in society as a whole, including the extent to which she should interest herself in matters of politics and social reform. The first section of this chapter explores the parameters of these debates, asking how far commentators and reformers envisaged female education as preparation for a role beyond the confines of the home and what form they believed that role should take.

The second section examines the educational opportunities available to middle-class girls in Leeds and the West Riding during the period. It addresses the relationship of private girls' schools to the public arena, while tracing the early development of female public schooling in the town. The primary concern is to assess the impact of national debates about education on the way in which the issue was addressed by educational reformers in Leeds. The evidence produced also gives some idea of the extent to which ideals of public service and usefulness were encouraged in girls through their educational experiences, and of the opportunities available to middle-class women as teachers.

The third and final section looks at women's engagement with high culture. Patronage of science and the arts was increasingly bound up with the middle class's sense of its own 'civilising mission' during this period. Instead of considering mental cultivation as the exclusive preserve of the wealthy, many middle-class intellectuals and collectors

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England 1760-1860* (London and New York: Longman, 1998).



believed that its advantages could be transmitted to the lower orders by osmosis, bringing wider social benefits and mutual understanding.<sup>2</sup> As a result, middle-class literary and scientific institutions often had a distinctly public-spirited bent. In Leeds this manifested itself through the many papers read on subjects relating to social reform; the willingness of committees to open their museums and grounds to the lower classes from time to time; and the public exhibitions of arts and manufactures that were held with the aim of enlightening the masses, as well as demonstrating the taste of the Leeds elite.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there was an increasing desire to provide working men and women with their own educational institutions, which could then become vehicles for the transmission of middle-class values.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this section is therefore to establish both the degree of access which Leeds women had to cultural resources, and the extent of their involvement in the promotion of art, literature and science as a corollary of civic pride and identity.

### 3.1: The Education Debate.

The debates over women's educational standards and the ideal curriculum for female students, and the reform movements which sprang from them, have been dealt with

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<sup>2</sup> Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class; Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> The connection between middle-class attitudes towards high culture and an ethos of social improvement has been widely noted. See for instance G. Kitson Clark, 'The Leeds Elite', *The University of Leeds Review*, 17, 2 (1975), 232-58; Howard M. Wach, 'Culture and the Middle Classes: Popular Knowledge and Industrial Manchester', *Journal of British Studies*, 27 (1988), 375-404. For the didactic aims of exhibitions see Morris, 'Middle-Class Culture', p. 210; Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 98; Toshio Kusamitsu, 'Great Exhibitions before 1851', *History Workshop Journal*, 9, Spring (1980), 70-89; Caroline Arscott, "'Without distinction of party': The Polytechnic Exhibitions in Leeds, 1839-45", in Wolff and Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital*, 83-115.

<sup>4</sup> Alan White, 'Class, Culture and Control: the Sheffield Athenaeum Movement and the Middle Class 1847-64' in Wolff and Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital*, 83-115; W. B. Stephens, *Adult Education and Society in an Industrial Town: Warrington, 1800-1900* (Exeter University Press, 1980).

extensively elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Instead, this section will be used in order to analyse the attitudes of reformers towards the public and social responsibilities of women. In particular, it will be argued that authors tended to see public and private virtues as inextricably linked, rather than as necessarily separate. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the very act of writing on female education brought both the subject and the authors themselves into the public domain. However, it is striking that such attitudes were shared even by those who wished to play down the overtly public aspects of women's existence, but who were forced to acknowledge that the peculiar place of women within the family gave them a significant influence on the character of society as a whole.

The Victorian middle class recognised that knowledge was power. If they forgot this fact for a moment, they were reminded of it through their Protestant religion, their politics, and their business dealings. However, it was widely thought that power and knowledge rightfully belonged in the hands of men. Many believed that women had no need for a vigorous intellectual training. Some even thought that they would be damaged by the experience, or that it would lead to a neglect of their all-important household duties. Despite this, a growing number of men and women believed that the education usually received by girls of the more affluent classes was inadequate, and that this problem affected not only the women themselves, but their future husbands, families and the nation as a whole.

Would-be reformers of women's education, of whatever hue, tended to begin from the premise that the middle classes were educating their daughters as decorative toys; in other words as 'ladies', possessed of fine accomplishments, such as drawing, dancing and singing, but very little else. Sarah Stickney Ellis wrote contemptuously of 'young ladies (for they are no longer *women*)' who aped aristocratic manners, but forgot their true vocation.<sup>6</sup> It was argued that such an education made women worse than useless; superficially charming in the flower of youth, perhaps, but incapable of fulfilling any serious role in society. Most reformers believed that girls' education should enable them to cope better

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<sup>5</sup> See Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred, Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965); Joyce Pederson, *The Reform of Girls' Secondary and Higher Education in Victorian England: A Study of Elites and Educational Change* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social and Domestic Habits* (1839), p. 12.

with what would be expected of them in life, so raising them from being idle parasites to a position of social utility. However, the kind of 'useful' woman that education was intended to achieve was a source of great debate. Should women be at all active in a public sense? Should the aim of woman's education be to fit her for economic independence, or merely an auxiliary domestic role? Finally, who were to be the main beneficiaries of female education: the family; the nation; or even women themselves through the acquisition of moral autonomy and mental resourcefulness?

These debates centred around the assumption that women occupied an important and influential place in society, with reformers arguing that this influence was perverted or devalued by the state of intellectual ignorance in which women were kept. Significantly, the first chapter of Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* was entitled 'Address to women of rank and fortune, on the effects of their influence on society', in which More claimed: 'The general state of civilized society depends ... on the prevailing sentiments and habits of women, and on the nature and degree of the estimation in which they are held.'<sup>7</sup> Sarah Lewis devoted the first five chapters of her hugely influential *Woman's Mission* to the same theme.<sup>8</sup>

Reformers' then proceeded to outline how women could cultivate their intellects in order to exert their influence for the good of society as a whole. The key to this lay in the development of reason as the basis of moral autonomy. This provided the main theme of works such as *Woman's Mission* and those which followed it.<sup>9</sup> For example, Sarah Ellis believed that 'The great point to be gained, is to penetrate at once to the root of the matter, and to begin by a different system of education, to render moral courage - the courage to do what is right - the first principle of female conduct.'<sup>10</sup> The Shirreff sisters, Emily and Mary, made the connection between intellect and morality even more explicitly: 'The greater the development of intellect in any age, the greater the need of moral power in

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<sup>7</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (1799: Oxford and New York: Woodstock Books, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Lewis, *Woman's Mission*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London, 1839).

<sup>9</sup> Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 112-13.

<sup>10</sup> Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 348.

education to give it a right direction.'<sup>11</sup>

The question remained as to the sphere or capacity in which women should exercise their intellects and their 'moral courage'. It appears that most authors had some conception of the 'public' or 'social' responsibilities of women, and their ideas of 'woman's nature' often included at least the potential for public activity. Moreover, thinking on this point in advanced circles developed in response to growing statistical evidence about the 'problem' categories of single and working women. However, family and home were the main starting points in most accounts of woman's duties and many writers, particularly before the 1840s and 1850s, believed that the majority of women would spend their lives in a domestic environment. Even after women's employment became an issue, it was often argued that women should not try to compete in the market place with men. Nevertheless, even these writers did not deny women an influence on the world outside the household.

For most early nineteenth-century reformers, the source of woman's influence lay in her domestic position. Moreover, for the majority, a woman's domestic duties as a wife and mother continued to take precedence over all else. On these points at least, there was little to distinguish the views of evangelical conservatives like More from those of radical republicans like Mary Wollstonecraft, although the social and political improvements each desired were diametrically opposed. For example, More would have found little to criticise in the following statement:

No employment of the mind is a sufficient excuse for neglecting domestic duties, and I cannot conceive that they are incompatible. A woman may fit herself to be the companion and friend of a man of sense, and yet know how to take care of his family.<sup>12</sup>

Even in her more radical works, Wollstonecraft's emphasis remained on the family as the environment in which good citizens were formed, although she did advocate a radical

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<sup>11</sup> Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff, *Thoughts on Self-Culture, Addressed to Women* (London, 1850). The sisters' contribution to educational reform is assessed in Edward E. Ellsworth, *Liberators of the Female Mind: the Shirreff Sisters, Educational Reform, and the Women's Movement* (Westport, Conn. etc.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787; New Jersey, 1972), p. 56.

restructuring of power relations *within* the household.<sup>13</sup> However, it is significant that Wollstonecraft's ideal of educated female citizens would produce 'more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers'.<sup>14</sup>

There was a major tactical consideration involved in acknowledging that woman's primary role was a domestic one, as opponents of educational reform often claimed that intellectual pursuits would distract women from attending to the welfare of their families. This point of view influenced much of the debate over educating women, particularly in the early nineteenth century. In a seminal article on the subject Sydney Smith rejected the idea that educated women would grow vain and careless of their duties, opining that woman's 'natural' instincts would not allow it to happen.<sup>15</sup> This article was often quoted approvingly by later writers and the idea of woman's natural instincts prompted a rich vein of argument about how the accomplishments of a lady were themselves unnatural, and that it was in fact the pursuit of such vanities which made women forget their duty to their families. By contrast, cultivation of the intellect and moral sense would enable women to see their 'true' mission more clearly and to discharge their duties more effectively. For example, Ellis defended her views by claiming that:

the highest aim of the writer does not extend beyond the act of warning the women of England back to their domestic duties, in order that they may become better wives, more useful daughters, and mothers, who by their example shall bequeath a rich inheritance to those who follow in their steps.<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to tell just how far such arguments were designed primarily to deflect criticism at the time. However, many women writing on the subject were clear about how far women should try to go. In the 1850s Emily Shirreff set out her opposition to those claiming equality with men. In a pointed reference to the republican tradition of Wollstonecraft, she argued: 'The dream of equality was, I believe, born of wild political

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<sup>13</sup> Carol H. Posten (ed.), *Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792: New York, 1975), especially Chapters IX and XII

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Sydney Smith, 'Advice to Young Ladies on the Improvement of the Mind', *Edinburgh Review*, 15 (1810), 299-315.

<sup>16</sup> Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 39. For similar views see Emily Shirreff, *Intellectual Education, and its Influence on the Character and Happiness of Women* (London, 1858), pp. 29-30; and William Landels, *Woman's Sphere and Work, Considered in the Light of Scripture* (London, 1859), esp. chapter 1.

theory, which would have founded government on a basis as unsound as that on which some women now seek to found social reform.’<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, such writers clearly did not believe that women’s influence was confined within the four walls of the family home. Instead, women were perceived to have a particular role to play in the encouragement of public virtue.

A favourite theme of writers was the importance of a mother’s influence on her offspring, particularly on boys who were to be the citizens of the future. A strong moral influence in the home was held to be vital to producing men with moral courage and strength. Such arguments could contain a significant element of patriotism. For example, Sarah Ellis believed that the men who went out to build the empire, ‘have borne along with them a generosity, a disinterestedness, and a moral courage, derived in no small measure from the female influence of their native country’.<sup>18</sup> Thus woman’s influence found itself becoming part of the myth of Britain’s ‘civilising mission’ abroad. This diffusion of the Englishwoman’s moral character throughout the nation and out into the rest of the world was a major theme of Ellis’ work: ‘the immediate object of the present work is to show how intimate is the connexion which exists between the *women* of England, and the *moral* character maintained by their country in the scale of nations’.<sup>19</sup> Women also had a duty to encourage public spirit in their children:

It is, as we have again and again repeated, the whole tone of the mother’s mind and habits of thought, which influences the associations and principles of her children; if then men early heard the language of enlightened patriotism from their mothers, can we believe it would remain without effect? If public motives and public duties had been held up to them from boyhood as things which must earnestly occupy every thinking man, would they not have looked more seriously upon them?<sup>20</sup>

By extending this influence to their husbands, women could also exercise a more immediate effect on the moral standards of public life. This added an extra, more pro-active ingredient to the familiar idea that one of woman’s primary duties was to provide her

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<sup>17</sup> Shirreff, *Intellectual Education*, p. 421.

<sup>18</sup> Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 54. These nationalistic sentiments were sometimes criticised. See T. H. Lister, ‘Rights and Conditions of Women’, *Edinburgh Review*, 73 (1841), 189-209, pp. 189-90.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Grey and Shirreff, *Thoughts on Self Culture*, pp. 165-6.

husband with a domestic haven from the rigours of business and politics. For Emily Shirreff:

Every tender thought, every lofty emotion, every generous sentiment that men may be in danger of forgetting in the clash and tumult of the world should be shrined in the hearts of women, and thence go forth to purify and sustain and resist the lowering tendencies of active life.<sup>21</sup>

In its own way this was very much a subversive idea. It was just such activity in public life that had originally formed the basis of middle-class claims to represent the nation through 'public opinion'. Success in business was a proof of moral probity. However, harking back to the civic humanist traditions of the eighteenth century, many women writers stressed the temptations and conflicts of the economic and political lives of the 'public man' in order to press the claim of women both to a moral high ground and to the necessity of being given a greater understanding of the temptations that their husbands faced. They therefore subtly re-structured the basis of middle-class morality, and through it public virtue, so that it seemed to flow from the domestic hearth rather than the counting house.

Other writers also developed this theme of enlightened and educated women as the 'spiritual guardians' of men, who guided their steps in the paths of morality and justice, just as men were the physical guardians of women.<sup>22</sup> For example, in his essay 'Of Queen's Gardens', Ruskin described the relationship between man and woman as being shaped by the code of chivalry, emphasising the complementarity of supposedly essential physical and intellectual differences between men and women:

his intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle ... Her great function is Praise [sic]; she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest.<sup>23</sup>

However, despite his belief in these fundamental sexual differences, Ruskin believed that women could only fulfil their duties if they were given access to adequate education.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Shirreff, *Intellectual Education*, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Ellis *The Women of England*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>23</sup> John Ruskin, 'Sesame and Lilies II: Of Queen's Gardens', in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin*, XVIII (London: George Allen, 1905), 109-44, pp. 121-2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-34.

In order to understand the problems which their husbands faced in public life, it was believed that women had a duty to develop their intellects. However, they were also required to maintain a distance from the public sphere that would allow them to exercise a beneficial and calming influence. For example, the Shirreff sisters believed that women should interest themselves in politics in order to become the conscience of the nation, but that this could not be achieved from a partisan position. Instead, women should learn to stand back from partisan strife, which threatened to immerse them in petty squabbles and distract them from the broader picture of the national interest. Emily and Maria criticised those women 'whose interest is habitually immersed in carpet-work, while questions touching a nation's life or death are hanging in the balance'.<sup>25</sup> Female partisanship, 'often as violent as it is inexcusable', was the result of 'the prevalence of feeling over judgement, and want of knowledge of the subjects on which they give an opinion'.<sup>26</sup> However, this did not mean that women should leave politics alone:

Removed from the actual strife, spared all the excitement and irritation of public life, they should avail themselves of their privilege to maintain calmness and freedom from prejudice in their own minds, to discover and appreciate worth and high principle under whatever banner it may be found, and to assert the great cause of truth and charity, above all party and sectarian interests ... When women shall thus cultivate and use political knowledge, female politicians will speedily lose the bad name they have so often deserved.<sup>27</sup>

Ellis also believed that women should gain a knowledge of politics, if only to calm the party spirit of their menfolk.<sup>28</sup> Theories of women's domestic influence therefore shaded almost imperceptibly into an active, even interventionist, conception of their role in public affairs.

So far only the indirect influence which women exercised on the wider world through their families has been considered. However, some reformers also envisaged an active role for women in the wider society. In particular, it was believed that a practical sphere of female action lay in transmitting the values of the middle and upper classes to the poor. Although there was a strong tradition of female agency in this area, the evangelical revival

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<sup>25</sup> Grey and Shirreff, *Thoughts on Self-Culture*, p. 166.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163. Such passages are an interesting reminder that the ideal of 'woman' as above party, even when engaged in politics, was just an ideal.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, *The Women of England*, pp. 341-2



instilled a new sense of duty to women's philanthropic activities. At the same time, the economic theories of the Manchester School had challenged traditional practices of indiscriminate almsgiving, arguing that this only increased poverty by placing a premium upon idleness. These theories had a profound influence on many reformers, encouraged partly by the popularisations of political economy published by Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau, and partly by the enthusiastic advocacy of the science by evangelical divines such as Thomas Chalmers.<sup>29</sup> For example, Grey and Shirreff believed that women had a duty to bring themselves to an understanding of the science, so that they could direct their charitable energies into beneficial rather than harmful channels. In particular, they thought that women could play a vital role in educating the poor about the need for reforms such as the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, thus diffusing social discontent.<sup>30</sup>

To these authors middle-class women themselves stood largely outside the economic sphere. Emily Shirreff encouraged women to take a role in their husbands' or fathers' businesses, but felt that women should not try to support themselves by work unless it was absolutely necessary. She believed that as soon as women started to compete with men economically then the bond of sympathy between the two sexes would be destroyed, with dire consequences for the future of society.<sup>31</sup> Ellis meanwhile made special mention of the lower middle classes, whose station made it foolish to educate their daughters as mere drawing-room ornaments when it was imperative that they possessed skills which could earn

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<sup>29</sup> See Jane Marcet, *Conversations on Political Economy* (1815) and Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, 9 vols. (1834). The impact of Martineau's work on a middle class seeking assurance about future stability in the face of economic and social dislocation is discussed in Elaine Freedgood, 'Banishing Panic: Harriet Martineau and the Popularisation of Political Economy', *Victorian Studies*, 39, 1 (1995), 33-53. For the links between political economy and evangelicalism see Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford University Press, 1988), *passim*. In 1841, the opening up of political economy to women was pointed out in M. Mylne, 'Woman, and her Social Position', *Westminster Review*, 35 (1841), 24-52, esp. pp. 34-5. The previous year had seen the publication of *Woman's Rights and Duties* (1840), the first educational book for girls to substitute a section on political economy for one on religion: John Killham, *Tennyson and 'The Princess': Reflections of an Age* (University of London, 1958), p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> Grey and Shirreff, *Thoughts on Self Culture*, pp. 33-4; Shirreff, *Intellectual Education*, p. 356.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 397 and 417-8.

them a wage should they need it. She also mentioned some occupations, such as pattern-making, which she believed should be opened to women of this class.<sup>32</sup> However, the general assumption was that women would have husbands to support them.

Nevertheless, a certain class of writers on women's education argued that women needed to be educated in order to support themselves, should they be unable to find a husband. This argument gathered ground from the 1830s onwards, largely as a result of the increasing volume of information available on women's work.<sup>33</sup> In the 1840s, working women of all classes were at the centre of attention. Women's work in factories, workshops and mines was seen as the root of a host of social ills, including drunkenness, prostitution and even poverty itself. However, as far as middle-class women were concerned, it was the plight of the governess that stood out. The work of the Governesses Benevolent Institution gave an idea of the numbers of these women, surviving at the margins of middle-class society, usually underpaid, often badly treated and with no pension to fall back on when their working lives were over. In 1845, Queen's College was set up in order to raise the standards of those applying for work as governesses. It was hoped that qualified women would be able to demand higher wages, while the unqualified would be forced into other employments.<sup>34</sup>

The Census of 1851 was a landmark in the development of this debate over vocational education for women, as it provided detailed breakdowns of women's employment. The findings of this survey were the inspiration for works such as J. D. Milne's *Industrial and Social Position of Women in the Middle and Lower Ranks* (London, 1857). Milne went further than merely advocating vocational education for women on the off-chance that they might need to work for a living. Instead, his vision entailed a radical restructuring of middle-class attitudes towards women's work. Industrial occupation, broadly conceived of as administrative or skilled rather than manual or unskilled, was portrayed as a positive good. Again, as with arguments relating to non-vocational education, women's work was put forward as a panacea for perceived 'national' social problems and for a lack of public

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<sup>32</sup> Ellis, *The Women of England*, pp. 346-7.

<sup>33</sup> Not all were convinced by the evidence. See for example Margaret Oliphant, 'The Condition of Women', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 83 (1858), 139-54.

<sup>34</sup> The Anglican Queen's was later joined by the non-denominational Bedford College.

spirit. Milne argued that the separation of the lives of men and women into mutually exclusive 'spheres' had eroded their relationship to one another.<sup>35</sup> By participating actively in the economy, women would be better suited to educating their sons to face the public world. Milne also believed that women would gain individual benefits, including mental and moral toughness, but these all fitted in to the general scheme of creating a better society for all.<sup>36</sup> In Milne's view, politics, political rights and influence were inseparably connected with business (a classically 'middle-class' point of view): 'It is impossible therefore, for women - so long as excluded from industry - to take a part or feel an interest in political and social movements, or to influence public opinion, national virtue or national progress.' This was a remarkable argument which assumed that such influence was not just possible, but necessary and desirable. However, the vital unit remained that of the family. His opinion that under this system, 'each family would, as in the days of Oliver Cromwell, be a centre of public opinion, and an altar of public principle' contained more than an echo of Wollstonecraft.<sup>37</sup>

In her review of Milne's book, Harriet Martineau understandably under-played the political arguments, preferring to dwell on the idea that women could be educated for branches of industry other than needlework without losing caste. She couched her argument in the language of free-trade economics, which had gained the position of established orthodoxy by the late 1850s after the bitter political controversies of the 1840s. Her primary example was that of watchmaking, a trade from which women were largely excluded, while the Swiss employed women to make watches that undercut native equivalents in the British market. Again, although her concern for the welfare of individual women forced into overstocked trades was obvious, the language she used was that of national well-being and national advantage: women should work because British industry would be stronger as a result.<sup>38</sup>

Writings such as those of Milne, Martineau and the Langham Place group, which pressed for women's entry into the professions and social work, chiselled away at

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<sup>35</sup> Milne, *Industrial and Social Position of Women*, chapter 1 part iii.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Harriet Martineau, 'Female Industry', *Edinburgh Review*, 109 (1859), 293-336.

contemporary models of femininity.<sup>39</sup> Behind them lay a feminist concern to enable women to achieve personal fulfilment. However, in order to sell their ideas to a sceptical world, they evolved theories of social and economic utility which gave firm direction and a radical edge to vague platitudes about 'woman's mission' or 'female influence'. Consequently, writers on women's education were drawn towards expanded ideals of women's roles which eroded theoretical boundaries between the public and private. This was especially so where issues such as women's work, or women's legal and political rights were at stake. Hence Milne's return to the family, not only as the basic social and economic unit, but as the basic *political* unit as well. Such thinking represented the complete dissolution of the public/private boundary, in an attempt to demonstrate that women's 'natural' domestic concerns would not suffer from political and economic activity.

Many of these works were reactions to a perceived separation of public and private life, which was often held up by contemporaries as a sign of progress away from barbarism and towards the perfect civilisation. However, the discourses of separation were constantly threatened by the demonstrable fact that contemporary British society was a long way from this utopia. In the 1830s and 1840s especially, the tensions created by industrialisation and urban expansion threatened to tear society apart, prompting calls for women to play a greater role in fostering social cohesion. From the late 1830s onwards such calls became more resonant, with the realisation that women played an important role in the economic life of the nation and were often the main victims of social and economic upheaval. While some responded by calling for greater regulation of women's work, there were an increasing number who believed that woman's social position could only be raised if the labour market were freed of false distinctions between men's and women's work, and between the work of 'ladies' and the work of 'women'.

These were radical views; however, as this section has demonstrated, even those who believed that women should keep almost exclusively to their domestic responsibilities accepted that women exerted a great and beneficial influence in the public domain. Ellis, a firm believer in women's public duty, claimed that 'all must allow, that it is to the

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<sup>39</sup> See for instance Barbara Bodichon, *Women and Work* (London, 1857); Bessie Rayner Parkes, 'The Market for Educated Female Labour', *English Woman's Journal (EWJ)*, IV (1859-60), 145-52; and 'What Can Educated Women Do?' parts I and II, *EWJ*, IV, 217-27 and 289-98. All of these essays are reprinted in Candida Ann Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (London etc.: Routledge, 1987).

indefatigable exertions and faithful labours of women of this [the middle] class, that England chiefly owes the support of some of her noblest and most benevolent institutions'.<sup>40</sup> Even conservatives like William Landels could admit that women had occasionally exercised a benevolent influence on public opinion, although he rejected any notion of them gaining individual satisfaction from this.<sup>41</sup> Having established a theoretical and rhetorical belief in the public and social responsibilities of women, the remainder of this chapter explores how far these ideals were reflected in the education that girls actually received, and measures the extent of their participation in the 'noble and benevolent institutions' that catered for the cultural aspirations of the urban middle classes.

### **3.2: Education for Middle-Class Girls in Leeds to 1860.**

It has been demonstrated that the nature of women's education was a source of continuing debate throughout the period, though that debate itself focussed mainly on education within the home. This section is primarily concerned with the education of middle-class girls outside the home in institutions of various kinds, and with the place that those institutions occupied in relation to the 'public sphere'. It will be argued that all schools were, to an extent, public institutions and that the educational debates described above and the local initiatives they sparked played a crucial role in making education for middle-class girls a subject of public concern. It is also hoped to show that girls away from home, even in genteel establishments, had opportunities to interest themselves in public life and even to participate in that life to a certain degree. Firstly however, it would be useful to examine the views of other historians in relation to the public and private nature of girls' schools and the teaching profession itself in the period before 1860.

The education of middle-class girls during this period has been little studied as a subject in itself. As far as schools are concerned, most authors on women's education have described the period before the reforms of the last third of the century as one of stagnation. For instance, Josephine Kamm's ambitious work on women's education in England paints a bleak picture of the 'ladies' academy' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

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<sup>40</sup> Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Landels, *Woman's Sphere*, p. 55. He was probably thinking of the anti-slavery agitation.

which was mainly distinguished by 'overcrowding, undernourishment, and an education which was no education at all'.<sup>42</sup> More recent accounts have portrayed these institutions in a more sympathetic light, whilst accepting that the education they provided was of small academic worth.

Joyce Pederson, whose main concern is also with educational reform after 1860, attempts to understand the schools in the context of their times and the ideal of womanhood which they were trying to imbue. For instance, the small size of most schools, blamed for many of their short-comings, made the schools more 'family-like' and therefore more like the domestic situation girls had come from and were expected to return to. For Pederson, 'the ideals of civility and sociability and self-repression which informed the education they offered are not fashionable today, but they do not appear to me entirely ignoble, especially in the context of their times.'<sup>43</sup> In her view, the major success of the reformers was to change the definition of female gentility, so that educational achievement came to be respected and even encouraged:

A major interest of the reforms is the function they served in promoting a redefinition of the status and roles of a social elite. The reforms in effect replaced an educational system dominated by ascribed social characteristics with one in which academic achievement was given more weight.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike Kamm, Pederson focuses mainly on the teachers at such schools rather than on the experiences of their pupils. This fits with her thesis that reform in girls' education was supply-led through the efforts of reforming headmistresses, bolstered at strategic junctures by the intervention of feminist campaigners who acted as catalysts for change.<sup>45</sup> However, teachers at these small schools were unable to introduce many changes, being too much at the mercy of the expectations of parents and conscious of the need to maintain social caste. In Pederson's view, their reasons for taking on schools were purely social and economic. Faced with a choice of losing caste by taking some other work, or teaching and maintaining the status of a 'lady', most women would opt for the latter. Similarly, as soon as the economic pressure was removed or a marriage partner found, the teaching was allowed to lapse. It was therefore impossible for lady teachers to develop the kind of

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<sup>42</sup> Kamm, *Hope Deferred*, p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Pederson, *The Reform of Girls' Secondary and Higher Education*, p. ii.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi.

professional ethos necessary to push through curricular reforms against the opposition or indifference of parents.<sup>46</sup>

Susan Skedd has written an account of women teachers at an earlier period, in which she concentrates on the *public* nature of the occupation, as opposed to Pederson's emphasis on the essentially *private* atmosphere encouraged within the schools themselves. Skedd's account is more positive about the effects of such schooling, arguing that the eighteenth-century expansion of commercial schools for boys and girls essentially changed the pattern of English education: 'The girls' schools were a greater educational innovation because for the first time they gave girls the opportunity of an extensive school education as an alternative to a private education in the home'.<sup>47</sup> Skedd also finds reason to reassess the lot of 'lady teachers' in a more positive light than either Kamm or Pederson: 'To dismiss teaching as nothing more than the last resort of destitute but genteel women would be to ignore the fact that keeping a school not only could be lucrative but also could secure a woman's respectability and give her a sense of usefulness and purpose in life.'<sup>48</sup> She concludes convincingly that schools were essentially 'public institutions that thrived on publicity and reputation', and that 'teaching was one of the few occupations open to women that freed them - at least in part - from dependence on male influence and expertise, and at the same time offered them a livelihood that was not confined to a private or a domestic sphere.'<sup>49</sup> This is a useful corrective to bear in mind, but one should not forget the accounts quoted by Kamm, which show that the lives of teachers and pupils alike could often be difficult and unrewarding.

Bearing in mind Skedd's view that girls' education cannot be understood in terms of public and private boundaries, the remainder of this section will examine the different educational options available to middle-class girls in Leeds during the period, while

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<sup>46</sup> See *ibid.*, chapter 4: 'The lady-teacher and the family-like school'.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Skedd, 'Women Teachers and the Expansion of Girls' Schooling in England, c. 1720-1820', in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), 101-25, p. 101.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-5. For some this included publishing educational works, such as Mrs Bryan's *Lectures on Astronomy* (1797), and *Lectures on Natural Philosophy* (1806).

assessing the contribution of girls' education to the development of rounded identities. Were girls being prepared for a purely domestic future, or did they have opportunities to glimpse broader horizons of public service and possibilities of personal fulfilment in a wider context? How far had the education of middle-class girls itself become a matter of public concern in Leeds and elsewhere by the end of our period, and what steps were being taken to improve standards?

There is little doubt that the majority of middle-class girls during this period were educated either at home or in academies such as those described above. This was certainly the case in Leeds, judging by the many advertisements for places at 'Ladies Seminaries' in the *Leeds Mercury* during the period, as well as from prospective governesses. The Leeds Census for 1851 lists 260 females under the profession of 'Schoolmistress', with a further 107 listed under 'Governess' and 77 as 'Other Teachers'.<sup>50</sup> A large number of the teachers and almost all of the governesses would probably have been genteel middle-class ladies. However, these figures are only a rough guide: many ladies' schools were situated in the countryside and were therefore outside the census district, whilst many of the teachers listed may have been lower-class in origin, engaged in teaching lower-class children at National Schools and the like.

Information about the education of girls of the middle-class elite is hard to come by. No female equivalent to the Leeds Grammar School existed before 1854. The journals of John Deakin Heaton do contain some useful information concerning the education of his sister, Ellen Heaton. Brother and sister had attended a day school from the age of six kept by the Baptist Minister Mr Langdon in Infirmary Street. At some stage, probably around the age of eleven or twelve, their elementary education came to an end and they went their separate ways. Heaton went on to Leeds Grammar School, followed by Cambridge, University College London and a distinguished medical career. Ellen went to the school kept by the Misses Plint at 1 Hanover Street and finally to a boarding school in Mirfield kept by the Misses Waltham.<sup>51</sup> The Plints' School was typical of the family-like establishments

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<sup>50</sup> *Census of Great Britain, 1851. Population Tables II: Ages, Civil Condition, Occupations and Birth-Places of the People*, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, Vol. lxxxviii, Part ii, p. 723.

<sup>51</sup> Bryan and Dorothy Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton, M. D., of Claremont, Leeds', *Publications of the Thorsby Society*, 53, 2 (1973), 93-153, p. 141. By contrast, Heaton had his own daughters educated at home, appointing a governess with a Queen's College certificate in 1859.



described by Pederson. In 1851 the household consisted of the sisters, Mary Anne and Jane Sidney Plint, another lady teacher, three servants and thirteen scholars between the ages of twelve and fifteen (presumably these were just the boarders - day pupils were also admitted). Of the scholars, only five had been born locally, most of the remainder originating from other parts of Yorkshire and County Durham, reflecting the extent of the Plints' reputation.<sup>52</sup>

Some girls had a wider choice than home education or attending a local boarding school. Schools from beyond Yorkshire occasionally advertised in the local press. Take for example the Edinburgh Institution for the Education of Young Ladies, which aimed to offer girls a solid grounding in natural science in addition to the usual accomplishments.<sup>53</sup> In order to deflect criticism, the school ensured that the accomplishments would themselves be taught to a high standard, by providing expert instruction in music, dancing and languages.<sup>54</sup> However, it is impossible to know how effective these advertisements were in persuading parents to ensure their daughters availed themselves of such opportunities. As the fees at this establishment were thirty-five guineas per annum, only the most affluent would have been able to attend anyway.

Certain religious denominations had their own schools for girls which had wide catchment areas. Of these the Quakers seemed to take the education of women most seriously.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the superior education of Quakeresses was pointed out in an article in

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Ellen maintained her connections with the Plints, attending the meetings of the British Association with Jane in 1862. See the 'Journal of John Deakin Heaton', i, pp. 199 and 339. Private Collection.

<sup>52</sup> The school had moved to 2 Park Place by this date. By 1863, the school was being run by a Mrs Robinson.

<sup>53</sup> See advertisement in the *Leeds Mercury*, 15 July 1837.

<sup>54</sup> 'Scottish Institution for the Education of Young Ladies', in the *Central Society of Education, First Publication of 1837* (1837: London: Woburn Press, 1968), p. 360.

<sup>55</sup> Unitarians also took the education of women very seriously. However, schools for girls were often *ad hoc* initiatives on the part of individuals, such as that run by the Reverend William Wood of Mill Hill chapel at the turn of the century. See Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians*, esp. p. 55; Charles Wellbeloved, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the late W. Wood FLS, Minister of the Protestant Dissenting Chapel at Mill Hill in Leeds* (London, 1809), pp. 68-83.

the *Leeds Mercury* as being one of their distinguishing features.<sup>56</sup> There were no large Quaker schools in Leeds itself, but the Leeds Friends had the option of sending their daughters to the schools at Ackworth or York (now The Mount School). Writing for the Schools Enquiry Commission in 1867, J. G. Fitch was extremely impressed with these two schools. Of Ackworth he wrote: 'I cannot sufficiently express my admiration of the order, seriousness, and repose of this great institution, nor my sense of the advantage which its pupils enjoy in the watchful supervision of the society to which they belong.'<sup>57</sup> At The Mount he found 'The curriculum of instruction is remarkable for the small proportion of effort devoted to accomplishments and the large share to intellectual culture. Accordingly this school stands out in marked contrast to the majority of ladies' schools.' He was also suitably impressed by the unique attention shown by the Friends to teacher training.<sup>58</sup>

The Mount School attracted Friends from as far afield as Ireland. It is therefore no surprise to find a number of girls from Leeds and other large West Riding towns on its books. From the opening of the school in 1831 to 1860, the five towns of Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield and Wakefield sent fifty-five girls to York, out of a total of 455 scholars entering the school over that period.<sup>59</sup> Of these, twenty came from Leeds. The curriculum at The Mount seems to have been fairly varied, with male masters and lecturers brought in to supplement the instruction of the women teachers. In 1836, Charles Caesar de Meuron, was engaged to give German and Italian lessons in addition to French; in 1837, the artist Edwin Moore was engaged to give lessons in drawing.<sup>60</sup> An old scholar (Rebecca Constable) wrote to Lydia Rous in 1881 and informed her 'we occasionally attended

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<sup>56</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 November 1831.

<sup>57</sup> *The Schools Enquiry Commission, Vol. IX*, Parliamentary Papers 1867-68, Vol. xxviii, part viii, p. 237. The Mount School was socially more exclusive than Ackworth.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237-8. The decision to train teachers at the York school had been taken in 1836, as a response to the difficulty in finding suitable candidates elsewhere. See H. Winifred Sturge and Theodora Clark, *The Mount School, York, 1785-1814; 1831-1931* (London and Toronto: Dent, 1931), p. 58.

<sup>59</sup> Figures abstracted from *The Mount School, York: List of Teachers and Scholars, 1784-1814; 1831-1906* (York: William Sessions, 1906).

<sup>60</sup> Sturge and Clark, *The Mount School*, p. 20. The use of outside masters is also cited by Skedd as one way in which commercial schools departed from the purely private/domestic model.

lectures in the Museum [of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society]', and that 'courses of lectures on Chemistry and kindred subjects (including experiments) were delivered at the school during part of the winter evenings, by some lecturer or professor engaged for the purpose'. An intellectual culture was also fostered by the practice of holding essay meetings, featuring both poetry and prose.<sup>61</sup> Despite this, there were periodic complaints about the standard of education The Mount offered, until Lydia Rous took over in the 1860s.<sup>62</sup> The Leeds examples also suggest that girls rarely stayed at the school for more than two or three years, no doubt limiting the benefits that they gained from their stay.<sup>63</sup>

Given the hazy details about middle-class education in Leeds, the extent to which girls were encouraged to develop a sense of public responsibility during their early years is a matter of conjecture. However, it is possible to make a few observations on this point. As we have seen, the writers on the reform of women's education tended to bear in mind the broader mission of woman in society, which comprehended a variety of public, social and domestic duties. These writers often envisaged an education within the home, though not necessarily one restricted to domestic concerns. What Pederson fails to bring out in her account of the 'family-like school' is that families themselves were not merely closed 'domestic' units; civic-mindedness suffused family connexions, with gender often determining only the nature or extent of public activity. An active schoolmistress could therefore inspire her boarders to engage in public-spirited activities, just as a reforming head of a household could exercise a similar influence on the daughters of the house.

Admittedly evidence of this occurring in Leeds is scant, but it is not non-existent. The Misses Plint were active on local committees, most conspicuously the Leeds Town Mission Society where they had a district to canvass for subscriptions and donations.<sup>64</sup> They also encouraged their charges to collect money for good causes. For example, in 1846 pupils at the school raised seventeen pounds for the Leeds Religious Tract Society. A further nine

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>63</sup> The only exception from Leeds was Maria Wilson, who joined the school in August 1844, and left in March 1849.

<sup>64</sup> Leeds Town Mission Society, *Annual Report*, 1839.

pounds was donated in 1847.<sup>65</sup> When Charlotte Baines discovered in 1838 that her granddaughter was to be sent to the school, she wrote to her daughter-in-law: 'I am very glad you have sent dear little Charlotte to them. I am sure they will do all in their power to promote her improvement in all that shall make her a valuable member of society and fit her for the station providence may assign to her'.<sup>66</sup> Charlotte's views may well have owed something to the Plints' philanthropic work.

That similar ideals of philanthropic duty were inculcated at other schools may be inferred from the exercise book of Jane Darby, a scholar at Mrs Kemplay's school in 1829. Amongst other writings on desirable attributes, this contains a poem on benevolence:

The needy Poor demand our care  
To secure them from th'inclement Air  
And turn the storm aside  
From lots where oft Disease and Age  
Unsheltered, bear its piercing Rage  
And modest Worth reside.

Where many an honest couple dwell  
With num'rous Offspring, once as well  
As you with Plenty blest  
Who now in tatter'd Rags confin'd  
To Scanty meals of coarsest kind  
Do scarce a Comfort taste.<sup>67</sup>

The poem embodies an idealization of the 'deserving poor', as well as containing a warning in 'once as well/As you with Plenty blest' as a reminder of the unpredictability of fate, and the possibilities of downward mobility.

Perhaps urban schools were more likely to participate in such activities: in urban centres social problems were more visible to the better off, and children in a school would

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<sup>65</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 21 November 1846; Leeds Religious Tract Society, *Annual Report*, 1847. The Tract Society and the Town Mission were closely linked. For more on the philanthropic contribution made by children, see Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, chapter 3.

<sup>66</sup> Charlotte Baines to Martha Baines, May 1838. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, Baines Papers, 47/4 (hereafter Baines Papers).

<sup>67</sup> Jane Darby, *Specimens of Penmanship carefully designed at Mrs Kemplay's Establishment for Young Ladies, Leeds* (1829). Leeds Central Library, Manuscript SR/652/D242.

have been no exception. Christian duty to the poor would probably have been taught early, therefore, if only to avoid indifference in later life. Moreover, the urban situation gave other opportunities for participating in a wider public arena which were lacking in the country. For instance, girls could gain limited access to the cultural and political events of a place, even if only as observers. The same old girl who recounted going to lectures in York to Lydia Rous, also commented on some of the political events of her schooldays:

Public affairs had a share of our attention. The proceedings of the Anti-Corn Law League were watched with interest. Cobden and Bright were our heroes of the day. I had the pleasure of hearing both these gentlemen address a crowded meeting, and I have always been glad that such an opportunity occurred.<sup>68</sup>

Of course, contemporary attitudes towards towns were often less than favourable, particularly in the first two decades of our period, when social investigators were depicting urban centres as sinks of dirt, disease and vice. Country locations were favoured for ladies' schools, as providing a healthier atmosphere, both morally and physically.<sup>69</sup> This ideal of seclusion is reflected in the description of many such schools as 'Seminaries', suggestive of the peace and isolation of the cloister, in contrast to the busier, more intellectual sounding 'Academy', which was usually (though not always) reserved for boys' schools. Again we find a tension between the perceived need to educate 'women' for the world and the desire of parents to educate their daughters as 'ladies' for society.

During this period, the efforts of Mechanics' Institutes to educate adult females led to an increasing concern with the education of girls, not only of the working classes, but of the middle classes as well. As a result of the work of local reformers, female education therefore became a matter of public concern. The Mechanics' Institutes were an early nineteenth-century innovation which aimed to encourage ideals of self-culture in the minds of the rapidly expanding urban working classes, although their chief market turned out to

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Lydia Rous, *Historical Sketch of the Friends' Girls' Schools, York, 1784-1814; 1831-1881* (York, 1881), p. 24. Also in Sturge and Clark, *The Mount School*, p. 53.

<sup>69</sup> This was an old prejudice: Wollstonecraft's ideal was the country day school, where scholars would be safe from the temptations of the Metropolis. See Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 159.

be the lower middle class of tradesmen, artisans and shopkeepers.<sup>70</sup> Throughout the period, there was a trend towards 'giving women greater access to Mechanics' Institutes'.<sup>71</sup> In Yorkshire, this was given an incidental boost by the creation of the West Riding (later Yorkshire) Union of Mechanics' Institutes (W.R.U.M.I.) in 1838. One of the stated aims of this organisation was 'the interchange of opinion and advice on the local management of Mechanics' Institutes, and the consequent rapid diffusion of improved methods'.<sup>72</sup> To this end, the individual Institutes contributed reports to the Union, which were then reproduced in the latter organisation's annual report. These reports provide a useful overview of the progress of women in Institutes throughout the county, demonstrating how ideas and policies introduced by some Institutes were rapidly adopted by others.

The York Institute took the lead, reporting in 1839 that first and second class members had been granted the privilege of introducing a lady free of charge to each lecture. Between 1839 and 1842, it was estimated that women had consistently accounted for around one third of lecture attendances. Meanwhile the increase in the membership of the York Institute, from 150 in 1838 to 307 in 1839 and 404 in 1840, was attributed to the establishment of gratuitous weekly lectures and the social events laid on for members, including tea parties and excursions. In particular, it was noted that a railway excursion had been mounted to the Leeds Exhibition in 1839, and that on this occasion the Committee had 'issued an extra number of tickets to the first and second class members, with the understanding that these were to be disposed of amongst the *female* friends of those members'. Female involvement therefore became an important part of the social dimension of the York Institute.

As the trade depression of the early forties began to eat into membership numbers, the

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<sup>70</sup> See J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790-1960: A Study in the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), especially Chapter 2. W. B. Stephens however has argued that this view is exaggerated in relation to the Warrington Institute: Stephens, *Adult Education*, p. 74.

<sup>71</sup> For an overview of female education in the Mechanics' Institutes see June Purvis, *Hard Lessons: The Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989); Mabel Tylecote, *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851* (Manchester University Press, 1957), esp. pp. 263-7.

<sup>72</sup> W.R.U.M.I. *Annual Report*, 1839.

example of York was seized upon by other Institutes. Some of these began to admit women at reduced rates in order to boost membership. For example, Bradford began to admit women at the same rate as under twenty-ones (i.e. six shillings per annum) in 1842. By 1843, Wakefield reported thirty one women as subscribers. In 1844, Marsden, Saddleworth and Wilsden Institutes were admitting women at weekly rates, and there were 32 ladies at Wakefield. The class breakdown at the latter society in that year is instructive, demonstrating the importance of an account of Mechanics' Institutes for a study of *middle-class* education and culture, as no less than 418 members were classified as middle or upper class, whilst only 255 were designated as lower class.

In January 1845, the *Mercury* gave an account of the Leeds Institute's AGM, commenting:

The Report notices with regret, that so few ladies have availed themselves of the various advantages which the Institution offers, and in order to facilitate this most desirable object, the report recommends the adoption of a law to admit the wives and daughters of members and subscribers at the low annual subscription of 5s. This law was afterwards adopted by the meeting.<sup>73</sup>

In a separate article, there was a report of a Shakespeare reading at the Institute by John Read:

On Monday, Hamlet was read to a numerous and attentive audience, including many of the fair sex, who appeared to take great delight in the intellectual treat prepared for them ... The new law, admitting as subscribers the wives and daughters of members and subscribers at 5s. per annum, has given general satisfaction, and is, we learn, being acted upon: intellectual reading and first rate lectures are therefore offered to ladies at a charge of little more than one penny per week.<sup>74</sup>

By the end of 1845, there were a total of thirty-five women subscribing at five shillings. The following year, this rose to 104 after the mothers and sisters of subscribers and members were admitted to the same privileges.<sup>75</sup> In 1847, a new category of ten shilling subscribers were added. Numbers in this category remained relatively steady, although the graph below shows that both sections were boosted in the wake of the Great Exhibition of

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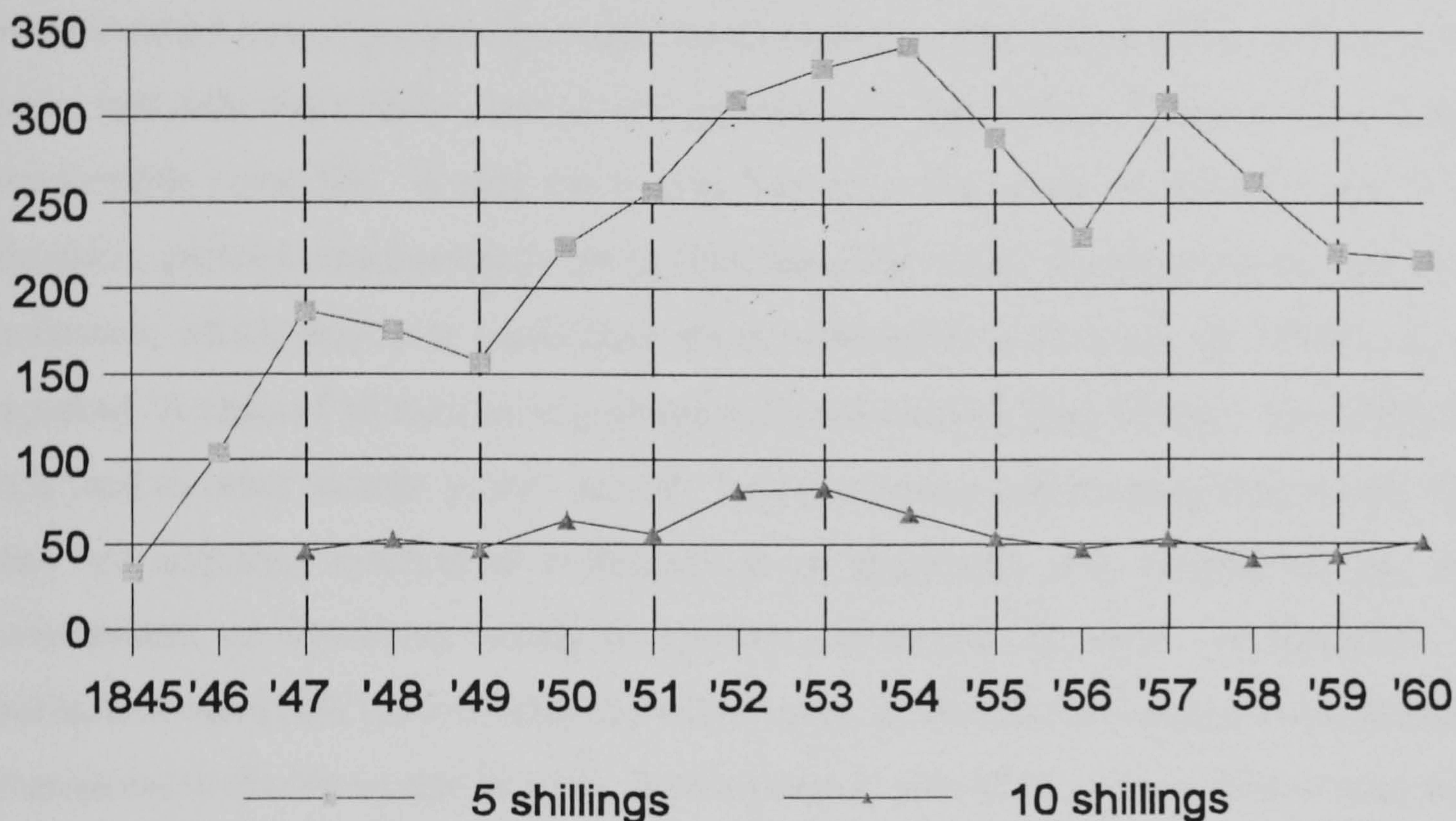
<sup>73</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 January 1845. See also Leeds Institute, *Annual Report*, 1845; Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes, *Annual Report*, 2 September, 1845.

<sup>74</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 January 1845.

<sup>75</sup> Leeds Institute, *Annual Report*, 1845.

1851.<sup>76</sup> The ten shilling category peaked at eighty-three in 1853, while the five shilling subscriptions peaked at 342 a year later. Thereafter there was a decline in the five shilling subscriptions to the end of our period, when they stood at 217.<sup>77</sup> Those women paying ten shillings were likely to be of independent means, i.e. widows or single women, with no male relations in the Institute, rather than necessarily better off than those paying five shillings.

**Graph 1: Female Subscribers to the Leeds Institute  
1845-1860**



The increasing numbers of women attending such institutions coincided with the widening debate over women's education. The subject received attention in lectures from various Leeds educationalists, especially from the mid-1840s. Samuel Smiles offered a lecture course to the Y.U.M.I. 'On the Education of Women' in 1845, while the Philosophical Society was addressed 'On the principles of education - for professional men, for females and for the working classes' in November 1848.<sup>78</sup> The Leeds Institute received

<sup>76</sup> All categories of subscriptions rose after this event. See R. J. Morris, 'Leeds and the Crystal Palace', *Victorian Studies*, 13, 3 (1970), 283-300, p. 299.

<sup>77</sup> Figures abstracted from the Leeds Institute Annual Reports, 1845-1860.

<sup>78</sup> Y.U.M.I. *Annual Report*, 8, 1845; Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society *Annual Report*, 1848-9.



similar lectures from Mr F. W. Bedford (1850), and Mr Traice (1854).<sup>79</sup> Local female reformers were also active in this regard, and Mrs Hudson of Leeds lectured the Wakefield Institute on the subject in 1846. Of this event, it was reported: 'A sketch of the best mode of acquiring proficiency in the arts of drawing and music, with a glance at the class of reading injudiciously selected by young females, was also given, and loudly applauded by a large number of the fair sex who attended.'<sup>80</sup>

As Mechanics' Institutes increasingly opened their doors to women, attempts were made to adapt lecture programmes and classes to their needs. Much of the instruction was basic, and reflected middle-class preoccupations with the ability of women to provide a comfortable home life. It was the smaller Institutes that made the initial forays in this direction, perhaps unsurprisingly given their marginal status compared to the big urban Institutes, which may have made them more responsive to demand. At Honley, it was reported 'A class of 18 females is gratuitously conducted by Miss Dyson.' At Kirkstall, a lady read to other women as they sewed, 'thus instructing and amusing their minds while they are acquiring mechanical expertness in an apparently very humble art, but one, nevertheless, on which much domestic comfort and decency depends'. At Holmfirth, the instruction was a little more substantial, with writing, arithmetic, sewing and knitting taught, plus access to the library and lectures, for the princely sum of 2d. a week. The women were organised into two classes, with twenty three members and an average attendance of twenty.<sup>81</sup>

Some of these experiments were short-lived and the classes at Honley and Kirkstall were discontinued within the year. Nevertheless, in 1847 there were twenty-four pupils each at the classes for writing and arithmetic, and reading, sewing and dictation at Holmfirth. At Wakefield, thirty-three women were registered for the Elementary Classes, although the average attendance was only sixteen. At Holbeck, a suburb of Leeds, fifty pupils were organised into three Elementary Classes, with the assertion 'that in one year,

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<sup>79</sup> The latter address marked the inauguration of a girls' school affiliated to the Institute. See below, p. 85.

<sup>80</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 3 January 1846; see also 27 December 1845.

<sup>81</sup> Y.U.M.I. *Annual Report* 9, 3 June 1846, pp. 10-11.

ignorant factory girls have been trained fit for Sunday School Teachers.’<sup>82</sup> However, by far the most significant event of that year for the education of women in the West Riding was the establishment of the Female Educational Institute in Huddersfield, with 262 members and 126 women in classes. The annual report thanked local ladies for giving their time as teachers at the Institute.<sup>83</sup>

Despite these gains, relatively few women were able to enjoy the benefits of the Institutions. Amongst other criticisms, including the decline of scientific instruction and overemphasis on lectures and undirected reading instead of class teaching, James Hole pointed out that only one in ten members of 86 Institutes in 1842 were women. This he attributed to ‘erroneous notions prevailing on the subject of the true position of Woman.’<sup>84</sup> He also recognised that even those women who were members tended to be very young. Of the 1,222 women in the Y.U.M.I in 1852, 655 were under eighteen. Hole blamed a lack of elementary instruction for this state of affairs: a problem which the larger Mechanics’ Institutes at Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool were increasingly to address.<sup>85</sup>

However, despite these difficulties and shortcomings, it seems that the arrival of numbers of women did have a definite impact on the Leeds Institute after 1845, which manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly, the content of the library and reading room, and of the lecture programme, began to reflect the needs and tastes of a more feminine market. In 1845 additions to the library included Eliza Acton’s *Modern Cookery* (1845), Maria Edgeworth’s *Parent’s Assistant* (1796) and Sarah Ellis’ *Mothers of England* (1843). By 1847 books suggesting more active roles for women were being acquired, such as G. L. Craik’s *Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties, Illustrated by Female Examples* (1847).<sup>86</sup> Lectures began to address women directly and were sometimes given by women. In 1847,

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 25 May 1847, pp. 13-14. The Children’s Employment Commission reports had sparked a continuing debate over the abilities of Sunday School teachers.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>84</sup> James Hole, *An Essay on the History and Management of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics’ Institutions* (1853: London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>86</sup> These and following references are taken from the *Annual Reports* of the years named, unless otherwise indicated.

Clara Balfour monopolised the January lecture programme, discoursing on the 'Influence of Women', 'The Female Characters of Shakespeare', and 'The Female Characters of Sir Walter Scott'. In October, she was back with two lectures 'On the most distinguished female Sovereigns of Europe'.<sup>87</sup> Balfour's choice of subjects reflected her concern with what women could achieve in the public domain, particularly in the area of social reform. She was something of a pioneer, and the *Mercury* commented that 'at no very distant date, it was difficult to convince some persons that it is not an improper thing for a lady to lecture'. However, Balfour's success had proved 'that there is as much delight and entertainment derived from a lady lecturer as from a lady vocalist, and with the invaluable addition of intellectual and moral instruction'.<sup>88</sup>

The Mechanics' Institutes were an important platform for the small band of women who made their living through writing and giving lectures or readings. Actresses who gave literary readings could often command large fees. For example, in 1853 the Lectures Subcommittee were affronted when Miss Glyn demanded thirty guineas for two drama readings, deciding that she should be offered twenty five instead. In the event of her refusal, it was decided that Mrs Kemble should be offered thirty, proving that pride, rather than pecuniary resources, were the main consideration. Perhaps this reflected unease at so shrewd a calculation of market value by a mere woman, suggesting that the acceptance of such women as professionals was often contingent and ambiguous.<sup>89</sup>

More importantly, however, female classes came to be laid on in various subjects. These classes seem to have been aimed at the middle class, rather than working women. In 1845 there were classes in French and German, with nine and three pupils respectively. The following year a female teacher, Mrs Gomersall, was appointed to teach French, and Italian classes were added. Following the example of Manchester, a ladies' class was added to the

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<sup>87</sup> Mrs Balfour also lectured in 1852, 'On the English Female Poets of this Century', and in 1854, 'On the Youthful Poets of this Century', and 'On Home Influences and Early Impressions'. In 1848, Miss G. Bennet lectured on 'The Female Poets of Great Britain'.

<sup>88</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 29 August 1846.

<sup>89</sup> Lectures Subcommittee Minutes, 27 May 1853. WYAS, Leeds, MS Leeds Institute, 18. (hereafter Leeds Institute). In the event, Miss Glyn got her thirty guineas, though some four years later. See Library and Lectures Subcommittee Minutes, 1 August 1857. Leeds Institute, 15.

School of Design in 1847.<sup>90</sup> In 1849, 42 women from the ages of twelve to forty were attending the Design School. Of these, nine were being educated as governesses and three as National School Teachers. However, the trades of thirty were undetermined, suggesting that the majority of students were busy acquiring social accomplishments rather than work-skills. Over half of those attending were aged between fifteen and twenty years of age.

In 1854, the opening of the Leeds Ladies' Educational Institution (later Leeds Girls' Modern School) marked a major advance in the cause of female education for the middle and lower middle classes of the town. In 1845 the Institute had established the Mathematical and Commercial School for middle-class boys, which aimed to supply a more practical alternative to the classical curriculum of the Leeds Grammar School. The girls' school followed largely the same plan as the boys', which was already highly regarded. The early twentieth-century historian of the Institute remarked that:

The elements of Natural Philosophy were taught on the same sound principles, and by the same masters as the Boy's School. Freehand Drawing and Music were both part of the general course of the comprehensive scheme of instruction, which was adapted in accordance with the views entertained by the most enlightened educationalists of the day.<sup>91</sup>

The *Annual Report* for 1854 reveals that the syllabus also included reading, writing, accounts, needlework, history, geography, logic, and ethics. Accomplishments such as drawing, music, dancing and languages were optional, as were the sciences. In 1856, the Head of the Institution, Miss Bonnyman, had started evening classes for adult females with thirty students. By 1857, the subjects taught at these classes included the three 'Rs', as well as grammar, geography and domestic matters, including hints on ventilation, water and heating, although falling attendances forced a 33 per cent reduction in fees the following year.

The Mechanics' Institutions therefore played a multiple role for middle-class women. Firstly, they became outlets for benevolent 'lady teachers'; secondly, they provided a market for female authors and audiences for female lecturers; finally, they increasingly began to offer the more practical and vocational training for lower- and middle-class girls so long advocated by many educational reformers. With the creation of the Institute schools the

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<sup>90</sup> The School had been opened in 1846.

<sup>91</sup> The Leeds Institute of Science, Art and Literature, *Historical Sketch, 1824-1900* (Leeds, 1901), p. 19.

education of middle-class girls made a significant step into the public domain, hitherto occupied predominantly by boys' and charity schools. In particular, the movement of women into institutions supported by public subscription meant that more emphasis came to be placed on the measuring of results and standards, something which was not even considered in the private commercial schools until the opening of the Cambridge Local Examinations to women in the 1860s. Although formal examinations were not instituted right away for women, there was at least some public scrutiny of their work. For instance, when the pupils at the new boys' school were examined in 1845, the ladies' German class were given the opportunity to put samples of their work on public display.<sup>92</sup> This may have been a minuscule step on the road towards regular academic evaluation of women's education, yet it was significant in a local context, and was followed up with admission to the Society of Arts examinations by the 1860s.<sup>93</sup>

In the course of this section we have looked at three very different types of educational institution for girls: the commercial school, as represented by the Plints' School; the independent denominational school, as represented by the Mount School; and the Mechanics' Institute school. The first two in particular were on the boundary of the 'public' and the 'private'. Although commercial schools purported to provide education for 'ladies' in quasi-domestic environments, their mistresses moved in a public world. The nature of their occupations meant that their reputations had to be beyond public reproach, and their names appeared regularly in the advertising columns of the local press. We have also seen how the pupils at such schools could be encouraged to develop a sense of wider responsibility to the urban society around them, sometimes led by the active example of the schoolmistresses themselves.

Finally, the work of the Mechanics' Institutes in educating women as adults and children was important in establishing that work as part of the public domain. Such work captured the imagination of a generation of local female reformers, who went on to form Ladies' Educational Associations in the following decade. The official seal of approval for the Institute's work came with J. G. Fitch's report to the Schools Enquiry Commission,

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<sup>92</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 December 1845.

<sup>93</sup> *Schools Enquiry Commission*, Mr J. G. Fitch's Report, PP. 1867-8, Vol. xxviii - part ii, p. 237.

where he singled out the Institute schools for special praise.<sup>94</sup> This Commission was both the symbol and the harbinger of a new attitude towards middle-class education generally, but one whose most dramatic impact was to be on the education of girls in the decades that followed.

### **3.3: Women, Culture and Citizenship in Leeds, 1830-1860.**

All ladies now-a-days read newspapers; some write pamphlets and conduct journals - are members of scientific associations, and 'grace the galleries' on occasion of public meetings.<sup>95</sup>

The importance assigned to culture by the improving middle classes during our period has already been noted, along with the vital role played by cultural institutions in the formation of a shared middle-class consciousness. However, the relationship of women to this cultural milieu has not been considered in any detail. The aim of this section is to explore the ways in which women contributed to and benefited from the cultural opportunities offered by the town of Leeds over the period, and how far they were able to translate this into a more active form of cultural citizenship through the support of civic and intellectual improvement.

Before 1820, Leeds offered relatively little in the way of intellectual stimulation and cultural relaxation to the elite of the town.<sup>96</sup> In addition to the difficulty in establishing cultural institutions, Morris has described the lack of interest in, even hostility to, theatrical entertainments in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Artistic exhibitions met with a similar lack of success. Only in the field of music did Leeds excel, with regular programmes of concerts.<sup>97</sup> However, cultural opportunities for the middle classes expanded from the early nineteenth century onwards, encouraged by spreading literacy and a demand for entertainment as well as civic pride. The elite were able to attend the Philosophical and

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-7.

<sup>95</sup> Mylne, 'Woman, and Her Social Position', p. 25.

<sup>96</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>97</sup> Morris, 'Middle-class Culture'. By the 1850s Leeds was a recognized centre for choral music.

Literary Society (1820, hereafter the Philosophical Society); the Mechanics' Institute (1824) was aimed at the respectable working classes, but was increasingly utilised by the lower middle class of shopkeepers and tradesmen; the Literary Society (1834) was established as a middle-class society, though one more broadly based than the Philosophical Society. Initially, little encouragement was offered to women by these institutions and subscription or membership charges were often prohibitively high, especially in those institutions deliberately aimed at a middle-class clientele. However, the exclusion of women from the privileges of membership did not necessarily mean that they were cut off from the cultural life of the town. Women were important consumers of culture and education in the form of lectures, although some subjects were considered a little too delicate for female audiences.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, exhibitions were looked on as welcome diversions as well as demonstrations of civic pride. Women were also in the habit of visiting museums and galleries, both national and local. Finally, a few women played a role in cultural production as singers, artists, writers, or indirectly as patrons.

The diaries of Elizabeth Gott, though incomplete, offer a rare insight into the cultural opportunities available to elite women in this period. Elizabeth was the wife of the Leeds woollen manufacturer, Benjamin Gott.<sup>99</sup> Having made a fortune from their woollen mills, the Gotts moved out of Leeds early in the century to Armley House. There, they were able to sustain the lifestyle of country gentry, which included participating in the social opportunities of the London Season. Nevertheless, Benjamin Gott and his successors maintained a lively interest in the town of Leeds and the cause of intellectual advancement. After his death it was said that 'He was well known to the most enlightened men of his day' and that he was 'Always ready to promote the welfare of Leeds, and [was] the advocate of

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<sup>98</sup> William Hey offered two lecture series on anatomy in 1800 and 1808, using the bodies of executed criminals. Women were admitted only to the lectures dealing with the eye, and the 1808 lecture was attended by fifty women. See S. T. Anning, *The General Infirmary at Leeds, Vol. 1, 1767-1869* (Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone, 1963), p. 53.

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin Gott, b. 24 June, 1762; d. 14 February 1840; m. 30 November 1790 to Elizabeth (d. 23 August 1857), daughter of William Rhodes; Chairman of Leeds and Selby Railway Company; Mayor of Leeds, 1799; Founder member of Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society. See *Burke's Landed Gentry*, 18th Ed., Vol. II. (London, 1969).

its literary, scientific and charitable institutions'.<sup>100</sup> He was a Proprietary Member of the Philosophical Society, contributing £500 to the building fund - an amount matched only by John Marshall. This combination of great wealth, a large house and social connections, meant that Elizabeth had more cultural opportunities than many of her middle-class contemporaries. Her diaries reveal much about the cultural life of Leeds, as well as her own personal interests.

In particular, the diaries show the importance of lectures as a source of intellectual stimulation and entertainment. In the volumes covering 1829, 1831 and 1834, there are eleven entries regarding trips to lectures in Leeds; either by Elizabeth or her family and friends. The subjects covered ranged from the popular pseudo-science of phrenology,<sup>101</sup> to Egyptology<sup>102</sup> and astronomy.<sup>103</sup> Local exhibitions were also a great attraction. Elizabeth visited the exhibition at Leeds in 1834 on at least two occasions; in 1849 she recorded a visit to another Leeds exhibition by her daughters Harriet Gott and Eliza Allen.<sup>104</sup> Possibly this was the Chinese Exhibition, which she visited with Mrs La Trobe and Mary Brooke in June of that year.<sup>105</sup>

Such means of self instruction, or entertainment, were available to most ladies in Leeds. However, Elizabeth Gott enjoyed more of life's privileges than most. Armley House, like many country houses of its day, possessed a well-stocked library.<sup>106</sup> It was also a good venue for entertaining, and Sir Walter Scott, son of the great author, dined there in 1838.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, annual visits to London allowed her to tap into the cultural wealth of

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<sup>100</sup> Taylor, *Biographia Leodiensis*, p. 377.

<sup>101</sup> The diaries of Elizabeth Gott, 30 February and 2 March 1829. Brotherton Library Special Collections (BLSC), Gott Papers, MS 194/3/9-15.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 March 1829.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 April and 9 April, 1834.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 April 1849.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 June 1849. See also entries for 8 and 20 June for visits to the exhibition made by other friends and relations.

<sup>106</sup> 'Mr P[reston] was very much pleased with the Library', Eliza Allen to Elizabeth Gott, Armley House, 3 May 1828. Letter Book, 1827-39. Gott Papers, MS 194/3/16.

<sup>107</sup> Diary, 8 February 1838.



the Metropolis. On 24 September 1838, she made a trip to the National Gallery (which unfortunately was closed); and the British Museum. The following day she visited the Polytechnic, where she was able to observe technical and scientific demonstrations.<sup>108</sup> In 1849, she visited the Old Watercolour Exhibition on Pall Mall, where she saw 'Many excellent of Prouts [sic] and more of Copley Fielding's'.<sup>109</sup> In May of that year, she visited the Royal Academy three days running - quite an achievement for a woman of 81!<sup>110</sup> She was obviously very interested in fine art: unsurprisingly, as her husband had built up a fine collection at Armley.<sup>111</sup> In 1850 she took a friend to see a painting of the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel, and Etty's *Judgement of Paris*.<sup>112</sup> By this time advancing years probably kept her from attending lectures and concerts.<sup>113</sup> However, a document in the Gott Papers demonstrates that to the end of her life she retained a faith in the importance of mental cultivation. Entitled 'Thoughts on the Scale of Humanity', the note reads as follows:

The scale of humanity rises by many steps from the lowest to the highest state; but surely the more our moral & intellectual powers are enlarged & improved in this stage of our existence the higher will be our destiny hereafter; for can we seriously doubt that time and eternity are but different periods of the same state, requiring the same dispositions & faculties.<sup>114</sup>

This may be read as a typical assertion of the middle-class self-help creed, adapted to

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25 September 1838.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 April 1839.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10 May 1839.

<sup>111</sup> Morris, 'Middle-class Culture', p. 208. For a detailed account of Benjamin Gott's collecting activities see Veronica M. E. Lovell, 'Benjamin Gott of Armley House, Leeds, 1762-1840: Patron of the Arts', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LIX, 32 (1984), 177-221.

<sup>112</sup> Diary 23 November 1850.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 November 1850, all the household except Elizabeth, John and Harriet attended an evening concert; 6 December 1850, 'Mary Brooke went with John, Mary Anne and the Young people to the concert'.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Gott, 'Thoughts on the Scale of Humanity', Gott Papers, MS 194/3/19. A note on the documents reads 'written when Elizabeth Gott was 90'.

a spiritual context by a woman who had no need to work for a living, and who indeed had not long to live. And Elizabeth was apparently not the only member of the family to take self-culture seriously. An inventory of books left by her sister, Abigail Rhodes, on her death in 1845, demonstrates a broad and enquiring mind (presuming of course that she had actually read them). With the exception of a three-volume edition of the Bible and a copy of Blair's *Sermons*, there were few books of a religious nature recorded. Instead, there were several volumes of contemporary periodicals, a number of volumes of poetry, sundry works of history, geography and philosophy, and forty-five volumes of Ree's *Encyclopaedia*, amongst other items.<sup>115</sup>

Some women were therefore important consumers of culture during our period. However, it is difficult to find much evidence of women involved in cultural production in the town of Leeds; the census of 1851 does not record any women supporting themselves solely by literary endeavours. Nevertheless, the journals and letters of Leeds doctor John Deakin Heaton give valuable insights into the literary and artistic pretensions of his sister Ellen, who was active in commissioning art work and had her own poetic aspirations. Ellen Heaton never married, and was a woman of independent means. She travelled widely on the continent and attended meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science whenever possible. She also did her best to gain entry to the literary and art world of the mid-nineteenth century, maintaining correspondences with John Ruskin, Dante Gabrielle Rossetti, and Elizabeth Barret Browning.<sup>116</sup> It was on Ruskin's advice that she purchased eight paintings by J. M. W. Turner, and commissioned eight by Rossetti and two by Arthur Hughes, as well as a chalk drawing of E. B. Browning by Field Talfourd.<sup>117</sup> J. D. Heaton was quite dismissive of Ellen's own literary talent, and felt (apparently justifiably)

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<sup>115</sup> Thomas Hardwick of Leeds, 'Inventory & Valuation of sundry Household Effects and other Personalty the property of Miss Abigail Rhodes of Armley House', 11 February 1845. Gott Papers, MS 194/3/22.

<sup>116</sup> Ruskin's letters to Ellen are reproduced in Virginia Surtees (ed.), *Sublime and Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton* (London: Michael Joseph, 1972).

<sup>117</sup> B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journal of John Deakin Heaton', pp. 141 and 143.

that Ellen forced her attentions on such people to satisfy her own pretensions.<sup>118</sup> However, Ellen's connections with Ruskin, and those of her brother-in-law, John Aldam Heaton, became an important means by which national tastes and fashions could find their way to provincial towns like Leeds (or in Aldam's case, Bradford). In Malcolm Hardman's words: 'they were both enabled ... to form a bridge between local sense and metropolitan sensibility'.<sup>119</sup> However, Ruskin always maintained the dominant position in the relationship, even demonstrating his power by appropriating a painting from Rossetti which Ellen had commissioned for herself.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, female collectors like Ellen seem to have been quite a rarity. For instance, Dianne Sachko Macleod's biographical directory of middle-class Victorian collectors contains the names of only five others, including husband and wife teams, out of a total of 146.<sup>121</sup>

In 1848, Dr Heaton himself contributed to a monthly periodical for amateur writers, the *Glow Worm*. This was edited by Miss Forrest, lady housekeeper of machine-maker Peter Fairbairn, later Sir Peter Fairbairn and MP for Leeds. Unfortunately, *The Glow Worm* lasted only a year; the manuscript remaining in the hands of Miss Forrest, who died in 1858.<sup>122</sup> Another local poetess was Rebecca Hey, wife of surgeon William Hey III. Her publications included *Recollections of Lakes and Other Poems* (1827), *The Moral of the Flowers* (1835) which ran through several editions, *The Spirit of the Woods* (1837), *Sylvan Musings* (1849) and *Holy Places and Other Poems* (1859). She was also part of a small circle of friends who produced five volumes of flower paintings with extracts of poetry and prose, which are now at the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> For instance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Robert Browning, 7 May 1846, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>119</sup> Malcolm Hardman, *Ruskin and Bradford: An Experiment in Victorian Cultural History* (Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 47. Ruskin was a patron of the Bradford Design School (1859), of which John Aldam Heaton was Honorary Secretary.

<sup>120</sup> Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* See pp. 427-8 for the entry on Ellen Heaton.

<sup>122</sup> Reid, *Memoir of J. D. Heaton*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>123</sup> See Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Robert Browning, 7 May 1846; also Leeds Local History Library, Correspondence, LH/Whalley 16/4/84; C. F. Forshaw (ed.), *Yorkshire Poets, Past and Present*, 4 vols. (London: 1888-9), iii, p. 33.

Although they reveal much about the cultural openings available to strong-minded, independent and relatively wealthy women, the activities of Elizabeth Gott and Ellen Heaton do not necessarily imply a broader cultural citizenship. This was expressed primarily through the various societies, both formal and informal, which placed an emphasis on raising the cultural tone of the town as a whole. In particular, literature and science were seen as important ways of raising the horizons of all of the town's inhabitants. Self-culture in the lower classes could either be encouraged directly, through the Mechanics' Institute, or indirectly, through the example of the middle class and the provision of an inspiring urban environment, including gardens, museums and fine public buildings. In Leeds, the Museum of the Philosophical Society was seen as crucial in this respect, and was often opened on Easter Monday and Tuesday free of charge. The management believed that:

Being thus brought into familiar and immediate contact with well-arranged Collections of the works of Nature and Art, whether of the present day or of ages past, cannot fail to have a most beneficial and humanising effect upon the mind of even the least informed member of the community, and forms not an unimportant feature in the means for civilising and refining the great body of the people.<sup>124</sup>

In his opening address to the Leeds Literary Society, on 9 May 1834, James Williamson set out his belief in this approach to civilisation by osmosis. He decried the failure of Mechanics' Institutions to inculcate a desire for self-improvement in the majority of the working classes, claiming with some justification that it was mainly the lower middle classes who made use of their facilities.<sup>125</sup> He concluded that the lower classes could only be educated properly if knowledge were diffused throughout society from the top down. It was therefore incumbent upon the middle classes, as part of their duty to the wider community, to educate themselves so that they could set an example:

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Rebecca's sister, Lucy Roberts, was also part of this circle.

<sup>124</sup> Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, *Annual Report*, 1840-41, p. 8. The Museum collection has been aptly described as 'a celebration of wealth, of travel, of the anxiety to possess, control and understand creation', Morris, 'Middle-class Culture', p. 214.

<sup>125</sup> James Williamson M. D., *On the Diffusion of Knowledge Among the Middle Classes* (London, 1835), pp. 25-26. Williamson was President of the Philosophical and Literary Society at the time of this address.

Occupying a position in the social scale, which admirably qualifies them to react beneficially on those placed at its opposite extremities,- invested by our constitution with the principal share of political power- pre-eminently distinguished by the virtues of domestic life, and the most efficient agents in the prosecution of those objects of benevolent enterprise, for which the present period is so remarkable;- any augmentation of their mental power, and their consequent moral influence, must be sensibly felt by the whole community.<sup>126</sup>

This ideal of middle-class citizenship through self-culture did not seem to extend to women, although they were not explicitly excluded. However, it is apparent that women did participate in the life of provincial cultural institutions, at least in a limited way, even before Williamson gave this address. In Halifax, the first meeting of the Literary and Philosophical Society (1830) agreed to allow women to become members and granted Honorary Membership to Anne Lister of Shibden Hall.<sup>127</sup> This was hardly a disinterested move, as Lister was a wealthy landowner and potentially an influential patron. Leeds had no need of such patronage: indeed the middle-class elite prided themselves on their independence from aristocratic sponsorship.<sup>128</sup> Before 1836, Leeds women had to be content with less official contributions to the Philosophical Society's scientific endeavours, such as providing artifacts and curios for the Museum. However, few women participated even in this limited fashion, with only forty-one separate donations across the whole of the period.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, when the Mechanics' Institute mounted an exhibition in 1839 to raise funds for a new hall, notices were placed in the press urging the middle classes to lend interesting objects. The lack of donations from women prompted the committee to address that constituency directly, in the language of civic duty:

We would impress on ladies, as well as gentlemen, in the town and neighbourhood possessing such [objects], and desirous of promoting the welfare and reputation of Leeds, the desirableness of not requiring an individual canvass, but of immediately making known their good-will to one of the Secretaries, Dr Pyemont Smith, Mr Plint, or Mr J. Simpson, jun.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>127</sup> Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society, *Centenary Handbook*, (1930).

<sup>128</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 232-3.

<sup>129</sup> Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, *Annual Reports*, 1830-1860 (excluding the years 1851-2 and 1855-6).

<sup>130</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 1 June 1839. This appeal was echoed by the Leeds Art Union in 1853: 'We trust the ladies will exert their "gentle yet potent" influence

In the event, only thirty-five exhibits were contributed by thirteen different women. Of these, fourteen had been donated by Mrs Strother, ranging from a pair of antique pistols to an 'incrustation from the inside of a water pipe.'<sup>131</sup> Perhaps of greater educational or scientific value were the 103 specimens of 'British Zoophytes and Sponges' donated by Mrs John Hey,<sup>132</sup> and the 176 Brazilian insects from Mrs Charles Wellbeloved, wife of the well-known Unitarian minister. The only art donated by women consisted of an engraved portrait of Clement XIII from the ubiquitous Mrs Strother, while Miss Robinson donated two of her own compositions.<sup>133</sup>

Although this paints a somewhat bleak picture of women's participation in civic culture during the 1830s, it must be remembered that intellectual culture was still the preserve of a few in Leeds at this stage. When the artist Benjamin Haydon lectured there in 1838, he found Leeds 'stupid' when compared to Manchester and London. He commented on his audience: 'They seem High Church and Bigoted. I was asked after if I meant to attack the Church, because I said the Reformation had ruined High Art.' However, he did find some knowledgeable individuals, including women as well as men. For example, he made the following entry in his journal for 10 February:

Spent the morning with Miss Bankes in looking over her collection of shells, according to La Marque. I gained immense knowledge, as I went through every species from the earliest formation to the last. The people here think her cracked. How evident is the cause of learned people being thought magicians in an earlier state of society.<sup>134</sup>

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towards furthering the progress of the Academy, and make it such a source of public attraction, as to foster and develop a love of art in its higher branches amongst our population'. *Leeds Mercury*, 15 January 1853.

<sup>131</sup> Possibly Mrs Ann Strother of Earl Street, Leeds.

<sup>132</sup> Widow of the surgeon John Hey, who had been curator of the Philosophical Society Museum until his death in 1837. Presumably this donation was part of his collection.

<sup>133</sup> *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Paintings, Curiosities, Models, Apparatus and Specimens of Nature and Art at the Music Hall Leeds* (Leeds, 1839). Some Leeds men acquired large art collections, including those of Benjamin Gott and Thomas Edward Plint. The latter's paintings were sold for £18,000 on his death in 1861, see Taylor, *Biographia Leodiensis*, pp. 497-8.

<sup>134</sup> Malcolm Elwin (ed.), *The Autobiography and Journals of Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1786-1846* (1853: London: Macdonald, 1950), pp. 553-4. NB: Jean Baptiste Lamarck, 1744-1829, French Biologist, pioneer of the modern system

It was partly this reputation for philistinism that the Leeds Exhibition of 1839 was intended to counteract. In fact, by the time of the Exhibition, women were already becoming more involved in the cultural societies of Yorkshire. This trend began, and later accelerated, as a result of financial pressures and the increasing importance of such societies in the social lives of the urban elite. These considerations led to a restructuring of the annual fees societies charged in order to encourage female support.

Cultural societies such as the Leeds Philosophical Society were quintessential 'subscriber democracies', in that the more money one contributed, the more say one had in the management of the organisation and its assets. Throughout the period, the Philosophical Society was geared to an elite membership, reflected in its membership charges. Proprietary Members, those who contributed at least £100 towards the purchase of land and erection of the society's premises, were exonerated from paying annual subscriptions and from paying fines for non-attendance at meetings. They were also responsible for decisions concerning the society's real estate. The Ordinary Members, those paying an entrance deposit of three guineas and annual subscriptions of two guineas in advance, could vote in the everyday affairs of the society and elect the committee.<sup>135</sup> Although there was nothing in the constitution of the society to exclude women, in practice these charges were far too high for all except the very wealthy. Instead, women found themselves becoming part of the hierarchy of privileges awarded to members. For example, for the *conversazione* of 1846, members of the council were granted two additional tickets for ladies, young men under 21 or strangers.<sup>136</sup> Such rules reinforced women's marginal and dependent status.

However, financial realities meant that women could not be ignored forever. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society, based in York, had begun to deal with the issue of female

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of classification based on observed characteristics; author of *The Natural History of Invertebrates* (1815-22); originated a theory of evolution based on the inheritance of acquired characteristics. See J. Wintle (ed.), *Makers of Nineteenth Century Culture 1800-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

<sup>135</sup> *Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, Laws and Regulations to May 1841* (Leeds, 1841), rules 2 and 3.

<sup>136</sup> Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, Council Minutes, Nov. 27, 1846. See also entries for Nov. 2, 1847 and Nov. 30, 1845. BLSC, MS 1975, Box 6/146.

membership or admission to privileges as early as 1828. In the report of 1828-9, it was declared that any lady contributing ten pounds or more to the Building Fund, 'Shall be entitled to personal admission for life to the MUSEUM and GARDENS with the power of introducing *Ladies* as visitors.'<sup>137</sup> The italics are suggestive. Ladies introducing male friends would be a subversion of social norms which bound men, unless they were strangers to the town, to pay for their own admission and not to be dependent on women. It was also a statement that this extension of privileges to women was an exception to a general rule, brought about in the light of extreme generosity which could not go unrewarded. However, it was also an incentive, from a society whose managers were shrewd enough to see a potential source of funds when they saw one. The following year saw the listing of female subscribers as a separate category, following a subscription drive aimed at clearing the society's debt.<sup>138</sup> These women were not full members of the society, and it was not until 1851 that a woman was elected to full membership. Thereafter a steady trickle of women did so, with fifteen joining between 1845 and 1860. To these small figures must be added the forty-three female subscribers in 1857-8, and the further seven women claiming privileges under the rule of 1828-9.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the Society's gardens, still a popular place of recreation today, were paid for by a group of thirty-one ladies in 1837.

In 1836, under pressure from the more popularly based Literary Society, the Leeds Philosophical Society also began to address the issue. After investigating the pros and cons of a merger with the Literary Society, the Council eventually rejected this option and instead adopted a number of incentives to encourage an increase in membership. These included the granting of an extra ticket for lectures to Proprietary Members, and making the admission tickets of Ordinary Members transferable. However, the major change was the introduction of a category of Annual Subscribers, who paid a guinea a year in advance with no deposit. The immediate impact of these changes was the recruitment of 98 annual subscribers, twelve of whom were women.<sup>140</sup> However, over the subsequent thirteen years

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<sup>137</sup> Yorkshire Philosophical Society, *Annual Report*, 1828-9. Donors to this fund included Abigail Rhodes (£20) and John Marshall (£50).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 1829-30.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 1850-1860.

<sup>140</sup> Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, *Annual Report*, 1836-7. See also Council Minutes, 24 June, 1835; 29 June 1835; 13 May, 1836. BLSC, MS 1975, Box 1/3.



the number of women subscribers peaked at thirteen in 1839, dropping to single figures after 1842.<sup>141</sup> In fact, it was only in 1859 that there was a dramatic increase in women subscribing to the society, with the introduction of a new five shilling subscription category. At this date, there were four women subscribing at the old rate and forty-four at the new, though this compares poorly with the numbers subscribing to the more popularly based Mechanics' Institute and Literary Society.<sup>142</sup>

Quantitatively and qualitatively, women were definitely second class citizens in the early nineteenth century cultural societies. However, despite this status, women became central to the *social* life of such institutions from the mid-1840s onwards. In the early 1840s, the Philosophical Society came under increasing criticism for being out of touch and irrelevant. There were even some who said that it should disband and leave the field clear for the new association created by the merger of the Literary Society with the Mechanics' Institute in 1842. In his inaugural address as president of the society in 1845, the Reverend Sinclair defended the society against these attacks. Unlike many of his predecessors, he did not view the society's primary function as that of advancing the cause of high culture. Instead, concurring with subsequent historians, he saw it as 'almost the last link which binds us together as members of the same community. Party spirit and sectarian antipathies but too widely prevail.'<sup>143</sup> The primary role of the society was therefore social, not intellectual. This was reflected in the often general and popular nature of many lectures addressed to the society; as we have seen in the case of Benjamin Haydon, lecturers realised that they were addressing a relatively unsophisticated audience.<sup>144</sup>

It was therefore in order to strengthen the social foundations of the society that Sinclair introduced what became an annual *conversazione* in 1846. These events quickly became major dates in the social calendar of the elite. Naturally, as in all such gatherings,

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 1837-1850.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 1850.

<sup>143</sup> Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, Minute Books of General Meetings, 17 October 1845. BLSC, MS 1975, Box 6/150. Also quoted in E. D. Steele, 'The Leeds Patriciate and the Cultivation of Learning, 1819-1905: A Study of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society', Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, *Proceedings of the Literary and Historical Section*, XVI (1975-78), pp. 185.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2.

the presence of women was vital to their success. The first *conversazione*, on 4 December 1846, was attended by members and subscribers and a large number of ladies who were present by invitation. The newspapers reported that 'a numerous and highly respectable party assembled, consisting of above two hundred ladies and gentlemen', and Sinclair told the gathering of the 'humanizing' effect of meeting for the 'friendly discussion of literary and scientific subjects'.<sup>145</sup> The emphasis of these events was on instruction as entertainment, the embodiment of 'rational recreation'. Entertainments typically included displays, papers, experiments and music.<sup>146</sup> In 1856 the President, John Hope Shaw, welcomed the assembly 'to another of these annual reunions, where science and literature, unbending their usual gravity, become the handmaids to relaxation'.<sup>147</sup> The following year these sentiments were echoed by James Garth Marshall, who talked about the relaxation 'somewhat of the severity of our literary and philosophical pursuits'. These men took such pursuits rather more seriously than Sinclair had and their pronouncements were probably attempts to lend a kind of mystique to the ordinary transactions of the society. Perhaps there was also an element of condescension, given that around half those attending the *conversazioni* were women, notwithstanding occasional nods in the direction of female intellect, such as this excerpt from an adapted version of Hannah More's poem 'The Bas Bleu':

And well-read women, too, who know  
What charms from polished converse flow,  
Yet in all female worth excel,  
As well as those who scarce can spell.<sup>148</sup>

The importance of such events for the cultural and social 'formation' of an elite group within the Leeds middle class has been underplayed by Morris and others. Strikingly, they were reported in both of the major newspapers, often with lists of those attending, both male and female. For example, it was said that the *conversazione* of 1850 was 'attended by a most brilliant and fashionable assembly of ladies and gentlemen', and in 1858 that these

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<sup>145</sup> Newspaper cutting from the Minutes of the General Meetings, 4 December, 1846.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 December, 1849.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 December, 1856.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 December, 1849.

events 'gather together the elite and beauty of the town'.<sup>149</sup> It is clear that Leeds Society no longer had to confine itself to the dinner tables of wealthy families such as the Gotts, punctuated by the occasional Ball; instead, it was now emerging into the public eye under the guise of intellectual instruction and improvement. This was facilitated and encouraged by the lessening of sectarian and political tensions during the 1850s, to which these social occasions may well have contributed. For women, these occasions gave them an additional social outlet beyond their usual chapel and family connections.

The soirées of the Leeds Institute were even more successful, with larger attendances often including intellectual and political luminaries. Lord John Russell and Lord Brougham gave addresses in 1852 and 1857 respectively, whilst in 1858, members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which met in Leeds that year, extended their visit to attend the soirée. Such events helped to put Leeds on the map intellectually, and it seems from an educational standpoint that the Institute at this time was a much more effective entity than the Philosophical Society.

Social gatherings were by no means limited to the more formal societies, either. The Leeds Conversation Club (1849) had a constitutional limit of twelve members, drawn from the leading citizens of the town. Its purpose was to discuss intellectual topics, including practical issues bearing on the life of the town.<sup>150</sup> The original members included J. D. Heaton, Edward Baines Jr., John Hope Shaw, the editor of the *Leeds Intelligencer*, Christopher Kemplay, and the Unitarian Minister Charles Wicksteed. Although the membership was small and exclusively male, it became the practice of this society from 1859 to hold a reception at each member's home in rotation, to which the leading families of the district were invited in order to observe various experiments and to discuss intellectual topics. According to Heaton, the club had adopted this practice 'to bring together the society of Leeds, so as to make acquainted with each other the members of the different little coteries into which society is divided.'<sup>151</sup> Again, this became part of the social round

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 November, 1850; 5 January, 1858.

<sup>150</sup> See Edwin Kitson Clark, *The Conversation Club, Leeds, 1849-1939* (Leeds, 1939). One of its offspring was the short-lived Leeds Improvement Society (1851), which originated plans for public improvements, such as ways of dealing with the smoke problem; improving sewerage; and most effectively, for building a new town hall.

<sup>151</sup> 'Journal of John Deakin Heaton', i, p. 40.

and was no doubt a great way of disseminating information on various improving projects, as well as providing an evening of instruction and entertainment. Heaton records just such an evening in February 1862 when he and his wife entertained 250 visitors at Claremont, 'including most of the principal families of Leeds'.<sup>152</sup> On this occasion, his wife Fanny was able to exhibit her needlework of St. Anne teaching the Virgin Mary, which she had begun for the International Exhibition. Ellen's paintings by Rossetti were hung in the dining room, while the hall was filled with the architectural plans of buildings in progress in Leeds and its neighbourhood.<sup>153</sup>

The cultural institutions of Leeds therefore helped the urban middle class to reinvent and redefine that semi-aristocratic sphere known as 'Society', where men and women of fashion and wealth could mix with equals. This new, specifically urban and provincial manifestation of Society was largely distanced from many of the unfortunate connotations of that word, such as idleness and frivolity, by an emphasis on 'rational recreation' and self-improvement, which fitted more closely with the work ethic of middle-class businessmen, manufacturers and professionals. There was also a sense in which middle-class society was part of the 'civilising mission', a demonstration of how civilised men and women gathered to pass their spare time, in amusement that was at once refined and useful. It therefore cried out for emulation, in contrast to aristocratic society which spent much of its time inventing ever more extravagant and exclusive diversions specifically to avoid this outcome. Women were crucial to the success of this exercise, as they were expected to participate in and enjoy such philosophical entertainments, even as they were not expected to make those subjects a particular study or, heaven forbid, a career. But this elite society does not fit neatly into any definition of the 'public' or 'private' spheres. It was certainly part of the private connection of particular families, where marriage or business alliances could be forged and acquaintances made. Yet it was also part of the public domain, connected with public institutions which, nominally at least, were open to all comers; it was an arena whose activities were reported in the local press as something to aspire to and to be proud of, something which was good for the wider reputation of Leeds as a city of culture and learning.

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<sup>152</sup> B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', pp. 135-6.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

Most middle-class women had access to the cultural life of the town in some way, even if that only extended as far as attending a few lectures or exhibitions. For a few with greater financial means and a reasonable degree of independence, the cultural resources of London and the continent could be accessed, and patronage of the arts was a real possibility. However, women continued to be marginalised intellectually as long as they were denied access to the avenues which brought intellectual respect, such as higher education or membership of a profession. Organisations like the Philosophical Society continued to be organised around the ideal of the male subscriber, while women continued to be thought of as dependents.<sup>154</sup> This exclusion was reflected in the failure of women to be elected onto the committees of the main middle-class institutions. Ellen Heaton was twice defeated in her attempts to become the first woman on the committee of the Leeds Library in 1886 and 1887. That honour eventually fell to Miss Louisa Reith thirty four years later.<sup>155</sup>

Nevertheless, although women were excluded from the management of institutions that were in the vanguard of the intellectual and environmental improvement of the town, they became essential to the life of those institutions through their social contribution. If the significance of the Philosophical Society lay primarily in reinforcing the social cohesion of the Leeds elite, then women played an increasingly important role through their attendance at the soirées, tea parties and *conversaciones* that became the public expression of middle-class reforming ideology, and where the intellectual elite engaged in rational recreation which was to set an example to those below (and above) in the social scale. Moreover, such events were a major source of civic pride and identity, as they demonstrated to the rest of the world that Leeds was a town of sophistication and culture. In 1831 Edward Bulwer (later Lord Lytton) wrote an article calling for upper-class ladies to raise the level of English society by opening their exalted circles to men of talent and learning.<sup>156</sup> By 1858, a year when members of the British Association attended the soirée of the Leeds Institute and dined with the Heatons at Claremont, it could be said that the middle-class ladies of Leeds had done just that.

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<sup>154</sup> The National Association for the Advancement of Social Science was an exception to this rule, allowing women to give papers and to sit on its committees.

<sup>155</sup> Dorothy Payne, 'Ellen Heaton', *The Dial*, 4, May (1995), p. 5.

<sup>156</sup> E. G. E. Bulwer, 'Spirit of Society in England and France', *Edinburgh Review*, 52 (1831), 374-87.

## CHAPTER 4

### Women and Philanthropy I: The 'Civilising Mission' and Class Identity

This chapter concentrates on the various campaigns, societies and institutions in Leeds which provided an interface between the middle class and the urban poor. These activities increasingly aimed not just to cater for immediate wants, but to effect a long-term improvement in the condition of the poor through the inculcation of virtues and values which were themselves fast becoming identified with the urban middle classes.<sup>1</sup> This was part of the process by which poverty itself was redefined as a badge of moral failure, and was no longer viewed as a divinely ordered state. Instead, a rational 'scientific' discourse of poverty and social reform emerged, based on the collection of 'moral statistics', which has recently attracted much attention from historians concerned with the production of social knowledge and its relevance to the relationship between gender and class.<sup>2</sup> This interacted with evangelical concerns for the spiritual conversion of the poor, providing the impetus for campaigns of social reform based on the premise that the material needs of the poor could only be met by elevating them morally.

This was the essence of the so-called 'civilising mission' to the urban poor, in which women played a key role by providing financial support and human resources.<sup>3</sup> Although their contribution was often contested, women were able to adapt older ideas about female benevolence to the emerging scientific discourses about the 'social' sphere, through emphasising the importance of female influence as wives and mothers in the elevation of the working classes.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the association of middle-class women with superior virtue allowed them to claim special responsibilities as moral exemplars. It was therefore seen as

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<sup>1</sup> See the argument in Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 394-440.

<sup>2</sup> Eileen Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*; Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body*; and Denise Riley, 'Am I That Name?'. See the discussion in Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive overview of women's involvement in such activity is Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*. See also F. K. Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy 1790-1830', *International Review of Social History*, 19, 3 (1974), 426-45; Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home: Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century', in Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 33-63.

<sup>4</sup> Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, esp. chapter 5.

only natural that middle-class women should be the teachers of working-class children and housewives. The same logic was also used by some as a reason for extending their concerns to the inmates of workhouses, prisons, hospitals and penitentiaries for the reformation of prostitutes.<sup>5</sup>

The philanthropic activities of women were therefore a key element of their contribution to middle-class identity, and their association with ideals of civic virtue. However, this association was not straightforward and often conflicted with ideals of feminine modesty and spirituality. The story is complicated by the fact that philanthropic organisations themselves played a significant role in the shaping of the public sphere in the early nineteenth century, as they grew in size and influence. This dynamic picture underlines the fact that gender relationships within the public sphere cannot be seen as simply a case of a particular group campaigning for entry to a space from which they were wholly excluded. Instead, gender relationships *within* the public sphere were re-negotiated as the nature of that sphere itself underwent continuous change.

The first section of the chapter looks at this process of negotiation through the activities of the missionary societies, which were central to the development of the idea of the 'civilising mission'.<sup>6</sup> It charts the development of female agency in the activities of these societies in Leeds, and examines contemporary reactions to their increasing involvement with the public domain. Section two continues this theme by examining the middle-class response to the temporal needs of the poor. In particular, it will be seen that despite increasingly scientific and rational approaches to the question of poor relief, contemporary ideals of middle-class femininity allowed women to justify an expansion of their role in the 'social' sphere, often in the face of considerable opposition from male committees. Both of these sections demonstrate the importance of women's initiatives in the creation of class solidarity. However, they also emphasise the fragility of class consensus in the light of political and sectarian divisions, as well as the uncertainties and conflicts that accompanied women's activities in these areas.

The final section analyses these processes as they were played out through two

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home'; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, esp. chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Alison Twells, 'The Heathen at Home and Overseas: The Middle Class and the "Civilising Mission", Sheffield 1790-1843' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York, 1997).

particular campaigns of moral reform: the fight against drink and the reform of prostitutes. The temperance movement offers an intriguing illustration of the way that the assumed right of the middle class to dictate morality to their social inferiors could be challenged from below, which included questioning assumptions about the intrinsic moral superiority of middle-class women. At the same time, individual women were able to use the campaign to gain a public platform for themselves and their views, which sometimes dealt with topics far beyond temperance. By contrast, the campaign against vice remained firmly in the hands of the middle-class elite, which meant that women's voices were circumscribed even while they continued to play a vital practical role in the operations of penitentiaries and rescue societies.

#### **4.1: Mission Societies.**

Leeds was the home of a huge variety of charitable associations and institutions during this period. However, by far the most common were those whose aim was to spread the gospel among the heathen and the ignorant at home or abroad. Leeds had auxiliaries of all the main national mission societies, including the Religious Tract Society (1805); the British and Foreign Bible Society (1809); the Church Missionary Society (c. 1812); and the London Missionary Society (1812). These organisations concentrated on spreading the gospel throughout the British Empire and beyond. In 1847, the Religious Tract Society boasted that it had distributed over 420 million copies of its publications since it began, with over 3,700 publications on its books in over 100 languages.<sup>7</sup> Other societies were more selective in their aims, running missions to Catholic Europe, the Irish, sailors (the Port of Hull Society for example), or the Jews. Societies dealing with all of these objects, and more, were active in Leeds during the period. However, though the target group varied, the three basic evils which the societies were designed to combat remained the same: ignorance, infidelity and Popery.

The missionary societies were important vehicles for cultural imperialism, and in many respects they mediated the relationship of pious middle-class citizens with the world beyond the English Channel. They had achieved this position largely as a result of their access to the public sphere. In addition to their own publications and the religious press, their

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<sup>7</sup> Leeds Religious Tract Society, *Annual Report*, 1847, pp. 5-6.



activities were extensively reported in secular newspapers, particularly the proceedings of the annual May meetings at Exeter Hall. The missionary societies used the influence this gave them to sustain the fear of persecution and of the lurking threat of Catholicism, an important component of English and later British national identity for over two centuries. For evangelicals this remained at the core of their identities throughout the period, neatly encompassing other touchstones of the national psyche such as the Empire and commerce, which were widely viewed as tools sent by Providence to help spread the principles of the English Reformation far and wide.<sup>8</sup>

The supporters of missionary societies could therefore feel that they were performing their duties in the war against ignorance and superstition, and reinforcing the bonds of evangelical Protestantism. This was true at the level of the individual town as well, particularly in those societies which prided themselves on their non-sectarian nature. For example, the Leeds Religious Tract Society was careful to maintain a committee comprised of equal numbers of churchmen and dissenters. In order to maintain this unity, the societies' visitors were instructed not to engage in religious controversy with those they visited, with the notable exception of Roman Catholics who evangelicals believed were only nominally Christian.<sup>9</sup>

However, while the missionary societies were a reminder of the common ground of the reformation, they also symbolized the intensely fragmented nature of English Protestantism. Every cause, every constituency, was fought over by societies representing each of the major denominations. The London Missionary Society was run mainly by dissenters, although some establishment clergy were also involved. Even in an ecumenical organisation such as the Bible Society, care had to be taken to avoid the introduction of theological discussions which could offend one sect or another. For instance, an attempt was made to introduce Trinitarian doctrine into its constitution in 1831, which would have

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<sup>8</sup> See for example the speech of Mr Richardson in *Report of Proceedings and Resolutions at a Meeting held the 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1812, on the Formation of an Auxiliary Bible Society, for the City of York and its Vicinity* (York, 1812), pp. 12-13. York Central Library, Y206.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Leeds City Mission, *Annual Report*, 1837, p. 6, rule II. For the precise theological objections to Roman Catholicism, see Frank Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Lewiston, New York etc.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), chapter 1.

alienated Unitarian sympathisers. Although this move was successfully resisted, the incident generated some unwelcome publicity.<sup>10</sup>

Despite contributing to such collective efforts, individual denominations were careful to maintain their own mission societies. Indeed, the role of the larger societies in many cases was that of preparing the ground for conversion and strengthening the resolve of the converted, through the distribution of scripture translations and religious tracts. To achieve and maintain actual conversion required an infra-structure of chapels, schools and ministers of the gospel which could only be provided by one denomination or another. This resulted in a bewildering array of societies pursuing the same objectives. For instance, between 1830 and 1850 at least three Irish mission societies were active in Leeds: the Irish Evangelical Society (Methodist); the Baptist Irish Society; and the Leeds Auxiliary Hibernian Society (Anglican). This pattern was repeated in many different fields of endeavour.

As the century wore on, attention became focussed on the poor and ignorant in British towns and cities as much as on the heathen abroad.<sup>11</sup> The efforts of the Leeds Religious Tract Society were augmented by the Leeds City Mission (1836); Leeds Town Mission (1837); and Leeds Domestic Mission (1844). The aim of these societies was 'to assist in the diffusion of religion and morality among the poor of Leeds, (more especially those unconnected with any place of worship), and in the general amelioration of their condition'. This was to be achieved through home visits, instruction and the distribution of religious literature.<sup>12</sup> Again sectarian competition was intense, with many societies organised at the level of the individual parish or chapel congregation, such as the Salem Chapel Home Missionary and Christian Instruction Society (1834), or the Leeds Domestic Mission attached to Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 May 1831.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Susan Thorne, "The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable": Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1997), 238-62; Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> Leeds Domestic Mission Society, *Annual Report*, 1855, rules 2 and 3.

<sup>13</sup> The creation of the Unitarian Domestic Mission has been attributed to 'the rediscovery of an older tradition of social usefulness'. E. A. Elton, 'A

The work of these societies was carried out in the massive urban slums that resulted from rapid urbanisation and economic dislocation. These districts contained thousands of households which had never been brought into contact with the Word of God, many of whom lived in abject poverty, with thousands of others whose material well-being rested upon the vagaries of the trade cycle. The diary of the Leeds Town Missioner for 1856, the Reverend Campbell, gives some idea of the extent of the problem. In Church Street for example, twenty-three out of thirty-one households visited professed to having no religion. The remainder comprised six Methodist households and two that belonged to the Established Church.<sup>14</sup>

For current purposes, the significance of the mission societies lies in the overwhelmingly feminine nature of their support. Reports of their public meetings demonstrate this. The audiences at the May meetings were renowned for consisting predominantly of the 'fair sex', a pattern that was repeated at the meetings of local auxiliary societies. Effectively barred from posts in the management committees, women's contribution was initially financial. The maintenance of paid missionaries, particularly in far away places, required an enormous amount of expenditure, as did the translation, printing and distribution of religious tracts at home and abroad. Women arrogated to themselves a number of fundraising methods which came to be perceived as peculiarly feminine, especially the use of a card system for the collection of subscriptions and the charity bazaar, or ladies' sale.<sup>15</sup> Both of these methods proved infinitely adaptable and could be applied to fundraising for political purposes, as well as purely philanthropic ones.<sup>16</sup> The financial contribution of women to charitable societies, many of which would not have survived or prospered without female support, eventually led to widespread acceptance of women's participation.

In particular, women were at the forefront of efforts to spread the gospel among the

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Victorian City Mission: The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in Holbeck and New Wortley, 1844-78', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LIV, 4 (1979), 316-32, p. 318.

<sup>14</sup> Diary of the Leeds Town Missioner. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, MS GA/z 53.

<sup>15</sup> See Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>16</sup> See below, chapter 6.

urban English poor, using their experience of visiting the poor in their homes to set up auxiliary societies for the distribution of the scripture.<sup>17</sup> In 1818, the Leeds Bible Society passed the following resolution:

That this meeting feeling with the Committee of the Parent Institution, the vast importance of Bible Associations, both as it respects the minds, the morals and the comforts of the poor: and knowing the difficulties which prevent the exertions of those who are engaged in commercial pursuits: suggests the propriety of forming a Ladies' Association, as the most efficient means for supplying the poor of this town with the Holy Scriptures: and that the Ladies of Leeds are respectfully requested to unite their exertions towards the attainment of this most desirable object.<sup>18</sup>

Women were perfect for such work because they were less likely to be involved in 'commercial pursuits' and could therefore make the commitment of time and effort necessary to carry out their duties.

The Association was successful, and soon expanded its activities. By 1820, a satellite association had been established at Hunslet, with another at Holbeck by 1822.<sup>19</sup> A similar pattern pertained at York, where the Auxiliary had been formed in 1812 and the Ladies' Association around 1821.<sup>20</sup> By the 1830s, Ladies' Associations were part of the accepted paraphernalia of missionary societies. For example, the Leeds Town Mission Society (1837) had a Ladies' Association from the outset. Unlike the Bible Society, these women were often restricted to the more ancillary role of fundraising, where they proved indispensable. In its second year, the Ladies' Association connected to the Town Mission raised £134 8s. 10d. for the society, out of total receipts of £646 11s. 8d.<sup>21</sup> The main method of fundraising was to canvass for subscriptions, when the town or parish was divided into districts with collectors assigned to each one. Men and women would then proceed from door to door with subscription cards. For example, the Ladies' Association of the Town Mission looked after 14 districts in 1839. Collectors included the Misses Plint and their former pupil Ellen

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<sup>17</sup> Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, pp. 52-60.

<sup>18</sup> Leeds Bible Society, *Annual Report*, 1818.

<sup>19</sup> Leeds Bible Society, *Annual Reports*.

<sup>20</sup> York Bible Society, *Annual Report*, 1833.

<sup>21</sup> Leeds Town Mission Society, *Annual Report*, 1839. The Leeds Town Mission Account Book gives details of the Ladies' Association's contributions over the following decade. Brotherton Library Special Collections, Jowitt Papers, 5.

Heaton.

At this time, the missionaries themselves were mostly men, although there is some evidence that this position was changing in the latter half of the period. For instance, when a town mission was formed at Bradford in 1850, one of the four missionaries was a woman.<sup>22</sup> As these posts were salaried, however, they would probably have been socially unacceptable for middle-class women. Nevertheless, women were able to play a more direct role in those societies which relied on volunteers to distribute tracts and other religious literature. Women working for the Bible Society sold Bibles to the poor by subscription, thus facilitating the spread of the gospel whilst encouraging virtues of thrift and self-reliance.<sup>23</sup> Other societies distributed tracts on a loan system, calling round the following week with more tracts and collecting the old ones to pass on to the next street. Women were automatic choices for such work from very early on in the period. At the second meeting of the Salem Chapel Home Missionary Society, in February 1835, it was determined that 53 men and 45 women were to be applied to as tract distributors. A week later, the committee had the names of 24 men and 24 women on its books, serving 60 districts between them (later reduced to 49).<sup>24</sup>

Women took an increasingly active role in visiting work throughout the period. Take for example the Queen's Street Methodist Church Mission, which began in the 1850s, supported by funds from the Ladies' Working Society. In 1859, 'ladies of the Church began to further the district mission work by taking small portions of it under their special care, visiting the people in their homes, and collecting the women together for reading the scriptures and prayer.'<sup>25</sup> Possibly these shifts were a result of the increasing commitment of time and effort necessary to cover districts adequately. Certainly women, particularly single women or those whose children had grown up, had more time to invest in such activities. Alternatively, men may have been focussing their efforts on debates over

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<sup>22</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 February 1850.

<sup>23</sup> Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>24</sup> Salem Chapel Home Missionary and Christian Instruction Society, Minute Book, 9-16 February, 1835. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, Trinity and St David's Utd. Reform Church, MS 78. (Hereafter Salem Chapel Missionary Society).

<sup>25</sup> William Thomas, *The Jubilee of Queen Street Chapel, Leeds* (Leeds, 1875), p. 49.

improving the physical and educational structure of the town, leaving the practical work among the poor largely to women.

However, the feminisation of missionary and charitable work was by no means a smooth or uncontested process. Some were concerned at the 'public' nature of the work, deeming it immodest.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, although it was often idealised in contemporary literature, there is no doubt that such work was often frustrating, unpleasant, and even downright dangerous. As a result, the fitness of women for such tasks was periodically questioned, even by the visitors themselves. Sometimes, early doubts were allayed as the work progressed. Speaking of her work in district 19 of the Salem Chapel society, Mrs Tweedy reported that she 'began to visit with a faint heart, now feels great pleasure in the work.'<sup>27</sup> However, in the annual report of 1842 Mrs Bolton announced that she was resigning the same district, 'in consequence of the disinclination of the people to receive the tracts and suggested that a Male distributor be appointed in her place.'<sup>28</sup>

Problems ranged from apathy and backsliding to outright hostility. Distributors and missionaries complained in particular of opposition from Roman Catholics and Socialists. The latter were a major issue in the late 1830s, when something of a 'red scare' swept the missionary societies.<sup>29</sup> This is understandable when one considers that the essence of Owenite socialism was perceived by evangelical Protestants not as a system of social reform, but primarily as an anti-clerical doctrine which made a virtue of atheism. Socialism was blamed for problems such as family breakdown in much the same way that alcoholism was, and at least one case of domestic violence in the town was attributed to the husband joining the socialists.<sup>21</sup> In an interesting example of lower-class response and resistance to the proselytising of the middle-class distributors, it was reported by the Methodist Tract Society (1829) in 1839 that the socialists had been replacing the religious tracts with literature of

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<sup>26</sup> Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, pp. 56-8.

<sup>27</sup> Salem Chapel Home Missionary Society, Minute Book, 22 June 1835.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 April 1842.

<sup>29</sup> See for example Leeds City Mission, *Annual Report*, 1837, pp. 25, 29-30; Leeds Town Mission, *Annual Report*, 1839, p. 4; Methodist Tract Society Minute Book, 29 June 1840. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, Brunswick Methodist Church, MS 155.

<sup>21</sup> Leeds City Mission, *Annual Report*, 1837, p. 29.

their own, disguised in the original covers. As the society operated a loan system, this meant that distributors had been unwittingly passing on this subversive literature to their clients.<sup>22</sup> It is no wonder that women like Mrs Bolton became disheartened.

It is easy to get the impression from works such as Frank Prochaska's *Women and Philanthropy* that there was a limitless supply of women to canvass, collect and distribute. However, this does not appear to have been the case in Leeds. Perhaps the sheer number of different and competing organisations meant that too many were chasing too small a number of philanthropic women visitors. The problems faced by such societies in keeping up the scope of their activities may be illustrated by following the fortunes of one of them over the period. As noted, the Leeds Auxiliary Bible Society acquired a Ladies' Association in 1818, which soon made itself indispensable in spreading the gospel among the poor and raising funds for the parent society. Although it expanded and established satellite branches in the out-townships during the early 1820s, this success did not last. In 1830, it was reported that there was a want of ladies to visit the districts.<sup>23</sup> In 1832, the cholera epidemic caused some visitors to suspend their activities.<sup>24</sup> By 1838, there were only 133 collectors for 234 districts.<sup>25</sup> The Ladies' Association continued to struggle throughout the 1840s, despite appearing to rally in the better economic climate in the middle of the decade. By 1848, receipts had slumped to £139 3s. 10d., compared to £349 12s. 1d. in 1837.<sup>26</sup> The Salem Chapel society had similar problems, and appears to have petered out in 1849. The last minute is for a meeting of distributors on 25 June, 1849. There were only fifteen people present, of whom twelve were women.<sup>27</sup>

It has already been noted that the missionary societies made an important contribution to the growth of the public sphere during the nineteenth century, both nationally and locally. If one held to a crude distinction between public and private experience, it would be easy to draw a simple connection between the preponderance of women at the May meetings and

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<sup>22</sup> Methodist Tract Society Minute Book, Quarterly Meeting (no date), 1839.

<sup>23</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 16 October 1830.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 October 1832.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 October 1838.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 October 1848 and 21 October 1837.

<sup>27</sup> Salem Chapel Missionary Society, Minute Book, 25 June 1849.

the formation of female public identities. However, challenging such a simple analysis. Alison Twells has described the formation of a 'missionary identity', which was formed as much within the context of the evangelical family as through the 'public' activities of the missionary societies.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, if we place the meetings themselves in their historical context, as a stage in the development of the missions which was not always welcomed, the picture which emerges is far more complex than a simple public/private model will allow. In fact the whole movement of the missionary societies into a more public arena was a problematic and contested process, as the audiences at missionary sermons grew and the sermons themselves were increasingly augmented by large public meetings. The London Missionary Society led the way in this, although its activities were looked on with dismay by others. Writing in 1815, John Ryland of the Baptist Missionary Society was concerned that the BMS 'so long marked by "unobtrusive modesty" should now be attempting to "vie with the London Society in the noise and ostentation of its meetings"'.<sup>29</sup>

This suspicion of ostentation and display was not confined to the Baptists. When Basil Woodd was asked to undertake a tour through the West Riding on behalf of the Church Missionary Society in 1813, he replied: 'I do not see the expediency of sending ministers from London to Yorkshire ... it has an aspect of publicity which I do not like. I am willing to succour the cause in my own little sphere, but do not ask me to take long journeys.'<sup>30</sup> In the event Woodd did go to Yorkshire, where he was well received. However, his objections reveal that a straightforward division of public and private along gender lines is a hopelessly inadequate model. In the pre-railway era, a tour to the north to address unfamiliar audiences outside his 'own little sphere' was a daunting prospect, even for a man. 'Publicity' itself was new and unfamiliar territory, with pejorative overtones in this context for which masculinity alone could not compensate. Even the Prebend of York Minster, Mr Richardson, expressed doubts about public meetings; although having

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<sup>28</sup> Twells, 'The Heathen at Home and Overseas', p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1992), p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, its Men and its Work*, 2 vols. (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), i, p. 132. The decision of the B&FBS to extend its operations to the provinces was criticised for essentially the same reason: Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, p. 44.



reluctantly consented to allow one in York around 1817, he confessed himself satisfied that a suitably religious atmosphere could be maintained at such events.<sup>31</sup> However, the difficulty of maintaining a 'Christ-like humility' in the face of the bustle and excitement of a crowded hall remained a concern for both sexes.

It was perhaps inevitable, given the high profile of women at meetings, that they should become particular targets for criticism in this respect. Such criticism supports Amanda Vickery's contention that the increasing elaboration of 'domestic ideology' at this time was the result of an expansion of women's public roles in the early nineteenth century, rather than a reflection of a society where women were increasingly confined to a domestic environment.<sup>32</sup> The following extract from an article on the May meetings in the *Christian Lady's Magazine*, written by an anonymous vicar, is an eloquent testimonial to the concerns felt by some contemporaries over the corrupting influence of the 'public sphere' on female piety:

I found ... a prevailing tendency to give unto man much of the glory due to God alone: certain speakers were regarded with a degree of partial favour, to which their greatest claim seemed to be the possession of accomplishments, equally belonging to the mere natural man. Eloquence, a fine figure, a melodious voice, a graceful action - these were among the chief recommendations of such popular men - these drew forth the greetings of rapturous applause - these furnished an engrossing subject for the domestic circle. Happy did she appear who had succeeded in engaging one of those acknowledged leaders, and placed him at a dinner table covered with delicacies, and surrounded him with a little band of admiring partisans ... When no such guest was present, I have listened for some acknowledgement of spiritual profit reaped during the morning's occupation; but too often have I heard in place thereof, a strain of animadversion very foreign to the subject of my meditations. The deportment of the chairman, the number, names, rank, learning, tones and family connexions of the speakers; the appearance and demeanour of the auditory, with plans for a timely attendance, in order to secure as good, or better seats at the next meeting - these have been the topics of many an hour during which I have vainly waited for something calculated to help forward the work of our own salvation, to promote the cause of truth among others, to water the good seed which faithful men had been careful to sow during the day.<sup>33</sup>

The author had a definite view of the temptations faced by women, with their pre-

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<sup>31</sup> Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>32</sup> Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p.7.

<sup>33</sup> Anon., 'May Meetings', *The Christian Lady's Magazine*, 1 (January-June, 1834), pp. 414-5.

occupations about marriage prospects and social standing, in entering upon such exciting scenes of public activity, scenes for which 'fervent private prayer' was the only reliable preparation to ensure the recognition of 'the privilege of sitting at the footstool of the Lord'.<sup>34</sup> However, the extract also tells us something about the nature of the corrupting 'public' sphere itself. Much of what it says about the actual *meaning* of these meetings to middle-class women, particularly those of some standing, rings true in the light of the points already made about women and cultural institutions. As with science and culture, Society had appropriated public space and in so doing had blurred the boundaries between public and private.

Despite these problems, the potential contribution women could make to the finances and practical work of missionary societies meant that male organisers were keen to promote pride in public activity amongst women as a means of encouraging them to further effort. This can clearly be seen in the various exhortations to the women of the Leeds Bible Society over the period, which were aimed at reversing the downward trend identified above. In 1838 the situation prompted a morale boosting speech from the Reverend Jowitt at the annual meeting, which was reported in the *Mercury*:

It was stated also that no fewer than 32,000 ladies - 200 of title - were now acting as officers or collectors in the Ladies' Associations connected with the British and Foreign Bible Society, having her Majesty herself at their head, she having lately assumed the office of Patroness to the society.<sup>35</sup>

In 1848, Jowitt was forced to make a more direct appeal:

He considered that the Ladies had been useful - perhaps the most useful part of the Leeds Auxiliary; and although, according to the report, they felt they had some defective members, he hoped they would be encouraged, for their labours could not fail to prove beneficial both to themselves and others.

Mr J. T. Bourne of the parent society was more forthright. Referring to St Saviour's, the Puseyite church in Leeds, and to the struggle against papistry that he believed to be raging in the town, he declared: 'If there was any place in this cherished land which more than any other required the faithful services of the ladies, he thought that town was Leeds'.<sup>36</sup>

Jowitt was clearly attempting to instill a sense of pride and community in the female

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 417.

<sup>35</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 October 1838.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 October 1848.

collectors, particularly in his first speech through references to women of title and the patronage of the Queen. Bourne went a step further, putting women (rhetorically at least) at the forefront of the struggle against the Church of Rome and the ritualists within the Established Church. Such speeches sent confusing messages to women about why they should participate in missionary activity. Although emphasising the number of titled women taking part could be taken as emphasising their equality and humility before God in condescending to visit the homes of the poor, it could also be taken as a sign that middle-class visitors were in good company and should not be worried about losing caste. Equally, it could be seen as promoting a pride in the public aspect of their role. Clearly there was a tension between the need for humility, and the need to appeal to women who were defining themselves in relation to national and civic communities as much as through their individual relationship to God.

As the missionary societies grew in size and influence, they moved increasingly into the public sphere and created arenas of public debate through their meetings and publications. As they did so they drew women with them, for women were the corner-stone of missionary activity. This in turn generated debate over the proper place of women at such events. Clearly, although they were effectively barred from the platform, they could not be removed from the meetings themselves as they usually formed the majority of the audience. Instead, women were encouraged to look on the public sphere as a potentially corrupting influence. This led to greater elaboration of gender difference in relation to the 'public' and the idea that men, being more worldly, were better equipped to deal with its rigours. Thus, in the minds of prescriptive writers at least, the 'public' took on a gender dimension which it did not intrinsically possess. However, the extent to which women did more than pay lip-service to such a notion is debatable, and the need to galvanise support when subscriptions began to flag helped to generate discourses which actually encouraged women to think of their work as a public service, of which they should be proud.

#### **4.2: Women and Philanthropy in Leeds: Theory and Practice.**

Female public identities were to be increasingly debated in relation to their part in caring for the physical needs of the poor. The provision of charitable relief had always been seen as an important way of maintaining social bonds between the privileged classes and those below them in the social order, and one with which women had traditionally been closely

associated. However, in the expanding industrial towns the methods of individual charity were found wanting, quite apart from the theoretical assault upon them from the advocates of political economy. New responses were therefore necessary and many of these were pioneered by women, often borrowing methods developed within the context of the missionary societies discussed above.

This section begins by looking at the way in which middle-class identity was shaped by common perceptions of the poor and common initiatives to deal with their problems. These perceptions were increasingly shaped by the experiences and accounts of social investigators from religious and medical backgrounds, and reflected through the various voluntary societies, medical charities, schools and public subscriptions which aimed to provide a united class response to the social threat posed by the urban underclass. It will then go on to look at the contribution that women made to this response, often in the face of opposition from male committees, or of the fashionable opinions about suitable occupations shared by many of their own sex. Finally, attention will be drawn to the way that the emerging discourses of social science were appropriated in order to break down these objections, by recasting such work as an extension of woman's domestic role. It will be argued that, although this effectively opened up new areas of philanthropy to women, the emphasis on their particular skills as mothers or household managers effectively limited the type of work they were allowed to do within the 'social' sphere.

The invasion of the streets of the poor and populous districts by missionary workers and tract distributors coincided with a growing awareness of the filth and squalor which they contained. From the 1830s onwards, a number of social surveys in towns across Britain described a world of dirt, disease and corruption which seemed to threaten the very fabric of society.<sup>37</sup> The experiences of missionaries seemed to support the pessimistic reports of medical men and government officials. Missioners like the Reverend Campbell made over a hundred household visits a week, and obviously gained great experience of the poor and the miserable conditions in which they lived. This 'knowledge' found its way into the annual reports of mission societies and other publications that addressed particular problems, such

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<sup>37</sup> See Michael J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain: The Foundations of Empirical Social Research* (New York: Hassocks, 1975); Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*; Poovey, *Making a Social Body*.

as vice or alcoholism.<sup>38</sup>

Although approaching the problem from a slightly different background, this literature shared with the investigations of medical men such as Kay-Shuttleworth in Manchester and Robert Baker in Leeds a common concern with the moral condition of the poor. This remained true throughout the period, despite gradual changes in emphasis. In the 1830s doctors were fond of linking poor physical health to moral failings, whereas later, particularly after the impact of Chadwick's Sanitary Report in the 1840s, religious reformers became increasingly aware of the importance of improving the physical environment of towns in order to effect a transformation in the morals of their inhabitants. The Domestic Missioner, Edward Hall, made just such a connection in his report of 1855, which urged the case for sanitary reform.<sup>39</sup> Often such writing utilised the discourses of imperialism, characterising the poor as a lower form of humanity whose customs and habits resembled those of savages more than civilised Englishmen. The poor districts became a foreign country which had to be brought to civilisation by the efforts of missionaries, male and female.

The response to urban deprivation was seen as one area in which the middle class could show a united front. Local statistical societies were important arenas in which knowledge about the social sphere could be collected and collated, whilst also providing important sites where common class identities could be constructed. However, there were other institutions that fulfilled a similar role, while attempting to deal practically with the needs of the poor. For instance, in Leeds the Benevolent or Stranger's Friend Society played a vital role in mediating relations between rich and poor, as well as providing a rare venue where churchmen and dissenters, Liberals and Tories, could co-operate.<sup>40</sup> This was in marked contrast to the local Poor Law Board, the official face of poor-relief, which was the scene of vehement party dispute over much of the period. Moreover, the poor law itself

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<sup>38</sup> For instance, William Logan, *Exposure, from personal observation, of Female Prostitution in London, Leeds and Rochdale, and especially in the City of Glasgow: with remarks on the cause, extent, results and remedy of the Evil* (Glasgow, 1843). Logan had been City Missionary in Leeds, 1838-1840.

<sup>39</sup> Leeds Domestic Mission Society, *Annual Report*, 1855, pp. 9-10. Hall was also on the Leeds Sanitary Committee. Elton, 'A Victorian City Mission', p. 322.

<sup>40</sup> See J. Myers Gardner, *History of the Leeds Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society, 1789-1889* (Leeds, 1890).

was increasingly contested by the poor themselves, especially after the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. In Morris' words, 'the poor law was not a suitable agency for maintaining class relationships through consensus'.<sup>41</sup>

There were other institutions in Leeds which attempted to provide such consensus, with varying degrees of success. Take for instance the various medical charities in the town, especially the Leeds General Infirmary which remained an important focus of local pride and loyalty, not least because of its antiquity (it was founded in 1767). Certain educational initiatives for the poor, such as the Leeds Infant School Society, also attracted broad support.<sup>42</sup> Later, when class and party tensions had cooled somewhat, initiatives for dealing with particular problem groups came to the fore, such as reformatories and ragged schools.<sup>43</sup>

However, the threat of disintegration was never far away. It has already been noted that the proliferation of hospitals in Leeds during the 1820s and 1830s was largely a result of tensions within the medical community itself. These tensions could be political in origin, and there were sometimes allegations of party bias surrounding the election of committees or medical staff.<sup>44</sup> In addition, hospitals were an imperfect means of mediating class relationships at this time because they, like the Poor Law Board, were often mistrusted by the poor themselves. Such antagonisms came to a head in many towns during the cholera epidemic of 1832, when medical boards were given draconian powers to enter the dwellings of the poor and to interfere with customary burial practices. There was even a widespread belief that fever hospitals were murdering patients to provide corpses for dissection.<sup>45</sup>

Educational initiatives were also liable to fall foul of sectarian conflict, particularly in Leeds where concerns over the moral welfare of the poor meant that the focus was on 'religious education'. W. B. Stephens has charted the sectarian competition which spurred

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<sup>41</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 205.

<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>43</sup> See *A Few Plain Facts about the Leeds Ragged and Certified Industrial Schools* (Leeds, 1867); also a leading article in *The Times*, 7 December 1866.

<sup>44</sup> For example, see a letter to the *Leeds Mercury* on 'Medical Charities': *Leeds Mercury*, 16 January 1841.

<sup>45</sup> See R. J. Morris, *Cholera 1832: The Social Response to an Epidemic* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 101-14.

much educational effort in nineteenth-century Leeds, whilst also acknowledging the importance of the humanitarian motives behind initiatives such as the model factory schools opened by John Marshall in Holbeck.<sup>46</sup> It has been noted in chapter one that sectarian conflict easily became politicised in this period, and education became a major flashpoint in Leeds on a number of occasions. In particular, Leeds was the centre of the Voluntaryist movement which rejected all forms of state interference in educational provision, relying instead upon the benevolence of the rich and the thrift of the poor for the financial support of schools. Led by the younger Edward Baines, it spearheaded the successful campaign against the education clauses in Graham's factory bill of 1843. Baines' militancy on this issue eventually produced a serious split in the Liberal faction in the town, which reached its nadir around the election of 1847, although the dispute continued to rumble on into the 1850s.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the Anglicans were able to steal a march on the Dissenters in the field of elementary education under the leadership of Dr Hook. Thus while in 1851 there were only twelve Protestant dissenting schools with 1,700 pupils, there were a total of thirty six Church schools with 7,000 pupils. In 1869, J. G. Fitch remarked on the 'exceptional apathy of the Dissenting bodies in Leeds':

with the exception of the Wesleyans and the Unitarians I have been unable to find a single Nonconformist congregation in Leeds which is doing anything to help forward primary education or is contributing money or supervision to the permanent maintenance of a day school in any form.<sup>48</sup>

The Benevolent Society, backed up by periodic crisis funds for raising subscriptions for the poor, was therefore a key institution in providing a sense of middle-class unity. Unfortunately, even this came under threat of sectarian disintegration from the 1830s onwards, particularly after the creation of the Church of England Visiting Society in 1833. At the inaugural meeting of the society, fears were voiced by Mr Wailes that the exclusively Anglican membership of the society 'would tend to effect an injurious breach in the benevolence of the town'. William Hey endeavoured to put his mind at rest by replying that relief would be made available regardless of sect or party. However, the fact that visitors were instructed to 'Inquire into the moral and religious state of the family' would have

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<sup>46</sup> W. B. Stephens, 'Elementary Education and Literacy, 1770-1870', in Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 223-49.

<sup>47</sup> Fraser, 'Voluntaryism', *passim*.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Stephens, 'Elementary Education and Literacy', pp. 231-32.

raised fears about undue pressure being placed on applicants for relief to conform.<sup>49</sup> These fears were eventually borne out, as the Anglicans had abandoned the Benevolent Society by 1843.<sup>50</sup>

Given the emphasis such societies placed upon reforming the habits of the poor at the same time as relieving their physical wants, usually enforced through strict criteria for eligibility, such fragmentation along sectarian lines is perhaps not surprising. Like missionary work therefore, such labour was increasingly carried out through a patchwork of societies which reflected and maintained the complex pattern of social and religious identity in Leeds. As well as the Visiting Society, the Anglicans could boast a Parochial Lying-in Society, of which Mrs Hook was the President. Other denominations were quick to step into the fray, and a Catholic Benevolent Society had been established by 1841.<sup>51</sup> This pattern of fragmentation continued, with a visiting society formed at East Parade Congregational Chapel in 1862.<sup>52</sup>

This is essentially the picture of philanthropy in Leeds that Morris describes in *Class, Sect and Party*. It is a picture of an elite-led class attempting to overcome recurring ideological divisions in order to establish a stable society at a time of social and economic change, and, as far as it goes, it is a persuasive one. However, despite a passing mention of women's importance to missionary societies, it is an account in which the entire dimension of gender is strangely absent.<sup>53</sup> Women were the prime movers in many of the societies described above, especially the more parochial district visiting societies. In fact, given their importance at the level of parish life, the fragmentation of charitable effort along sectarian lines from the late 1830s may actually have enhanced their role. On the other hand, participation in the more inclusive societies could have helped to strengthen their civic and

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<sup>49</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 January 1833. The visitors in this society were, initially at least, all male.

<sup>50</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 268.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>52</sup> 'East Parade Ladies' District Visiting Committee, as arranged November 1862'. MS, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, Trinity and St David's United Reform Church, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 175.



class identities alongside those of the church or chapel, in the same way that Morris claims they did for men. For instance, in 1832 the Benevolent Society mobilised the women of the town in response to the Cholera epidemic. In that year, the Special Relief Committee of the Society reported that:

The ladies have also performed their part in the work of charity with their accustomed alacrity and perseverance. Their labour indeed in the fabrication of petticoats, chemises, shirts and children's clothing, can be duly appreciated only by those who have opportunities of witnessing the great quantity of these articles which have been through their hands.<sup>54</sup>

Clearly the participation of women in charitable effort deserves more attention, both from the point of view of understanding the experiences of the women themselves and from seeing how they contributed to the construction and maintenance of class relations. Firstly then, we should look at the changing role of women in the theory and practice of philanthropy over the period.

Women played an important role in the theory and practice of 'rational' modes of philanthropy, which denigrated the practice of 'indiscriminate almsgiving' as tending to corrupt the recipient and instilling complacency in the donor. Many supported local self-help societies by offering their services as patronesses and distributing membership cards. Such work had been pioneered in the rural south by women such as Hannah More and her sister, who started clubs which provided lying-in benefits to married women, whilst also placing a premium on virginity at marriage as a way of reforming the wayward sexual behaviour of the lower classes.<sup>55</sup> In large towns such as Leeds, the face-to-face methods employed by the More sisters were inappropriate, but many of the principles remained the same. The practice of dividing towns into districts and the central collection of funds also meant that women from lower down the social scale could become involved in providing relief, an activity which had hitherto been the preserve of women with greater resources.

Despite these initiatives, older patterns of philanthropy continued to exist, particularly in rural areas. Some wealthy women and their families maintained earlier paternalist traditions, such as the Gotts at Armley, who continued to distribute blankets to the poor

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Gardner, *History of the Leeds Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>55</sup> Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, p. 11.

each winter and in times of hardship.<sup>56</sup> Conversely, it has been suggested that the spread of urban philanthropic societies helped to revitalise charitable traditions amongst the landed gentry, where the image of the 'Lady Bountiful' was updated to incorporate more 'middle-class' modes of giving.<sup>57</sup> It is also certain that alms continued to be distributed 'indiscriminately' to beggars in the streets, no matter what political economists thought of such behaviour.

There was some resistance to new modes of giving, both from the recipients and from public opinion. For instance, Yeo has pointed out that the benefit societies' concentration on fertility risked ignoring the fact that lower-class women were more worried about leaving enough money in the kitty to provide themselves with a decent funeral. Although they deplored such extravagant expenditure on the dead, clubs were therefore forced to provide funeral benefits in order to remain viable.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the practice of district visiting was not always accepted as appropriate for women. For example, the authoress Mary Howitt, who had been introduced to the visiting of the poor by her schoolmistress, Hannah Kilham, recorded that she had initially been wary of visiting for the Nottingham Provident Society in the 1830s because she thought that going from door to door in such a fashion was unfeminine. However, she soon concluded that helping working people to help themselves in fact constituted charity in the widest sense.<sup>59</sup>

Howitt claimed that her early experiences of poor visiting gave her an appreciation of the individuality of the poor which shaped her later work in encouraging self help, notably through *Howitt's Journal*, the periodical that she ran with her husband. Other authors went so far as to claim that women's charitable work gave them unique opportunities to win the confidence of those classes, something that insensitive and intrusive male investigators had singularly failed to do. In Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South* the heroine, Margaret Hale, uses her influence to promote greater understanding between the operatives of Milton and their employers, ultimately contributing to the stabilisation of class relations in the

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<sup>56</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 January 1832.

<sup>57</sup> J. Gerrard, 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, 30, 2 (1987), 183-209.

<sup>58</sup> Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Margaret Howitt (ed.), *Mary Howitt, An Autobiography*, 2 Vols. (London, 1889), i, p. 251.

town.<sup>60</sup> These arguments potentially undermined the impersonal bureaucracies of poor relief which Morris identifies as the basis of emergency relief funds in the first half of the century. This is important given that the distance between the wealthy subscribers and their clients, who became mere 'objects' of relief, was at the heart of the rhetoric generated by many philanthropic societies.<sup>61</sup>

It was the personal touch that women could bring, together with their supposedly natural didactic gifts and expertise in household matters, which went a long way towards justifying women's involvement in philanthropic societies, and not just those associated with district visiting. Education was seen as a peculiarly feminine province, especially when it involved girls and infants. Moreover, the education of the poor was an issue which exercised the minds of many philanthropists in the nineteenth century. Bringing poor children into charity schools was perceived as the best way of removing them from the pernicious influence of their home environments, exposing them instead to beneficial religious and civilising examples. The Leeds Infant School has already been mentioned in this context. Women were the driving force behind this society, as the reports of meetings demonstrate. In 1831 the *Mercury* reported: 'A considerable number of ladies were present; but the gentlemen did not make so good a muster on account of the annual meeting of the Leeds Public Library having been held at the same time'.<sup>62</sup> One can speculate that the men saw this charity as a feminine matter. Prescriptive literature widely acknowledged the unique relationship between women and children, particularly in infancy. This work could therefore be left safely in the hands of their womenfolk, whilst they attended to the 'real' public business at the Library. Nevertheless, the Society did attract the attention of a number of male educationalists in the town, including William Hey (President 1842), the Rev. Thomas Scales and Edward Baines. Elizabeth Gott was also active in the cause, and there are five references to meetings of the Society in her diaries between April 1829 and October 1834.<sup>63</sup> In addition, a list of stallholders for a Bazaar in aid of the society in 1837

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<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855: London etc.: Penguin Books, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 215.

<sup>62</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 June 1831.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Gott, *Diaries*, 29 April, 4 May and 21 May, 1829; 28 April 1831; 6 October 1834. Although this seems like a small number of entries, it must be remembered that the intervening diaries do not survive.

includes Quakers like Mrs J. Armistead, Mrs Eddison (wife of the Town Clerk) and Mrs H. Rawson, alongside Miss Baines (Independent) and Mrs Chantrell (wife of the Anglican architect Robert Chantrell).<sup>64</sup> The Society had a school near the South Market until 1836, at which date it moved to Park Street, where it remained until the premises were taken over as a Working Men's Hall in 1864.<sup>65</sup>

Despite, or even because of, the fact that education was such a contested issue during this period, it was an aspect of philanthropy which enabled women to take part in public debates which touched on important questions of class and gender relations. More problematic was the role of women in other public institutions, such as hospitals, prisons and workhouses. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a great increase in the numbers and variety of these establishments. Prisons and workhouses were institutions of state and local government, administered by paid officials and, in the case of workhouses, superintended by a publicly elected committee. Hospitals were run by members of the medical profession, overseen by committees of local notables who were also benefactors and subscribers. Women were therefore largely absent from them, except in a subordinate role. Much of the actual supervision of hospitals and workhouses was carried out by salaried matrons, sometimes assisted by nurses. However, these women tended to be drawn from the lower classes and had little say in management policy.

Nevertheless, some women were determined to challenge this effective exclusion. Their arguments were strengthened by the fact that inmates were drawn from both sexes. Poverty, insanity, sickness and criminal tendencies were not the preserve of a particular sex, so hospitals, prisons and workhouses had to make separate provision for men and women. This existence of a sizeable, if shifting, population of women in institutions which were often dirty, overcrowded and ill-provided with material and spiritual comfort, provided an easily identifiable cause for early women social reformers and evangelicals.

However, the efforts of reformers such as Elizabeth Fry and Louisa Twining to gain access to prisons, workhouses and hospitals were often resisted. Local government officials and medical men were jealous of their privileges and were at this time often struggling to establish and maintain a shared professional ethos, which left no place for amateur meddling with management practices sanctioned by the combined prejudices of tradition and

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<sup>64</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 April 1837.

<sup>65</sup> *White's Directory of the West Riding*, 1837 and 1866.

medical/administrative 'knowledge'.<sup>66</sup> In York, the pioneering Unitarian philanthropist Catherine Cappe had a long struggle to overcome such prejudices before she succeeded in establishing a female visiting committee at York County Hospital in 1813:

I had long been convinced from the careful observation of many facts, which for a series of years had come to my knowledge, that it would be of the greatest importance to the welfare of all our public institutions, whether hospitals, lunatic asylums, poor-houses, or prisons, that the female departments, should be regularly visited and inspected by well educated persons of their own sex, officially appointed by the governors for that purpose. The great necessity of such a regulation in our own County hospital, in particular, had been especially apparent; but the opposition of some of the governors, who had a kind of instinctive horror against what they deemed innovation, and especially if it were to be effected by any species of female interference, together with other circumstances ... and the general indifference on the part of the public at large, rendered it quite hopeless for some years to bring forward any precise proposition on the subject.<sup>67</sup>

Cappe's response to the problem was novel, but effective. Learning of the hospital's financial difficulties, she enlisted a number of influential women from Yorkshire gentry families to promise subscriptions to the institution, on the condition that a women's committee be appointed by the governors for the purpose of visiting the female inmates. This was effectively a cunning subversion of the principle of the subscriber democracy, the workings of which have been described in great detail by R. J. Morris.<sup>68</sup> Institutions run on such lines were effectively oligarchies, where the elite were able to dictate the rules and regulations of the society and effectively control the composition of committees. The level of subscription required to gain such control was often beyond the purses of women, unless their families were particularly wealthy, or they were possessed of independent fortunes. The subscriber democracy was therefore an inherently masculine phenomenon and Cappe's actions provided a challenge to some of its basic premises.

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<sup>66</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 138-41 and 163-81; Kathleen McCrone, 'Feminism and Philanthropy in Victorian England: The Case of Louisa Twining', *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers* (1976), 123-39; Anne Summers, "'In a few years we shall none of us that now take care of them be here": Philanthropy and the State in the Thinking of Elizabeth Fry', *Historical Research*, 67, 163 (1994), 134-42, esp. pp. 137-8.

<sup>67</sup> Catherine Cappe, *Memoirs of the Late Catherine Cappe Written by Herself* (London, 1822), pp. 414-5. Cappe was the widow of Leeds-born Unitarian minister Newcome Cappe.

<sup>68</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, *passim*.

The success of Cappe's visiting scheme prompted emulation elsewhere. Cappe herself noted with satisfaction that a similar scheme had been instituted at the Leeds General Infirmary in 1816.<sup>69</sup> However, whether or not this resulted from a similar case of external female pressure is unclear. The committee of the infirmary portrayed the move as part of a package of measures designed to rationalise the internal management of the hospital, and nothing at all remarkable. The particular role envisaged for the ladies was in helping to ensure that the nurses provided clean linen for patients, as the matron had experienced difficulties in this area.<sup>70</sup> This episode is interesting, firstly because it demonstrates the rapidity with which amateur women could become accepted within the hospital environment. Secondly, it shows that male committees were keen to maintain at least the semblance of control over this process. The Infirmary minutes are clear that it was the men who first made official overtures to a number of female subscribers, not the other way around.

It is probable that all of the major Leeds hospitals introduced analogous committees by the 1830s, although evidence is hard to come by in the surviving minutes. However, the evidence that does exist suggests that their roles were circumscribed and designed to fit into accepted ideas about particular areas of female competence. For instance, the ladies at the Infirmary were initially invited in to supervise the nurses, a task which could easily be equated to the management of servants within the household. Similarly, the management committee of the House of Recovery passed the following resolution in 1827: 'That the Ladies' visitors be requested to examine the Linen and compare it with the Inventory and also to purchase what is necessary to supply the deficiency'.<sup>71</sup> Again, this could be interpreted as analogous to a problem of household management, in this case the control of domestic consumption.

There was, therefore, a strong relationship between charitable work and the construction of femininity. This became more pronounced as the period progressed and women began to use the discourses of social science to extend their claim to a special place

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<sup>69</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 142; Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, p. 267.

<sup>70</sup> Leeds General Infirmary Committee Minutes, 23 February and 1-29 March, 1816. Leeds General Infirmary Archive (L.G.I.), MS 3/8.

<sup>71</sup> Leeds House of Recovery Committee Minutes, 6 December 1827. L.G.I. MS 158/2. This minute is the only clue to the existence of such a committee.

in the work of social reform. Yeo has demonstrated that women could appropriate such discourses surrounding their 'natural' roles, particularly that of motherhood, in order to expand the kinds of work that it was acceptable for them to do.<sup>72</sup> This was particularly the case after the censuses began to reveal the higher proportion of women over men in the population.<sup>73</sup> This 'surplus' of women, with no prospect of marriage, was perceived as a real problem, and many solutions were put forward, including emigration to colonies where there were more men than women. Another line to take was to emphasise the potential that existed for single women to find fulfilment in social work of all kinds. The idea was that caring for the poor would provide an outlet for mothering instincts which would otherwise go to waste. This approach was taken up by the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science which admitted women on an equal footing with men from its inception, allowing them to give papers and serve on its committees. The *English Woman's Journal* also took up the cause, promoting social work as a fit occupation for middle-class women.<sup>74</sup>

The NAPSS acted as an umbrella organisation for a number of female initiatives in this field, including the Ladies' Sanitary Association which aimed to raise the living standards of the poor through educating them in sanitary science.<sup>75</sup> Other initiatives included the Workhouse Visiting Society, which pressed to have women admitted to these institutions to educate and care for the inmates. Branch societies were established around the country, including ones at Bradford and Leeds.<sup>76</sup> Their main aim was to introduce a more family-like atmosphere into these forbidding institutions.<sup>77</sup> However, in all of these initiatives it was

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<sup>72</sup> Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, esp. pp. 122-6.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>74</sup> See Jane Rendall, "'A Moral Engine'?: Feminism, Liberalism and the *English Woman's Journal*", in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 112-38.

<sup>75</sup> See for instance Mary Anne Baines, 'The Ladies' National Association for the Diffusion of Sanitary Knowledge', *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, 2 (1858), 531-2. The Association met in Bradford the following year.

<sup>76</sup> 'Report of the Bradford Standing Committee', *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, 3 (1859), xxii-xxiii; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 178-9.

<sup>77</sup> McCrone, 'Feminism and Philanthropy', esp. pp. 125-7.

assumed that middle-class women had a right to interfere in the lives of the poor, simply because they *were* middle-class.<sup>78</sup> Female participants in such activities therefore found themselves in the position of being undervalued within their own class because of their gender, while demanding respect from those below them in the social scale, both male and female. The following section will examine the tensions between class and gender in two very different reform campaigns during this period: the campaign against drink and the campaign against vice.

### 4.3: Temperance and Vice.

As might be expected, Leeds was involved in all of the major social reform campaigns aimed at urban areas during the nineteenth century. These campaigns were often anxious to enlist the support of women. Although the role envisaged for them was usually an auxiliary one, many women were able to use them to achieve a broader public platform for themselves and, to an extent, for their sex.

The temperance movement stemmed from the foundation of the British and Foreign Temperance Society in London. As Brian Harrison has pointed out, this was a reforming society based on 'traditional' evangelical models and financed by wealthy philanthropists, rather than by the victims of intemperance themselves.<sup>79</sup> Instead of trying to eliminate the consumption of alcohol totally, the aim of this society was to promote moderate consumption of beer and wine - in fact many members were brewers themselves - and to eliminate the consumption of spirits among the lower classes.

By the mid 1830s, however, the BFTS came under fire for its equivocal stance on total abstinence. Several groups had been toying with what became known as teetotalism, the origins of which have been traced to a particular group of lower middle-class

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<sup>78</sup> For a case study of such attitudes in action, see Alison Twells, "Let us begin well at home": Class, Ethnicity and Christian Motherhood in the Writing of Hannah Kilham', in Eileen Yeo (ed.), *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester University Press, 1998), 25-51.

<sup>79</sup> Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 107.



temperance men in Preston.<sup>80</sup> The criticisms leveled at the BFTS included the inherent class bias in their campaign, as the evil was seen to rest in the spirits consumed by the poor, while the rich could continue to consume their claret with impunity. Also, the idea was challenged that drunkards were irreclaimable once they had been seduced by the Demon Drink. Teetotalism placed great emphasis on the conversion of the drunkard, arguing that reclaimed drunkards could go on to raise their position in society. As Harrison claims: 'the early teetotal meeting was a theatre dramatizing social mobility, whereas the anti-spirits meeting merely sanctified the existing social hierarchy.'<sup>81</sup>

The temperance movement eventually split over this issue. Many societies attempted to retain a united front by including a 'long' teetotal pledge alongside the 'short' temperance pledge. However, as class tensions increased during the 1830s, this position was increasingly untenable. Harrison has identified many underlying reasons for this split, arguing that dissenters resented Anglican dominance of the BFTS, while the independent working and lower middle-class men of south Lancashire and west Yorkshire, the heartlands of teetotalism, felt alienated by an upper middle-class society based in London.<sup>82</sup> The following account examines the impact of these conflicts on the association of middle-class women with the Leeds Temperance Society, especially the way in which growing class tensions within the society were partly articulated by challenging the idea that such women were morally superior - a notion fast becoming part of the currency of middle-class philanthropic effort elsewhere.

The Leeds Temperance Society came into existence on 31 August, 1830. Women were admitted to membership the following January and there was a substantial attendance of ladies at the society's first public meeting on 9 March that year.<sup>83</sup> The annual reports of the Society reveal that women were important in the movement's rhetoric from an early stage of its existence. Partly this may have been due to criticism of the movement, which was accused of setting up temperance as a false idol by many clergymen in its early years.

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-26.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 113 and 142-3

<sup>83</sup> Leeds Temperance Society, First Minute Book, 31 August 1830; 27 January 1831; 9 March 1831. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, MS JC/A/1a.

It was widely felt that female support would help to stifle such comments, and it is noticeable that the references to women coincided with an increase in scriptural rhetoric in the reports.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, affluent middle-class women were perceived to be in a crucial position for the encouragement of temperance among the working classes, starting with their own servants.

However, as teetotalism gained ground in the society, criticisms emerged which questioned the way that female influence was sometimes used. For instance, the 1834 report saw an anxious appeal to the ladies from the committee. They declared that 'Female influence is irresistible'; 'it commences in the domestic circle, and extends to the circumference of the world'. Devoted to good, it was 'one of the most powerful agencies which can be brought to bear upon any benevolent object'. However, when devoted to unworthy ends, or misdirected through ignorance, 'it is a withering curse to the human race'.<sup>85</sup> Dror Wahrman has claimed that the appropriation of domestic virtue by the middle class was a contested process, which was only really consolidated after the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832.<sup>86</sup> Such comment on female influence could be read as a sign that this process was much more complex than even Wahrman suggests. In fact, the schism in the temperance movement in the West Riding of Yorkshire came to present a severe challenge to middle-class social leadership, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s. This qualification of belief in female influence was just part of a rhetoric which stressed the bad example given by many of the middle classes to their inferiors through indulgence in drink. Given the influence which the middle classes were held to exercise over the lower classes, many argued that the middle classes would have to be reformed first.<sup>87</sup>

The issue came to a head in Leeds in 1836, when a vitriolic public meeting debated the propriety of adopting the teetotal pledge as the sole basis of the society. Tempers ran high, and at one point Edward Baines Senior accused the Reverend Beardsall of blasphemy

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<sup>84</sup> See for example Leeds Temperance Society, *Annual Report* 1834.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>86</sup> Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 400-8.

<sup>87</sup> For examples of this, see the first *Annual Report* of the Leeds Temperance Society, 1831.

for refusing to administer the communion cup.<sup>88</sup> The result was a defeat for the middle-class moderationists, who promptly deserted the movement. In Harrison's words, 'when an anti-spirits society adopted the teetotal pledge, gentility usually departed in a hurry. The rise of teetotalism within the anti-spirits movement constitutes a *coup* by an elite of working men allied with radicals and non-conformists'.<sup>89</sup> The pattern was repeated in other towns, although in Bradford the class split was staved off until 1843 when the nature of the pledge was again the issue.<sup>90</sup>

However, abandonment by the elite did not mean the end of female involvement. In the first place, not all of the elite were driven off. Despite his fathers' opinions, Baines Junior was a long pledge man who retained his contacts with the society and even chaired meetings. Moreover, lower class women, especially the lower middle-class wives of artisans and tradesmen, became increasingly important. In a sense the subversive nature of teetotalism gave women more freedom to express themselves, in the same way that it was an ideal platform from which the lower classes could resist and subvert clumsy attempts at social control by the urban elite. Effectively, temperance was able to create a strong and vibrant counter-culture, with its own institutions, its own press, discourses and modes of sociability, all based around a common abstinence from alcoholic beverages. As such, it required the efforts of the whole community, male and female, in order to succeed. In this situation, the social role of women became vitally important in spreading and upholding the new principles, and the temperance press made hay over instances such as the women of Llanfair in Wales, who had decided to refuse all offers of marriage unless their suitors took the pledge.<sup>91</sup>

One area in which women proved indispensable was in organising alternative

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<sup>88</sup> *Report of a public meeting of Leeds Temperance Society held in the Music Hall, Tuesday 21 June 1836, to consider the propriety of adopting the total abstinence pledge as the exclusive principle of the Society* (Leeds, 1836).

<sup>89</sup> Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 137.

<sup>90</sup> See Lilian Lewis Shiman, 'Temperance and Class in Bradford, 1830-1860', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 58 (1986), 173-8.

<sup>91</sup> *Leeds Temperance Herald*, 1 (1837), p. 7.

entertainments to the gin shop and the pub, in the form of festivals, galas and tea parties.<sup>92</sup> Such events were central to the financial survival of temperance societies which had been largely deserted by their middle-class patrons, as in Leeds. For instance, before 1837 over half of the annual receipts of the Leeds Temperance Society came from subscriptions, but by 1850 subscriptions had fallen in absolute terms and comprised only a fraction of the annual receipts. The balance included money from collections and the hiring out of equipment, such as tea urns, but by far the largest contributions were from festivals and galas. In 1850 for instance, of approximately £300 raised during the year, only £34 16s. 6d. came from subscriptions, while the profits of the Christmas Festival amounted to £29 6d. and the annual Gala raised a massive £200 15s. 3d. Although this seems to have been exceptional - the Whit Gala in 1854 raised just over £34 - the general picture remains true. In the same year subscriptions and donations together amounted to less than £10, out of a total balance at the end of the year of £304 2s. 1d.<sup>93</sup>

Significantly, the first Christmas festival was held in 1836, consisting of a procession followed by a tea-party. Tea was of course the crucial ingredient for any temperance event, but ‘the cup that cheers but doesn’t inebriate’ also played a crucial part in the feminisation of organized philanthropy and revolutionised middle-class patterns of sociability. In recognition of the important role of women, the business of charitable societies increasingly moved away from the masculine institution of the ‘public dinner’, where the inevitable consumption of alcohol meant that women, if admitted at all, could only watch proceedings from a gallery after the cloth had been drawn. Instead, tea parties became the preferred form of gathering together the subscribers of societies for instruction, exhortation and entertainment, with cold collation often replacing the full sit-down meal if more substantial refreshment were required.<sup>94</sup> Tea parties therefore became synonymous with women; indeed the custodianship of the urn was an exclusively feminine duty. One would be hard pressed to find any instance of a tea party during this period where thanks were not expressed to ‘the Ladies’ for their services in supervising the tables and providing the tea.

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<sup>92</sup> See for example the Minutes of the Leeds Temperance Society, 14 April and 10 October 1842.

<sup>93</sup> Leeds Temperance Society, *Annual Reports*.

<sup>94</sup> At the annual meeting of the Religious Tract Society in Wakefield in 1838, cold collation was served in place of a formal meal expressly so that women could attend. *Leeds Mercury*, 12 May 1838.

Women were therefore strongly encouraged to support the temperance movement. To this end, the temperance press were quick to try and prove that temperance was a 'woman's issue'. Particular emphasis was placed on the effect of alcohol on family life, with women and children starving at home while husbands went to spend their wages at the ale house. However, there was also a strong current of discourse which stressed the dangers that women themselves faced, either by unthinkingly promoting drinking through the ignorance of its effects, or through falling into the trap of alcoholism themselves.<sup>95</sup>

Women did answer such pleas in substantial numbers, particularly as the growing emphasis on reclaiming drunks invested the movement with a missionary zeal that appealed to evangelical piety. Women's Temperance Societies were established in a number of areas, and the Leeds society had a women's branch by the 1850s. In London, where societies continued to be led by elites, a ladies' meeting in 1853 made a public appeal addressed to the 'Women of England' (a synonym for middle and upper-class women), in which they referred to the problem of female intemperance.<sup>96</sup> Increasing attempts to bring young people and children into the movement were both a symptom and cause of more women becoming involved. In 1847, Anne Carlyle visited Leeds to lecture to a group of children on the benefits of temperance. Her visit inspired Jabez Tunnicliffe, the Baptist Minister, to found the Band of Hope movement for children.<sup>97</sup> These societies were run by mixed committees of men and women, who had the right to visit the homes of their charges in the case of delinquency.<sup>98</sup>

Anne Carlyle was just one of those women who were able to gain a public voice through temperance. Female authors and lecturers such as Clara Balfour, whose *Women and the Temperance Reformation* was published in 1849, began their public careers as

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<sup>95</sup> See for instance the article 'Female Influence', *Leeds Temperance Herald* 1 (1837) pp. 193-4.

<sup>96</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 August 1853.

<sup>97</sup> Ronald Harker, 'Beware the Demon Drink', *Yorkshire Ridings Magazine*, 24, 24 (1987), p. 59. For a more in-depth analysis, see L. L. Shiman, 'The Band of Hope Movement: Respectable Recreation for Working-Class Children', *Victorian Studies*, 17 (September 1973), 49-74.

<sup>98</sup> Leeds Temperance Society, *Annual Report* 1850, Rules II and VII of Leeds Band of Hope.

temperance campaigners.<sup>99</sup> Alongside female education, this subject was one of the few on which it is possible to find a number of women lecturing to mixed audiences from early on in the period. Although some lectured only on temperance, others introduced lectures on social reform and the public role of women into their programme. For instance, in January 1849 Mrs Theobald lectured at Bingley 'On Woman's Duty, Interest and Position in Society' and 'On Temperance'.<sup>100</sup> In January 1853, Mrs Frances Huggins lectured at the Ebenezer Independent School on 'Total Abstinence'; 'Christian Responsibility'; 'The Christianity of Today'; and 'Female Happiness'.<sup>101</sup> Balfour herself was interested in a wide variety of social reform movements, being fond of lecturing on the subject of the 'Influence of Women on Society' to audiences at Temperance Halls and Mechanic's Institutes alike. In the 1850s she published *Working Women of the Last Half Century* (1854), which gave short biographical sketches of women such as Elizabeth Fry and their work in social reform. Her aim was to show the wide variety of fields in which women of all classes might exercise some influence for public benefit, without involving themselves in the hustle and bustle of political agitation.<sup>102</sup>

Some historians have pessimistically concluded that women had little influence on the content and direction of the temperance movement.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, it has been argued here that temperance did play an important role in the shaping of women's sense of social duty, although it is difficult to pin this influence down to a particular class of women in the case of Leeds, where lower-middle and working-class elements were particularly strong in the society after 1836. Moreover, these elements were closely connected with other movements of a similar social complexion, particularly Chartism. To an extent, it was precisely this identification as a counter-cultural, community-based movement which left room for women to manoeuvre (another similarity with the Chartist movement). Women could therefore be

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<sup>99</sup> Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, p. 256.

<sup>100</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 January 1849.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1853.

<sup>102</sup> Clara Balfour, *Working Women of the Last Half-Century: The Lesson of their Lives* (London: W. & F. G. Cash, 1854).

<sup>103</sup> This is the conclusion reached by L. L. Shiman, 'Changes are Dangerous: Women and Temperance in Victorian England', in Gail Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (London etc.: Croom Helm, 1986), 193-215.

significant at a local level, despite their exclusion from processes of decision-making on a wider stage.

In many ways, the nature of women's contribution to the campaign against vice differed quite substantially from that made to the temperance movement.<sup>104</sup> Measures for the reformation of prostitutes, and later for the suppression or regulation of their trade, remained firmly in middle-class hands throughout the period and beyond. There was therefore a much clearer division between those who were to be reformed and those who were to do the reforming. Although it was accepted, and occasionally even deplored, that middle-class men often had recourse to prostitutes (a fact which the radical working-class press were quick to exploit),<sup>105</sup> the reform campaigns focused almost exclusively on the prostitutes themselves, who were overwhelmingly working class. Given the prevailing assumptions about the kinds of subjects that respectable women could legitimately address audiences about, the middle-class domination of debates over prostitution meant that it was virtually impossible for women to write or talk about the issue in public. Women only commented openly on this issue when the debate over the Contagious Diseases Acts brought the subject of a double standard of morality firmly into the public domain.

Despite this, women were intimately involved in the reform of prostitutes through public institutions such as Lock Hospitals and penitentiaries. Although penitentiaries were supported financially by men and their management committees were universally male during the period, it was impossible for men to take an active role in the day to day management of inmates. This was prevented by fear of temptation and scandal. Instead, most of the work was performed by the matron, while the women were visited and instructed in Scripture by a committee of ladies. The only men allowed into contact with the inmates were clergymen and doctors, and even the latter had to be respectably married

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<sup>104</sup> For more information on attitudes to prostitution in the nineteenth century, see Frances Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (Cambridge University Press, 1979); Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London etc.: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>105</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 34-5; Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, p. 111.

men.

Nevertheless, the entry of women into the running of an institution supported by public subscriptions was closely controlled by the gentlemen's committee. This may be seen from the records of the penitentiary at York, founded in 1845, which are more complete than those for the Leeds Penitentiary where only the annual reports survive. Here, the decision to erect a penitentiary was taken at a meeting on 1 April 1844, which was composed entirely of gentlemen. In the meantime, John Prest, Joseph Rowntree and William Whytehead were given the task of visiting the penitentiaries at Leeds and Hull, to help decide on the best constitution for the institution. This delegation reported in February 1845, but it was not until the end of November that ten women were asked to form a committee.<sup>106</sup>

This subordinate position was reflected in the rules of the Leeds society, as the gentlemen's committee set the rules for the internal regulation of the house and exercised a high degree of control over the composition of the ladies' committee, selecting sixteen names from a list of twenty-four provided by the ladies themselves.<sup>107</sup> The women were responsible for the running of the house and their duties included deciding on the eligibility of applicants, superintending the employment, diet and dress of the women, reading improving works to the inmates, and visiting the house. However, they could only register approval or disapproval of a matron selected by the men's committee, to which they also had to submit weekly reports.<sup>108</sup>

Women were therefore central to the whole project of the penitentiary, which was to reclaim prostitutes morally and turn them into useful members of society by providing them with an alternative source of income. The latter was to come through domestic service, which had the merit of placing the reformed prostitute in a situation where she could be closely supervised until she found a suitable husband. It was therefore essential to find enough middle-class women willing to take them on after they had completed their two-year

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<sup>106</sup> York Penitentiary Society, Minute Book 1844-57, 1 April 1844; 6 February 1845; 27 October 1845. York City Archives, Acc 212/1.

<sup>107</sup> Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual Report*, 1822, Rules and Bye-Laws - xvi and xxiii. See also Mark Pharaoh, 'The Leeds Guardian Society 1821 to 1908: Women and Moral Reform' (unpublished BA dissertation for the School of Economic Studies, University of Leeds, 1986).

<sup>108</sup> Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual Report*, 1822, p. 9.



term and were deemed officially 'reformed'. While they were in the penitentiary they paid their own way by doing laundry work, and again the support of benevolent ladies was essential to ensure that enough work was to be had. Such support was therefore regularly solicited in the annual report of the society. The question remains though, as to how far middle-class women were able to translate this practical and economic importance into a broader influence on the reform campaign.

Mark Pharaoh has pointed out in a short dissertation that the women reported only to the men's committee, and not directly to subscribers.<sup>109</sup> However, while this emphasises still further the women's subordinate position, it should be pointed out that the men's lack of day-to-day contact probably meant that the annual reports were written substantially from information supplied by the women's committee and the matron. With greater access to the inmates, the ladies' committee were able to form a more accurate picture of the backgrounds and experiences of the women they dealt with. It is also possible that the emphasis in many reports on the role of higher-class seducers in bringing women to this condition was an expression of the views formed by the ladies' committee.

However, there seems to have been little or no criticism from women about the way in which the penitentiaries were run, or of the rationale behind them. Prostitutes were still regarded as lost souls to be reclaimed, and close contact probably had the effect of reinforcing preconceptions about their coarse manners and depraved way of life. Moreover, the reports demonstrate the pervading influence of the paradigm of the Magdalen, humbly seeking redemption from past wickedness.<sup>110</sup> As a result, by imposing the essentially middle-class designation of the 'fallen woman' upon working-class prostitutes, reformers missed the fundamental point that prostitution was often merely a stage in the life cycle for working-class women - a means of earning money before settling down. This explains the incomprehension of reformers at instances where women had left the asylum 'unreformed', yet were found some time later living as respectable married women. Equally, it was just as hard to explain why apparently 'reformed' women were often found to have 'relapsed' into old habits.<sup>111</sup> These stereotypes, attitudes and assumptions were common to male and

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<sup>109</sup> Pharaoh, 'The Leeds Guardian Society'.

<sup>110</sup> Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, esp. chapters 3-5.

<sup>111</sup> For example, 'They who make the highest professions as inmates, sometimes turn out the worst characters after leaving', Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual*

female reformers alike. There seemed little need to change the way in which penitentiaries operated during the period, despite questioning of their relevance given the small numbers of places they contained, and also their effectiveness in the light of a high rate of recidivism.

An attempt to counter such criticism was made through the increasing adoption of the medical language of contagion. Penitentiaries were often organized on the same lines as fever hospitals, with newcomers placed in isolation wards to prevent them 'infecting' those who had started the process of recovery. Similarly, one of their benefits was seen to lie in the removal of prostitutes from the community, thus preventing the infection of other morally 'healthy' women with their depraved habits.<sup>112</sup> No doubt this was also a metaphor for preventing prostitutes from spreading physical infection.<sup>113</sup>

Rescue work could also provide an outlet for paternalist critiques of modern industrial society. The perceived increase in prostitution in the mid-nineteenth century was often interpreted as a direct result of the spread of factory employment, which removed girls at an early age from the benign influences of home and family and placed them in crowded workrooms with inadequate sanitary facilities, under the dubious authority of male overlookers. Hence reformed prostitutes were deliberately prepared for domestic service, which meant that they could be kept under reasonably close supervision, whilst gaining skills which would be useful to them in married life. This remained the case even though some social investigators produced figures suggesting that domestic servants were more likely to become prostitutes than factory girls.<sup>114</sup>

Attitudes towards prostitution as a social problem did undergo a change in emphasis over the period. The penitentiaries themselves were never seen as a way of eliminating

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*Report*, 1827, p. 12.

<sup>112</sup> For instance, Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual Report*, 1826, pp. 13-14.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Poovey has explored some of the ways that social investigators used discussion of sanitary reform as a metaphor for the regulation of prostitution. See Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, chapter 4, especially pp. 92-4; also Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, esp. pp. 118-34, 144.

<sup>114</sup> For example, in 1858 the London Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children reported that of 296 'fallen women' in its care, 236 had been servants and only three were factory girls. *Annual Report*, 1858. York Penitentiary Society Papers, 171.

prostitution, and the twentieth report of the Leeds Society conceded as much.<sup>115</sup> Instead, their aim was to provide a way back into respectable society for the truly penitent. However, from the 1840s onwards, more effort was directed towards the regulation of vice. This was to be achieved through the creation of Societies for the Protection of Young Girls, which aimed to stamp out coercion and ensure that prostitution became a 'deliberate and voluntary act'. However, the existing laws proved inadequate to this purpose, prompting the creation of the Associate Institute for Improving and Enforcing the Laws for the Protection of Women.<sup>116</sup> A Bill sponsored by this society failed in 1844, but in 1846 the Leeds Guardian Society was recommending that the ladies of the town sign a petition to the Queen sponsored by the Institute. The report of 1850 called for seduction to be made a penal offence.

These campaigns aimed to enlist the active support of women for a change in the law regarding prostitution, bringing women's involvement in rescue work out from the relative anonymity of the penitentiary and into the arena of public debate. The Institute placed much emphasis on public education, publishing a journal, the *Female's Friend*, directed at a feminine audience, and setting up auxiliary societies.<sup>117</sup> In Wakefield for example, a Female Associate Society to the Female Moral Refuge met in 1850 and passed a resolution to petition Parliament.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile, public effort went into treating the physical ills of prostitutes through Lock Hospitals. That in Manchester was founded by a Ladies' Committee in 1822, while Leeds acquired a similar institution in 1842.<sup>119</sup> However, Walkowitz has pointed out that they failed singularly to limit the risk of contagion from sexually transmitted disease, while the nature of their work meant that they were often unable to attract the public support necessary to survive in the long-term.<sup>120</sup> The Hospital at Leeds is a case in point: it closed in 1856, after only fourteen years in existence.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual Report*, 1841, p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 April 1850.

<sup>119</sup> White, *Directory of Leeds*, 1853.

<sup>120</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 57-62.

<sup>121</sup> Leeds Public Dispensary, *Annual Report*, 1856-7.

Efforts were also made over the latter half of our period and beyond to increase the effectiveness of penitentiaries. Increasingly, a more pro-active approach was taken, with missionaries going out into the streets to reclaim the fallen, rather than waiting for prostitutes themselves to seek out subscribers who could help them. However, as it was thought unseemly for ladies to go out into the streets this work was usually entrusted to lower-class women, many of them ex-prostitutes themselves.<sup>122</sup> In 1860, it was suggested that such a movement be started in Leeds.<sup>123</sup> At the same time, the operations of many penitentiaries were extended. A penitentiary for the West Riding was established at Leeds in 1852-3, generating much public debate in the local press.<sup>124</sup> However, public support was not great enough to maintain two such institutions in the town and it soon merged with the Leeds Guardian Society.<sup>125</sup>

From being the focus of a movement based around a few small institutions in the growing towns of the nineteenth century, prostitution therefore spawned an increasing amount of public debate during the period, largely as a result of the social investigations of the 1830s and 1840s. These investigations were preoccupied with the degenerate moral condition of the urban poor, and with vice as one of the most visible manifestations of their corruption. Increasingly, reformers turned to local authorities, and then to Parliament, as the most effective agencies for regulating the trade. Female reformers therefore became involved in campaigns for new legislation which were necessarily more high profile and public than the unobtrusive work of the rescue societies.

Rescue work did not give women the same access to the public sphere as temperance. The women who participated on the committees of such societies did not enjoy as high a profile as those who supported other public or medical institutions - not least because methods of fund-raising dependent on publicity, such as the bazaar, were unavailable to

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<sup>122</sup> Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, p. 202.

<sup>123</sup> Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual Report*, 1860, p. 10.

<sup>124</sup> See especially the *Leeds Mercury*, 25 January, 7 and 15 June 1851; 24 January 1852.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 November 1853; Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual Report*, 1853. The society also took over management of the Lock Hospital at around the same time.

them.<sup>126</sup> This, together with the firmly subordinate position occupied by ladies' committees, had profound implications for the conception of their 'public' role which women developed through such work. Female voices were also conspicuously absent from public discussions on rescue work, such as that over the West Riding Penitentiary in the early 1850s. This could lead to an undervaluing of women's contribution. Indeed, one correspondent of the *Mercury* went so far as to declare that matrons and Ladies' Committees 'are, generally speaking, of little worth as to real usefulness'. Significantly, this letter drew an angry response from George Moxon, husband of the matron at the Leeds Guardian Society, but no-one was prepared to make a statement on behalf of the Ladies, despite their important contributions.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, the position of women within penitentiaries implicitly recognized their claims to a 'unique' place as exemplars to the less fortunate of a lower class and their special skills as educators of children and servants and as housekeepers. Women were thus able to participate in an area of reform that played a key part in the construction of class identity, albeit in a subordinate capacity.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that women had a valuable and increasingly acknowledged role to play in the mediation of class relations within the mid nineteenth-century town. However, it has also pointed out that this role was contested, not just by the groups targeted by reform campaigns, but also by middle-class men concerned about the 'public' nature of much philanthropic work, or who rejected female 'interference'. Moreover, even where women were accepted, it was usually the case that their activities were firmly under the supervision of male committees. In particular, women's access to the apparatus of the public sphere, especially to the platform, was severely limited. For example, the reports of Guardian Society meetings in the 1830s reveal a picture of passive female audiences listening to male-dominated debates over the best means of regulating the town's brothels.<sup>128</sup> Finally, women usually restricted themselves to spheres of operation where their activities could easily be defended as in keeping with their feminine natures, although in practice this encompassed a wide range of work.

Clearly this pervasive gender division within middle-class philanthropy posed the danger of conflict erupting along gender lines. Having found their particular niches within

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<sup>126</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 60.

<sup>127</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 15 and 28 June 1851.

<sup>128</sup> For example, *ibid.*, 10 December 1831.

philanthropic organizations, women were anxious to defend them from direct or indirect encroachment on the part of male committees, who often tended to act as if the women occupied their positions on sufferance. The following chapter analyses the nature and importance of female voluntary associations and their contribution to the construction of feminine identities in the public sphere. In particular, it focuses on the important role of gender conflict in this process, revealing the extent to which male opposition, or even ignorance, could encourage women to defend their work and reputations by portraying themselves as virtuous middle-class citizens working for the greater good.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Women and Philanthropy II: Women's Committees and Gender Conflict**

This chapter examines the institutional basis of female civic identities in more detail. It begins by demonstrating that women's committees acted in similar ways to their male counterparts in encouraging cross-class cooperation, especially amongst the elite. Elite women could play a high-profile role in generating public support for institutions, campaigns and charitable appeals. Meanwhile, the wives and relations of professional men were also seen as having a valuable role in the mediation of class relations within the community, which could in turn provide a springboard for wider involvement in civic life.

The focus of the chapter then shifts from relationships of class to those of gender. It is argued that despite organisational similarities, female committees often differed from men's committees in their priorities, aims and methods. These differences created the potential for conflicts over resources and management policies, prompting women to mobilise discourses of female efficiency, competency and civic pride in order to justify their claims to greater autonomy and control. Several case studies will be used to illustrate different conflicts that could arise and the ways in which those conflicts could generate and strengthen discourses of collective female identity, particularly through the act of annexing or defending public territory. The second half of the chapter focuses on bazaars, which were uniquely feminine institutions that brought women into public space and threatened the 'masculine' principles of the subscriber democracy. The Leeds Institute Bazaar of 1859 saw the development of a major conflict between a cumbersome and insensitive male committee and a female committee anxious to exert greater control over the way in which its members were presented to the public eye. Significantly, most of the case studies used in this chapter date from the last decade or so of the period. This reflects women's growing confidence about acting and asserting their views in the public sphere, as well as a greater acceptance of women taking on such roles in the 1850s.

#### **5.1: Committees in Conflict.**

R. J. Morris has demonstrated that the committees and subscription lists of the Leeds voluntary societies were dominated by a commercial and professional elite, with a scattering

of manufacturers and gentlemen of independent means.<sup>1</sup> This pattern was reflected by female committees. For example, the list of stallholders for the 1828 Lying-in Hospital bazaar includes the names of the wives and relations of a number of surgeons and clergymen, while the remainder were local worthies such as Mary Gott, daughter-in-law of Benjamin and Elizabeth, whose husband John had taken over the family business, and the wife of Alderman Benjamin Sadler.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, several of these women had relations who were on the committee of the institution; this link between the members of men's and women's committees was a widespread practice. Over half of the women involved in the Leeds Guardian Society in 1850 had husbands or fathers on the men's committee.<sup>3</sup> Female committees could therefore provide ways for women to support their male relatives in public. Moreover, women could also become part of the equation by which influence was shared among the various political and religious factions of the elite. Again, this is apparent in the structure of the Lying-in Hospital Bazaar Committee, where Mary Gott's position as secretary balanced John Marshall's presidency of the institution. Thus the two dominant manufacturing families of the town, one Tory and Anglican, the other Liberal and Unitarian, were represented in conjunction with an important event in the town's philanthropic and social calendar.<sup>4</sup>

Such examples provide an alternative picture to that of socially isolated spinsters taking up public and philanthropic activities as an alternative role to marriage and motherhood.<sup>5</sup> Instead, certain women were expected to have a high profile in public initiatives because of their family position, or the nature of their husband's occupation. This was especially true of the wives of those professionals whose callings put them in regular contact with the poor and needy, namely doctors, surgeons and religious ministers. When the *English Woman's Journal* wanted to drum up support for the Ladies' Sanitary Association, for example, readers were told: 'We want the action of *women* in every parish;

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, esp. pp. 219-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 March 1828.

<sup>3</sup> Leeds Guardian Society, *Annual Report*, 1850.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of men connected with the hospital, see Parsons, *Leeds Directory*, 1826.

<sup>5</sup> This frustration theory plays a large part in Prochaska's arguments: Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy', p. 441.



we want the clergyman's wife and the doctor's daughter to know the laws of health, and to enforce them in the perpetual intercourse which we hope and believe they maintain with their poorer neighbours'.<sup>6</sup> Although there was obviously a significant degree of wishful thinking in these sentiments, it is virtually impossible to find a female committee list that did not include representatives of one of these groups.

There are many examples of clergymen's wives taking an active and public role in middle-class associations in Leeds. One of the most prominent was Anna Delicia Hook, wife of Walter Farquhar Hook, the Vicar of Leeds from 1837 to 1859. Within months of her arrival, Hook was actively involved in a bazaar to raise money for alterations to St Mary's Church, Quarry Hill.<sup>7</sup> In fact, without her efforts and those of the wives and relatives of other clergymen and lay people in raising money for new churches and schools, it is doubtful that the Anglican revival in Leeds would have been as impressive as it was.<sup>8</sup> By the 1850s, her activities had extended from supporting directly church-related causes to embrace a wider range of responsibilities to the town and nation. These included taking the presidency of the Parochial Lying-in Society and the ladies' committee of the Women's and Children's Hospital (1853), and membership of the Leeds Clothing Committee for the Wounded of the Crimean War (1854).<sup>9</sup> This spread of causes suggests Hook's multiple interests as wife of the town's leading clergyman, including a strong commitment to civic

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<sup>6</sup> Bessie Rayner Parkes, 'The Ladies' Sanitary Association', *EWJ*, III (April 1859), 73-85, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 November 1837.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Hook has traditionally been given the major credit for this revival: see Yates, 'The Religious Life of Victorian Leeds', pp. 253-6; and H. W. Dalton, 'Walter Farquhar Hook, Vicar of Leeds: His Work for the Church and the Town', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LXIII (1990), 27-79. In a recent thesis, Dalton has portrayed Hook more as a facilitator of church extension, while the churches themselves were built through the efforts of other clergymen and lay people: H. W. Dalton, 'Anglican Church Life in Leeds during the Early Victorian Resurgence, 1836-1851, with Special Reference to the Work of W. F. Hook' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1993). Details of Hook's earlier career may be found in Sheridan Gilley, 'Walter Farquhar Hook, Vicar of Leeds', in Alistair Mason (eds.), *Religion in Leeds* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994), 43-63. None of these accounts make any significant references to Hook's wife.

<sup>9</sup> *In Memoriam of Anna Delicia Hook* (1871), p. 11; *Leeds Mercury*, 5 March 1853 and 9 December 1854.

and national issues as well as those specifically affecting women. It is noteworthy that half of the women involved in the hospital were also on the committee list for the Crimean society. The others were Mrs John Gott, Martha Baines and the wives of the Reverend Sinclair and John Hope Shaw (Mayor, 1853), whose husbands were all prominent members of the Leeds elite.

The occasion of Anna Hook's death in 1871 brought many eulogies in the press, which were published in a separate collection along with extracts from letters of condolence. Typically, these writings attempted to reconcile the undeniably public aspects of her calling with the supposedly 'private' woman. For example:

it was characteristic of her that, except among those who had personal knowledge, her name was never noised abroad ... she knew and filled her own special sphere. While she had all the qualities needed for the public duties which fell to her lot, still her power for good was deeply felt in the quieter and more personal action, which is so essentially feminine.<sup>10</sup>

In support of this claim, the author referred to her responsibility for a number of devotional works commonly attributed to her husband, and printed under his name.<sup>11</sup> However, despite this natural reticence, Hook did adopt a relatively high public profile during her time in Leeds. When the Hooks left Leeds in 1859, her public contribution was honoured alongside that of her husband at a civic testimonial, when she received a gold casket containing £270 from the 'Ladies of Leeds'.<sup>12</sup> The wife of Walter Hook's successor, Dr Atlay, was not quite so appreciated. While writing in glowing terms of her husband, Dr Heaton noted that 'his wife is not very popular, & not to compare with Mrs Hook'.<sup>13</sup>

Women like Anna Hook and Mary Gott were at the apex of the town's elite, and their husbands were the prime movers in many civic initiatives. However, women's committees did more than just reflect and enhance the status of a few influential individuals. As nodal points in the web of public and philanthropic activity, charity committees were a vital part of the public sphere, and were therefore important places where class identities could be

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<sup>10</sup> *In Memoriam of Anna Delicia Hook*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> John Mayhall, *The Annals and History of Leeds and other places in the County of York from the earliest period to the present time* (Leeds, 1860), p. 741. See also Stephens, *The Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook*, pp. 517-9.

<sup>13</sup> 'Journal of J. D. Heaton', i, p. 215.

strengthened and articulated. Moreover, as overwhelmingly feminine institutions, they also helped to give a focus and a form to collective female identities, particularly those connected with civic service, virtue and pride. Attempts were periodically made to mobilise these identities nationally as well as locally, such as the appeal of the Ladies' Irish Clothing Society to the 'Women of England' in 1847.<sup>14</sup> These collective identities were a potent source of strength, which could also be called upon when a committee's activities, or its competence in carrying them out, came under criticism or scrutiny from an external source.

It has previously been noted that there was a potential for conflict where male and female committees coexisted in the same institutions, particularly as the latter were usually subordinated to the former. Frances Finnegan has described some of the conflicts which arose in the York Penitentiary over the hiring and firing of salaried staff. In particular, the institution had major difficulties in finding a suitable matron during the 1850s, which the women blamed on the gentlemen. For instance, accusations of intemperance were levelled at the serving Matron in June 1852, but it was not until October 1853 that the gentlemen could be prevailed upon to dismiss her. In 1858, concerned at the shrinking number of inmates, the women questioned the whole ethos of the regime, asking 'whether a more conciliatory management would not be more likely to be beneficial in producing a softened mind and not bringing into constant collision with the matron, with whom the Ladies have conversed and endeavoured to state their views on the subject'. Conflicts also arose from the summary dismissal of inmates and staff by the gentlemen without consultation. In May 1861 matters came to a head with the dismissal of the Laundress. On this occasion, the Ladies' Committee threatened to resign *en masse*. The outcome was a new set of bye-laws, whereby the Matron and the Laundress had to be interviewed by the women prior to being appointed. In addition, the Ladies' Committee were given greater control over the internal management of the institution, including the power to dismiss unruly or unsuitable inmates.<sup>15</sup>

On this occasion, women were exercising collective power in an institution that would literally have ground to a halt without them. However, in those institutions where influence stemmed from being a subscriber, women were outnumbered and isolated. Many of them were only too aware that the subscriber democracy was not only an oligarchy of class, but

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<sup>14</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 February 1847.

<sup>15</sup> Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution*, pp. 183-5. It is unfortunate that the committee minutes from the Leeds Penitentiary are no longer extant, as they may well have provided examples of similar conflicts.

also of sex. Although Catherine Cappe was able to challenge this dominance in the case of the York County Hospital, this was very much the exception that proved the rule. For example, the 1860-61 subscription list of the Leeds House of Recovery shows that only nineteen women were entitled to vote in the election of physicians on the basis of donations, out of a total of 155 electors.<sup>16</sup> Instead, women were far more likely to support charities that were aimed at members of their own sex, where they had greater chance of being able to influence the decision making process.<sup>17</sup> In Leeds, this pattern is revealed in relation to those medical charities which dealt specifically with the needs of women.

The Leeds Lying-in Hospital was a case in point. A strange conspiracy of silence surrounds the founding of this institution, although in part this may have been caused by the opening of the Leeds Dispensary as an adjunct to the House of Recovery in the same year, which occupied many column inches in the local press. In contrast, the foundation of the Lying-in Hospital drew forth only a terse statement in the *Mercury*, which declared: 'There is at present upon the *tapis* a project for establishing a *Lying-in Hospital* in this town'.<sup>18</sup> When the first annual report of the charity was published in 1825, the *Intelligencer* made cryptic allusions to 'unaccountable opposition, secret and avowed ... from a few individuals'.<sup>19</sup> In all probability, the Lying-in Hospital had been the focus of a dispute among the medical profession in Leeds, similar to that which accompanied the founding of the Eye Dispensary in 1826.<sup>20</sup> Such questions may never be answered satisfactorily; however, the significant fact is that the hospital survived into the 1860s, despite these obstacles.

This survival was largely due to the support of the female members of the middle class, some of whom were invited to form a Ladies' Committee at a meeting on 7 June

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<sup>16</sup> Leeds House of Recovery, *Annual Report*, 1860-61.

<sup>17</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 March 1824. So obscure are the origins of this hospital that one authority has claimed that no new maternity hospitals were founded in England between 1815 and 1830: Alistair Gunn, 'Maternity Hospitals' in F. N. L. Poynter (ed.), *The Evolution of Hospitals in Britain* (London: Pitman Medical, 1964), 72-101, p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 5 May 1825.

<sup>20</sup> Black, 'The Leeds Eye Dispensary', p. 103.

1824.<sup>21</sup> The subscribers to the hospital seem to have been overwhelmingly female, judging by the number of proxy votes cast during elections of medical staff. Only women and those men residing at a distance from the town were allowed to vote by proxy, and for most medical charities the number of such votes formed only a tiny percentage of the total cast. However, a total of 231 proxy votes out of 263 were cast at a meeting to elect a physician and three junior surgeons to the Lying-in Hospital staff in June 1828. The majority of these proxies may safely be assumed to have belonged to women.<sup>22</sup> In addition, women helped to offset the lack of wealthy male subscribers by swinging their fundraising efforts behind the new institution, organising the 1828 bazaar noted above. The event was a striking success, raising over £1,000.<sup>23</sup> The Leeds Hospital for Women and Children (1853) also counted heavily on female support, although it received rather more publicity when it was founded.<sup>24</sup> On this occasion women did not wait to be asked and ‘volunteered’ their services as a committee, headed by the indefatigable Mrs Hook.<sup>25</sup>

However, adherence to the subscription principle could do little more than guarantee an input into the proceedings of a few marginal institutions directed towards the relief of poor women. Women’s most distinctive contributions to civic culture came instead through the development of alternative forms of fund-raising and through providing non-monetary aid for the poor. These forms included the bazaar, or fancy sale, with women often making the fancy goods themselves in addition to running stalls and organising the event.<sup>26</sup> During particular crises, such as the cholera of 1832, the Irish famine and the Crimean War, women also organised clothing societies to augment the financial aid orchestrated by male committees.<sup>27</sup> Both of these methods utilised practical feminine skills, rather than financial

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<sup>21</sup> Notice in the *Leeds Mercury*, 5 June 1824.

<sup>22</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 June 1828.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 March and 10 April 1828.

<sup>24</sup> The history and significance of this institution are traced in Andrew Claye, *A Short History of the Hospital for Women at Leeds, 1853-1953* (Leeds: privately published, 1953).

<sup>25</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 March 1853.

<sup>26</sup> See Prochaska, esp. chapter 2.

<sup>27</sup> For references to female clothing committees set up during the Irish famine, see the *Leeds Mercury*, 30 January, 20 February, 6 and 27 March 1847.

power. In this respect they may be contrasted with the great public subscriptions got up in times of distress, when a man's public reputation was judged on whether or not he had contributed according to his means.<sup>28</sup> Instead, the contributors to clothing societies were largely anonymous, with the notable exception of the committee members themselves. The same was true of bazaars, though the dependence of these events on bringing in the paying public ensured a higher profile for the committee and patrons.

Although the clothing societies seem at first to have complemented the actions of male committees, insofar as they provided a different form of relief, conflicts sometimes arose over access to resources and the most efficient way of allocating them. In Leeds, this is clearly demonstrated by the history of the Leeds Ladies' Lancashire Cotton Famine Relief Association. On this occasion, the women's committee was disadvantaged by the fact that most cash donations found their way to the (male-run) Leeds Lancashire Cotton Famine Relief Fund, with the result that the women became financially dependent on this organisation to a great extent. This gave the men a powerful lever, which they used in various attempts to gain influence over the operations of the ladies' society. These attempts prompted repeated statements by the women reasserting their status as an independent entity and emphasising their competence to carry out their work unsupervised.

The Ladies' Relief Committee resulted from a public meeting in the town hall in September 1862, convened by the Mayoress, Ann Kitson.<sup>29</sup> Over 70 women attended, who elected a committee that included Kitson's daughter, Mary, and Fanny Heaton as secretaries. Kitson and her supporters had acted greatly in advance of public opinion on this issue. Although there had been calls for action at an earlier date, a public meeting to coordinate the men's response to the crisis was not called until 3 November. When it finally took place, the *Intelligencer* used the work of the women as a way of shaming the men into greater effort.<sup>30</sup> The rather lame excuse used for their initial inactivity was that the men of

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<sup>28</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, esp. chapter 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 September 1862. Ann was the wife of the self-made engineer and future First Lord Airedale, James Kitson. See Edwin Kitson Clark, *Kitsons' of Leeds 1837-1937: A Firm and its Folk by One of Them* (London: The Locomotive Publishing Co., 1938), p. 9; R. J. Morris, 'The Rise of James Kitson: Trades Union and Mechanics Institution, Leeds, 1826-1851', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LIII (1973), 179-99, pp. 179-80.

<sup>30</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 and 8 November 1862.

Leeds had been too busy with the subscription for a new Infirmary building, an attempt at face-saving which emphasised the assumed 'masculinity' of the subscription system.<sup>31</sup>

The first bone of contention was a grant of £50 made to the men's committee by a Mr Hudson, to be expended specifically on clothing for the poor. Initially, the men voted that this money be donated to the Central Relief Committee at Manchester, on the condition 'that it be Expended [*sic.*] in the redemption of clothes in pawn, and that they [the Leeds deputation] endeavour to impress upon the central committee, the importance of carrying out that mode of relief'.<sup>32</sup> This represented an attack on the place of the pawn shop in the working-class economy, in an attempt to impose middle-class ideas about property and thrift. In particular, it was feared that newly made clothes would be pawned straight away and the money spent on drink, while the recipients continued to wear rags. However, having got wind of Hudson's donation, the Ladies' Association felt that they should be entitled to the money in order to provide new clothes for the poor. Taking advantage of a request for clothing from Todmorden, which had been passed on to them by the men's committee, the Ladies' secretary wrote back outlining the work that they had already done and the limitations on their exertions caused by lack of funds:

I am therefore requested to ask your committee to place at our disposal the money which has been given for the purpose of providing clothing &c. There is no doubt that it will be judiciously expended as the Ladies' Committee has had already considerable experience in selecting and purchasing the articles that are at present most required.

Hoping your committee will decide to entrust us with the 'Clothing Money'

I remain ...

Mary Kitson.<sup>33</sup>

At first the men were reluctant to help the women with gifts of money, claiming that the Board had no money for clothing 'excepting such as are specially appropriated for the redemption of clothes from pawn: but that the committee will have much pleasure in

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<sup>31</sup> Whilst also suggesting, perhaps, that the women had to seek an alternative outlet for their charitable impulses, having been denied a direct input into this particular project.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the General Committee, 18 November 1862. Brotherton Library Special Collections, Leeds Lancashire Cotton Famine Relief Fund, (hereafter Cotton Famine Relief Fund) MS 2/1.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Kitson to the Gentlemen's Committee, 22 November 1862. Cotton Famine Relief Fund, MS 4/8.

transferring to the ladies' comm. all parcels of clothing, which may be sent to them or to the wards committees'.<sup>34</sup> The women persisted, however, and on 1 December 1862, John Jowitt, one of the men's secretaries, delivered a message from them to the men's committee, again requesting funds. In response, the men appointed a sub-committee 'to confer with the Ladies' Comm. with a view to obtaining a correct knowledge of the operation of that Assoc., & especially of the principle on which their Grants and Distributions were carried on'.<sup>35</sup> The report of these discussions was read on 8 December 1862, whereupon the committee gave the treasurer power to make over Hudson's grant to the Ladies' Committee. The first round therefore went to the women, who had successfully proved their competence and managerial abilities.

The connection between the two committees did not stop there. On 22 January 1863, notice was made of a coming motion to grant £100 to the Ladies' Committee. A week later, apparently under pressure from the men, the Ladies' Committee passed a resolution whereby they agreed to forward all clothing purchased with grants from the men's committee to the Central Relief Fund. However, they reserved the right 'of making special grants according to their own discretion, from funds derived from other sources, especially as contributions are occasionally placed at their disposal exclusively for the benefit of Yorkshire or particular localities'.<sup>36</sup> This resolution was read out to the men's committee later the same day, whereupon they agreed to make the grant.<sup>37</sup>

More than a year later the men were still attaching these explicit conditions to grants made to the women's committee. In March 1864 the Reverend Jackson wrote to the Ladies' Committee, with news that the men's committee wished to check if those in the distressed districts who would be beneficiaries of such grants had already applied for clothing to the General Committee in Manchester, *before* any money would be granted to the women: 'The same resolution also rules, that clothing purchased in part by this board,

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<sup>34</sup> Minutes of the General Committee, 25 November 1862. All abbreviations are as the original.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 December 1862. The Relief Fund records also contain an account of the first ten weeks of the Ladies Committee's activities, which may have been drawn up in support of this application. Cotton Famine Relief Fund, MS 4/14.

<sup>36</sup> Resolution of the Ladies' Committee, Town Hall, 29 January 1863. Cotton Famine Relief Fund, MS 4/10.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the General Committee, 29 January 1863.



must be forwarded to the local relief committees in the particular Districts, & not to private individuals, or at the application of such'.<sup>38</sup>

These exchanges demonstrate the desire of the men's committee to keep a tight rein on how their grants were spent by the recipients. This desire extended not only to the women's committee, but also to the Central Relief Fund in Manchester, whose activities were also investigated.<sup>39</sup> However, the dependence of the women's committee on grants from the men meant that the interference was much more serious in this case, effectively representing an attempt to dictate the actions of that committee. In response, the women were forced on a number of occasions to defend both their competence and their independence. This may be seen in Mary Kitson's letter where she emphasised the experience accrued by the women's committee (possibly also a veiled reference to the fact that the women's committee had been in existence before the men's). It is also clear in the resolution which defended the women's right to distribute funds from sources other than the men's committee in any way they saw fit. While being united by their general objectives, by their class and often by ties of kinship, the separation of male and female committees using distinct and sometimes contradictory methods of relief therefore generated a potential for friction and conflict along gender lines.

Although female committees gave women the opportunity to participate in a common class-project in providing services for the poor, their activities sometimes brought them into conflict with over-mighty male committees. This was especially the case if the female committee was placed in a subordinate position to the men; however, even nominally independent female committees could find their activities scrutinised by men working in the same field. More positively, women's committees were occasionally in a position to mobilise their collective strength in order to wring concessions from their male counterparts. Alternatively, they could provide proofs of their competence in order to win male support, as the Leeds Ladies' Association managed to do during the cotton famine. However, committee work in the social sphere gave women more than just an opportunity to play politics. Service for a public institution could bring with it a sense of public pride and collective identity, which conflicts with male counterparts may even have helped to

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<sup>38</sup> Reverend E. Jackson to the Secretary of the Ladies' Committee, 9 March 1864. Cotton Famine Relief Fund, MS 4/2.

<sup>39</sup> See the instructions to the Leeds delegation to Manchester: Minutes of the General Committee, 18 November 1862.

strengthen. Moreover, committees provided institutional spaces within which new female initiatives could be developed.<sup>40</sup> The following section will look more closely at one of the more important of these: the charity bazaar.

## 5.2: Bazaars and Public Space.

By the third decade of the nineteenth century, bazaars were a ubiquitous part of urban life. They were an infinitely adaptable way of raising money for public institutions, churches, schools and sundry other causes. Some societies, notably the Methodists, instituted bazaars as annual events and came to rely on them for funds. Others resisted this undermining of the subscriber principle, which had the merit of providing a regular annual income and allowing for the influence of peer-group pressure, in order to ensure that the richer members of the middle class were contributing in proportion to their wealth. In comparison, bazaars seemed a trivialisation of charity, where little pressure could be exerted on anyone. Moreover, they were also difficult to organise and though they often raised large sums, regularity of income could not be guaranteed.

For instance, the proposal to hold a joint bazaar in aid of the Leeds Dispensary and the House of Recovery met with decided opposition from certain committee members of the latter institution. Their opinions were recorded in the minutes and are worth noting:

It was thought by Mr Scales & Dr Thorpe to be a better plan to depend upon annual subscribers, as a more permanent means of support. Mr Garlick thought this mode more exclusively adapted to the House of Recovery, as he thought the Dispensary required casual as well as regular support. Dr Thorpe said he had communicated with several influential gentlemen, who thought sufficient might be raised by annual subscription. They were averse to a bazaar ... Dr Williamson wished for a bazaar for both institutions as a first measure. Dr Thorpe appeared averse to this measure as interfering with permanent subscriptions.

It was eventually decided to hold a bazaar in the following winter or early spring, but only on the condition that simultaneous efforts were made to increase the permanent income through subscriptions.<sup>41</sup> These objections demonstrate real unease as to the effects of

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<sup>40</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 144.

<sup>41</sup> House of Recovery Minutes 1824-40, 2 December 1830. L. G. I. Archive, MS 158/2. See also the Leeds Public Dispensary Minutes 1824-43, 25 October and 2 December 1830. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds. Leeds Public

bazaars as a means of fund-raising on the political economy of middle-class voluntary societies. The underlying concern appears to have been that if bazaars became the mainstay of their finances, the wealthier and more influential members of the community would either see no value in attaching their names to them, or donate their money to other causes.<sup>42</sup> However, despite such misgivings, many institutions were quick to adopt the bazaar when a large sum needed to be raised in a relatively short space of time, in order to clear debts or purchase new premises for example.

In addition to their importance to the public institutions of the town, the larger bazaars, often held in prestigious public buildings, were high-profile events that gave women an important role in the production of middle-class cultural identity and a place at the heart of civic life. Moreover, participation in bazaars as patronesses, committee members or stallholders gave women a high degree of visibility, which was not always a feature of their other philanthropic work, such as home visiting, rescue work or tract distribution. Women were the public face of the bazaar in a very real sense, as well as being heavily involved as organisers behind the scenes or in production of many of the items offered for sale.<sup>43</sup>

This visibility was an inescapable feature of the large bazaars. The public needed to be made aware that the event was to take place, in order that they should attend in numbers and bring their purses with them. Moreover, it was also necessary to convince people that the bazaar was going to be a spectacle worth seeing, and here the role of the patroness became crucial. A long list of well-known and well-respected patronesses, preferably including a smattering of the nobility, and if possible headed by the Queen, was virtually a guarantee of success. Not only did it ensure the attendance of the public, but it reassured female contributors and potential stallholders that the bazaar was for a worthy cause and

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Dispensary 1/1. References to an earlier bazaar for the Dispensary may be found on 14 September and 6 December 1826, and 17 January 1827.

<sup>42</sup> The increasing importance of bazaars in the financial support of non-conformist congregations in the last quarter of the century has in fact been linked to the concurrent decline of the principle of the subscriber democracy. See S. J. D. Green, 'The Death of Pew Rents, the Rise of Bazaars and the End of the Traditional Political Economy of Voluntary Religious Organisation: The Case of the West Riding of Yorkshire, c. 1870-1914', *Northern History*, 27 (1991), 198-235.

<sup>43</sup> More information on bazaars generally may be found in Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, chapter 2.

that it would actually take place, so ensuring that their painstaking labours would not be in vain. By granting or withholding their names, patronesses therefore wielded some degree of power over the success of the proceedings. Conversely, to be invited to patronise a large bazaar could be a recognition of the power and influence of certain women, both in the local community and beyond.

The following case study of the Leeds Institute Bazaar of 1859 provides an important illustration of all of the themes of this chapter. The event in question had a number of features not necessarily common to all bazaars, but which are nevertheless important in a study of female and middle-class identities in this period. First, it was held in support of a major civic institution, and one that was central to the middle-class 'civilising mission'. Secondly, following in the footsteps of the great Anti-Corn Law League bazaars of 1842 and 1845, it attempted to link the traditional ladies' sale of fancy work, curiosities and other miscellanea, to a civic exhibition of local trades, manufactures, art and science. Such exhibitions had been developed in the great industrial towns of south Lancashire and the West Riding from the 1830s, reaching their apogee with the Great Exhibition of 1851.<sup>44</sup> The aim of this linkage was to make the exhibition itself more entertaining, attractive and, it was hoped, lucrative. However, it also had unforeseen consequences, as these two traditions of public activity, one dominated by men and the other by women, did not always sit comfortably together. In the case of the Leeds bazaar the results were almost disastrous.

Bazaars often originated on the initiative of women who were already involved in a particular institution or cause. As a result, the women themselves were usually left to their own devices, while men helped out where necessary. This was especially true of smaller events. For instance, Fanny Heaton became involved in a bazaar to clear the debt on the Burmantofts National School in Leeds, and made a suggestion to the Vicar of St. George's that a similar event could be held to clear the debt on the parish school as well.<sup>45</sup> In contrast however, the Leeds Institute Bazaar was under the control of a large committee of gentlemen, reflecting its intended subordination to the planned exhibition of arts and manufactures. This dramatically increased the scope for masculine interference in the bazaar

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<sup>44</sup> The history of the exhibition movement is traced in Kusamitsu, 'Great Exhibitions before 1851'.

<sup>45</sup> B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', p. 109. To Heaton's chagrin the Vicar initially opposed the scheme, only to recant at a later date.

itself, particularly as the relative importance of the bazaar grew until it, rather than the exhibition, became the main event.

The idea of a bazaar in aid of the Leeds Institute was first mooted in 1856, as the Institute's debts mounted at the same time as the broadening scope of its activities made the construction of a new building increasingly desirable. However, the first meeting of the Bazaar Committee did not take place until 11 February 1858. At this meeting it was decided that eight sub-committees should be formed, of which the Ladies' Committee was not even first on the list. Another committee of eight gentlemen, headed by the Reverend Conder, was created in order to 'oversee the ladies'.<sup>46</sup> However, the Ladies Committee did not meet until June, as a result of suspicions about the men's competence and organisational ability. A letter to prospective patronesses had not been drafted until 19 April, and a note in the minutes for 27 April records that many ladies were found to be withholding their support from the bazaar until a list of patronesses could be provided by the general committee.<sup>47</sup>

When the ladies committee finally met, they lost no time in stating their objection to the proposed date of the bazaar, which had been scheduled for the first week in January. Opposition had originally been mounted to this date by gentlemen involved in the Leeds Music Festival and the meeting of the British Association at Leeds that year, on the grounds that the public would not support three major events in such close proximity to one another. At the time, the Executive Committee had brushed these objections confidently aside.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the ladies were adamant that the event could not take place in the first week of the year, 'the festivals of the season interfering materially and engaging so much of their time and attention'.<sup>49</sup> As the event depended on the wholehearted support of the women, the men had no choice but to acquiesce and choose another date. The plans which the Leeds Music Festival and the British Association had failed to derail eventually succumbed to the social obligations of the New Year and the Christmas period.

However, the problems of the Leeds Institute Bazaar were only just beginning. By

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<sup>46</sup> Leeds Institute, Minutes of the Bazaar Committee 11 February 1858, Leeds Institute, MS 32.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 April 1858.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 March 1858.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 June 1858.

late October it was clear that the General Committee was in disarray: obligations were not being fulfilled and non-attendance was becoming a serious impediment to the progress of the business in hand. The meeting of 22 October instituted a new set of rules aimed at curbing these problems, by making it easier to expel non-attenders.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, subsequent events suggest that the ladies continued to be dissatisfied with the performance of their male counterparts. A succession of crises in the period from December to March saw a marked shift in the relative power of the Ladies' and Gentlemen's Committees in favour of the former. The first of these was the resignation of Mrs Botterill from the committee in December. The Executive Committee were informed that this news had been deliberately concealed from the rest of the women, 'as it might influence other ladies who are now members'. Faced with the desertion of such an influential lady and fearing a general exodus, the men were forced to send a deputation to wait on Mrs Botterill 'to induce her to take part in the Bazaar and to allow her name to remain on the committee'.<sup>51</sup> Significantly, although Mrs Botterill's husband was president of the Management Committee, it was never suggested that he should intercede informally. Her standing, and the importance of the Ladies' Committee, made it imperative that she be treated with due respect.

The second crisis was more serious, and threatened to derail the whole enterprise. Once again, it centred around the proposed date for the bazaar. Following the women's initial objections, it had been decided at a meeting on 15 October that this should be moved to 20 April. However, the information does not appear to have been communicated to the Ladies' Committee until at least late December or early January, when advertisements appeared carrying the names of the Ladies' Committee along with the new date of the bazaar. Not only was this taken as an insult to the Ladies' Committee, who had not authorised the advertisement, but the date which the men had chosen fell in Passion week, the most important week in the Christian calendar. This outraged the women and tested their commitment to the cause to the limit. A meeting of the executive on 7 January did its best to rectify the situation, acknowledging the calls from the Ladies' Committee for better liaison with the men and moving the date of the bazaar once again, to the last week in May. Even so, they were too late to prevent Mrs Lupton, Mrs Rhodes and Miss Ayston from

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 October 1858.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 December 1858.

withdrawing from the committee, and these ladies do not appear in the list of stallholders printed in the 1859 report of the Institute.<sup>52</sup> In order to fill the gap left by their absence, the men were reduced to writing begging letters, and it was moved that a memorial requesting support be sent to Mrs Gotsmidt, to be 'influentially and numerously signed'.<sup>53</sup> Less than a week later it was reported, with obvious relief, that an influential Ladies' Committee was now in place, thus averting disaster.<sup>54</sup>

However, the bazaar was not yet out of the woods. The appearance of a further unauthorised advertisement in early March prompted a blistering attack on the men by Hannah Eddison, the ladies' secretary and wife of the solicitor Edwin Eddison. Eddison took advantage of her husband's absence in London to break with usual practice and write a formal letter to the Executive Committee, outlining the women's grievances. She claimed that the advertisement had appeared in direct contravention of her instructions following the fiasco in January, and that the gentlemen responsible had confessed themselves inexcusably ignorant of the proceedings of the Ladies' Committee. Eddison was greatly concerned for the safety of her own public reputation, which appeared to be at the mercy of certain capricious members of the Executive Committee. She wrote:

I have been extremely anxious not to appear in public again until it was absolutely necessary, because the advertisement stating that the Bazaar was to be held in the last week in Lent had done us a great deal of harm, and I wanted to be forgotten for a while.<sup>55</sup>

She also questioned the efficacy of such advertisements in bringing in subscriptions for the bazaar and angrily demanded that the women be acquainted with the state of the bazaar's finances, arguing that: 'We wish to pay the debt and have as much over as possible and we are not prepared to have the proceeds of our exertions expended by the gentlemen's committee without our consent'.<sup>56</sup> Here Eddison implicitly questioned the priorities of the Executive Committee, many of whose members seemed intent on activity for activity's sake

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 January 1859; Leeds Mechanics' Institute and Literary Society, *Annual Report*, 1859, pp. 12-14.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes of the Bazaar Committee, 7 January 1859.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 January 1859.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Hannah Eddison, Bazaar Committee Minutes 18 March 1859.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

rather than considering what was necessary for the success of the bazaar. Even worse, they appeared stubbornly to ignore the needs and wishes of the women who were shouldering most of the burden of organisation, and whose reputations were so closely bound up with the success or failure of the enterprise.

It would appear that the men's committee had not fully grasped that the success of bazaars depended not on amassing a large list of (male) subscribers, but on getting enough women involved as patronesses and stallholders, enough material for sale and enough of the public through the doors to ensure a profit. Similarly, the women could not understand the male obsession with publishing subscription lists in newspapers at great expense. Mrs Eddison went right to the heart of the problem when she argued: 'It is customary for the management of Bazaars to be undertaken by ladies with the assistance of a few gentlemen to carry out their wishes, and I should think that this is the only instance of that not being the case'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, it is clear that the men were distinctly uncomfortable with the idea that they were expected to allow the women to scrutinise their own activities. This unusual situation of having to defer to the 'second sex' in matters of public business explains the apparent lack of respect which many of the men had for the Ladies' Committee, which manifested itself in a propensity to ignore its wishes and proceedings. Eddison opined that 'although the gentlemen's committee is far too large to be efficient, I see no reason whatever why we may not work very well together if we are so disposed', and insisted that her main wish was that 'the ladies' committee [should] have the position to which their exertions entitle them'.<sup>58</sup>

This letter saw the end of the conflicts engendered by the gentlemen's attitudes to the Ladies' Committee. The general meeting on 18 March resolved that no circulars or advertisements were to be issued without first submitting them to the Ladies' Committee for approval. On 1 April, the General Committee were notified that the ladies were preparing lists of the names of gentlemen who they wanted on the sub-committees responsible for decorations, music and stewards - committees which had originally been proposed by the first (all male) meeting back in February 1858. On 8 April, the ladies were invited to send up their list of additional stewards.<sup>59</sup> Mrs Eddison had got her way, and the

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 April and 8 April 1859.



gentlemen were now dancing to the tune called by the ladies. In retrospect, her letter was the turning point in relations between the two committees, putting an end to the conflicts that threatened to wreck the bazaar while throwing the nature of those conflicts into sharp relief. This was reflected in a change in attitude on the part of the men's committee, which gradually accepted the importance of the women to the success of the bazaar. The new attitude found its way into the report in the *Leeds Mercury*:

As to the ladies who presided at the stalls, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of their services. Their labours have been arduous, but they have been discharged with a grace and zeal which have greatly enhanced their value, and placed the institution under an obligation which it will be an honour to record in the warmest possible terms of acknowledgement.<sup>60</sup>

This brief, but eventful, episode in the life of one of Leeds' foremost cultural and educative establishments tell us much about the politics of gender in Leeds in the late 1850s. In particular, it is difficult not to be struck by the rapid development of a group identity on the part of the Ladies' Committee, who did not shrink from asserting themselves from their very first meeting. This defensiveness was due, to a great extent, to the perception that the men were encroaching on female territory, showing precious little regard for feminine sensibilities in the process. The issue of the date, for instance, suggests that totally different meanings were assigned by men and women to particular seasons of the year. To male businessmen, the first week of the year and the last week in Lent probably seemed the most logical times to hold such an event, when business was slack, they had plenty of free time and the populace were in a holiday mood. However, for women these were important and busy times of the year: the first devoted to social and family occasions, the second to devout religious observance. The men were also incredibly careless when it came to publishing the names of the women in the local press, showing scant regard to the importance of a woman's reputation, which was judged by completely different criteria to that of a man. The men obviously thought they could enlist the help of their womenfolk without modifying their own behaviour and attitudes accordingly, witnessed above all by their unwillingness to allow the women's committee access to the bazaar accounts. In a gendered version of capitalist relations, the women were expected to do the bulk of productive work for the event, while the men retained control over how the money was to be spent.

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<sup>60</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 May 1859.

The women were able to reverse this situation and implement their will as a result of the financial power which they wielded through the bazaar. This gave them the bargaining position necessary to emerge victorious from what was, in essence, a clash of two very different cultures. After all, without the support of the women, the Institute would not even have been able to clear its debts, let alone start a fund for the construction of new premises. However, not wishing to reduce the outcome to a simple question of economic relations, one must give credit for the coup to the women themselves, and ask why they were not prepared to allow themselves to be trampled on. The answer, of course, lies in reputation, and the fierce determination of the Ladies' Committee to exercise a degree of control over how they were presented in public.

Participation in such grand civic events had a great significance, first as part of the broader tapestry of provincial middle-class life, and secondly in the lives of the women who took part in them. Obviously civic pride played a great role: pride in the institutions of middle-class life, such as the Leeds Institute, which the bazaars supported; pride, too, in the ability of the town to host such large, glittering occasions and to attract the patronage of important personages, in this instance Her Majesty Queen Victoria. The combination of the 1859 bazaar with an exhibition was another source of pride. It meant that the event was also a self-congratulatory demonstration of the town's economic and cultural achievements. However, the bazaar itself came to overshadow the exhibition, possibly as a result of the success of a similar event in Bradford in 1858, which raised over £2,000. This may have persuaded the organisers to hold the bazaar on a grander scale than originally envisaged, on the premise that anything Bradford could do, Leeds could do better.<sup>61</sup> Finally, the decision to hold the bazaar in Leeds' impressive new town hall, opened the previous year by Queen Victoria, was a symbolic way of placing the event at the heart of civic life and middle-class consciousness, as well as being a convenient way of showing off the building to visitors from out of town.

From the women's point of view, bazaars had a great variety of meanings. Some of these are apparent from the way in which women's roles in the Leeds Institute bazaar were represented in the sources considered above. However, the nature of the sources, and their historical context, produces a very one-dimensional idea of women's motivations. The women of 1859, locked in a struggle to obtain due respect from the mens' committees,

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<sup>61</sup> Bazaar Committee Minutes, 1 June 1858.

presented themselves as being experienced, mature organisers, concerned primarily with raising enough money to clear the Institute's debt, while at the same time anxious to preserve their public image as respectable women. In short, they displayed all the virtues associated with a public-spirited middle class, whilst remaining within the bounds of feminine respectability. Far from being radical attempts to subvert gender norms and claim a higher public status, intrusions into traditional areas of male competency, such as the examination of the bazaar accounts and the management of publicity, were justified as necessary to the preservation of their feminine reputations. Above all else, the women wanted to be taken seriously and to be respected for what they were doing.

Ascertaining the motivations of individual women from these sources is therefore impossible, as we have only the collective 'party line', imposed by political necessity. However, it is probably safe to assume that women who became involved in bazaars did so for a variety of reasons, ranging from the desire to do their civic duty, to the excitement and interest of working with other women for some great object. Probably there was a combination of these factors. For example, Fanny Heaton took her civic responsibilities very seriously, but clearly enjoyed the opportunity that bazaars gave her to show off her skill in needlework. In addition to displaying her handiwork to the Conversation Club, she and her sister Marianne invited a number of friends to view their work in 1860, while in 1864 she contrived to have a pair of her hand-screens purchased by Prince Albert at a bazaar in London. Heaton recorded in his journal that 'Fanny was much gratified ... it is some distinction for her that her work should have been taken by the Prince, and it must serve as a recommendation of her work to other purchasers'.<sup>62</sup> One could also surmise that he himself took no little pride in her achievement.

In conclusion, it is possible to observe a shared identity resting on the assertion of female civic virtue emerging through the rhetorical expressions and internal politics of women's committees. This seems particularly to have been the case at the end of the period, although allowances must be made for the role of chance in the preservation of more documentation from the 1850s onwards. These committees, like their male equivalents, were elite-led; yet they also enabled less powerful women to gain access to a collective identity as 'benevolent ladies'. Like all voluntary associations they were also

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<sup>62</sup> 'Journal of J. D. Heaton', i, p. 237; B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journal of John Deakin Heaton', pp. 136-7.

infinitely adaptable, and were applied to causes connected with a variety of overlapping identities: religious, civic and patriotic. However, the activities of women's organisations were not limited to philanthropy. Perhaps inevitably, attempts to reform society also brought them into contact with the broader world of local and national politics. The political role of female voluntary associations in Leeds will be examined in the following chapter, along with the position of women within the official political sphere and the way in which the press interpreted and packaged female political activity for public consumption.

## CHAPTER 6

### **‘Not perfectly proper’:<sup>1</sup> Women and Politics**

In Chapter Two it was established that many writers on female duty believed that women exercised an important influence on the political sphere, although such writers frowned on any suggestion that women should be granted full political rights. This chapter examines the relationship between women and politics in practice. First, it demonstrates that the exclusion of women from the formal political sphere was by no means complete. Secondly, it explores the ways in which discourses of female influence were adapted to enable women to play a more active role in the political process through extra-parliamentary agitation, often by adapting the language and institutional forms of organised philanthropy to the exigencies of political campaigning. In the process, it questions the assumption in a recent book by James Vernon that women were becoming increasingly marginalised politically at this time. Finally, it examines the role of the press in deeming such activities respectable or otherwise.

Vernon has challenged the idea that the nineteenth century witnessed a general progression towards liberal democracy, arguing instead that the many reforms hailed by contemporaries as defeats for ‘Old Corruption’ in fact had the effect of excluding large sections of the community from participation in the political process. Although groups such as women and un-propertied males had always been excluded in practice from the parliamentary franchise, many of them had nevertheless been able to register their social and political opinions in a number of ways, for instance by attending political meetings, voting in meetings of the vestry (for ratepayers), and by participating in the various rituals associated with parliamentary elections. However, Vernon argues that successive Reform Acts and reorganisations of local government meant that politics increasingly became defined as the preserve of propertied males. Moreover, according to this view, the development of a more formal public political sphere with bureaucratic party organisations, ticketed meetings and a pervasive print culture that privileged ‘rational’ forms of political discourse, effectively excluded women and large sections of the male population from

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<sup>1</sup> For the source of this quotation see below, p. 173.

political participation.<sup>2</sup>

While this is an interesting and, in many ways, useful thesis, Vernon's account of the effects of this process on women is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Principally, the persistent privileging of culture over class often leads him to lump all women in with disenfranchised males as a universally excluded group. This not only ignores the vast differences in the ways that women from different socio-economic backgrounds experienced politics and the political process, but also rides roughshod over the crucial contemporary distinction between 'ladies' and other 'females' that is a striking characteristic of reports of political events and meetings. The main purpose of this chapter will be to examine the extent to which middle-class women, including lower middle-class ratepayers, were able to maintain a toe-hold in the political process while those lower down the social scale were slowly being squeezed out. It will also shed light on the process by which gender was constructed in the public political sphere via the press. This will give a more balanced view than Vernon's straightforward model of exclusion.

The first section begins by looking at the place of women in the formal political sphere of elections and party politics. Contemporary attitudes to the idea of female suffrage are examined, before going on to assess the practical implications of the contemporary rhetoric of 'female influence' and the way in which this gave women a legitimate means of developing and expressing party loyalties and political affiliations. It is argued that the great variety of voting customs and practices at the local level allowed some women to maintain or even expand their degree of involvement in formal politics by the use of the vote and through the holding of office.

The second section considers the importance of women's participation in extra-parliamentary campaigns, which by definition transcended the realm of formal politics. In particular, it is argued that the benefits of female support encouraged the leaders of such movements to appeal to women using the kind of 'rational' discourse usually associated with masculine activity in the public sphere. Moreover, campaigning allowed women to generate their own discourses of citizenship and public virtue by allowing them to organise committees for purposes such as fundraising and petitioning on a variety of issues. These activities and discourses allowed women avenues of political involvement which are significantly absent from Vernon's narrative.

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<sup>2</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*.

This is balanced in the final section by a consideration of the role of the press in presenting such activities to a broader audience, thereby helping to shape as well as to reflect contemporary attitudes to female involvement in the public political sphere. Mainstream newspapers, in particular, tended to portray politically involved women either as pious abstractions or as depraved individuals, depending on the political orientation of the paper in question. Such accounts therefore provide us with valuable insights into the way that gender was constructed in the public sphere for a largely middle-class audience.

### 6.1: Formal Politics.

In 1832, the newly enfranchised borough of Leeds experienced its first election campaign to elect two representatives to Parliament. In a deliberate attempt to distance themselves from the politics of aristocratic influence the two Liberal candidates, John Marshall and Thomas Babington Macaulay, eschewed the traditional practice of a personal door-to-door canvass of electors in favour of election meetings in Leeds and the out-townships, at which they gave speeches outlining their policies and answered questions from the floor. At one such meeting, in the New Market, Leeds, the following exchange took place between Macaulay and one Mr Ayrey, a local shopkeeper and radical:

Mr Ayrey: Every man who fights the battles of his country has a right to vote - will you vote for universal suffrage?

Mr Macaulay: No I will not. (A laugh). Why should not a man of twenty years of age have a vote?

Mr Ayrey: He has not arrived at years of discretion.

Mr Macaulay: (With much quickness) - Why not a woman?

(This cross examination of the questioner by Mr Macaulay occasioned vast amusement to the meeting, especially as Mr Ayrey was obviously puzzled by the last question and had no answer ready).<sup>3</sup>

A few months later, at a meeting in the Leeds Music Hall, Macaulay found the question turned back on himself:

Mr Lindley said, he perceived that a number of their fair townswomen were

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<sup>3</sup> *The Preliminary Proceedings to the First Election of Representatives for the Borough of Leeds; including the speeches of T. B. Macaulay Esq. MP, John Marshall Jun. Esq. And M. T. Sadler Esq. MP at the Coloured Cloth Hall on Tuesday September 4<sup>th</sup> 1832* (Leeds, 1832), p. 64. This election has been described in detail in A. S. Turberville and Frank Beckwith, 'Leeds and Parliamentary Reform', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, XLI (1954), 1-81, especially pp. 77-81.

present, and he would ask the Honourable Candidates if they would support a proposition for conferring the elective franchise on unmarried females, possessing property in their own right? And he would also ask, could a line of distinction be drawn between those natural capabilities that would qualify a woman to preside over a great nation, and those required to give a vote for a member of Parliament. (Laughter).

Mr Marshall: He did not think it would be advisable for them to be troubled with the elective franchise: he thought they would be much better employed in their own houses - (Laughter); and he doubted very much whether they would wish to have it conferred upon them. (Applause).

Mr Macaulay: He thought it was enough if the men were engaged in political anxieties and cares, and that they were wise in leaving one important and amiable part of society to pacify, soothe and sweeten life for the rest. (Loud cheers, with laughter).<sup>4</sup>

The exclusion of women from the parliamentary franchise was justified by the idea that they were already adequately represented by their husbands or fathers. This theory had increased in popularity since the eighteenth century, gaining legitimacy from its development in the writings of John Locke.<sup>5</sup> In the early nineteenth century, the idea was reiterated by James Mill in his *Essay on Government* (1823). Despite Jeremy Bentham's argument that women should be entitled to the same political rights as men, the majority of contemporaries followed the elder Mill's line on the question.<sup>6</sup> Such ideas about the dependency of women were reflected and re-affirmed by the legal position of married women, who had no separate existence in law from their husbands and who could not own property in their own right.

However, Lindley's question demonstrates that there were those who were beginning to question the validity of excluding women from the franchise, particularly those with property, even as that exclusion was being given legal substance for the very first time. The Great Reform Act, which officially defined the parliamentary suffrage as an exclusively male privilege, may well have been the beginning of what Vernon has identified as a 'concerted attempt to impose an official and nationally uniform definition of the public political sphere

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<sup>4</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 8 December 1832.

<sup>5</sup> See Catherine Hall, 'Private Persons versus Public Someones: Class, Gender and Politics in England, 1780-1850', in Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class*, 151-71.

<sup>6</sup> M. Williford, 'Bentham and the Rights of Women', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), 167-76.



as the preserve of propertied men'.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as Kathryn Gleadle has pointed out, 1832 was also the year that the first female suffrage petition was presented to Parliament, and that James Silk Buckingham argued in the House of Commons for women's right to political autonomy.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Gleadle has identified the suffrage issue as an important strand in the thought of an early feminist movement, centred around a diverse network of radical Unitarian families in the 1830s and 1840s.

Despite such stirrings, it is clear from Macaulay and Marshall's replies to Lindley and Ayrey that, beyond these radical circles, female suffrage was quite literally inconceivable at the beginning of our period. The candidates could therefore get away with trite and formulaic answers to Lindley's enquiry, based on the common assumption that women had no interests outside of their own homes, and that their only purpose was to 'soothe and sweeten' the lives of men. This was despite the fact that Lindley's question specifically concerned women who owned property in their own right, many of whom would certainly have had external interests as ratepayers, investors of capital, or owners of businesses. The idea of enfranchising women was simply a matter for jest, or worse, a way of ridiculing the supporters of universal suffrage.<sup>9</sup>

The existence of dissenting voices is, however, significant. Those who would oppose female enfranchisement were forced into elaborating on the virtual representation of women through their husbands, and a rhetoric of 'female influence' developed. Macaulay and Marshall may have ridiculed the idea of women actually voting, but they and their agents made frequent appeals to 'female influence' during their election campaign, and the presence of women in the crowds at their meetings was pointed out wherever possible.<sup>10</sup> At Bramley, for instance, Mr Richardson declared: 'I say not only to you, Gentlemen, but to every one of the good wives and pretty lassies that hear me, that in an election there is not an

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<sup>7</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Macaulay was not alone in this tactic, which had previously been employed by Charles James Fox. See Anna Clark, 'Gender, Class and Nation: Franchise Reform in England, 1832-1928' in James Vernon (ed.), *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 230-53, p. 234.

<sup>10</sup> *The Preliminary Proceedings to the First Election of Representatives for the Borough of Leeds*, pp. 25, 28, 37, 38, 45, 46 and 57.

individual, however humble, but may do something. “If I have not a vote, I can speak, and I can recommend the man whom my conscience approves”.’<sup>11</sup>

Such behind the scenes influence was deemed acceptable behaviour for women, in contrast to claims for female suffrage, which carried the implicit threat of women ‘usurping’ the public positions of their menfolk. Take for example a fictional piece in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, in which the character of Isabella Talbot, a believer in female suffrage, is contrasted with that of the principled and intelligent Jane Marshall, who is not. Jane uses her influence behind the scenes, in contrast to the public electioneering of Isabella. Of course Jane’s activities are shown in the most favourable light, and receive the approbation of her husband (the ultimate arbiter of female behaviour). He defends the education of women in political matters, not so that they can set themselves up as public figures, but as a means of preparing them for their roles as the mothers of ‘patriots’.<sup>12</sup>

The theory and practice of female influence was developed to good effect by the various reform campaigns which attracted female support in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly the anti-slavery campaigns and the corn law agitation. The importance of these campaigns for involving women in practical politics, and in the construction of female political identities, will be explored in the following section. The remainder of this section will be concerned with the participation of women in the sphere of formal politics, and the way in which that was shaped by local and national institutions, and legal definitions of local and national citizenship.

We have already established that the Great Reform Act formally excluded women from the parliamentary franchise, confirming established practice. However, this did not mean that women were excluded from the whole of political life. Political participation was possible in a number of ways and on a number of levels, from the female aristocrats who controlled the votes of their tenantry, to those women who waved flags at elections, voted in vestry meetings, or took part in extra-parliamentary agitations of one sort or another. Thus women were able to develop and express political opinions and even to develop links with particular parties or factions.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Anon., ‘Female Influence: A Domestic Sketch’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 5 (1838), 668-71.

Female influence may have been more of a myth than a reality, at least on the level of electoral politics, but propertied women were sometimes able to exercise influence of a more tangible kind over voters in their localities, particularly over their tenants or local tradesmen. Sarah Richardson has described in detail the political activities of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall near Halifax, and Elizabeth-Sophia Lawrence of Studley Royal, who were both active in the cause of Toryism during the 1830s.<sup>13</sup> In 1837, the *Mercury* complained that the West Riding tenants of Lady William Gordon had been urged to vote for the Tory candidate in the impending West Riding election.<sup>14</sup> Such instances clearly demonstrate the possibilities for influence open to propertied and independent women, and are a reminder that aristocratic influence did not die with the Great Reform Act, which now appears to have been less of a revolution than was once claimed. Indeed, reformers believed that constant vigilance was a necessity if aristocratic interests were not to creep in, even in newly enfranchised industrial boroughs like Leeds. In 1832 it was observed that the Marchioness of Hertford had sent canvassers to Leeds on behalf of the Tory candidate M. T. Sadler. The *Mercury* noted, somewhat pessimistically, 'This is a first step towards converting Leeds into a rotten borough, subject to the Lady of the manor of Holbeck'. For good measure, it was claimed that Sadler had acted on her instructions when he voted against the Leeds and Selby Railway Bill, thus proving that he was in fact a tool of the landed interest.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, the *Mercury* made no issue of the sex of the Marchioness, who was portrayed more as an example of the perfidy of her class, than as a debased specimen of womankind.

Middle and lower-class women also tried to influence the outcome of elections from time to time. One tactic was to use their economic power, through pressurising local tradesmen. This could give rise to more direct forms of action, such as blockading shops and denying customers entry until the shopkeeper declared that they would vote for a particular candidate. This sometimes drew opprobrium from the press, but only if the candidate involved had been of the opposite political colour.<sup>16</sup> Even women engaged in

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<sup>13</sup> Sarah Richardson, 'The Role of Women in Electoral Politics in Yorkshire During the 1830s', *Northern History*, 32 (1996), 133-51.

<sup>14</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 29 July 1837.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August 1832.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 January 1833. On this occasion it was the Tory women of Manchester who drew the *Mercury's* ire.

charitable activity were not above suspicion, and lady visitors for the Leeds Church Visiting Society were accused in the *Leeds Times* of using bribery to encourage the families they visited to support the Tory party in the forthcoming municipal elections.<sup>17</sup>

The central role of women in the family had a major impact on their contributions to political activity, at a time when religious and kinship ties were paramount in securing a majority. Contrary to the widespread belief among historians that women were largely excluded from such participation by the hostility of men, Elaine Chalus argues that 'their electoral activities were multi-faceted and flexible, logical extensions of traditional female roles in a familial political culture; moreover, their participation was generally accepted, often expected, and sometimes demanded'.<sup>18</sup> Activities could include canvassing, visibly supporting their menfolk at election meetings and on the hustings, and even making the occasional speech. Not all of these activities were universally condoned. At the Liberal celebration dinner in Ripon in 1833 for instance, the successful candidate, Mr Stavely, said that his wife 'constantly told him that she thought it was not perfectly proper for ladies to canvass, although he knew that ladies had canvassed, and a great deal more than they ought to have done'.<sup>19</sup> Less obtrusive support was readily welcomed though. As Sir John Beckett said of the Conservative ladies of Leeds in 1834: 'Their interference was like that of Providence, unseen but felt in its benignant effects'.<sup>20</sup>

However, Beckett undoubtedly exaggerated the 'unseen' nature of female support and influence. In fact, women often played a prominent part in the ritual and pageantry that surrounded elections in this period, which has recently become a subject of interest to historians of political culture.<sup>21</sup> The role of women in these public rituals will be analysed in the next chapter. For now, it will be sufficient to note that, although the Reform Act had

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<sup>17</sup> Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 269.

<sup>18</sup> Elaine Chalus, "'That epidemical madness': women and electoral politics in the late eighteenth century", in Barker and Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth Century England*, 151-78, p. 153.

<sup>19</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 January 1833.

<sup>20</sup> Report of a dinner of Leeds Conservative Association, Monday 24 October 1836, in *The Times*, 27 October 1836.

<sup>21</sup> Especially Vernon, *Politics and the People*, and Frank O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in Later Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 138 (1992), 79-115.

denied women national political citizenship in a legal sense, the extension of the franchise to the industrial boroughs increased their opportunities to participate at this more popular level. For example, Derek Fraser has observed that Easter week 1837 saw no less than seven political events in four days in Leeds, which involved men and women, electors and non-electors alike: In Fraser's words: 'one of the fruits of reform was that participation within the system was now possible'.<sup>22</sup>

Women were particularly visible in the celebrations which followed elections to local or national government. Before the borough of Leeds was itself enfranchised in 1832, this mainly took the form of women attending as spectators at dinners arranged by and for men. For instance, following the return of Brougham and Morpeth for the West Riding in 1830, twenty-two ladies were observed sitting in the orchestra at a dinner in the Commercial Rooms.<sup>23</sup> However, it is notable that after the Reform Act, and particularly after the election of 1834, separate entertainments began to be organised for lady supporters, usually taking the form of tea parties. Several such events were organised along ward divisions, suggesting that women played a role in the highly organised party structure in Leeds. Take for example the tea party held by the ladies of the south and south-west divisions of the town in the Commercial Buildings in March 1834, to celebrate the return of Edward Baines. This party was attended by 135 ladies, 'most of them wearing orange ribands, flowers, &c.', and significantly took place in one of the public buildings of the town.<sup>24</sup> Other parties were held in strategically placed public houses, such as the Boot and Shoe Inn in February 1835.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes, men were admitted later in the evening, or the entertainments were designed for both sexes.<sup>26</sup> As with philanthropy, this seems to testify to a change in behaviour.

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<sup>22</sup> D. Fraser, 'The Fruits of Reform: Leeds politics in the 1830s', *Northern History*, 7 (1972), 89-111, p. 110. The events were: Monday - public entry of the Liberal candidates; public dinner for the Operative Conservatives. Tuesday - public meeting against the church rates; 'sectional' meeting of liberal electors at the Music Hall. Wednesday - A similar meeting. Thursday - Vestry meeting, which refused to pass a church rate; Tory meeting to petition in favour of a church rate.

<sup>23</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 October 1830.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 and 29 March 1834.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 February 1835.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, 29 March 1834 and 14 February 1835.

Masculine dinners, which women could attend only as observers, were increasingly being supplemented by more relaxed occasions, where the sexes could mix more freely in a less formal atmosphere. By encouraging greater social interaction, it was hoped that party ties would be strengthened. For instance, when over a hundred women gathered at the Golden Lion in Holbeck to celebrate the return of two Liberal councillors in the municipal election, the *Mercury* beamed: 'it is anticipated that the proceedings will have the most beneficial results, by uniting more firmly the Reformers of Holbeck, and diminishing the overbearing pride, barefaced arrogance, and surreptitious influence of their Tory opponents.'<sup>27</sup>

There is some evidence that the women who took an active part in such events were often drawn from a rank lower than the civic elite, although it is usually impossible to find out exactly who attended. For instance, the vice-chair of the party at the Boot and Shoe Inn was one Mrs Thompson, proprietor of the Bay Horse. This suggests that lower middle-class women, especially those with property, may have figured prominently in such activities.<sup>28</sup> Challenging the number and status of those attending party social events was one way in which the partisan press could score points, and women were an easy target. In 1836 the *Mercury* jeered at the 'motley group, consisting of all grades', which allegedly attended a Tory dinner in Wakefield. The *Mercury* added 'A gallery was erected for the ladies, to which they were admitted at 2s. 6d. each. We [h]ear that more than one wealthy Tory bought £20 worth of tickets, which were squandered away in all directions in order to increase their numbers.'<sup>29</sup> Innuendos about the gentility of the opposing party's women were rife. In 1841, still smarting from the return of two Tory candidates at the West Riding election, the *Mercury* seized on an allegation in the *Leeds Times* that tickets entitling the bearer to a shilling's worth of liquor had been given to women at one Tory celebration. The *Mercury* was convinced that 'every woman who used the shilling for such purposes either would be, *or ought to have been*, intoxicated', although the correspondent admitted he had no personal knowledge of the events.<sup>30</sup> Visibility, then, had its negative aspects. However, such slurs may well have strengthened the party identities of the women so maligned.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 November 1840.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 February 1835.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 December 1836.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 August 1841.

Parliamentary elections were just one aspect of politics in the Victorian city. Since the 1970s, the link between electoral politics and essentially local issues and people has been effectively re-established by urban historians. This has helped to explain some of the 'mysteries' of Victorian politics, such as the supposed failure of the middle classes to develop distinctive political structures in the wake of the Reform Act. One symptom of this failure was meant to have been the lack of impact made by urban MPs from middle-class occupational backgrounds in Parliament. However, John Garrard has argued persuasively that wealthy businessmen were able to gain enough prestige in their communities through local government office, without needing to immerse themselves in the expensive and time consuming business of national government.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, even those elected were less concerned with acquiring government office, both because they tended to be relatively advanced in years compared to the career politicians from the ranks of the gentry, and because most of their time and energy was spent steering local Bills through Parliament. Local politics was paramount; parliamentary elections merely provided another arena in which local issues, aspirations and rivalries could be pursued and played out.<sup>32</sup>

In turn, this realisation has sparked historical interest in the institutions of local government. Derek Fraser has demonstrated that the importance of local government institutions as centres of local power and social prestige meant that they often became highly politicised, particularly in towns where there were significant 'out' groups, such as religious dissenters.<sup>33</sup> Fraser uses what he describes as an 'archaeological' model of nineteenth century local politics, in that it was made up of four different layers: parochial and township administration; municipal government; parliamentary elections; and political agitation. Political issues are described as 'bore-holes' which penetrated each layer. Therefore, in Fraser's words, 'politics intruded into the whole urban experience and the limited political world of parliamentary elections, identified by many historians as the stuff

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<sup>31</sup> Garrard, 'The Middle Classes and Nineteenth-Century National and Local Politics'.

<sup>32</sup> See Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England 1734-1832* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 318.

<sup>33</sup> For his fullest exposition of this position, see D. Fraser *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (Leicester University Press, 1976).

of urban politics, was not a political boundary recognised by contemporaries'.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most important features of Fraser's work is the way in which it draws attention to the parish vestry as an important political site, particularly before the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, but also for a long period after that event.<sup>35</sup> Before 1835, even incorporated boroughs were usually governed by a self-selecting clique. In Leeds, this effectively gave control to a group of Tory Anglican merchants and excluded the dissenters, as well as a number of those who had made their money as manufacturers.<sup>36</sup> This meant that the only site where the dissenters could gain political influence was, ironically enough, through the vestry, which as Vernon argues was actually the most democratic institution of local government, and remained so for a long time to come.<sup>37</sup> This democratic element was confirmed in Hobhouse's Vestry Act of 1831, which abolished the oligarchical metropolitan Select Vestries; restored to rate-payers the equal votes which had been scrapped in favour of a system weighted towards large property owners in 1818; and made provision for the election of one third of vestry officers each year, and for the inspection of accounts on request.<sup>38</sup> Crucially, from women's point of view, it also recognised the right of female rate-payers to vote, something which the earlier Sturges-Bourne Act of 1818 had left to local custom.<sup>39</sup>

Parochial politics was therefore an exception to the increasing tendency to define property as masculine. Quite how important women were to parish politics is difficult to gauge, certainly in Leeds the relative importance of the vestry as a political arena declined after the Municipal Reform Act opened up the Corporation to the liberal-dissenting interest. However, the vestry retained control over important areas of local administration, particularly poor relief, well into the 1840s. This was largely a result of the failure to extend

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibid.*, chapter 1; also Fraser 'The Leeds Church Wardens'.

<sup>36</sup> See Turberville and Beckwith, 'Leeds and Parliamentary Reform', and R. G. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants*. Municipal reform is explained and evaluated in D. Fraser, *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester University Press, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 16-21.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.



the operation of the New Poor Law to Leeds until 1844. An attempt had been made to form a poor law union in 1837, but it quickly became a party issue. The election of Guardians was seen as defective, and the result was declared void. In 1844, a renewed effort was made in an attempt to force the building of a new workhouse, the old one having become a public disgrace. This merely resulted in the party battle lines being drawn up around the issue of the new workhouse. In the event the Tories, who opposed it, were victorious, while the Liberals only managed to gain majorities on the board in 1853, 1854 and 1859.<sup>40</sup>

Under the New Poor Law, women rate-payers continued to vote in the election of officers. However, women were rarely, if ever, appealed to directly as voters. There seems to have been a great stigma surrounding the very act of women voting, a much more public activity in the days before the secret ballot. One rare occasion when women's voting rights were publicly affirmed occurred in 1854, when the *Leeds Mercury* published an article explaining exactly who could and could not vote in Poor Law elections following revelations of Tory gerrymandering in previous years.<sup>41</sup> Although women were not directly called on to vote this is implicit in the aim of the article, which was to make rate-payers aware of their rights. Vernon claims that the system of polling cards delivered door-to-door introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Act 'was symptomatic of the increasing reliance on print within official politics and its use to redefine the public political sphere by placing the accent on the individual male's private experience of politics'.<sup>42</sup> However, this example shows that although the voter may have been generally assumed to be male, this was not always the case in practice. Moreover, although women would have been statistically more likely to have had difficulty in reading the complicated polling cards that Vernon describes, it is equally possible that they benefited from the introduction of private voting, which could be done in the comfort of the home rather than under the scrutiny of watching crowds. On the other hand, proof that women did exercise their franchises in public may be found in contemporary accounts. For instance, the *Law Times* pointed out in 1866 that women 'are at this moment lawful members of vestries; they may and do in fact vote at all Parish

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<sup>40</sup> Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England*, pp. 56-57; see also Fraser, 'Poor Law Politics in Leeds'.

<sup>41</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 14 January 1854.

<sup>42</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 157.

meetings'.<sup>43</sup> When it came to female franchises, though, silence was the general rule. Even when women's rights to vote could not be denied, as in the case of voluntary societies with female subscribers, women were often excluded as far as possible from the public expression of personal preference. This was particularly true of the medical societies, where appointments could often be influenced by party political considerations. On these occasions female subscribers were strongly encouraged to vote by proxy.

Despite such prejudices, women could occasionally become office holders in the minor institutions of local government. Their right to be elected as sextons was confirmed by the test case of Olive versus Ingram in 1739, albeit only on the grounds that as it was 'an office that did not concern the public, or the care and inspection of the morals of the parishioners, there was no reason to exclude women'.<sup>44</sup> The 1851 census reveals no less than 865 women serving as church officials in England and Wales.<sup>45</sup> Sixteen women are noted under this category in the West Riding division of the census, all over fifty years of age. The borough of Leeds had the highest proportion of these, with five female officers from a total of thirty-three, or over one in seven.<sup>46</sup> There were even rare examples of women being elected to serve as poor law officers. There was at least one such instance in the West Riding - a Miss Tempest, who was elected an Overseer of the Poor by the rate-payers of Ackworth in 1849. The *Mercury* thought this extremely noteworthy, and even went to the trouble of finding out the names of several other women who had been elected in East Anglia.<sup>47</sup> However, Anna Maria Tempest was clearly an exception; a member of a prominent Catholic gentry family, she had been left the estate of Ackworth Grange by her mother in 1845, thus

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Katherine S. Williams, 'The Public Law and Women's Rights: The Nineteenth-Century Experience', *Cambrian Law Review*, 23 (1992), 80-103, pp. 97-8.

<sup>44</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 17. This case and its ramifications have been considered in detail by Hilda L. Smith, 'Women as Sextons and Electors: King's Bench and Precedent for Women's Citizenship', in Hilda L. Smith (ed.), *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 324-342.

<sup>45</sup> Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, Parliamentary Papers 1852-1853, Vol. lxxxviii Part II, pp. 687, 720 and 723.

<sup>47</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 May 1849.

underlining the important role played by property in opening up avenues of political opportunity for independent women.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 did not extend the benefits of the municipal franchise to women property-holders. Like its predecessor, the Great Reform Act, it too defined the citizen as male, thus extending the pattern of formal restriction on women's political rights into local as well as national institutions. Therefore, although it could be argued that opportunities did exist for women to participate in the sphere of formal politics on a local level, these were probably becoming fewer and more marginalised as the period progressed. However, we must remember that the formal world of electoral politics was not the only arena in which political identities could be developed or expressed. So far we have examined only three of Fraser's four 'layers' of politics: parochial and township; municipal; and parliamentary elections. One of the most important, and certainly the most visible, arenas for the political participation of women was that of political agitation. The following section takes a closer look at women's roles in such activity and examines the kinds of public identities that were made available to them. In particular, it is hoped to draw out the relationship between the practical work undertaken by women in political causes and the development of contemporary discourse about women and politics.

## 6.2: Political Agitation.

This section is intended to answer the questions of how far women were encouraged to participate in the political process via extra-parliamentary agitation and what kinds of public or political identities this participation encouraged. The emphasis will be on national campaigns aimed either at raising awareness of issues, such as the slavery campaigns after 1837, or at procuring definite legal or constitutional amendments, such as the campaign for repeal of the corn laws.<sup>49</sup> Although a large number of such movements competed for public

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<sup>48</sup> See Margaret Lancaster, *The Tempests of Broughton Hall* (Settle: J. W. Lambert Press, 1987), p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> Little has been published on the subject of women and the Anti-Corn Law League, despite the acknowledged importance of the campaign in the pre-history of the feminist movement. For example, Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain 1866-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1967), esp. p. 61; and Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, pp. 244-5. Rather more is known about women's anti-slavery activities: see

attention in Leeds during our period, the bulk of the following discussion centres on these two movements. There are a number of reasons for this, not least the scarcity of evidence concerning the participation of women in campaigns where they played a more peripheral role. Some campaigns where women did have a prominent part, such as Chartism or the agitation against the New Poor Law for instance, are not looked at in detail because they tended to attract women of a lower-middle class or working-class background, instead of the elite middle classes with whom this thesis is more intimately concerned.<sup>50</sup> More positively the anti-slavery and corn law campaigns pioneered the involvement of women in public debate, by carving out a niche for women in contemporary political thought and allowing them to develop peculiarly feminine techniques of agitation. It will be argued that such campaigns attracted women through the use of 'rational' argument, as well as appeals to pious sentiment, questioning Vernon's assumption that such discourses were only available to masculine audiences during this period. Finally, these campaigns had a broad national and even international significance, which brought women into contact with a wide circle of reformers and radicals at home and abroad.

In order to get an idea of the kinds of agitations which appealed to female public opinion over the period, it is instructive to begin by looking at the petitions and memorials which they signed. 1830 saw the first large scale female petitioning of Parliament, on the issue of West Indian slavery. Previously such petitions had been primarily masculine affairs. Clare Midgley has identified a number of possible factors which encouraged this campaign, including the rising tempo of anti-slavery effort, which was greatly assisted by the establishment of a number of independent female societies from 1825 onwards. Small-scale petitions had also been sent in from women and dissenting congregations in 1829 and 1830 on the subject of suttee, or Indian widow-burning. Finally the persecution of missionaries and converted slaves in the West Indies prompted a wave of anti-slavery petitions from non-

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especially L. and R. Billington, "A Burning Zeal for Righteousness": Women in the British Anti-slavery Movement, 1820-1860', in Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different*, 82-111; and Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*.

<sup>50</sup> Information on women's contribution to these campaigns may be found in Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London: Temple Smith, 1984), chapter 7; and 'Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics' in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds.), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 112-38; Malcolm Thomis and Jennifer Grimmet, *Women in Protest 1800-1850* (London etc.: Croom Helm, 1982), esp. chapter 6; David Jones, 'Women and Chartism', *History*, 68, 222 (1983), 1-21.

conformist chapels.<sup>51</sup> These petitions set an important precedent for future female action, although parliamentary petitions continued to be controversial for women. However, a less contentious alternative existed in the form of memorials directed to the Queen. For instance, such a memorial was appended to the petition from the Sunday School teachers of Bradford in favour of the factory acts in 1836 so that the women could add their names, 'which they were not allowed to do to parliamentary petitions'.<sup>52</sup>

Other campaigns and causes on which women petitioned in Leeds and elsewhere during our period included such issues as slavery, the New Poor Law, the corn laws, the introduction of laws on seduction, Papal Aggression and the marriage laws.<sup>53</sup> Going slightly beyond the end of our period, Ellen and Fanny Heaton collected signatures in Leeds for the earliest female parliamentary petition on women's suffrage in 1866.<sup>54</sup> It is noticeable from the wording of female petitions that women tended to approach such public questions from a distinctly feminine perspective. It seems fairly obvious that women would have a particular interest in subjects such as seduction and the marriage laws; however, what is most interesting is the way in which subjects which were not intrinsically gendered were interpreted in terms specifically designed to appeal to women. For instance, anti-slavery propaganda tended to concentrate on the supposedly corrosive effect of slavery on family life, especially of the tendency of families to be split up for sale to different masters, and on the opportunities the system provided for the abuse of slave women.<sup>55</sup> Similarly anti-Catholic petitions, such as that from the women of Liverpool in 1850, tended to concentrate on the perceived threat posed to Victorian family life by convents and the intrusive potential

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<sup>51</sup> Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 60.

<sup>52</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 March 1836.

<sup>53</sup> See the *Leeds Mercury* for 3 March 1838; 5 February 1842; 16 May 1846; 7 December 1850; 4 and 18 May 1833; 21 September 1850 and 7 May 1853 respectively.

<sup>54</sup> Ann Dingsdale, "'Generous and Lofty Sympathies': The Kensington Society, the 1866 Women's Suffrage Petition and the Development of Mid-Victorian Feminism" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Greenwich, December 1995), p. 127.

<sup>55</sup> See Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 93-103.

of the confessional.<sup>56</sup>

Although the wording of such petitions was usually worked out by a committee, the process of collecting signatures and sympathetic press reports ensured that the grievances concerned reached a wider audience. It is also probable that they helped to encourage an identification of shared community interests. This community could be relatively small, such as the congregation of a particular church or chapel. Many petitions during the period originated from dissenting communities, which often provided a valuable introduction to political questions for female members, particularly if the minister or the wider denomination took a particular interest in a subject. Good examples of this are the anti-slavery petitions from the Wesleyan Methodists in 1833, which carried 229,426 signatures from a *total* membership (male and female) of around 232,883.<sup>57</sup> Campaigners were quick to grasp the potential of such institutions and were often keen to hold meetings in chapels. Sydney Smith pioneered this approach for the Anti-Corn Law League, starting with two lectures at Haslingden Baptist chapel in November 1839. These meetings gave Smith access to a substantial female audience. The first was ‘graced by a fair proportion of ladies’, whilst at the second ‘a considerably greater proportion of the audience consisted of ladies’, who contributed generously to the subscription at the end of the meeting.<sup>58</sup> These lectures were followed the same month by meetings at other chapels in the area, and in the first week of January 1840 Smith lectured to an audience of around 2,000, including 500 women, at the Wesleyan Chapel in Hebden Bridge.<sup>59</sup> The same approach was taken by Walter Griffith in

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<sup>56</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 December 1850. For female opposition to Roman Catholic convents, see John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 269; also Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism*, pp. 207-9.

<sup>57</sup> Roger Anstey, ‘Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics, 1829-1833’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 2 (1981), 209-26, p. 222. However, these figures may well be misleading as they do not take into account the large percentage of non-members attending Methodist services. I am grateful to Edward Royle for pointing this out.

<sup>58</sup> *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 12 November 1839. This paragraph draws on the author’s paper ‘Domestic Economy and Political Agitation: Women and the Anti-Corn Law League’, in Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (eds.), *The Power of the Petticoat: Women in British Politics 1780-1860* (forthcoming).

<sup>59</sup> *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 7 January 1840. After this the practice became widespread.

Wales, where congregational support was such that it was often thought unnecessary to form separate anti-corn law associations.<sup>60</sup> For many women the chapel would have provided a first introduction to the world of politics, although the kinds of questions addressed would often have been restricted by the interests and aspirations of the male members.

Women quickly found ways of organising at the level of the civic community as well. The larger campaigns were particularly successful in encouraging this. In February 1842 the Leeds Anti-Corn Law memorial to the Queen gained 25,000 signatures in five days, including 6,000 from women. In Huddersfield, over 10,000 women signed a similar address.<sup>61</sup> Involvement in a wave of petitioning such as this, usually timed to coincide with attempts to move a particular motion or piece of legislation in Parliament, reinforced the feeling among petitioners and organisers that they were part of a great national movement for reform. The anti-slavery campaigners pioneered the use of door-to-door canvassing for petitioning, following the same pattern that the missionary societies had used to obtain cash subscriptions.<sup>62</sup> This may be contrasted with the usual practice of leaving petitions to be signed in public buildings or chapels. Women were therefore able to peruse and sign the document in a more private and domestic situation, and were spared a potentially troublesome journey. Like the use of polling-cards discussed in the previous section, such a device may actually have empowered women of the lower-middle and respectable working class, rather than excluding them from the political process.<sup>63</sup>

Petitions were an important means of shaping public opinion on extra-parliamentary

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<sup>60</sup> Ryland Wallace, 'Wales and the Anti-Corn Law League', *Welsh History Review* 13, 1 (1986), 1-23, pp. 8-9. Letters from Griffith to the League concerning these activities are reprinted with a short introduction in Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'The Anti-Corn Law Letters of Walter Griffith', *Bulletin Board of Celtic Studies*, XXVIII, 1 (1978), 95-128.

<sup>61</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 February 1842.

<sup>62</sup> Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 62-72.

<sup>63</sup> Although equally it meant that those collecting petitions could be more selective if they wanted. The Heatons concentrated on gathering the signatures of female heads of households, which was after all the group they intended to enfranchise.

issues and of keeping questions before the public eye.<sup>64</sup> Female petitions were very valuable in this respect and were encouraged where it seemed appropriate. However women also contributed to campaigns in a variety of other ways. Agitators like Richard Cobden were often mindful of the way in which female support could lend credence to their claims to be above the conflicts of mere party interest. More practically, women could help to swell the coffers by using the same fundraising techniques which they applied to local philanthropic ventures.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, women could play a role in long-term agitations, as the campaigns against slavery and the corn laws turned out to be, by oiling the wheels of social interaction through the medium of soirées and tea parties.

The history of women in the Anti-Corn Law League demonstrates their importance in all of these areas. Their financial potential was especially coveted from late 1841 onwards, when the League began to concentrate its efforts on procuring funds with which to finance election campaigns and a costly programme of voter registration.<sup>66</sup> When the League launched its £50,000 fund in 1842, women were called upon to canvass from door to door for subscriptions in the same manner as for missionary societies.<sup>67</sup> The annual report of the Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association reveals that, in 1843, the lady members had collected £47 6s. using the card subscription method.<sup>68</sup> Tea parties and soirées also kept the funds rolling in, while allowing free-traders to mix on a less formal basis and encouraging more women to become involved. The Manchester Tea Party in the Autumn of 1840 was the first deliberate attempt by the central committee of the League to attract a more feminine audience, although the attempt had been encouraged by spontaneous displays of feminine support in the past. These included attendance at Anti-Corn Law lectures and dinners, particularly the great Manchester banquet of January 1840. In

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<sup>64</sup> For the history and significance of petitioning in this period, see Colin Leys 'Petitioning in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Political Studies*, 3 (1955), 45-64.

<sup>65</sup> See Tyrrell, 'Woman's Mission'.

<sup>66</sup> Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838-46* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), pp. 163-87.

<sup>67</sup> *Anti-Bread Tax Circular*, 17 November 1842

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of the Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association, 8 March 1843. Calderdale Archives, HAS/B:11/1.



following years Manchester's example was followed throughout the country, as towns vied with one another to hold the most fashionable and successful tea parties and soirées.<sup>69</sup> Such events played a role directly analogous to that which they played in the world of charity and culture, by helping to strengthen social bonds between men and women from different towns and with differing religious affiliations, but who were united by similar social backgrounds and a belief in the benefits of free trade. The success of such initiatives was no doubt the reason why they were adopted by other campaigns. For example, the Anti-State Church Association held a soirée in Huddersfield in November 1851, while the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control held similar events in Halifax and Bradford in 1854.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps the greatest innovation made by the Anti-Corn Law League in respect to women was their adaptation of the bazaar into a vehicle for fundraising and propaganda for an overtly political object. Women had actively supported the Boston Anti-Slavery Bazaar since the 1830s, which had been instrumental in forging links between American abolitionists and their British counterparts.<sup>67</sup> However, there was no guarantee that an anti-corn law bazaar would have the same success. Writing to the secretary of the League in October 1841, Thomas Milner Gibson summed up the problem: 'If the object was to build a new Church or to propagate the Gospel in Foreign parts I should have no fear of getting the ladies in shoals to assist us, but what the "distinguished" matrons will say when we talk of an anti-corn law Bazaar, I can't say till I try'.<sup>68</sup>

In the event the first national League bazaar, at Manchester in February 1842, was a great success. According to Archibald Prentice, editor of the *Manchester Times* and historian of the League, one of its main purposes was 'to bring to friendly communication, and daily social intercourse, the friends of free trade, and especially the ladies who had taken

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<sup>69</sup> For examples from the West Riding see the *Leeds Mercury*, 27 March, 17 April, 24 April, 21 August, 16 October 1841; 1 January, 22 January, 5 February, 3 December, 10 December 1842; 21 January, 2 December 1843; 3 February 1844; 15 March 1845.

<sup>70</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 November 1851; 9 December 1854.

<sup>67</sup> Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, chapter 6, especially p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Milner Gibson to George Wilson, 29 October 1841. Manchester Central Library, Wilson Papers, M/20 (hereafter Wilson Papers).

a deep interest in the question as affecting the welfare of suffering millions'.<sup>69</sup> More practically, the aim was to break down the public conception that the League was merely a regional pressure group acting in the interests of a clique of self-interested mill owners, and to prove instead that it was a truly national movement commanding widespread support. The fact that the handsome sum of £10,000 was raised for the League funds was an added bonus.<sup>70</sup>

By the time of the Great Bazaar at Covent Garden in 1845, the League's efforts at national mobilisation had proceeded apace. Its news sheet, the *Anti-Bread Tax Circular*, had been reincarnated as *The League* and was now published in London, whilst the League itself was now holding huge weekly meetings at Covent Garden which were avidly attended by both sexes. However, it was the Great Bazaar which demonstrated the reach of the League beyond all reasonable doubt. It was claimed that over a thousand women throughout the country had been mobilised to provide fancy goods for the event.<sup>71</sup> Local committees were formed in order to purchase or obtain materials for sale. A further innovation was added, in that the bazaar was not only to be a sale of fancy goods, but was also a national exhibition of manufactures, a grander version of the exhibitions which had been such a characteristic vehicle for middle-class civic pride and culture in the industrial districts since the 1830s.<sup>72</sup> Crucially, each town contributing items to the bazaar had its own stalls, so that in effect it was to be a show case of the creativity and generosity of all parts of Britain, symbolising the unity of the nation in the cause of free trade. These stalls were presided over by women from the town in question. Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the complex and important interface between local and national pride and identity.

Local bazaar committees were formed in Leeds, Halifax, Bradford, Huddersfield and elsewhere. Naturally each town vied with the other to produce the most well appointed stall. To gain extra publicity and reinforce the sense of local achievement, the ladies

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<sup>69</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, 2 Vols. (1853: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968), i, p. 296.

<sup>70</sup> An account of the Manchester Bazaar may be found in *ibid.*, i, pp. 296-301.

<sup>71</sup> *Punch*, Volume 8, (1845), p. 216.

<sup>72</sup> See Toshio Kusamitsu, 'Great Exhibitions before 1851'. A full account of the Covent Garden Bazaar may be found in Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, ii, pp. 315-41.

committee arranged to exhibit the Leeds contributions at the Music Hall before their trip down to London.<sup>73</sup> The excitement of arriving in the metropolis must have been intense. Most of the stallholders had probably visited the capital before; few would ever have done so as the representatives of their home towns, or on such a unique and public occasion. Something of the atmosphere is captured in this extract from a letter by Mary Thompson to the *Bazaar Gazette*, which describes the scene at Covent Garden theatre the night before the opening:

On entering, I was bewildered. There were persons just arrived from all parts of England, running this way and that ... I then regretted not having enrolled myself. The scene was so exciting, that I felt inclined to run from the pit to the gallery, or to dive to the lowest depths beneath the stage; but in so doing I should only have fatigued myself and been in everybody's way.<sup>74</sup>

The sense of common identity which grew up between the stallholders quickly manifested itself in unexpected ways. In what was to become standard practice in large-scale bazaars, the price on the opening day had been set deliberately high, in order that the spectacle could be enjoyed in its pristine state by men and women of fashion and taste. The price was subsequently lowered, to enable those of a lower social class to witness an event which was ostensibly being held for their benefit, as well as to increase the takings on the door. However it seems that the price was set too low, for the women refused to work, blaming the crush in the theatre. The council of the League was forced to send a deputation to meet with the women, which agreed to raise the entrance price to half a crown. This had the effect of easing the crush but also excluded a large portion of the lower orders, allowing *Punch* to claim that the real reason for the 'strike' was that these low characters had been inconveniencing the ladies by their attentions.<sup>75</sup>

The Great Bazaar was a fascinating event, not least because it offered women a way of breaking out of their local circles and allowed them to appear on a national stage as representatives of a specifically middle-class political culture. The local bazaar committees that were created also made up to some extent for the general absence of independent female societies, equivalent to those which existed in the anti-slavery movement. It appears that this institutional space was occasionally used to develop ideas and policies quite

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<sup>73</sup> See the *Leeds Mercury*, 19 April and 3 May 1845.

<sup>74</sup> *Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, No. 8, (London, 1845), pp. 3-6.

<sup>75</sup> *Punch*, Volume 8, (1845), p. 234.

independently from the central committee of the League, as on the occasion in 1842 when the *Manchester Courier* derisively reported that the Manchester Ladies' Committee had passed a resolution to abstain from all produce carrying government duties until the corn laws were repealed.<sup>76</sup> This was an idea that had been tried by the rejuvenated Birmingham Political Union in 1837, who were themselves following in the footsteps of the various campaigns of abstention from slave-grown sugar from the 1790s onwards.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless it serves to demonstrate independence of thought and action on the part of the women Leaguers.<sup>78</sup>

These activities drew much opprobrium at the time from those who believed that, while it was perfectly possible for women to take part in a clear-cut moral and religious issue such as anti-slavery, debates over domestic economic policy were incompatible with respectable femininity. Alex Tyrrell has contended that the League was able to overcome such objections by a forceful propaganda campaign, which argued that, as the aim of the League was to provide cheap bread for the populace, such work was easily compatible with 'Woman's Mission' as a bearer of comfort to the oppressed. This message was broadcast particularly effectively via the speeches of George Thompson, the veteran anti-slavery campaigner, and the 'Letters of a Norwich Weaver Boy', which were published in *The League* as a way of encouraging women to contribute to the Great Bazaar.<sup>79</sup> Moreover the contemporary history of the League by Archibald Prentice, himself a prominent campaigner, placed great emphasis on the noble and moral aspirations of the female Leaguers.<sup>80</sup>

However, closer examination of the League periodicals and other sources reveals a more complex picture. Alongside appeals to philanthropic sentiment, women were being bombarded with 'rational' discourses emphasising the benefits to themselves and their families that would result from repeal of the corn laws. Moreover, there seemed to be a general opinion that women were fully capable of following quite tortuous arguments of

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<sup>76</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 19 February 1842.

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Hall, 'Private Persons versus Private Someones', pp. 161-2.

<sup>78</sup> Abstention was never an official League policy, and would probably have been rather difficult to carry out, not least because of the importance of tea in League activities.

<sup>79</sup> Tyrrell, 'Woman's Mission', p. 214.

<sup>80</sup> Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, especially i, pp. 170-3.

political economy, an opinion based on the rich tradition of female writing on the subject in the early nineteenth century by authors such as Jane Marcet, Margracia Loudon and Harriet Martineau. Having made references to these authors, an article in *The League* went on to argue that:

None are more interested ... than the women of the middle classes of Great Britain in the removal of obstructions to trade and industry, which ... make husbands anxious and careworn, drive sons and brothers to Australia or Canada, compel daughters to go out as governesses or dressmakers, and charge them with the burden of carrying out those painful and pinching economies which so grievously interfere with the comfort of everyday domestic life.<sup>81</sup>

In this extract common middle-class fears of poverty, family breakdown and loss of respectability are brought into play. Unlike 'Woman's Mission', which was based on an ideal of selflessness, these alternative discourses were designed to appeal to women through their experiences in the home as wives and mothers. There was therefore a tension between the desire to project women as acting from selfless motives, which placed them above the petty squabbles of sect and party, and the need to persuade women that the League's arguments were the correct ones and were in their own best interests. This was no small matter given the weight of intellectual and political support behind protectionism at the time, which has only recently been rediscovered by historians.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the difficulties are illustrated by the fact that some women remained unconvinced that political agitation was compatible with female gentility. Take for instance Lady Kinnaird, who wrote to the secretary of the League in 1842 to say 'I hardly think it right that ladies should take a prominent part in politics, and unfortunately the Corn Laws have now become a purely party question'.<sup>83</sup> Even the Norwich Weaver Boy's arguments were not universally accepted, as witnessed by a letter from 'Some of the Women of England', who claimed that many women who were in agreement with the object of the agitation withheld their support

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<sup>81</sup> *The League*, 12 April 1845. For further examples see Morgan, 'Domestic Economy and Political Agitation'.

<sup>82</sup> Angus Macintyre, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists: A Lost Cause?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 39 (1989), 145-65; Anna Gambles, 'Rethinking the Politics of Protection: Conservatism and the Corn Laws', *English Historical Review*, CXIII, (1998), 928-52. These historians owe much to the earlier insights of Derek Walker-Smith, *The Protectionist Case in the 1840s* (Oxford University Press, 1933).

<sup>83</sup> Lady Kinnaird to George Wilson, 1 October 1841. Wilson Papers, M/20.

because of the language of class hatred which the League frequently employed.<sup>84</sup>

Generally speaking, one of the achievements of the League was to make political economy into a more acceptable subject of public debate for women. In 1835 Charlotte Tonna, the Tory Ultra-Protestant writer, had been forced to abandon a series of articles on the subject in the *Christian Lady's Magazine*, possibly as a result of complaints from her readership, before she even got as far as free trade.<sup>85</sup> By contrast, in 1842 the League were able to reprint the sections of Loudon's *Philanthropic Economy* which dealt with the corn laws. In 1844 the *Leeds Mercury* commented on women's frustration that there was to be no female equivalent of the Leeds petition for an equalisation of duty on free and slave-grown sugar, 'an occasion where their feelings and their *taste* are so materially involved'.<sup>86</sup> This is particularly astonishing when it is remembered that women had been at the forefront of the campaigns to abstain from slave-grown produce, which was the same aim that the colonial duty had been intended to promote. As will be seen, the influence of these doctrines among the female reformers of Leeds had a profound effect on the future course of the anti-slavery movement in the town.

The Anti-Corn Law League was therefore an important means by which women could become involved in public-political debate, presenting a challenge to the model of the rational political citizen as essentially masculine. In particular, women working for the League were able to occupy a certain amount of autonomous space through the bazaar committees, which made up to an extent for the general absence of the kinds of independent female societies present in the anti-slavery movement. Finally, appeals to women's self-interest were also balanced by the legitimising discourse of 'Woman's Mission', which portrayed their intervention in a more idealised and less threatening light. It is interesting that campaigns such as this are absent from Vernon's thesis on the development of the

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<sup>84</sup> *The League*, 21 December 1844.

<sup>85</sup> See the *Christian Lady's Magazine*, IV, (July-December 1835), p. 91 for the last in the series. There is no direct explanation for the sudden break, although Tonna's series on politics was renamed and dramatically altered at the end of the year because 'We are denounced on all hands; by some, for meddling with politics in any way - by others, for so heading a paper which, they say, rarely contains anything properly reducible under that head'. *Christian Lady's Magazine*, IV, p. 558. It seems likely that the political economy series succumbed to similar pressure.

<sup>86</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 May 1844.

public sphere in the nineteenth century, although arguably the kind of blanket politicisation attempted by the League was never successfully repeated after 1850.

Access to independent institutional space was of great importance in the development of political identities. Unfortunately there was no independent female anti-slavery society in Leeds to compare with those of Birmingham, Glasgow or Darlington. This deficiency was somewhat supplied by the foundation of the Leeds Anti-Slavery Association in 1853, after the failure of an attempt by Maria Weston Chapman to encourage such an initiative in 1851. Chapman had been staying with the Luptons, Unitarian connections of Mary Estlin, the Bristol abolitionist and supporter of William Lloyd Garrison on whose behalf Chapman was touring Europe.<sup>87</sup> Harriet Lupton was one of the prime movers behind the new society, although until relatively recently the initiative had been assumed to lie with the society's president, the Quaker philanthropist Wilson Armistead. Armistead's involvement has been described elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> However, Clare Midgley has since drawn attention to Lupton's pivotal role and to the influence of American abolitionist Sarah Pugh, who inspired Lupton on her visit to Leeds in 1853.<sup>89</sup>

While Pugh was in town, news arrived of the Duchess of Sutherland's Stafford House Address 'From the Women of England to the Women of the United States'. This address tapped in to the sensation which was being caused by Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the widespread indignation over the Fugitive Slave Law, which decreed that escaped slaves discovered in the Northern States had to be returned to their owners in the South. Lupton and Pugh moved quickly to capitalise on the situation, organising a debate on the address in the Leeds Stock Exchange, with a view to reviving the idea of forming a women's Anti-Slavery Society. Guided by the two women, the meeting decided

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<sup>87</sup> Clare Taylor, *Women of the Anti-Slavery Movement: The Weston Sisters* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 81-2.

<sup>88</sup> Irene E. Goodyear, 'Wilson Armistead and the Leeds Anti-Slavery Movement', *Thoresby Society Publications*, LIV (1979), 113-29. See also Wilfred Allott, 'Wilson Armistead, 1819-1868', *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, 50 (1963), 158-63.

<sup>89</sup> Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 168-9. Some details of Pugh's visit to Leeds, taken from her diary, are contained in *Memorial of Sarah Pugh: A Tribute of Respect From Her Cousins* (Philadelphia, 1888), pp. 67-73. However, the major sources for this visit are a number of detailed letters from Pugh to Mary Estlin at the Dr Williams Library, London. Estlin Papers, 24.121.17-30.

to reject the form of the address proposed by Lord Shaftesbury, which had talked of gradual emancipation, in favour of an amendment stressing the need for immediate abolition.<sup>90</sup> Their efforts are described in a series of letters that Pugh wrote to Mary Estlin in Bristol, who had first introduced her to the Luptons of Leeds. These letters provide fascinating insights into the methods and difficulties involved in setting up a multi-denominational women's committee in a town such as Leeds, as well as giving interesting cameos of many local figures.<sup>91</sup>

While the meeting over the address turned out to be a great success, the task of forming a society proved troublesome. In particular, it was difficult to attract women from the Established Church to cooperate. Pugh, a Unitarian, seems to have been imbued with a number of prejudices concerning other denominations, especially against Quakers ('the despised sect') and 'Church-people'. While her Leeds experiences seemed to give her a more favourable impression of the former, she laid many of the complications in setting up the Anti-Slavery Association at the feet of the latter. Her main cause for complaint was the apparent lack of independence among Churchwomen. For instance, on 14 December 1852 she and Lupton traversed the town calling on women whom they believed would be sympathetic to getting up a committee to arrange a meeting concerning the Stafford House Address, and possibly to organise a society. Having already called on Mrs Guest, 'the animated & spirited wife of an Independent Minister', and Hannah Ford, Quaker cousin of the Darlington abolitionist Elizabeth Pease, they arrived at the house of 'Miss Totty [sic]':

whom they hoped would give her name to a call for a meeting of Ladies next week - but Miss Totty belongs to the Church - and believes in daughters being subject to their husbands even as Harriet said the prospective husband - and as these could not be immediately consulted - nothing was gained by our visit to her.<sup>92</sup>

The following day they called on a clergyman's wife 'who relied on St Paul to [prescribe] her duties - of course aiding this movement was not mentioned in the programme - and she

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<sup>90</sup> The local response to the address may be followed in the *Leeds Mercury*, 4 December and 18 December 1851; 1 January 1852.

<sup>91</sup> The address and the meeting are mentioned in Estlin Papers, 24.121.18-20.

<sup>92</sup> Sarah Pugh to Mary Estlin, 15 December 1852. Pugh pointed out in the margin that Tottie had once been a Unitarian. More information on Ford and her husband, Robert, may be found in June Hannam, *Isabella Ford* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), esp. chapter 1.



gives no assistance in this righteous cause that would involve publicity - tho' she good woman, will work for the bazaar'.

Despite the success of the meeting and the subsequent petition, the process of forming a society was slow. In part, this was due to Lupton's determination that the society should be independent of the so-called 'Broad Street Quakers' of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS). This reflected the influence of Pugh, who was a supporter of William Lloyd Garrison. The Garrisonians were unpopular amongst mainstream abolitionists at this time due to their boycotting of churches which supported slavery, which led to allegations of infidelity. In addition, memories still rankled of Garrison's protest over the barring of female delegates from taking their places at the great Anti-Slavery Convention of 1842 in London.<sup>93</sup> In America, rival groups sprang up, including the Rochester Anti-Slavery Society inspired by the ex-slave Frederick Douglass. During the 1850s a number of female societies were formed in the West Riding in response to a tour by Julia Griffiths, a member of the Rochester Society and an outspoken critic of Garrison.<sup>94</sup> In this climate the decision to embrace a Garrisonian position was a brave one, which placed the putative society in a politically controversial position within the anti-slavery movement as a whole.

This position was further complicated by the various religious and political allegiances of potential supporters. Pugh hinted at these difficulties in January 1853:

The prospect of a society to be formed here - is still in the future - so many various - if not conflicting elements to be reconciled. 'After a time' it will be accomplished. I doubt not - for if the few 'impracticables' do not yield somewhat, the others will go on without them. Harriet and Mrs Guest ... are the chief movers - and they are very earnest to form a Society not connected with Broad Street.<sup>95</sup>

One element in the desire for independence from Broad Street were concerns over the constitutional commitment of the BFASS to agitate for discriminatory duties on slave grown produce. An early letter from Harriet Lupton to the secretary of the BFASS cited this as

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<sup>93</sup> See Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 158-67.

<sup>94</sup> Societies were established at Halifax, Huddersfield and Wakefield: *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 5 (1857). 2 March, p. 72; 1 April, p. 78; 1 May, pp. 115-6.

<sup>95</sup> Pugh to Estlin, 26 January 1853.

one of the main reasons that the Leeds society had not affiliated in the first instance.<sup>96</sup> Pugh's letters confirm the influence of free-trade principles on the Luptons. In December 1842, she had complained to Estlin that Harriet's sister, Charlotte, was 'engrossed with Political Economy'.<sup>97</sup> By January, Pugh was expressing misgivings about the influence of this system of thought on Harriet herself:

Miss L. is very earnest in her way - but it is a way so different from ours that it is quite a study to me. She views it all from the 'political economy' standpoint - a point to be wisely considered, it may be, but so fully have I settled in my mind that the highest right - is the highest expediency - that these 'lower law' reasonings seem to me 'so of the earth earthly' that it is hard to give them due place. She is very earnest to have a society formed - but upon what principles [I] cannot exactly say - yes her principle would be right- but it seems to me there may be a want of something, I can hardly tell what, in the working of the machinery - But I will not anticipate difficulties.<sup>98</sup>

During a meeting in February attended by twelve ladies and three gentlemen, the objections of some of the 'impracticables' became more apparent. On this occasion the sticking point turned out not to be Garrison's alleged infidelity, a complaint raised by the Baptist minister Mr Brewer, but successfully smoothed out. Instead, in Pugh's words, 'Lo! A new element to cause delay. One of the Church Ladies - felt scruples about moving without the sanction of some of the clergy!!' None had been invited to the meeting, and Pugh's reason why this was so is revealing: 'thought it was no use to waste labour upon them - though this was not said aloud'. The result of this miscalculation was a fortnight's delay while a delegation waited on the clergy of the town.<sup>99</sup> By the time of Pugh's final letter on 22 February, the matter seemed no nearer resolution.<sup>100</sup>

Although the last pieces of the jigsaw are missing, it is clear that a society was

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<sup>96</sup> Harriet Lupton to the Secretary of the BFASS, 27 March 1853. Rhodes House, Oxford, Brit. Emp. S 18, MS C158/251. (Hereafter Anti-Slavery Papers). The offending article was rule IV:2, which committed the BFASS 'To recommend the use of free grown produce (as far as practicable) in preference to slave-grown; and to promote the adoption of fiscal regulations in favour of free labour'.

<sup>97</sup> Pugh to Estlin, 15 December 1852.

<sup>98</sup> Pugh to Estlin, 13 January 1852.

<sup>99</sup> Pugh to Estlin, 9 February 1853.

<sup>100</sup> Pugh to Estlin, 22 February 1853.

successfully created. However, Pugh's letters do throw some light on the question of why the society took the form it did. For rather than being purely a female association on the lines of those at Edinburgh and Bristol, the Leeds society was something of a unique experiment, being the only one in the country to apply in practice the Garrisonian principle of a mixed-sex committee.<sup>101</sup> In the society's first year, fourteen out of the first twenty committee members were women, while they also occupied most of the important committee posts. Lupton and Mrs Guest were secretaries, while Mrs Richardson was treasurer and Armistead's wife was librarian. Financially, the society was also overwhelmingly dependent on female support, with 110 female subscribers and donors out of 187 in 1853-4.<sup>102</sup> Pugh's letters suggest, though, that this experiment had not been intended from the outset, but was instead a response to the lack of enthusiasm amongst the women of the town for the society, or consensus over the principles on which it should be run.<sup>103</sup>

By the end of February a society had been formed, which set about raising funds for a testimonial to Harriet Beecher Stowe, to be presented to her when she visited Leeds the following month. Unfortunately, Stowe was in delicate health when she arrived in Leeds and requested that the public ceremonies be scaled down. In consequence, it was decided to present the testimonial at the house of Edward Baines, whose wife was a committee member of the Leeds Association and who was accommodating Stowe during her visit. Nevertheless the occasion was attended by the leading lights of Leeds society, providing yet another example of the artificiality of distinguishing between 'public' and 'private' space. True to form, Stowe did not address the assembled dignitaries in public, but rather relied on her brother to express her thanks before giving a short speech to the ladies in another room.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Howard Temperley, *British Anti-slavery 1833-1870* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 245; Goodyear, 'Wilson Armistead', p. 126.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120; *First Annual Report of the Leeds Anti-Slavery Association, March 1853-March 1854* (Leeds, 1854).

<sup>103</sup> See also Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 168.

<sup>104</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 March 1853; *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 1 (1853), 1 October; *First Annual Report of the Leeds Anti-Slavery Association*, pp. 7-8. Apart from Stowe and Pugh, Eliza Follen also addressed the Association during its lifetime. See Wilson Armistead to L. A. Chamerovzow, Secretary of the

Unfortunately, the lack of any complete annual reports after the first one makes it difficult to piece together many of the Leeds society's activities. However, using the one which survives, alongside the reports of meetings in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* and letters from Wilson Armistead and others, it is possible to build up a reasonable picture. In addition to high profile events like Stowe's visit, the Association worked to raise awareness about slavery in less public ways, such as persuading subscribers to take anti-slavery journals like the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* and by collecting a library of anti-slavery literature in Leeds.<sup>105</sup> One of Armistead's pet projects was to print a series of tracts on the subject in Leeds, with the aim of producing half a million copies. Some of these tracts dealt with the effect of slavery on women and family life and were designed to appeal to the maternal instincts of women.<sup>106</sup> Finally, the Association was active in promoting the Boston Bazaar. The first report contained a list of Leeds women who supported this, most of whom were also on the committee of the Association.<sup>107</sup>

Despite an increase of one in the overall numbers of women on the committee in 1854, it seems that female influence was already waning by this point. The total size of the committee was increased to twenty-six, half of whom were now men. Of the female officers, only Mrs Guest remained in her post from the previous year, while Mrs Scholefield replaced Mrs Richardson as Treasurer. Mary Armistead gave up the librarianship to her husband, who had ceded the presidency of the society to his maternal uncle, the Mayor, John Wilson. Perhaps the most serious blow was Harriet Lupton's replacement as secretary

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British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 14 February 1854. Anti-Slavery Papers, C27/56.

<sup>105</sup> The Library is mentioned in several letters from Armistead to Chamerovzow, 15 July and 28 August 1853 and 15 February 1854, Anti-Slavery Papers C27/51, 52, 57. See also the *First Annual Report of the Leeds Anti-Slavery Association*, p. 9. Armistead claimed that the Association had increased the circulation of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* in Leeds by over thirty a month: Armistead to Chamerovzow 24 August 1853, Anti-Slavery Papers C27/55.

<sup>106</sup> Wilson Armistead (ed.), *Liberty is the Birthright of All ... A series of Anti-Slavery Tracts of which Half a Million are now first issued by the Friends of the Negro* (Leeds, 1853). Leeds Central Library, 326.4/L51L. See especially Tracts 9-11, 39, 41, 50-1, 54 and 74. At least one of these, Tract 11, claimed female authorship.

<sup>107</sup> *First Annual Report of the Leeds Anti-Slavery Association*, p. 16.

by George Wailes, although she retained a place on the committee.<sup>108</sup> After this first report, information concerning the internal history of the society is even more scant than that concerning its public activities. It does appear, though, that Armistead took over as corresponding secretary the following year.<sup>109</sup> These changes suggest that what had been a female society with some male-support was giving way to one in which the sexes were to be seen as working in partnership. However, the fact that the main positions were being taken by men suggests that the partnership grew progressively unequal over time.

Due to lack of sources, the eventual fate of this society remains unclear. What is certain is that it was not 'replaced' by the Leeds Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society, as claimed by some historians, which by definition excluded women not only from its committee, but from membership as well.<sup>110</sup> In fact, the Young Men's Society co-existed happily with the Association for a number of years. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* continued to carry accounts of the annual meetings and extracts of the annual reports of both societies until 1859. In that year it was reported that the two societies intended to unite in issuing an appeal from 'British Christians to their American Brethren', but there was no talk of constitutional merger.<sup>111</sup> There is no reason to suppose that women were ever officially excluded from membership of the original society or its committee, although, as we have seen, it appears that women were effectively being squeezed out of the more important committee posts from an early stage. Indeed, there is evidence that women remained active in the society until at least 1858, when it was announced at the annual meeting that a box of contributions had been forwarded to the Boston Bazaar. The same year Mrs Wilson Armistead and Mrs Joseph Lupton were named as collectors in a circular from the committee of the Boston Ladies' Association, after the annual bazaar had been discontinued

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* and Goodyear, 'Wilson Armistead', p. 120. Ellen Heaton appears to have been one of the new recruits.

<sup>109</sup> This is Armistead's title in a letter to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 3 (1855), pp. 261-2.

<sup>110</sup> See Goodyear, 'Wilson Armistead', p. 120. In making this error, Goodyear is following Temperley, *British Anti-slavery*, p. 245.

<sup>111</sup> *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 7 (1859), p. 168. D. G. Wright explains that the new society 'supplemented' the old in his article 'Leeds Politics and the American Civil War', *Northern History* IX, (1974), 96-122, p. 119.

in favour of a system of direct cash donation.<sup>112</sup>

The history of the Leeds Anti-Slavery Association demonstrates that even taking a stand on such a seemingly straightforward moral issue as that of slavery meant negotiating between a number of interrelated political and ideological standpoints. The situation was complicated by the legacy of the political struggles of the 1840s, both in the anti-slavery movement between Garrison and his detractors, and in Britain between the Anti-Corn Law League and theirs. The latter provided an important political education for a number of British women; it also raised awareness of political economy amongst women like Charlotte and Harriet Lupton, colouring their views on other issues. The Association also demonstrates the influence of particular religious networks, local and national, in facilitating female political action. The Luptons' connections with Unitarians in Bristol were especially important, but the influence of Quakers, Baptists and Independents on the committee was also notable. These networks were often strengthened by kinship ties. As well as Harriet Lupton, the first committee included her cousin Joseph Lupton and his wife Eliza. Pugh's letters also reveal the important auxiliary role played by members of Harriet's circle who did not appear on the committee, including her sisters Charlotte and Jane and Jane's husband, the Reverend Charles Wicksteed.<sup>113</sup> Finally, despite the obvious tensions, the Leeds society provided a lesson in cooperation not only between women of different confessions, but also between the sexes.

During the period, women increasingly took the blueprint of voluntary organisation, with which they were familiar from their philanthropic activities, and adapted it for the exigencies of political campaigning. This gave them the space to develop their own political discourses based around a recognition of gender difference which encouraged a group identification *as women*. Additionally, women were able to mobilise using religious and kinship networks. These networks were built upon by the anti-slavery societies and, in particular, by the Anti-Corn Law League, which used its bazaars to encourage wider national networks based primarily on politics rather than religion. This was an example which the peace movement attempted to follow with the League of Brotherhood Bazaar of 1850. Again, ladies' committees were set up around the country, in the hope 'that in this

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<sup>112</sup> *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 6 (1858), pp. 116-7 and 240.

<sup>113</sup> These family relationships may be untangled through reference to C. A. Lupton, *The Lupton Family in Leeds* (Ripon: William Harrison, 1965).

way new and powerful ties may be established, binding the different countries of the world in relations of mutual friendship and alliance'.<sup>114</sup> The importance of women's networks in other agitations, particularly in the ultra-protestant campaigns against government interference in education, or in favour of disestablishment, has largely been ignored, although it is probable that women played an important, if less public, role.<sup>115</sup>

However, there were limits to the part that women were allowed to take in political movements. Although the Leeds Anti-Slavery Association demonstrated a willingness by some men to take the efforts of women in the public realm seriously, even here the advantages were not long enjoyed. As we have seen in the previous chapter in relation to philanthropic enterprises, such recognition often had to be fought for; those conflicts often helped to sharpen female identities and lead them to a greater consciousness of what it was they were struggling for. Nevertheless it is clear that women's political activities took place in a milieu which often denied their claims to a broader political citizenship. Most importantly, female activities were presented to the general public via the mainstream press, whose editors and audience shared a particular view of femininity in the public sphere.

These limitations support Vernon's assertion that women's attendance at political meetings, often facilitated by the use of selective ticketing in order to exclude undesirables, cannot be construed as an admission of women to political citizenship, because women were expected to behave decorously on such occasions and were usually denied full participation in public business.<sup>116</sup> However, Vernon ignores the fact that women did make independent and even unsolicited contributions to public political debate during this period, by holding their own meetings, adopting petitions, writing articles and raising funds. Such activities were not ignored by the press. Instead, conventions concerning the nature of women's political activities placed limitations on the way in which women's actions were represented, allowing those representations to be manipulated to suit the agenda of a particular

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<sup>114</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 16 March 1850. This movement was in many ways the successor to the Anti-Corn Law campaign, and Mrs Cobden was one of the patronesses of the bazaar.

<sup>115</sup> For instance, 800 people, 'of whom a considerable proportion seemed to be highly respectable females', attended the Anti-State Church Association meeting against the Maynooth grant at the London Tavern in October 1847. *Leeds Mercury*, 23 October 1847. Few historians have mentioned this involvement, although see Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism*, p. 190.

<sup>116</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 225-9.

newspaper or its editor. Frustratingly, such accounts are often the only indicators as to the motivations behind women's activities. However, explaining how and why this manipulation occurred presents a fuller picture of the conditions under which women entered the world of politics and how this was interpreted by others. It is the purpose of the next section to examine some of these issues in order to add to historical understanding of the way in which the public sphere was gendered during the period.

### **6.3: The Press and the Politics of Gender.**

James Vernon has drawn attention to the complex relationship between the press and the process by which, in his view, politics became reconstituted as the concern of individual men in the privacy of their own homes, instead of being a collective experience acted out in the streets, at monster meetings, through the songs of ballad singers and by participating in the rich pageantry surrounding early nineteenth-century elections. Through privileging 'high' over 'low' politics, for instance by excluding dialect speeches and only printing those translated into the Queen's English, and by denigrating lower class speakers, the middle-class press tried to redefine the public sphere by appealing to the reason and intellect of a respectable, independent, male audience.<sup>117</sup> This account is woven into Vernon's wider thesis that the nineteenth century saw the gradual withdrawal of politics from the informal popular public arena to become the preserve of a more formalised version of the public sphere, where hierarchical and rigidly organised party machines dominated the political landscape and competed for the vote of the private, rational (and male) citizen.

However, the increasing use of print as a political medium did not automatically exclude women. Vernon's use of the raw statistics of female literacy in order to support such a contention is misleading, again because it ignores the crucial issue of class. It also ignores the importance of female education within certain religious traditions, particularly Quakerism and Unitarianism, both of which played an important role in political agitations during the period. Charlotte Tonna was an example of an Anglican Ultra-Protestant, whose political opinions were shaped by reading newspapers from an early age, and who went on

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 3, esp. pp. 146-7.



to write and edit a number of politico-religious tracts and periodicals.<sup>118</sup> Newspapers such as the *Leeds Mercury* and *Intelligencer* were quite aware of the importance of a female readership, carrying advertisements directed at women and giving increasing column space to reviews and articles on fashion with women in mind.<sup>119</sup> It seems difficult to imagine that all women confined themselves solely to those sections of the newspaper, particularly as they were often interspersed with local news and political comment.

This section will be devoted to analysing the way in which female political initiatives and activities were described by the mainstream press. Where applicable, comparison will be made of the way in which self-consciously 'middle-class' newspapers such as the *Leeds Mercury* interpreted these activities and the way in which they were portrayed by more radical and counter-cultural publications, such as the *Northern Star*. It will be argued that the middle-class newspapers did indeed portray women's political involvement in a relatively restrictive fashion, placing more emphasis on appearance and respectability than on what women were actually trying to say. However, it is also important to remember that although the newspapers could shape the interpretation of women's actions, the very fact that there were actions to be reported was in itself a significant reminder that the public political sphere, although heavily gendered, did not exclude women entirely.

Unsurprisingly, the accounts of female political initiatives in these newspapers varied greatly depending on the political views of the paper itself. Women supporting measures of liberal reform, such as repeal of the corn laws, were more likely to be encouraged in the pages of the *Leeds Mercury* than in the *Intelligencer*. However, unlike differing interpretations of the activities of supposedly rational male subjects, which tended to concentrate on a man's reputation and the relative merits of his political views, debates over women's political activities tended to focus on the suitability of such activity for the female sex in the first instance. Hostile commentators who opposed their cause usually construed such actions as degenerate and unfeminine. These attacks in turn spawned even more elaborate defences from the more sympathetic elements of the press, which became paeans to the feminine qualities of the women involved. What emerged from these dialogues was a particular construction of femininity in the public political sphere which may be contrasted

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<sup>118</sup> Monica Fryckstedt, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and the *Christian Lady's Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, XIV, 2 (1981), 43-51, esp. p. 44.

<sup>119</sup> From 1832 the *Mercury* devoted a page to literary and miscellaneous articles 'agreeable to ladies'. *Leeds Mercury*, 14 July 1832.

with the pretence of rational and reasoned debate that characterised newspaper reports of male activities. In other words, instead of concentrating on what the women were saying, reports tended to look at how they were saying it and how best their words and actions could be construed in order to fit in with the political views of the newspaper.

One may argue that such a process is common to public debate. However, the modern manipulation of short 'sound-bites' bears little resemblance to the way in which political meetings and debates were recorded in the nineteenth century, when newspapers often reproduced speeches verbatim so that readers could, in theory, judge speakers by their own words. Significantly, the speeches at women's meetings were rarely recorded in the mainstream press, although that was not always true of the more radical publications.<sup>120</sup> Where contentious issues were raised, as over the Stafford House Address in December 1852, only the ultimate decision was recorded rather than the arguments for and against.<sup>121</sup> This allowed reporters to give the impression that decisions were the result of consensus rather than conflict, but also gave credence to the idea that women based their political decisions on emotion rather than reason. This construction may be contrasted with the appeals to feminine reason which we have already seen from journals dedicated to particular causes, such as the anti-corn law movement. These periodicals addressed a specific audience already sympathetic to the campaign, while publications like the *Leeds Intelligencer* and the *Leeds Mercury* had to be more circumspect, catering as they did for a broader and more mainstream readership.

Friendly newspapers therefore tended to concentrate on those 'feminine' qualities which could be beneficially applied to the public sphere, for the greater good of the whole community. It has already been noted that appeals to feminine philanthropy utilised the language of civic virtue, and women's political activity was often described in the same terms. Indeed, the most effective way of sugaring the pill of female political action was often to dress it up in the guise of philanthropy. During the campaign against the Fugitive Slave Law, for example, the *Mercury* reported: 'We are glad to observe a movement in Leeds on the question of American Slavery ... We doubt not the important and humane object sought to be accomplished will meet with a hearty response from our philanthropic

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<sup>120</sup> See below, p. 207.

<sup>121</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 1 January 1853.

townswomen.’<sup>122</sup> Such views were reasonably uncontroversial, as the anti-slavery movement rested on a broad consensus of middle-class opinion by this time. However, this was definitely not the case with subjects such as the Anti-Corn Law League. Even here, though, as Alex Tyrrell has demonstrated, the language of philanthropy played an increasingly important part in the League’s attempts to cast itself as a great social movement which stood up for the rights of the poor, rather than being a selfish pressure group acting on behalf of a narrow class of industrialists, intent on lowering wages.<sup>123</sup> We have already seen that the League’s adoption of the bazaar as a means of fundraising greatly facilitated this process, and it should come as no surprise that the *Mercury* could describe the Manchester Bazaar of 1842 as being ‘intended to promote one of the most charitable and benevolent as well as just objects, namely the cheapening of bread to a whole population’.<sup>124</sup> Female efforts were therefore portrayed as primarily philanthropic, even when they involved interfering in such hotly contested political terrain as the government’s domestic policy.

In addition, there was an automatic tendency for the activities of a few female activists to be universalised, so that they came to stand for the whole of the ‘Ladies of Leeds’, or even ‘The Women of England’. This device had many immediate advantages, including the maintenance of the fiction that women were above party politics. The portrayal of women in the aggregate also made it more difficult for individual activists to be singled out for attack. At the same time, it underlined essential differences of interpretation between male and female activity in the public sphere. The former was portrayed as the pursuit of private, independent gentlemen acting in the service of their borough, county or nation and ultimately holding their own unique combination of views on the issues of the day. Women however did not represent themselves only, but acted in the name of their sex.

Such rhetoric was not always as inclusive as it appeared. For instance, the ‘Women of England’ was often shorthand for middle-class women, although it did prove important in such instances as the collection of signatures for female petitions, which were signed by women from across the social scale. In fact, petitions also symbolised the difference between men and women in the public sphere. Leaving aside those submitted by religious congregations, female petitions organised on a city-wide level tended to assume the

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<sup>122</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 18 December 1852.

<sup>123</sup> Tyrrell, ‘Woman’s Mission’, pp. 215-7.

<sup>124</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 4 December 1841.

existence of a coherent female constituency with a particular interest in certain public debates. By contrast, all-male petitions were never advertised as such, but instead placed the signatories in categories which implicitly emphasised masculine independence, such as 'the inhabitants of Leeds', the 'electors of Leeds', the 'ratepayers of Leeds' and so on.<sup>125</sup>

The identification of women with the town or nation as a whole, rather than with a particular group or faction within it, was something which found further expression in the civic rituals and ceremonies by which Leeds and other Victorian towns began to construct narratives of themselves during the mid-nineteenth century. The place of women within these narratives will form the subject of the next chapter. For current purposes, the significance of these identities is that they encouraged sympathetic newspapers to apply to women terms such as 'patriotic' and 'heroic' which were normally associated with the activities of male citizens. The implicit acceptance of a particular civic role for women in matters of political debate often emerged in response to hostile criticism of women's activities from other sections of the press. This was certainly the case before the Anti-Corn Law League bazaar at Manchester in 1842, when the *Mercury* leapt to the defence of the Leeds women involved; not least because the critical assault had been launched from the pages of its Tory rival, the *Intelligencer*. On this occasion, the ardent defence of the 'respectable, patriotic and actively benevolent ladies' was mixed with a personal assault on the 'dealer of moonshine philosophy, made up of fag-ends of O'Connorite Socialist speeches,' who had 'cast through the medium of the *Intelligencer*, his vile calumnies, and poured out his impertinent rebukes upon those excellent females'.<sup>126</sup>

Such an assault was one way of turning adverse criticism of women in the public sphere on its head, by questioning the gentlemanly credentials of men who publicly castigated women for their actions. Not only was this intended to invoke a sense of shame in the original critic, it also helped to further exalt the actions of the women themselves, who had demonstrated their willingness to expose themselves to such calumny on behalf of a cause they believed in. An example of this in action may be found in the *Leeds Mercury* for

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<sup>125</sup> A typical example is the petition against the corn laws from 'The Inhabitants of the Borough of Leeds', presented to the House of Commons by Edward Baines senior, 15 January 1839: *Appendix to the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions, 1839*, App. 27. The only complete set of these reports is in the House of Commons Library.

<sup>126</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 January 1842. Unfortunately, the offending article has not been discovered, either in the *Intelligencer* or any other local paper.

6 February 1836. In printing the 'Letter to the Ladies of Great Britain by the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association of New England' in 1836, the *Mercury* referred to the authors as 'the accomplished, pious, and heroic President and Secretary, who so admirably conducted their meeting, when surrounded by the *gentlemen savages* of Boston'.<sup>127</sup> The image of courageous women holding a meeting while surrounded by a howling mob of supposedly respectable men was too good to pass up as a means of exciting sympathy from English women, as well as demonstrating the demoralising effects of the institution of slavery which had reduced the so-called gentlemen of Boston to the state of savages. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the usually masculine trait of heroism with the 'feminine' attributes of accomplishment and piety could be taken as proof that the Boston women had not been unsexed by their actions, but rather further ennobled.

The *Mercury* also used such taunts in more subtle and positive ways, by presenting the patriotic and selfless actions of women as examples to be followed and, if possible, surpassed by the gentlemen of the town. This has already been noted in the case of the Cotton Famine Relief Fund; however, it was a tactic which could also be applied to more political purposes. For instance, reporting on the preparations for the Covent Garden Bazaar in May 1845 the *Mercury* announced:

We understand that the ladies of Leeds have far outshone the gentlemen in their exertions and contributions to the Bazaar; while the gentlemen of Bradford, on the other hand, have quite taken the lead of their fair co-adjutors [*sic*], and we hope that with such an example before them, the gentlemen of Leeds will yet do something to efface the little disgrace that may attach to them on this score.<sup>128</sup>

Here female effort is being used as the bench-mark for male achievement, although it is clearly assumed that to put in less effort than the women amounted to failure. For good measure the superior performance of Bradford, Leeds' greatest rival as the cultural and commercial centre of the West Riding, is thrown in as an extra incentive. Significantly the implication is that the Bradford merchants were doing more than their Leeds counterparts, rather than that the women were doing less.

So far we have concentrated on those campaigns which the *Mercury* broadly supported. By contrast, women who openly supported campaigns for which the *Mercury*

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 February 1836.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 May 1845.

had little sympathy could expect to find themselves denigrated in its pages, however much their own partisans sought to portray their actions as equal in philanthropic and patriotic intention to anything that the liberal women of Leeds could do. Such attacks concentrated on questioning the gentility of ladies by the ironic use of italics or inverted commas, or on imputations of sexual licentiousness (often these went together). Ironically the tendency of women to approach political questions from a specifically feminine point of view left them open to innuendo of this kind from inventive journalists; so also did the habit of collective identification through the common use of terms such as 'sisters' and 'daughters' to refer to women generally rather than to specific family relationships.

The way that this worked in practice may be demonstrated by reference to the Elland women's meeting and the subsequent petition against the Poor Law Amendment Act. This meeting was reported in three newspapers published in Leeds at the time: the Chartist *Northern Star*, the Whig/Liberal *Leeds Mercury* and the radical *Leeds Times*. There are interesting differences in the way that these three papers reported the event which warrant a detailed investigation. The sympathetic *Northern Star*, a paper closely identified with the anti-Poor Law movement, actually printed extracts of the speeches made on the occasion, which was unusual in the case of female meetings. The speakers, Susan Fearnly, Mrs Grassby and Mrs Hanson, portrayed their actions as those of wronged women trying to protect themselves and their families against a tyrannical and uncaring legislature. In particular, the law was castigated as an assault on family life which would separate women from their children and wives from husbands, thereby preventing them from performing their natural duties to either.<sup>129</sup> Criticism was also levelled at the assault on feminine dignity that the law represented, as women were expected to submit to having their hair cut off and to wearing 'grogam gowns of shoddy and paste'.<sup>130</sup>

The *Leeds Times* was also sympathetic to the aims of the Elland women, and although it did not print extracts from the speeches, it gave brief summaries of what was said and actually printed the petition adopted by the meeting in full. The correspondent pointed out that the arguments given were directed 'to the hearts and reason' of the auditory, and praised Grassby for describing the effect of the new poor law 'in a manner which would

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<sup>129</sup> For the use of discourses of domesticity by Chartist women, see Michelle De Larrabeiti, 'Conspicuous before the world: the political rhetoric of the Chartist women', in Yeo (ed.), *Radical Femininity*, 106-26.

<sup>130</sup> *Northern Star*, 17 February 1838.

have done honour to a great senator'. However, the way in which the correspondent attempted to put across the mood of the meeting concentrated on the *emotional* response of the women to the speeches, thereby emphasising the role of the sex of the audience in shaping that response. Grassby's speech for instance 'made tears flow so that there was scarcely a dry cheek in the meeting'; while Hanson's

melted the hearts and drew forth floods of tears; and ... the meeting seemed ready to act upon a pledge which their eloquence had elicited, viz - to take vengeance upon all who support this oppressive law; many names were mentioned, and many suggestions thrown out, such as tarring and feathering &c.<sup>131</sup>

Significantly, it was this more sensationalist account of the meeting which provided the ammunition for a correspondent of the *Leeds Mercury* to attack the Elland petition. The comparatively moderate account in the *Northern Star* was not mentioned, possibly because the author was not aware of it, but equally it is difficult to see how it could have been construed as being so offensive to female dignity. In the context of maintaining respectability, the virtue of the *Northern Star's* decision not to print the petition in full also becomes apparent. The basis of the *Mercury's* assault was not that the women were misinformed about the possible effects of the law, nor was there any attempt to appeal to them on the grounds of reason. Instead a vicious personal attack was launched on the women from the point of view that only those with low moral characters had anything to fear from the law. The letter, signed 'Johannis', illustrates so well the tactics which could be employed to denigrate the characters of female agitators that it is worth quoting at length:

I am not aware whether or not you have noticed a late meeting of the *Ladies of Elland*, got up under the auspices of Messrs. Pitkethley and Co.,<sup>132</sup> to petition her Majesty on the subject of the New Poor Law, but I am sure you will agree with me that that petition may serve as an example for the ladies of Great Britain, and a model of purity of diction and sentiment. The *Ladies* ... were so affected and worked up at the extreme wickedness of the New Poor Law, that "their tears flowed until there was scarcely a dry cheek in the meeting." - It must, indeed, have been a sight most piteous to behold - melting hearts and flowing tears! No wonder that "*tarring and feathering*" filled their minds and fired their gentle souls! The *Ladies*, in their anxious wish to secure the rights and privileges of their hopeful offspring, informed her Majesty that the law in

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<sup>131</sup> *Leeds Times*, 17 February 1838.

<sup>132</sup> Lawrence Pitkethley, radical woollen draper of Huddersfield. See Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 163-4.

question “is monstrously unjust to *our daughters*, particularly in the *bastardy clauses*; for it will of *necessity*, drive them to commit suicide and *child murder!*”

Now is this not a dainty dish  
To set before a Queen!

A virgin Queen too! O, rare Elland! What a land of purity it must be. It would indeed be lamentable if these *virtuous daughters* should have any restraint placed upon their wantonness by a wicked and heartless Act of Parliament.<sup>133</sup>

Johannis ironically ascribes to the Elland women the title of ‘Ladies’, before proceeding to attack their claim to such a description. This is despite the fact that the reports in the *Leeds Times* and the *Northern Star* never use the word, preferring ‘females’ instead, which usually denoted a mixed or lower class group of women.<sup>134</sup> The same wording is used in the petition, which is addressed from ‘the *Females* of Elland’.<sup>135</sup> In Johannis’ account, ‘Ladies’ is not used in the restricted context of a class label, but instead as an ideal of purity. The implication throughout is that the Elland petitioners lack such purity, and hence have something to fear from the Act which virtuous women do not. Focussing on the petition’s mention of the bastardy clauses of the Act, the correspondent deliberately ignores the convention that collective pronouns in such petitions were intended to refer to women generally rather than specific individuals or groups. Instead he construes the phrase ‘our daughters’ as referring specifically to the daughters of the petitioners, and proceeds to use the implication to question the morality of women who would prefer not to have their daughters’ sexuality shackled by law. Finally, aspersions are cast on the moral purity of the village of Elland itself for having played host to such a movement, no doubt as a way of mobilising peer pressure from other inhabitants against further demonstrations of this sort.

It is little wonder that relatively few women were prepared to expose themselves to this kind of appalling attack. Mrs Grassby consequently found herself compelled to make a statement in the *Northern Star* in order to refute the scandalous stories that were

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<sup>133</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 3 March 1838.

<sup>134</sup> In fact the Elland women appear to have been the wives and relations of lower middle-class artisans and tradesmen. For example, Elizabeth Hanson was married to the radical shoemaker Abram Hanson. Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 182-4.

<sup>135</sup> *Leeds Times*, 17 February 1838, original emphasis.



circulating about her marital affairs.<sup>136</sup> However, women were not necessarily safe from sexual innuendo even when their cause was an acceptable one. For example the correspondent who reported on the memorial of the ‘Women of Liverpool’ to the Queen regarding the Papal Aggression episode of 1850, could not resist observing that ‘The “practice of auricular confession” seems to shock the ladies more than all the other terrors of Popery’, thus implying that the women were more concerned about the idea of having to reveal the secrets of the boudoir to a priest, than about the dangers of idolatry, the belief in transubstantiation, and the sundry other ‘superstitions’ which were routinely denounced by press and pulpit throughout this period.<sup>137</sup>

The mainstream press therefore tended to interpret women’s public activities in ways which did not fundamentally threaten the construction of ‘woman’ as a-political and above party. However, by the same token, women were depicted in terms which emphasised their patriotism and civic virtue. Although one has to agree with Vernon that such idealised constructions could often marginalise women from the ‘masculine’ sphere of reasoned public debate, nevertheless such discourses did open up to women a domain of public activity which they were not slow to exploit. The very fact that the *Mercury* reported female petitions, bazaars and meetings is proof that its editors were alive to the existence of a female ‘public opinion’, which could profitably be enlisted in the support of a range of causes. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the geographical spread of such reports, which were not confined to West Riding initiatives. The reporting of petitions on subjects from Papal Aggression to slavery from Liverpool, Edinburgh, Darlington and elsewhere was calculated to have a galvanising effect on local women. This was particularly the case over the corn law and slavery agitations, where the *Mercury* saw itself as being in the vanguard of public opinion. Against this, it must be remembered that reports of such female political initiatives were very infrequent. Women were far more likely to be mentioned as forming part of the audience at political events and other public occasions than as active participants.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that women were still present at the margins of formal politics, despite increasing attempts to construct the political subject as a private, masculine citizen. However, women’s formal political rights were rarely mentioned.

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<sup>136</sup> Thomis and Grimmet, *Women in Protest*, p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 December 1850.

Instead, discourse tended to focus on the more intangible realm of 'female influence'. Although limiting in theory, in practice this idea could be mobilised in order to justify and encourage female involvement in extra-parliamentary campaigning. Women themselves played an active role in this process; pushing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and defending their right to interfere, adapting the language of philanthropy to the political sphere. Their activities were taken as a sign of an increasingly vocal and coherent 'female' public. The sympathetic press played a vital role in portraying these activities as respectable and worthy ones for women to engage in. However, notions of respectability were a double edged sword, which newspaper correspondents could use to silence women whose views differed from their own.

The following chapter will examine the ways in which the ideals of female influence and civic virtue were used to shape women's participation in civic rituals and ceremonies. It will be argued that these ideals allowed contemporary observers to interpret women's presence in ways which preserved the idea of their physical and moral purity, despite the political overtones of many of these events. In turn, women became an important element in the narrative of these events, as the custodians of civic virtue and the guardians of fair, free and rational debate.

## CHAPTER 7

### Civic Landscape and Ritual

This chapter examines the relationship between women and the civic landscape of Leeds, including the important public buildings and spaces, along with the whole panoply of ritual and ceremony associated with them. It takes as its starting point the idea developed by Clifford Geertz, that public rituals are the 'stories cultures tell about themselves'.<sup>1</sup> The technique of 'thick description', pioneered by Geertz as a means of interpreting such rituals, has increasingly attracted historians of nineteenth-century culture such as James Epstein, Frank O'Gorman and James Vernon.<sup>2</sup> Focussing mainly on political culture, they examine the way in which symbolic forms interacted with written and verbal modes of communication in the formation of social identities and trace the pervasive presence of ritual throughout public life. For example, Epstein examines the pedigrees of radical symbols such as the liberty cap, as well as analysing the rituals associated with radical dining practices. O'Gorman concentrates on the rituals associated with late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century elections, arguing that these were a way of involving the whole populace in the political process despite the small size of the actual electorate. Finally, Vernon takes a more holistic approach to the symbolism of political culture, including analysis of the creation and uses of 'sacred' civic spaces. His approach suggests that the physical environment itself became an important site for the conveying of social and political

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the essays 'Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture', and 'Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', both in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies'; Vernon, *Politics and the People*; and James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford University Press, 1994). For similar approaches applied to different periods or national contexts see Mary Ryan, 'The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order' in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (University of California Press, 1989), 131-53; and Peter Borsay, 'All the town's a stage: urban ritual and ceremony 1660-1800', in Peter Clark (ed.), *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600-1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 228-58. The importance of visual media in ritual and symbolism have been examined in Paul Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), 144-62; and Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 108-16.

messages, in the form of imposing public buildings and monuments. In consequence, public spaces themselves were very much part of the performance during public rituals and celebrations. Vernon summarizes his argument thus:

The civic landscape represented the town to itself through public buildings and amenities, street names, statues and memorials - it articulated not only the competing narratives of the community's historical purpose and destiny, but also the roles of different individuals and groups within those narratives.<sup>3</sup>

These approaches have proved invaluable in drawing attention to the wealth of nineteenth-century rituals and their importance in the construction of coherent community narratives. However, most of these histories pay little attention to the particular roles assigned to women during such performances. For instance, O'Gorman's essay makes no reference to women at all. Vernon does address the subject of women and gender, but only to insist that women were either excluded completely from participation, or were merely part of undifferentiated crowds of onlookers. Although he goes on to credit these crowds with an important role in interpreting and subverting public rituals and in shaping the speeches of public men, women have no independent part in this. Yet closer examination reveals that women did help to shape civic landscapes, being present as allegorical symbols in processions, on buildings and in sculpture. They also contributed actively to the rituals and ceremonies of voluntary societies, both religious and secular.<sup>4</sup> Little attempt has so far been made to interpret the meanings of such activity for the formation of female identities, or its impact on social life more generally. The first aim of this chapter is therefore to recover the participation of women in public ritual, while accepting that much of this participation was peripheral to the broader civic context.

It is difficult to deny that women rarely appeared as participants in the major civic rituals which were such showcases of local pride and which privileged the activities of elite men. For instance, it is significant that female friendly societies were rarely, if ever, invited to swell the ranks of civic processions, a privilege routinely extended to the larger male societies. This denied them an important means of developing and expressing a civic identity. However, despite this women often formed an important part of the audiences at

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<sup>3</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> The participation of women in American ceremonies has been explored in Ryan, *Women In Public*, esp. chapter 1. See also Ryan, 'The American Parade', pp. 147-52.

such events. Moreover, the presence of particular groups of women in prominent and appropriate vantage points was frequently pointed out in contemporary accounts. These women were almost always characterised as 'ladies', a significant term as we have already suggested, and were usually described in ways that emphasised their contribution to the visual spectacle of processions and other ceremonies through their colourful and vivacious appearance. The presence of women at such events therefore made narrative sense to contemporaries and should not be dismissed lightly. The second aim of this chapter is to explain the incorporation of respectable women in the audience into the narrative structure of public life, while assessing the influence this had on the kinds of public identities available to women. It will be argued that by understanding the way in which gender roles were represented and reinforced on such occasions, we can further illuminate the social construction of gender in nineteenth-century society as a whole. This will be related back to the overriding concern of this thesis with the relationship between class, gender and citizenship in the nineteenth-century town.

In order to accomplish these aims, the chapter has been broken down into two sections. The first examines the way in which ideals of citizenship were constructed as essentially masculine through civic ceremonies from which women were largely excluded. It then proceeds to look at ritual 'counter-publics' where some women were able to develop public identities and lay claim to public space. Finally, it addresses the question of class, arguing that lower-class women were more likely publicly to express their social identities in this way, while women of the middle and upper classes might express their membership of the civic community less obtrusively, by providing financial support for civic projects for example. The second section seeks to explain the important presence of women as privileged members of the audience at public ceremonies by examining their place in the community narratives developed by contemporary observers. In particular, it will be argued that chivalric discourses allowed women to appear in contested public-political spaces by emphasising the purifying effect of 'Woman' on the corrupting sphere of politics. The way in which this discourse mediated gender relations in the public sphere will be analysed through a consideration of some of the ways in which the ideal was subverted or challenged by those who envisaged a more interventionist role for women in public life.

## 7.1: Civic Ritual and Citizenship.

Through symbolism we recognise who are the powerful and who are the weak, and through the manipulation of symbols the powerful reinforce their authority.<sup>5</sup>

For David Kertzer, it is symbolism which distinguishes ritual performance from mere custom or habit.<sup>6</sup> Through the ritual demonstration of power, ruling figures and groups publicly legitimate their authority. James Vernon has noted the need for such strategies in mid nineteenth-century towns following nearly half a century of change in the institutions of local government. Hence the 1850s and 1860s were a golden age of civic building and improvement, during which 'Local ruling elites sought to endow their institutions with new identities by inventing civic traditions which appropriated a selective past in order to emphasise the progress of the present'.<sup>7</sup>

In Leeds, nothing symbolised this quest for legitimacy and belief in progress more than the new town hall, constructed between 1853 and 1858.<sup>8</sup> This building represented the wisdom, wealth and ambition of both the town and of the reformed corporation, who had taken the decision to pay for it out of the rates after the failure to form a joint stock company to manage the venture. It was an important statement of local pride, being deliberately larger than St George's Hall in Bradford which was inaugurated in 1853. It was also intended to enhance the claim of Leeds to be the 'real capital of the West Riding' by providing it with the facilities to become an Assize town.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the town hall symbolised the triumph of a particular view of the ruling middle class as a dynamic, cultured and morally superior social group with a duty to encourage their social inferiors to improve themselves economically, morally and intellectually. The hopes that these improvers vested in the town hall were summed up by J. D. Heaton, whose travels on the continent had convinced him

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<sup>5</sup> David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> The history of the Town Hall project may be found in Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, chapter 4. See also Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall'.

<sup>9</sup> These claims were made explicit in the loyal address to the Queen on its opening, which is quoted in Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp. 173-4.

of the immense moral and cultural value of such a building. Heaton believed that, 'if a noble municipal palace ... were to be erected in their hitherto squalid and unbeautiful town. it would become a practical admonition to the populace of the value of beauty and art, and in course of time men would learn to live up to it'.<sup>10</sup>

However, should these arguments appear too deterministic, it should be remembered that Heaton's views were by no means universal. They were contested by a council faction, largely composed of smaller tradesmen, who believed that their task as local administrators was primarily to limit the burden on middle-class rate-payers. This entailed opposing prestige projects which had little immediate practical or economic benefit. The struggle between these two opposing philosophies took place on many fronts, effectively hampering many initiatives within the borough, especially those relating to improvements in the water supply and sanitation and the construction of a new workhouse.<sup>11</sup> However, things came to a head over the issue of the town hall tower. Not a feature of the original design, the tower was suggested by Sir Charles Barry, who had judged the competition for a design for the hall. The so-called 'Philistines' opposed the idea because it would have no practical value whatsoever, its purpose being wholly decorative. The decision to build the tower was therefore one of the greatest victories of the improvers, and the whole episode has been seen by later historians as a milestone in the history of Victorian civic pride.<sup>12</sup>

One of the reasons that the triumph of the improvers appeared so complete, shaping the view of the Victorian era handed down to posterity, was the way in which they used public rituals and ceremonies to gain the symbolic approval of the whole community.<sup>13</sup> These events helped to foster the impression of public involvement in civic projects, while putting pressure on local political figures to publicly bury their differences over schemes that were in fact extremely controversial. This compliance was more or less guaranteed when the town hall was officially inaugurated by Queen Victoria in 1858, as support for the new building became inextricably bound up with loyalty to the Crown. As the *Leeds Mercury*

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>11</sup> An overview of projects for civic improvement in Leeds may be found in Derek Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Oxford University Press, 1979), chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> These conflicts are traced in Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 48-9.

proudly boasted, the Queen's visit meant that 'this old and busy seat of industry becomes in a sense the seat of Empire'.<sup>14</sup> Thus party strife was subsumed by local and national pride.

A similar effect had been achieved on earlier occasions, such as the unveiling of the statue to Sir Robert Peel in 1852. The statue was situated at the junction of Park Row and Infirmary street, adjacent to the Court House and the Coloured Cloth Hall, both significant locations in the administrative, economic and political life of the town. The *Mercury* estimated that 30-40,000 people turned out to witness the unveiling ceremony, which was followed by cold collation at the Music Hall for the gentlemen of the town.<sup>15</sup> The Peel statue represented a conscious attempt to stake a place for Leeds in the wider affairs of the nation. Unlike other towns which erected memorials, such as Bury or Tamworth, Leeds had no direct connection with Peel to speak of. However, in common with many other manufacturing towns, Leeds was eager to claim for itself a statesman who epitomised the triumph of the national interest above mere party considerations.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as the man who had eventually repealed the corn laws, Peel was also a potent symbol of reconciliation between rich and poor, landowners and manufacturers. By honouring Peel, the town's elite were associating themselves with qualities of fairness, competence and selflessness, and symbolising their hope for an end to the social and political struggles which had convulsed the town for over two decades.

The following year, the foundation stone of the Town Hall was laid with even greater pomp and ceremony. A huge procession was held which included the committees of the Philosophical and Literary Societies, the friendly societies, representatives of business and the professions, local government officials and distinguished guests. After the stone was laid there were numerous speeches, followed by a civic banquet for the elite. Provision was also made to entertain the populace at large, with numerous bands playing on Woodhouse

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<sup>14</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 September 1858.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 August 1852.

<sup>16</sup> The history of this statue is described by Melanie Stafford, 'Peel's Statue in Leeds - A First for Town and Country', *Leeds Art Calendar*, 90 (1982), 4-11. For an analysis of Peel's posthumous reputation, as well as descriptions of other Peel memorials, see Donald Read, *Peel and the Victorians* (Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 294-301.



Moor to an audience estimated at 60,000 people.<sup>17</sup>

The crowds which turned out on such occasions suggest that the ruling elite were successful in attracting popular support for their ideals of civic virtue and improvement. This popular involvement went further than just turning out as spectators. During the Queen's visit for example, local people went to great lengths to decorate their districts and could read the descriptions of their handiwork in the press.<sup>18</sup> Large numbers of ordinary people could even get involved in official processions. In particular, the members of friendly societies often marched on civic occasions, as they did for the laying of the foundation stone of the town hall in 1853.<sup>19</sup> However, there were definite limits to this popular involvement in public ceremony and civic improvement, which reflected the cultural views and aspirations of those who organised them. Nowhere was this clearer than at the opening ceremony of the town hall, which took place within the hall itself in front of an exclusive audience of the town's elite with their honoured guests, thereby excluding the vast majority of the populace. Even those who marched in their thousands in civic processions were members of organisations that reflected the model of working-class respectability and self-help which influential elements of the middle class were anxious to promote. This greater respectability and self-discipline allowed them to be coopted by the elite to help keep order at major public events like the Queen's visit.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the marchers were universally male. Although female friendly societies had their own tradition of marching, this was not translated into the wider sphere of civic ceremonial.

Mary Ryan has argued that women's exclusion from similar events in the United States reflected their wider exclusion from political citizenship and the belief that their social role was primarily domestic rather than public.<sup>21</sup> One might be tempted to challenge the validity of this conclusion given the presence of disenfranchised males in the friendly societies which marched in England, where unlike the northern United States there was no

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<sup>17</sup> The foundation stone ceremony and its attendant festivities are described in Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance the descriptions in the *Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 September 1858.

<sup>19</sup> Programmes for this event, including the order of march, are in the West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds. Leeds Town Hall, LC/TC:A.

<sup>20</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 173.

<sup>21</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, esp. pp. 27-8; 'The American Parade', pp. 149-50.

universal manhood suffrage. However, it was a common argument among liberals and civic improvers after the Reform Act that by thrift and hard work any man might raise himself to the franchise. It was precisely these values of self-help and self-discipline that the friendly societies represented. Each man in the procession was therefore a potential voter in municipal, borough or county elections, even if he was currently disqualified by age or lack of property. Women on the other hand had no such prospect. No matter how hard they worked, they would never be included in the 'official' political nation, therefore making it possible to deny them this important means of expressing their civic citizenship.

This is not to say that women never took part in public rituals. Radical movements offered an important platform to both men and women to develop counter-publics with their own rituals and traditions, particularly during the first half of the century. Some of these rituals have been explored by James Epstein, who notes the importance of women's participation in seminal events such as the Peterloo Massacre and the subsequent memorialisation of it.<sup>22</sup> Although contemporary reports of radical processions and meetings rarely mentioned women specifically, there is no doubt that they constituted a large proportion of the participants. The violence at Peterloo meant that the women present were ensured a privileged place in radical hagiography, albeit as the innocent victims of state repression. Much was made of their presence in the crowd, which observers cited as evidence of the peaceful intentions of the marchers.<sup>23</sup> It is quite possible however, that little would have been known about their involvement if the Yeomanry had not interfered. We should not assume that, just because women were not mentioned in contemporary accounts of marches and processions, they were not there. It is difficult to believe, for example, that the large party which marched in May 1832 from the Coloured Cloth Hall at Leeds to the West Riding reform meeting at Wakefield was composed entirely of men. However, the *Leeds Mercury* made no mention of women as being part of the group, or of the estimated 170,000 people who attended the meeting itself.<sup>24</sup>

The reform agitation and the Chartist movement continued the importance of women in the line of march largely because they were community-based movements, unlike

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<sup>22</sup> Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 86-92, 160.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196, n. 78.

<sup>24</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 26 May 1832.

subsequent working-class movements which centred around particular trades or factories.<sup>25</sup> Women could therefore march to proclaim their place at the heart of such communities. Often, as we have seen, such activities were frowned upon by the respectable middle-class newspapers. However, occasionally the political aspirations of working-class radicals and middle-class reformers brought them together in uneasy alliance, which meant that lower class women could be praised for parading their political preferences in public. Such a convergence occurred after the Reform Act. The threat to property and accepted gender-roles that the preceding agitation had raised was now abated, and for a brief time lower class women were praised for parading their political preferences in public, as long as they were seen to do so in a suitably decorous fashion. For example, the *Leeds Mercury* reported a number of processions in celebration of the passing of the Act that involved women, although it was careful to add a veneer of respectability to the proceedings. At Rastrick, for instance, it was recorded that '400 females partook of tea at this place, in celebration of reform. After they had paraded through the town with a band of music, they were accompanied to the different inns in four companies, where they spent the day with the greatest decorum and enjoyment.'<sup>26</sup> The theme of respectability is obvious in this account. The acceptable female activity of tea-drinking is made the focus of the celebration rather than the procession itself, while the final sentence emphasises the decorous nature of their celebrations, thereby offsetting the possible association of the inn with drinking and licentiousness.

For a time, this tolerance extended to female supporters at post-reform elections and the celebrations that followed. During the Leeds campaign of 1832, for instance, women accompanied the procession of the Liberal candidates to the out-township of Bramley:

One of the most interesting parts of the procession was composed of comely and healthy young women who seemed to participate heartily in the triumph of the occasion, and who bore a flag with the following modest and appropriate inscription - 'We also would show our humble attachment to liberal principles'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For a useful summary, see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume II: The Rise of Classes and Nation States* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 June 1832.

<sup>27</sup> *The Preliminary Proceedings Relative to the First Election of Representatives for the Borough of Leeds*, p. 37.

Again this short account dwells much on respectable attributes, notably youth, health, beauty and modesty. At Rothwell on 25 May 1835, 3-400 'females of the middle and humbler classes partook of tea in the same apartment. After tea they walked in procession through the village, displaying the orange favours with which each female was neatly and tastefully adorned, accompanied with banners.' The emphasis on 'respectable' attributes such as neatness and good taste, implied not only the respectability of the women, but also of the political party they were supporting. Significantly, however, we are not told what slogans adorned the banners on this occasion. Unlike the Bramley procession, it could be that their sentiments were not deemed sufficiently 'appropriate', providing an important reminder that women were more often seen than heard during this period.

The general lack of sources makes it difficult to assess the extent to which women took part in the processions associated with election ceremonies. Such events were often large, heterogeneous and relatively informal. This was especially true of the processions to the hustings at county elections, which consisted of large numbers of electors and non-electors. On these occasions it must have seemed like the whole countryside was on the march, especially in a county as large as Yorkshire. From 1830 onwards the West Riding had its own representation, shifting the destination of the marches from York to Wakefield. Again women were rarely mentioned, despite evidence that they were usually present at the hustings in large numbers. The distances and numbers involved meant that there was no disciplined order of march, unlike for instance the short processions of triumphal candidates after the return of the poll.<sup>28</sup> This probably allowed women to take more of a part.

It is difficult to gauge the effect of changes in the culture of nineteenth-century politics on these demonstrations of female political identity. Sometimes these changes were the result of technological developments. For instance, marching between towns declined as the major centres were joined by rail links.<sup>29</sup> Instead, shorter and more tightly organised processions marched from the point of arrival to the site of the hustings, although the press continued to mention the visual effect of the smaller processions which arrived from

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<sup>28</sup> The Baines Papers contain a pamphlet detailing the order of march for just such a procession from the election of 1834. Baines Papers, Box 80.

<sup>29</sup> Special election trains were laid on for the first time in the West Riding at the election of 1841. *Leeds Mercury*, 3 July 1841.

outlying villages with no rail-links.<sup>30</sup> Legal changes also had an impact. The Reform Act's creation of new borough seats in the Riding meant that opportunities to participate in the processions at borough elections actually increased, at least for a time. However, from the 1830s onwards attempts were increasingly made to limit the extent of popular involvement on such occasions: It is noticeable that the *Leeds Mercury* makes no mention of female marches during the 1840s and 1850s, while the presence of ordinary women (though not of 'ladies') at the hustings was being criticised as early as 1834.<sup>31</sup> Vernon has also pointed out the effect of anti-corruption legislation on curbing much of the popular side of election rituals from the 1860s onwards.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the emergence of Chartism by the end of the 1830s made radical marching less acceptable, by men or women.

In contrast, though perhaps for similar reasons, reports of working-class men and women marching to celebrate less threatening identities become more widespread in the middle-class press from the late 1830s onwards. The existence of groups such as the Old Malton Female Interment Society, who marched annually from the village school room to St Mary's Church, provided reassurance to middle-class readers that working-class women were accepting and acting on principles of self-help that were increasingly becoming associated with 'middle-class values'.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the seemingly obligatory church services on such occasions reinforced the image of a respectable and conformist working-class. However, some of these processions utilised public sites with more secular connotations. In Bradford for instance, the annual tea-drinking of the Bradford Female Friendly Society involved a procession from the Piece Hall to the Parish church. Afterwards, they walked to the Temperance Hall for tea.<sup>34</sup> Rather than merely walking through the town, this procession linked three important points in the civic landscape, representing industry, religion and sobriety respectively. Thus women simultaneously asserted their right to make use of these buildings, while appropriating positive values which signified their respectability as women and as members of a particular voluntary group.

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<sup>30</sup> See for instance the *Leeds Mercury*, Extraordinary Issue, 4 February 1846.

<sup>31</sup> See below, p. 227.

<sup>32</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>33</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 18 July 1846.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 June 1838.

The use of the Temperance Hall has multiple significance in this respect. Male friendly societies were often criticised for their lavish entertainments, especially those involving alcohol.<sup>35</sup> The need to maintain feminine respectability therefore coincided with the need to assure observers and members alike of the society's moral standards. Furthermore, as well as being out of bounds for respectable women in public, alcohol was seen as a major factor in the reduction of many working-class families to poverty. Thus the taking of tea in the Temperance Hall could act as a further reminder of the dangers of drink to the stability of the family economy, especially given that temperance campaigners often claimed that women were the main victims of their husbands' intemperance. Becoming a member of a friendly society could therefore be presented as a way in which women could protect themselves from such unfortunate consequences and gain a limited degree of independence.

Such processions also carried important messages about class relationships. The female members of friendly societies, like their male counterparts, were usually drawn from the lower-middle or working classes. However, they were often accompanied on their walks by more affluent middle-class women, who sponsored these societies as part of their philanthropic activities. During processions, these social differences were sign-posted by the wearing of sashes or ribbons which distinguished middle-class stewardesses from ordinary members of the society. For example, stewardesses of the York Female Friendly Society wore purple ribbons on their annual march to the Minster, silently informing observers that their presence was a sign of benevolence rather than necessity.<sup>36</sup> In less urbanised areas, these occasions could be used to symbolise the persistence of other forms of social stratification. At Halton in Cheshire, the annual ladies' walk was led by Lady Brooke of Norton Priory, symbolising a traditional social hierarchy as well as female solidarity. Photographs of the Halton procession demonstrate the carnival atmosphere that prevailed on such occasions. A local brass band was employed as part of the festivities, while the men of the village turned out in force to witness it.<sup>37</sup> Events like this allowed women a rare opportunity to show themselves off in public, while the procession itself could

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<sup>35</sup> P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England 1815-1875* (Manchester University Press, 1961), pp. 117-9.

<sup>36</sup> A list of stewardesses provided with special coloured bows for the 1848 procession is to be found in the York City Archive, along with a note of thanks to Mr Markham for his sermon at York Minster. YL/FF 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> H. F. Starkey, *Old Runcom* (Halton Borough Council, 1992), pp. 142-3.

become a major way of attracting new members, or of maintaining the interest of old ones. The York society procession seems to have been introduced for precisely these reasons as early as 1794.<sup>38</sup>

Despite being prevented from enhancing and displaying a civic identity through 'official' civic rituals, women were therefore able to utilise public space to assert class, political and gender identities, either as part of a counter-public associated with radical political movements, or as members of self-help societies. At the same time, it seems that such activities were out of bounds for women who wished to be described as 'ladies', unless as part of some charitable commitment. However, middle-class women could and did play an important role in projects of civic improvement, investing heavily (both symbolically and literally) in public buildings and amenities. Although many of the debates over civic improvements actually took place within council meetings, which were a male preserve, such conflicts were merely the political manifestation of discussions that were taking place throughout Leeds society at the time. Much of this thesis has been spent arguing that women invested a great deal of time and energy in developing the idea of the middle-class 'civilising mission', especially through their philanthropic activities and their support of the town's cultural institutions. Institutions such as the Philosophical and Literary Society were used extensively as ways of disseminating ideas about civic improvements, with J. D. Heaton giving a paper on the subject in 1854.<sup>39</sup> Women would not therefore be ignorant of these debates, nor would they be devoid of strong opinions upon them one way or the other.

More practically, women often made significant contributions to the cost of such projects. As the Leeds Town Hall was paid for out of rates, women's contribution in this instance is obvious - although it was hardly voluntary. On the other hand, women also contributed to buildings built by subscription, or raised funds in other ways. For instance, women subscribed towards the opening of the Bradford Exchange buildings in 1829, while one (who was unnamed) paid for the furnishings of one of its principal meeting rooms. These contributions earned them a 'bumper toast' at the dinner marking the building's

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<sup>38</sup> Mrs Edwin Gray, *A Woman's Friendly Society* (York, 1902), pp. 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> 'Journal of John Deakin Heaton', i, p. 119. See also Reid, *Memoir of J. D. Heaton*, pp. 123-4.

inauguration.<sup>40</sup> Bazaars also gave women the opportunity to contribute to such projects, as to so much else. The most obvious examples were the Leeds Institute Bazaars of 1859 and 1868. These helped to pay for new premises on Cookridge Street, within sight of the Town Hall. Women were also frequently associated with the support of public parks and gardens. It has already been noted that the gardens of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society had been paid for by a special women's subscription fund.<sup>41</sup> Finally, committees of women associated with various charitable and political causes often met in public buildings, challenging a straightforward distinction between 'masculine' public and 'feminine' private space.

Moreover, women did have at least a symbolic role in the civic landscape, appearing in the form of statues representing civic and regional virtues or characteristics. For instance, the tympanum over the main entrance of Leeds Town Hall shows a group of five female figures, the central figure of Leeds encouraging the Fine Arts, Music, the Sciences and Industry.<sup>42</sup> Mary Ryan has noted that the exclusion of women from political citizenship meant that female figures were perfect vehicles for such unifying apolitical messages.<sup>43</sup> It has also been argued that, while women were made the vessels of such virtues, it required men to give them practical form. One way in which this could be done was by incorporating allegorical female figures into civic statues representing male public figures.<sup>44</sup> This was the case at Manchester, where the statue of Peel unveiled in 1853 was accompanied by two female figures, one representing trade and industry and the other the arts and sciences.<sup>45</sup> In other circumstances, the mere association with a building in which public business was carried out by men was enough to convey the message that, although women were bearers of virtue in its purest form, for it to achieve practical results it must be applied in the public

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<sup>40</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 6 February 1830.

<sup>41</sup> See above, Chapter 3.

<sup>42</sup> Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 182 and 202.

<sup>43</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: the Allegory of the Female Form* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985), p 69.

<sup>45</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 15 October 1853.



sphere by men.<sup>46</sup>

Public ceremonial space was therefore overwhelmingly defined as masculine by the elite, who used it to convey messages about their own power and ideals of civic citizenship. As Vernon has pointed out, the narratives represented by street names, public buildings and statues were those of 'male' achievements in government, art, science and industry.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, conscious efforts were being made to limit access to these sites to the respectable middle classes, even while making a show of popular involvement. The opening of the town hall provides a graphic example of these double standards. However, despite being excluded from civic processions or from any meaningful role in the performance of public ritual, women were able to find a role in movements for civic improvement through their financial support and membership of middle-class cultural societies. Moreover, they were never fully excluded from public space. The most common and most visible part played by women in public during the nineteenth century was in the audience at public events. The significance of this role will be assessed in the following section, which will examine the way in which class and gender relations were explained and constructed through the narratives of civic ritual.

## **7.2: Public Ritual and the Narratives of Gender.**

The aim of this section is to interpret the particular role assigned to women in the narrative structure of public rituals. It will begin by establishing that respectable middle-class women, as opposed to the lower classes, did in fact play a distinct and officially approved part on such occasions, despite their exclusion from the main action. Most cultural and women's historians have either ignored the importance of this role, or have merely used it to support their own arguments about the exclusion of women from the public political sphere, without attempting to analyse in any detail the interpretations placed upon it by contemporary observers. The remainder of the section will attempt just such an analysis, stressing the importance of such events for the public construction of class and gender roles. This will be followed by a brief consideration of some of the ways in which these official constructions of female participation were challenged or subverted by contemporaries.

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<sup>46</sup> Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, pp. 68-9.

<sup>47</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 49.

We will begin by examining one contemporary attempt to use public ritual to define the 'rational' citizen. The nomination for the Leeds Borough election of 1834 was something of an experiment for the town's Liberals. It has already been noted that they had abandoned the practice of the personal canvass in favour of more recognisably 'modern' meetings of the electorate in 1832, thus doing away with an important component of election ritual and significantly limiting popular involvement in the political process.<sup>48</sup> In 1834 this practice was continued, but this time the Liberals went even further in their attempts to make the public political sphere the domain of rational voters, rather than the idle and uneducated. They did this by entirely abandoning the practice of having bands and banners as part of their procession to the hustings, in complete contrast to the Tories, who employed eight bands for the occasion. Unfortunately the experiment failed, insofar as the Tories gathered a larger crowd by employing traditional techniques, enabling them to win the show of hands at the nomination. Such a humiliation at a time of Liberal dominance in the borough forced a return to the traditional paraphernalia at the next Leeds election.<sup>49</sup> However, in 1834 the *Mercury* took some comfort from the fact that:

The friends of Mr Baines having determined to employ no such means of drawing together and exciting the Electors and inhabitants, adhered firmly to their resolution, nor did they or any of their friends exhibit, during any part of the proceedings, even a solitary flag. They were also entirely without music whilst the numerous bands of their opponents enabled them to collect great crowds of idle persons (including a very large proportion of women and children), in addition to the real supporters of their cause.<sup>50</sup>

By contrast, the *Mercury* boasted that Baines' train, estimated at 10-12,000 persons who marched only with Orange cards in their hats as badges of allegiance, had been brought together 'by principle alone, and without the use of any one of the allurements which have usually been thought necessary at Elections, and which were employed with such extravagant profusion by the opposite party.'

These extracts appear to present a very clear picture of the kinds of people that the Liberals believed should be attending the hustings: specifically disciplined, principled, adult male voters. The women who attended were merely 'idle persons', with no business at such

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<sup>48</sup> See O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies', *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 10 January 1835.

<sup>50</sup> The account quoted here and subsequently (unless otherwise noted) may be found in the *Leeds Mercury*, 15 February 1834.

an event. However, one telling sentence describing the scene at the hustings suggests that there were important exceptions to this general rule, as the correspondent noted with approval that ‘Carriages of every kind, full of ladies, decked in the rival colours, were drawn up in all parts of the ground’. Just as they were admitted to indoor election meetings, there was no suggestion here that privileged middle-class women should be excluded from attending political ceremonies simply because of their sex, unlike their lower-class counterparts whose presence was found to be undesirable.<sup>51</sup> This implies that a model based on the progressive exclusion of all women from the scene of public ceremony is inadequate, even though we have already established that women were largely precluded from taking an active part in the rites themselves. Instead, an explanation is required for why women of a certain social status were not just tolerated in their attendance at such events, but were even actively welcomed and encouraged as long as they remained within the boundaries set out for them.

The grounds for this assertion come from numerous accounts of elections, public meetings, processions and other forms of public ceremonial where the presence of women, or more accurately ‘ladies’, was pointed out with great satisfaction by observers. This is despite the fact that women actively proclaimed their party allegiances at elections through the wearing of favours, or by decorating their carriages with party colours. During the poll for the representation of the West Riding in 1834, it was noted that ‘the windows of the different houses presented their usual interesting pictures, the fair sex, who each displayed their partiality in favour of the Blue or the Yellow’.<sup>52</sup> A similar scene was painted three years later at the Hustings in Bradford, where ‘The windows of the houses in the streets through which the processions respectively passed, were thronged with elegantly dressed ladies, who displayed the colour of their favourite candidates, and manifested their approbation of each by waving of handkerchiefs and ribands’.<sup>53</sup> It must be remembered that this was the newspaper which castigated the obnoxious ‘Tory principles’ which had motivated certain women in Manchester to blockade the shops of liberal voters in 1832; yet

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<sup>51</sup> See above, Chapter 6.1. In 1834, women also attended the second and subsequent election meetings, which were held in the Leeds Commercial Buildings: *Leeds Mercury*, 8 February 1834.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 May 1834.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 July 1837.

here it was proudly describing the female supporters of both parties. There was clearly an important difference between passively displaying one's preference in public and more active political intervention.

Women were also present as spectators at other public political events, particularly public meetings and dinners. They were not always expected on such occasions, as may be inferred from the apparent surprise with which women were noted at early meetings of the Anti-Corn Law League. At a meeting in Sheffield in 1840 the *Leeds Mercury* correspondent 'observed, what is not usual on the discussion of questions of this nature, a considerable number of ladies'.<sup>54</sup> In other circumstances women had to fight for their right to be admitted. Catherine Hall gives the example of the women who attended the dinner at Birmingham Town Hall in celebration of the town's incorporation in February 1839. Hall quotes the *Birmingham Journal* as saying that their presence was the result of 'many pressing applications'. Additionally, the first idea for accommodating them would have placed them in a position where they would not have been able to hear or see what was going on. However, the *Journal* also noted that when this became apparent, the ladies' sharp response prompted a hasty rethink of the seating arrangements. Hall goes on to quote the toast to 'the ladies' which was given by the diners, which stressed the apolitical nature of women, concluding that:

Those 'elegantly dressed ladies' could not have been told more clearly that they did not occupy the same political sphere as men. Those 'fit and proper persons' who had voted both nationally and locally and stood as candidates in Parliamentary and council elections relied on their women to soften, bless and purify their imperfect, and political, natures.<sup>55</sup>

There is more to this incident than Hall allows however. She does not comment on

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 October 1840.

<sup>55</sup> The key part of the toast runs as follows: 'We sometimes forget in the animosity of our contentions, that differ as we will, we are still of the same kin and of the same country ... united by one common bond of mutual dependence and of mutual interest ... Woman's gentle nature never forgets it. She knows no hatred, nor will let us know any, if we but appeal to her. Let us then, gentlemen, whenever we feel our hearts hardening towards each other, or towards our political opponents, let us fly for counsel to those whose province and whose dearest task it is to soften, to bless, and to purify our imperfect nature. Then ... we shall ever find a store of charity, large as our deficiencies, and learn how easy a thing it is to conciliate, without the sacrifice of independence, and to contend without the bitterness of animosity'. Hall, 'Private Persons versus Public Someones', p. 164.

the fact that the women's rejection of the original seating arrangements implied a working knowledge of the town hall's acoustics and lines of sight; in other words, they were familiar with the topography of this important public space. Moreover the toast is an excellent example of the way in which women could be incorporated into the civic narrative. Hall interprets it as simply a statement of exclusion from the sphere of rational debate. While this is true, it was also the case that the way in which women were praised and portrayed in public set out an alternative role which was perceived as no less important for the health of public life, specifically in the maintenance of standards of public virtue. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to demonstrating that this was not just patriarchal rhetoric, but a powerful idea which actively shaped the way in which women were introduced into public spaces throughout the period.

It is important to understand the way in which feminine virtue was constructed through public display, and the vital role of the press in that process. Newspaper reporters played a crucial role in interpreting public ceremonies to their readers, and as such it is they who shaped the gendered narratives under investigation. In the previous chapter it was noted that the construction of feminine virtue through the press was an extremely subjective and contingent process, and that there was an important and loaded distinction between describing women as 'ladies' or as 'females'. Several factors were taken into account in making this distinction, including appearance and behaviour. However, the densely crowded streets during elections or other major public events presented certain difficulties in this respect, not least because it did not seem respectable for higher class women to be jostling in the street with the hoi polloi. Instead, it seems that observers often described women as 'ladies' simply because they occupied visible, segregated and especially elevated positions. The physical elevation and segregation of women in public therefore became an important allegory for feminine virtue, linked to contemporary ideas about sexual propriety.

Spaces such as windows and galleries were firmly identified with respectable womanhood by the middle of the century. In its report of the procession to accompany the proclamation of the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837, the *Mercury* pointed out that 'in Park Place, at the windows of which, as on the whole line, the ladies appeared to show their loyalty, the procession was well seen'.<sup>56</sup> Many women observed these occasions from their own shops or houses, probably inviting their friends to get a good view. For example, the

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<sup>56</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 1 July 1837.

Heatons invited their friends and neighbours to Claremont to witness Queen Victoria's procession to the Town Hall in 1858.<sup>57</sup> However, access to more convenient buildings could also be arranged when the need arose. At the Bradford Hustings of 1837 'the roofs of the warehouses on the opposite side of the road were crowded with spectators, and the windows of both those buildings and the courthouse were crowded with the fair sex'.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that the organisers of such events were becoming increasingly aware of the demand from a respectable female audience for separate accommodation.

Eventually, it became the norm to provide separate accommodation for women, designed to ensure comfort and preserve reputation. Galleries were incorporated into new public halls, while more temporary structures were erected for outdoor occasions. When the Anti-Corn Law League decided that it wanted to attract women to its great banquet in Manchester in 1840, the event was postponed so that a gallery could be added to the temporary pavilion on St Peter's Field.<sup>59</sup> One of the earliest examples of such arrangements in Leeds was the laying of the foundation stone of East Parade Independent Chapel in 1839. While the gentlemen of the congregation symbolically processed from their existing place of worship to the new site, the ladies watched the proceedings from an inclined platform 'advantageously situated for their witnessing all that passed'.<sup>60</sup> Access to such platforms was by ticket only, restricting entry to the elite of the community and enhancing the exclusivity of these spaces. In this way, the elite men who were the principal actors could officially recognise the supporting role of their womenfolk by setting them apart from the anonymous faces crowding at the windows.

By the time of the great civic celebrations of the 1850s and 1860s, the provision of separate accommodation was well established. At the inauguration of the statue of Sir Robert Peel in Leeds a number of ladies were admitted by ticket to the yard of Mill Hill Chapel: 'The yard being elevated above the level of Park Row, afforded those who obtained admission, especially the ladies who occupied the front places, a full view of the statue, and

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<sup>57</sup> 'Journal of John Deakin Heaton', i, p. 193.

<sup>58</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 29 July 1837.

<sup>59</sup> *The Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10 and 24 December 1839.

<sup>60</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 September 1839.

of those engaged in the ceremonial'.<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere arrangements were more sophisticated, with a temporary gallery being provided at the inauguration of the Peel statue at Bury (see Figure 1 below).<sup>62</sup> A similar expedient was used when the foundation stone of the Leeds Town Hall was laid in 1853. This seems to have become standard practice at future ceremonies, such as the laying of the foundation stone of the new workhouse in 1858.<sup>63</sup>



Figure 1: Unveiling of the Statue of Sir Robert Peel at Bury, from the *Illustrated London News*, 18 September 1852. The gallery is shown to the right of the statue.

Mary Ryan has described similar developments in America by the mid-nineteenth century, arguing that 'The public audience had acquired an official and more defined gendered aspect.' However unlike men, who were enlisted to help plan festivities, women's places were 'arranged' by male committees, reflecting their lack of autonomy in the public sphere. She therefore concludes that:

they did not enter this public ritual of the young republic to represent either themselves or their sex. The female participants in these ceremonies were

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 August 1852.

<sup>62</sup> The structure is portrayed in the report of the event from the *Illustrated London News*, 18 September 1852.

<sup>63</sup> See the *Leeds Mercury*, 6 April 1858 and the *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 April 1858.

almost all consorts of elite males. They were not, like the contingents of males, enlisted into the public culture in the manner of popular sovereigns.<sup>64</sup>

The examples of the partitioning of public space from this side of the Atlantic follow a similar pattern of social exclusivity and of the separation of women from the construction of citizenship. Women had little control over access to such sites themselves. For example, many of the women who attended the opening of Leeds Town Hall had their places allocated by ballot, with circulars being sent to the male guests asking how many ladies' seats they wished to compete for.<sup>65</sup> However, Ryan's assertion that these women represented no-one but their wealthy spouses may be questioned, although she is right that they represented neither individuals nor an identifiable civic constituency. Instead, it is clear that these select groups of women played an important role in the representation of civic pride, through the visual display that they provided and the civic virtues which they came to symbolise. The latter was no less true of privileged groups of women in the audience than it was of the various allegorical female figures in parades or of civic statuary.<sup>66</sup>

The presence of women as distinct groups became an important feature of the visual spectacle provided by such events. Women had long played a role in the production of flags, banners and party favours, including those carried or worn by men. James Vernon has noted that lower-class women were able to participate vicariously in public ceremonies by providing such accoutrements, at least until control over their production was professionalised after the middle of the century.<sup>67</sup> There is also evidence that middle-class women participated in a similar way. For instance, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna refers to such activities in one of her dialogues with the fictional 'uncle'.<sup>68</sup> However, women of this class also became part of the display themselves. For instance, when Victoria and the Duchess

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<sup>64</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>65</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 171. Various information concerning this ballot may be found among papers relating to the construction and opening of the Town Hall at the Leeds City Archive, including an entry in the Festival Committee Minute Book, 14 August 1858. This records a resolution that the ballot be held in the Festival Committee rooms, Monday 23 August. Leeds Town Hall, LC/TC: P.

<sup>66</sup> See Ryan, *Women in Public*, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 116.

<sup>68</sup> *Christian Ladies' Magazine*, 3 (January - June 1835), p. 82.



of Kent passed through Leeds in September 1835, it was said that ‘the windows presented a very beautiful display of the fair sex.’<sup>69</sup> Two years later, during the celebration of Queen Victoria’s Accession, it was said that the visual effect of the military uniforms, carriages and gentlemen on horseback in the procession combined with ‘the dresses of the ladies who crowded almost every window of each story in the houses on both sides ... to produce a coup d’oeil of a truly remarkable character.’<sup>70</sup>

The effect of the fashionable clothes worn by these women was heightened by their ‘animation’, contrasting feminine vivacity with the often solemn rituals being enacted before them. It was said that the presence of women at the Leeds Exhibition dinner of 1839 ‘added a charm and a liveliness’ to the scene. The segregation of women at public events allowed those who planned them to use their appearance to maximum visual effect. This was clearly the intention at the opening of the Leeds town hall, when women were placed in the centre of the body of the hall, the orchestra and of course the gallery:

the contrast, with the animation which their presence gave to the scene, afforded one of the noblest sights we have ever witnessed ... The balcony ... was not inappropriately compared to a garden of living beauties, and the fair dames who graced it with their presence were fully entitled to the complement implied in this remark, not that their sisters in the orchestra or the body of the hall were less worthy of admiration, but the peculiar position of the balcony gave to the grouping an effect which could not be obtained elsewhere, and rendered the coup d’oeil perfect.<sup>71</sup>

These arrangements ensured that they would be able to see clearly, but were clearly also intended to make sure that the women would be seen by everyone else. A similar effect was achieved during the laying of the foundation stone to St George’s Hall in Bradford in 1851, when a temporary gallery formed the centrepiece of the visual display, ‘being filled with a gay and fashionable company, amongst whom were many ladies in the richest and most brilliant attire. The gallery itself was completely surmounted by a rich variety of flags and streamers’.<sup>72</sup>

However, the importance of this female audience was not limited to its visual impact,

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<sup>69</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 September 1835.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 July 1837.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 September 1858.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 September 1851.

although this was obviously important. Women were also seen as having a part to play in the maintenance of ideals of civic virtue. As has been suggested, the women who appeared at windows, on balconies or in carriages were raised above the common crowd metaphorically as well as literally. Their occupation of these positions allowed them to be portrayed as pure and virtuous. It also served to reinforce the physical and symbolic distance between a-political 'Woman', the observer, and political 'Man', the active participant in the arena of politics and civic display. As the toast cited by Hall suggests, that arena was considered to be inherently corrupting.<sup>73</sup> The presence of woman at its margins therefore acted as a moral counterweight, constantly bringing man back to the path of righteousness and redeeming him from the vexations and temptations of public life.

This did not preclude women from demonstrating any political preferences. In fact, contemporary narratives of female influence justified such favouritism, as long as it was untempered by overt party animosity. Instead, women attending elections or public meetings, where their very presence would seem to have compromised their a-political credentials, were actually believed to play a beneficial role by encouraging decorum, civility and fair-play. Moreover, belief in the 'civilising influence' of women actively shaped the way in which they were introduced into public spaces, particularly those more usually associated with men.

It may be imagined that there could be no more masculine a space during the mid-nineteenth century than the hustings. This assumption gains some support from the depictions of election nominations in the *Illustrated London News*. The *ILN* tended to rely on stylised representations of the hustings, being more concerned to detail the architecture of the public spaces in which they occurred, rather than accurately representing personalities and issues. Election banners in the foreground simply proclaim the names of the candidates, while the candidates themselves are tiny figures, dwarfed by public buildings. The only women present tend to be in the foreground, at the margin of the crowd. In contrast, the occupants of the hustings are portrayed as universally masculine, represented by a featureless sea of top hats (see Figure 2 below).<sup>74</sup> However, it seems to have been by no means uncommon for women to occupy the hustings, although the exact arrangements varied widely from place to place. At Wakefield in 1832, for example, chairs were placed

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<sup>73</sup> See above, n. 55.

<sup>74</sup> See the *Illustrated London News*, 21, 10 July 1852, pp. 24-5.

around the hustings 'for the accommodation of ladies'. There were also women present on the hustings at Halifax the same year.<sup>75</sup> In 1837, it was reported that the hustings at the Wakefield election 'were thronged with ladies; Lady Caroline Lascelles, and Mrs D. Gaskell, each in an open carriage, arrived soon afterwards, and took places in front of the hustings'.<sup>76</sup>

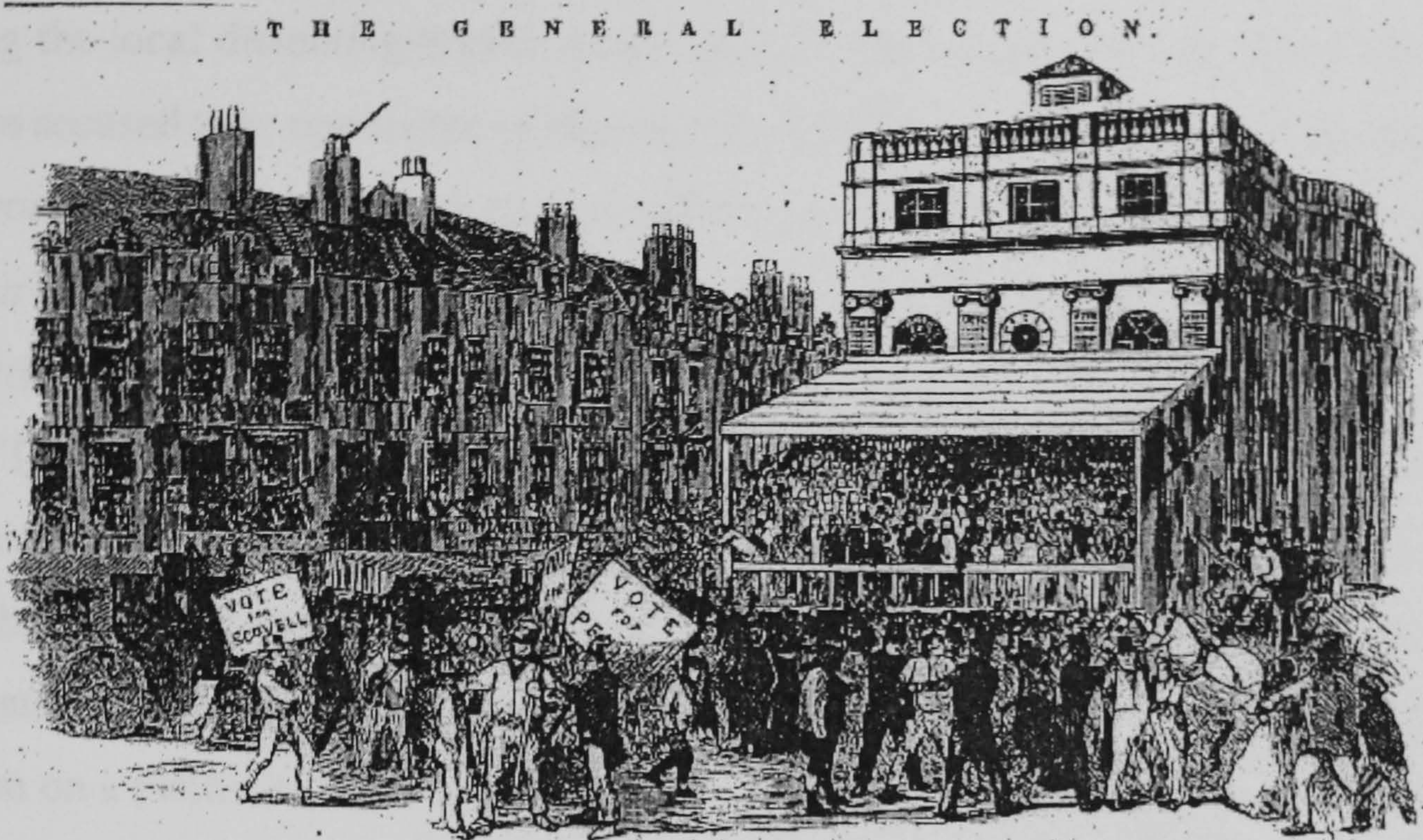


Figure 2: The hustings at Southwark. From the *Illustrated London News*, 10 July 1852.

In some instances, the presence of women on the hustings fulfilled an important symbolic function. By the time of the General Election of 1841, for example, women had come to occupy a significantly neutral position at the centre of the hustings at Leeds, where they sat with the Mayor and his legal assistants. While the women formed a symbolic division between the Liberals and the Tories on the platform, a more tangible barrier separated the supporters of the two factions on the field itself, reinforced by a heavy police presence. These measures had probably been influenced by the riot at the West Riding election of 1837, when two persons were killed and the hustings came under assault from a volley of stones. The reports of this latter occurrence are instructive, not least because women who had hitherto been 'invisible' in the newspaper account of the nomination, suddenly became 'visible' once the assault began. As the stones began to rain down on the Orange hustings we are told 'all was terror, the ladies screaming, and many flying to the

<sup>75</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 16 December 1832.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 July 1837.

stairs with the greatest rapidity'. Secondly, when it came to apportioning blame for the incident the Liberals were able to use the presence of their womenfolk as proof that they had not deliberately provoked the riot, which was apparently sparked by an incursion by some of their voters into the Tory half of the field.<sup>77</sup> Similar arguments were used in 1847 after a disturbance at a public meeting in Wakefield over voluntary education, an issue which was tearing the local dissenting-liberal caucus apart.<sup>78</sup> On this occasion the pro-Voluntaryist faction accused their opponents of planning the disturbance, citing as proof the absence of any women supporting them from the platform or the gallery, as well as claiming that one of their own female supporters had been asked whether she was prepared for trouble when she arrived at the hall.<sup>79</sup>

The incidents described above suggest two conclusions. First, it seems that the presence of women at public meetings and debates was expected to increase the pressure on public men and their supporters to behave in a civil fashion, while transgressors were castigated for jeopardizing the safety of the 'weaker sex'. Secondly, the very presence of women on a platform or in the audience could be interpreted as a pledge of good faith by those they supported, theoretically ensuring that they intended to behave with civility and decorum. If trouble did then break out, the fact that the female supporters of a given faction were present could then be cited as proof of innocence of any unlawful intent, while the absence of women supporters could be taken as decisive evidence of guilt. These were similar arguments to those produced by middle-class observers as proof of the peaceful nature of the Peterloo march.<sup>80</sup>

If these conclusions appear too functionalist, it must be pointed out that they are not intended to be definitive explanations of women's presence in such confrontational situations. Instead, they describe the way in which their presence was manipulated and interpreted by those who organised or reported such events. These interpretations essentially confirmed beliefs about the nature of men and women which emphasised the role of the latter in tempering the natural aggression of the former. In other words, the presence

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August 1837.

<sup>78</sup> Fraser, 'Voluntaryism and West Riding Politics'.

<sup>79</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 March 1847.

<sup>80</sup> See above, p. 219.

of women as passive observers was viewed as aiding 'rational' debate in the masculine public sphere by limiting confrontation to the use of reason rather than physical force. Conversely, the actual participation of women in political debate would have brought them down to the level of men. By abandoning their allotted role, such women would then forfeit their right to expect polite treatment and any 'civilising influence' would therefore be lost also. Hence the frequent argument that women would become 'unsexed' by active participation in politics.<sup>81</sup>

These ideas of female influence had their roots in Enlightenment narratives about the advance of civilisation, specifically those which used the status accorded to women as a fundamental benchmark of progress. Eighteenth-century philosophes had identified the emergence of the chivalric code in the middle ages as the key moment in the development of civilised relations between the sexes.<sup>82</sup> From this point on, it was argued, the true worth of woman was recognised and men began to use their superior physical strength to protect women rather than to subjugate them. In turn, it was believed that women exercised their civilising influence on men. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a romanticised version of the chivalric ideal had been popularized through the novels of Walter Scott, particularly *Ivanhoe* (1819). Chivalric scenes also became commonplace in the works of poets such as Tennyson.<sup>83</sup> Contemporaries therefore had a ready-made narrative form to hand when they came to explain the appearance of women during public ceremonies and celebrations. For their part, women were only too happy to play the role, dressing in their finest clothes and energetically waving handkerchiefs in approbation of their public 'champions'.

As well as explaining how women could use their influence to regulate public conflict, in the same way that medieval ladies were supposed to have ensured honourable conduct during tournaments, the chivalric metaphor was also used on occasions where the aim was to display civic unity. For example, when the Queen visited Leeds in 1858 the men proved

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<sup>81</sup> This may be compared with the idea from Republican ideology that the presence of women representatives in government would rob male senators of their rationality, instead making them slaves of the senses: 'By equating women with sexuality, American republicans justified their exclusion from the political citadel of rationality and virtue.' Ryan, *Women in Public*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>82</sup> See above, p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> See for instance *The Princess* (1847) and the *Idylls of the King* (1859-89).

their chivalric devotion to her person by putting aside their everyday political disagreements: 'before Victoria, the spirit of faction is abashed, that of chivalry brightens into its highest lustre', the *Mercury* purred.<sup>84</sup> Victoria herself became an allegorical figure, representing all that was virtuous in woman, while eliciting masculine virtue from her male subjects. At the end of the ceremony, she completed her allegorical and chivalric function by knighting the Mayor of Leeds, Peter Fairbairn, thus officially recognising and rewarding his civic virtue.

However, one did not have to be a Queen to bestow honours on public servants. Just as Victoria rewarded Fairbairn, so women of less exalted rank used their influence to encourage public-spiritedness through the ritual bestowal of testimonial gifts. Such presentations were highly symbolic. By contributing to and formally presenting testimonials women were able to say important things about the recipient and about themselves. In particular, it allowed them to play an active and visible role in upholding and shaping community value systems.

The recipients of such honours were often politicians. In 1838 Daniel Gaskell was presented with two pieces of plate from the 'Ladies and Reformers of Wakefield' (note that 'reformers' were assumed to be masculine).<sup>84</sup> Lord Morpeth was given a diamond ring following his defeat in the 1841 West Riding election, while the ladies of Bradford subscribed for a similar gift for their liberal MP Mr Burfield.<sup>85</sup> Clergymen were also likely recipients, especially on their retirement or if they were moving to another congregation. The Reverend James Scott of the Independent chapel at Cleckheaton was presented with a silver tea service from the congregation in May 1839, while the women bought him a silk gown and cassock and new cushions for the pulpit.<sup>86</sup> In 1842, the minister of the West End Chapel at Sowerby Bridge received a silver inkstand.<sup>87</sup> An inkstand and pencil case were also presented to Thomas Scales, the veteran anti-slavery campaigner, by the ladies of the Queen Street Chapel, Leeds, in 1850.<sup>88</sup> Other individuals to receive such tributes could

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<sup>84</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 September 1858.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 January 1838.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 August and 23 October 1841.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 May 1839.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 July 1842.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 January 1850.

include visiting celebrities such as Harriet Beecher Stowe (Leeds. 1853), or more modest philanthropists like William Dove, who was presented with a gold chain by the ladies of Huddersfield in 1837 in recognition of his services as a teacher of writing, as an author and for his kindness to orphans.<sup>89</sup>

In order to understand the significance of such occasions in the construction of public female identities, it is necessary to understand the web of mutual obligations that surround ritual gift-giving. So far, nineteenth-century historians have paid little attention to the subject, rendering it necessary to turn for inspiration to the work of sociologists and social anthropologists.<sup>90</sup> In particular, the work of Marcel Mauss on gift-exchange helps explain the symbolic and practical importance of testimonials.<sup>91</sup> Although Mauss' theories were developed from studies of 'archaic' cultures, his work has increasingly been applied to gift practices in 'modern' societies (i.e. those of the capitalist west). His followers have mainly been concerned with the economic implications of gift-giving, especially its importance in the capitalist market, or with its place in the maintenance of kinship networks and relationships.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, these approaches have little to do with the kinds of formal and apparently one-way presentations which we have described. However, Mauss' own insights suggest some fruitful lines of inquiry. In particular, he realised that gift-giving was intimately bound up with issues of status honour for both the donor and the recipient, which tied both into a relationship of mutual obligation. In the case of testimonials it can be argued that communities were honour-bound to reward those who had served them faithfully by holding some kind of public presentation. Presentation ceremonies not only drew attention to the achievement's of the person being rewarded, but also to the generosity of the community who were publicly recognising the debt that they owed.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 March and 10 October 1853; 8 July 1837.

<sup>90</sup> Although see Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), esp. chapter 5. Joyce is specifically interested in the testimonials workers occasionally gave to their employers. However his interpretation of such occasions as merely illustrative of a deferential factory culture is unhelpful, particularly in explaining gift exchanges between social equals.

<sup>91</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1966).

<sup>92</sup> For a summary see David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London: Routledge, 1988), esp. Chapter 1.

This is only part of the story. Mauss pointed out that the obligation to receive such gifts:

is no less constraining [than the obligation to give] ... in principle, however, gifts are always accepted and praised. You must speak your appreciation of food prepared for you. But you accept a challenge at the same time. You receive a gift “on the back”. You accept the food and you do so because you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy.<sup>93</sup>

Although there was no obligation to repay testimonials in kind, to receive gifts and public praise for one’s virtues carried with it the responsibility to live up to an enhanced public reputation. Hence donors could indirectly influence the recipient’s future conduct and self-view. The implications of this will be discussed below. Meanwhile, it is necessary to examine the social significance of giving from the point of view of female donors.

Testimonials were essentially community actions, representing collective acts of generosity and gratitude by the subscribers. Moreover, the gifts, their inscriptions and the speeches made by donors and recipients effectively re-affirmed the collective commitment to beliefs about desirable standards of public behaviour and virtue. However, this does not explain why women found it important to organise their own testimonial gifts instead of contributing to general subscriptions. After all, many testimonials were contributed to by both sexes and presented in the name of the whole community. On these occasions women were often present to witness the ceremony, but their involvement as a distinct group ended there.<sup>94</sup> In contrast, separate female testimonials seem to have resulted from a desire to demonstrate women’s importance as a subgroup within the community. By organising separately they were implicitly challenging the idea that their public interests were fully represented by men. Instead, women were consciously demonstrating the ability to recognise public virtue independently of their male counterparts, as well as the financial and organisational ability to reward it collectively. Returning to the obligation to give, this may be interpreted as a desire on the part of women to shoulder their own part of the responsibility, in a society where women were often denied such opportunities and were usually cast in a dependant role.

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<sup>93</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>94</sup> For example, when the Liberals of Leeds presented a testimonial to Edward Baines after his defeat in the West Riding election of 1841, provision was made for women to view the ceremony from the orchestra and gallery of the music hall. *Leeds Mercury*, 13 and 27 November 1841.



Moreover, testimonials allowed women to give emphasis to the kinds of virtues which they admired in public figures, just as separate female petitions allowed women to voice peculiarly feminine opinions on public political matters. The inscriptions on gifts of silver plate were an important medium for this purpose, in addition to establishing the women's connections to the recipient, to the community as a whole and to their shared values. That on the silver vase presented to Daniel Gaskell read:

Presented by the Ladies of Wakefield, friendly to the Reform Act, to D. Gaskell Esq., in testimony of their high admiration of his services during the first and second representation of Parliament of the borough of Wakefield, and also of their lively sense of his gentlemanly manners, kind feeling and firm integrity.<sup>95</sup>

The first part is a social statement. By describing themselves as 'Ladies' the women are claiming social equality with Gaskell himself, thereby establishing their right to comment on his public character. Secondly, they identify themselves with the town of Wakefield, but then qualify that by stating that they represent only that part of the Wakefield public 'friendly to the Reform Act'. On one level this declaration is a firm commitment to a particular party (the reformers). However, on another level it is an assertion of loyalty to the reformed constitution, and by implication to the Crown itself, thereby placing themselves above the intrigues of party politics. The inscription then proceeds to note Gaskell's public service in Parliament, before concluding by describing his personal qualities, especially his 'gentlemanly manners, kind feeling and firm integrity'. This quite specific list of qualities may be compared with the more general statement on the men's gift, which simply read 'in testimony of their high approbation of his incorrupted patriotism as a senator, and of his private worth as a gentleman.' Although it is difficult to generalise from one example, it does appear that the qualities singled out by the men and women differ materially, the former concentrating on public responsibilities while the latter places more emphasis on personality and social skills. Finally, the presentation ceremony itself allowed the women to elaborate on Gaskell's qualities via the medium of Mrs Marriott, who made the presentation and gave a short (and unfortunately unrecorded) speech. Marriot herself was qualified for this privilege by being the widow of the chairman of the liberal election committee at the time of Milton and Marshall's election for Yorkshire in 1826.

Testimonials also carried certain implied obligations for the recipient, who was expected to maintain the public standards for which he or she had been rewarded.

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<sup>95</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 January 1838.

Therefore, as symbols of public virtue, gifts did not just look back at the past life and achievements of their recipient, but were also intended to influence his or her future life and actions. In the case of practical gifts, the reminder would come every time they were used. For example, the inkstands presented to the two ministers mentioned above probably symbolised to the two men the intellectual and didactic aspects of their roles in the local community. The gift of vestments to the Reverend James Scott may have served as a reminder of the need to live up to his calling spiritually as well as in physical appearance. Other less practical gifts, such as decorative silver-ware, were intended to be prominently displayed in the recipient's home. They could be a source of pride, but were also a reminder to the owner and any guests of the need to uphold the virtues being celebrated. In a similar way, presentation ceremonies were a reminder to all present of their duties and responsibilities.

Testimonials were therefore intended to help perpetuate the very qualities which they celebrated. In a subtle way, women could feel that their gifts were helping to uphold the virtues of public life. These occasions offered a rare opportunity for women to pass judgement on the behaviour of public men, allowing them to press their claim to full membership of the community which those figures were serving, whether that was a religious congregation or a political constituency.<sup>96</sup> As always there were limits to how far this could be taken. The honouring of parliamentary candidates after the elections had taken place was less controversial than engaging in political controversy during the height of a campaign. This was particularly true in defeat. In such cases the chivalric nature of these gifts became even more explicit, as they offered solace to their chosen champion and honoured his valiant endeavours. However, on such occasions women could exploit these conventions in order to deliver a more pointed political message. This was the case when a number of women presented a piece of plate to J. B. Smith, President of the Anti-Corn Law League, following his defeat by Captain John Gladstone at the Walsall by-election. The plate bore the inscription: 'Presented to John Benjamin Smith Esq. by the Ladies of Walsall as a testimonial of their gratitude and esteem for the patriotic and spirited manner

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<sup>96</sup> Presentations to women were rare. On 4 June 1851 the Pontefract Female Benevolent Society presented a piece of plate to Miss Muscroft 'as a testimonial of their grateful sense of her kind and unwearied exertions on behalf of the charities of the town generally, and as honorary secretary of this institution in particular, during a period of many years.' *Leeds Mercury*, 7 June 1851.

in which he stood forward in February, 1841, to contest the representation of the borough with a monopolist and a bread taxer'.<sup>97</sup>

This example brings the discussion to the subject of the more overtly political uses of the chivalric motif. It should come as no surprise that the Anti-Corn Law League mobilised chivalry behind their cause, arguing that the women who attended its meetings and tea-parties did so out of a desire to cheer on their champions in their fight against injustice. This position was elaborated most fully by French political economist Frederick Bastiat, who argued that woman's true mission was as the 'natural dispenser of shame and of glory'. His formulation of this point of view is worth quoting at length:

In former times the ladies crowned the conqueror of the tourney. Valour, address, clemency, became popularised by the intoxicating sound of their applause ... What! because the times are changed; because the age is advanced; because muscular force has given place to moral energy; because injustice and oppression borrow other forms, and strife is removed from the field of battle to the conflict of ideas, shall the mission of woman be terminated? ... In our days it pertains to woman to decree to moral virtues, to intellectual power, to enlightened philanthropy those inestimable prizes, those irresistible encouragements, which they formerly reserved for the valour of the warrior alone ... Oh! If woman would but cast on political abjectness that poignant contempt with which she formerly withered military cowardice! If she had for him who traffics in a vote, for him who betrays a trust, for him who deserts the cause of truth and justice, some of that mortal irony with which, in other times, she would have overwhelmed the felon knight who had abandoned the lists or purchased his life at the price of his honour, our conflict could not offer that spectacle of demoralisation and of baseness which saddens elevated hearts, jealous of the glory and dignity of their country.<sup>98</sup>

The message here is somewhat ambiguous. According to Bastiat's theory, 'progress' is seen mainly in terms of the triumph of rational debate over 'irrational' violence. Woman's place in the public sphere has remained essentially unchanged: an observer, who regulates morality from her lofty position in the balcony, but who is precluded by her sex from ever descending into the arena of conflict. Ironically however, the women of the Anti-Corn Law League did descend into the arena of political activity. Prentice's intention in quoting Bastiat at such length, and indeed in devoting so many pages of his history of the League to the activities of women, was mainly to play down their more radical implications, by presenting them in a more understandable and acceptable form. Tea parties and bazaars

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<sup>97</sup> *Anti-Bread Tax Circular*, 21 April 1841.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, (i), pp. 171-3.

were acceptable 'feminine' activities which could be elaborated on at length. No mention is made of women campaigning for the League, or of the huge meetings of women such as that at the Hanover Square Rooms in April 1845.<sup>99</sup> At the time however, like the idea of 'woman's mission', the chivalric motif appropriated as a way of justifying more radical activities, despite being inherently limiting in and of itself.

The chivalric metaphor was therefore an increasingly important way of explaining and containing gender relationships in the public sphere during the period. For women, openly challenging such a pervasive narrative of woman's passive influence without exposing themselves to the charge of being 'unsexed' was difficult. One way in which this could be achieved was through the more acceptable medium of fiction. By analysing literary critiques of chivalry, it is possible to bring to light some of the alternatives favoured by contemporaries, and to give a clearer idea of how chivalry was meant to work in practice. The example cited here comes from the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell. Contemporaries and most later reviewers have concentrated on the novel's critique of class relations in the rapidly expanding industrial towns of northern England.<sup>100</sup> However, it also presents an exploration of contemporary ideas about gender roles and relationships, particularly the idea of the 'gentleman', and the proper role of women.

The most important scene in relation to the chivalric metaphor is also the crux point of the novel. The scene opens with the arrival of the heroine, Margaret Hale, at the home of the mill-owner Mr Thornton. The visit is inopportune, as Thornton is awaiting the arrival of a crowd of striking operatives, angry at his employment of Irish strikebreakers. When it becomes clear to Margaret that Thornton merely intends to skulk indoors until the military arrive to disperse the crowd, she indignantly demands that he go outside and reason with them:

'Mr Thornton,' said Margaret, shaking all over with her passion, 'go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. I see one there who is. If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them,

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<sup>99</sup> *The League*, 12 April 1845.

<sup>100</sup> See for example the reviews of *North and South* in Angus Easson (ed.), *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 330-71.

man to man.’<sup>101</sup>

Having thus goaded Thornton into action and barred the door behind him, Margaret then rushes to the upstairs window - her allotted place in the chivalric drama about to unfold. However, on seeing the workmen preparing to throw missiles at Thornton, she realises with horror that she has instigated a potentially violent confrontation. Straining for a better view, she tears off her bonnet - a symbolic rejection of the passive, decorative femininity that she abandons in practice moments later by flying down the stairs to interpose herself bodily between Thornton and his would-be assailants. Again Thornton’s masculinity is questioned, this time by the workmen who accuse him of hiding behind a woman. However, when Margaret is felled by a stone it is the workers who are discomfited. They drift away shamefaced, while Thornton tends to Margaret’s wound.<sup>102</sup> This episode marks a turning point in the novel, both in the relationship between Thornton and Margaret, and between Thornton and the operatives. Discord and confrontation eventually give way to harmony and co-operation as the result of Margaret’s actions.

This is a complex and ambiguous passage. In making Margaret feel guilty about the violence she has unwittingly encouraged, Gaskell is clearly criticising the chivalric model of female influence, which is essentially irresponsible because woman’s divorce from the public sphere effectively shelters her from the consequences of her actions. Although in this instance the success of more practical female intervention still relies on the maintenance of male feelings of respect and protectiveness towards women, reasserted in this instance after Margaret is injured, Gaskell still abandons models of gender behaviour taken from medieval romance. However, Margaret’s intervention on this occasion is not portrayed as unproblematic. Patricia Ingham has pointed out that she is made to feel sexual guilt over her intercession on Thornton’s behalf, which has made her symbolically a ‘fallen woman’.<sup>103</sup> This point could be taken further by linking it to Margaret’s abandonment of her position at the window, with its connotations of sexual purity. Gaskell was therefore well aware that

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<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1853: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 175. I am grateful to Emma Goodman for bringing this passage to my attention.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-8.

<sup>103</sup> Patricia Ingham, Introduction to *North and South* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. xviii.

the role she envisaged for women required a fundamental shift in the way that gender relations were organised and perceived, so that women could act freely without having to worry about their actions being misinterpreted.

To conclude, although certain women did take part in public ceremonies, these were essentially marginal to the official public life of the town. Throughout the period, women were generally excluded from any active role in civic ceremonial, which reemphasised their exclusion from the full privileges of citizenship. Significantly, however, they did form an increasingly visible and distinctive part of the audience at such events. In particular, certain physical locations such as windows and galleries came to be associated with respectable women, or 'ladies', who maintained their reputations by avoiding the hustle and bustle of the street or the main body of a hall. Increasingly, this appearance at public events was formalised by the provision of specific seating arrangements for elite women, where ticketing was employed to limit access. Such women and the platforms they occupied came to be a central part of the visual display on these occasions.

The appearance of these women in the reports of public events was an important way of encoding gender relations through the division of public space. The segregation of women in elevated positions reflected ideals of feminine virtue and purity, which were closely linked to the belief that women transcended the sordid realities of public and political life. Having been safely excluded from this corrupting arena, women were then reintroduced into public life by means of a narrative which cast them in the role of medieval ladies from a chivalric romance, spurring on their male champions to public glory and shaming those whose conduct fell below expected standards. Women were in these narratives allowed to appear at political events such as election nominations because their presence was seen as a way of upholding public standards of morality, rather than as a direct intervention in party wrangles. On great civic occasions, such as the opening of Leeds town hall, the large number of elegant 'ladies' present became allegories for the civilisation of the town itself, and a symbol of civic unity in the presence of their sovereign.

However, these ideals were by no means uncontested. The belief that women's superior virtue gave them a beneficial influence over public life was adapted by radical organisations such as the Anti-Corn Law League to justify an increased political role for women. Others questioned the validity of the whole narrative of chivalry as a means of regulating gender relations in the public sphere, arguing that it took away the responsibility

that women had for their own views and opinions.<sup>104</sup> The discourses which emerged around the appearance of women in public spaces during our period were therefore contested and ultimately flexible, despite their origins in a desire to delineate, limit and control women's engagement with the public sphere. .

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<sup>104</sup> The radical Unitarians in particular vilified chivalric discourses which were seen as a way of keeping women in their place: Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, esp. pp. 56-7, 110-11, 135 and 157.

## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion: Women, Class and Civic Virtue

This thesis has moved from the ideals of feminine virtue and influence put forward by didactic writers, through the actual engagement of the women of Leeds with life beyond the domestic circle, before ending by examining the way in which their experiences and activities were constructed and interpreted by the local and national press. It has tried to strike a balance between ideals and the 'realities' constructed by women themselves; it has also discussed the differences between women's perceptions of themselves and the views of other observers. It merely remains to answer the questions with which the thesis began: to what extent did women's involvement in the 'public sphere' give rise to a specifically feminine public or civic identity, and how far did such women contribute to the emergence of the ideal of an improving and enlightened 'middle class'?

The answer to the first question depends on one's perspective. When talking of identity, it is imperative to distinguish between the viewpoint of members of a particular group and those of outside observers. This is even more important in the case of marginal identities, as it tends to be the hegemonic group (in this case middle-class males) who set the terms of debate. As the case histories of individual societies, institutions and campaigns have demonstrated, middle-class men often found it difficult to accord due respect and consideration to women working in the public sphere, despite the fact that the range and extent of such involvement was apparently increasing. The natural response of male-dominated agencies and organisations to female initiatives was that of containment and control. Although appeals to female sentiment were periodically made in the press, the issues and methods supported were restricted in practice to those congruent with contemporary ideals of femininity. Moreover, the reports of female public activities reduced the participants to the level of abstraction. With a few exceptions, such as Anna Hook, the achievements of individual women were rarely mentioned.

The Reverend R. V. Taylor's *Biographia Leodiensis*, published in 1865, offers a classic example of the gendered construction of the public figure. Taylor's book was part of the growing and increasingly celebratory literature on the modern history and development of the borough, which also included J. Wardell's *Municipal History of the Borough of Leeds* (1846), the *Life of Edward Baines* (1853) and John Mayhall's *Annals and*



*History of Leeds* (1860).<sup>1</sup> These works were very much in a Whig tradition, celebrating events such as the enfranchisement of the borough and the abolition of the closed Corporation. They also celebrated the development of a very masculine public sphere. In his introduction, Taylor repeatedly made the connection between civic worth and masculinity.<sup>2</sup> The whole book contains only three entries for women: Lady Elizabeth Hastings (1682-1739); Mrs Matthewman (d. 1848) and Mrs Wood (1802-64).<sup>3</sup> The latter had gained her place by virtue of being a vocalist of national repute. The two former had been substantial benefactresses of the established church. In particular, Mrs Matthewman's bequest facilitated the improvement of twelve existing incumbencies and the partial endowment of six new ones, including an expenditure of £20,000 on new churches. The only other woman who gained a substantial mention was the widow of Charles Carr M.D., who left a total of £1,200 to various local charities, including £500 to the Infirmary where her husband had been the physician from 1810 to 1825.<sup>4</sup> This action also brought Carr a mention in the *Leeds Mercury*, a rare honour for a woman.<sup>5</sup> These were women who exemplified the ideal of the 'Lady Bountiful', but Taylor's portrayal of their contributions to civic life was one-dimensional and, in all but the case of Lady Elizabeth, those contributions were posthumous.

For an idea of the way in which civic duty and identity were woven into the pattern of women's lives, it is necessary to turn to other sources. The journals of John Deakin Heaton, used throughout this thesis, provide an invaluable account not only of Heaton's activities, but also of those of his sister Ellen, and his wife Fanny. Heaton began his journal in the late 1850s, writing it up from a daily diary, now lost. He was at least in part writing for posterity; certainly Fanny thought so, completing the final volumes herself after Heaton's death.<sup>6</sup> She also made them available to Heaton's biographer, Thomas Wemyss Reid, and

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<sup>1</sup> These works were later joined by C. S. Spence, *Memoirs of Eminent Men of Leeds* (Leeds, 1868), published as a memento of the opening of the New Infirmary by the Prince of Wales.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, *Biographia Leodiensis*, pp. 33-46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-50, 443 and 518-20. Matthewman did not even get a full entry.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>5</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 4 July 1846.

<sup>6</sup> B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', p. 94.

they provide the main source for his account. However, while acknowledging the value of the journal as a record of nineteenth century domestic life, Reid focussed on Heaton's public activities.<sup>7</sup> In part, he claimed, this was out of respect for Heaton's surviving relatives; but it was also typical of the time to compartmentalise experience in this way. In writing the journals, however, Heaton failed to respect these artificial boundaries, happily mixing accounts of events which could be considered 'public' with those which could equally be seen as 'domestic' or 'private'. Indeed, many of the activities he describes do not fit neatly under either of these headings. The same is true of Heaton's references to his wife's activities, which are by no means restricted to domestic details. It is thus possible to use the journal in order to build up a reasonably full picture of Fanny's experiences.

Born 12 July 1828, Fanny (Frances) Heaton was the daughter of Sarah Rimington and John Heaton, stuff merchant, of St John's Cottage, Leeds.<sup>8</sup> Along with her sister Marian, she attended a school in Bath.<sup>9</sup> It was shortly after completing her education, when she was seventeen, that she first met Dr Heaton.<sup>10</sup> During their courtship, Heaton commented on her ability as a Latinist, which suggests that she had received at least the rudiments of a classical education. She also attended educational lectures in Leeds, from which Heaton occasionally offered to escort her home.<sup>11</sup>

Despite great opposition from Fanny's maiden aunt, Miss Rimington, Fanny married Dr Heaton at St George's Church on 3 April 1850.<sup>12</sup> Initially they lived at Heaton's house in East Parade, but moved in 1856 to Claremont, an eighteenth-century villa on Clarendon Road, which is now the headquarters of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society and the Thoresby Society.<sup>13</sup> It was this move to Claremont that allowed Heaton to develop his role

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<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 97. The following owes much to a number of conversations with Brian and Dorothy Payne about the Heaton.

<sup>9</sup> 'Journal of J. D. Heaton', i, p. 253.

<sup>10</sup> B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> John Deakin Heaton to Fanny Heaton, January 1849. Private Collection.

<sup>12</sup> B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94. The present character of the building owes much to Heaton's alterations. See Brian and Dorothy Payne, *Claremont, Leeds* (Leeds: Yorkshire Archeological Society, 1980).

in Leeds society, providing a venue for the entertainment of large numbers of guests from Leeds, Yorkshire and beyond.<sup>14</sup> However, Fanny's activities extended far beyond those of the diligent hostess devoting her energies to furthering her husband's public and professional career. Instead, Fanny was fully involved in all of the activities identified in this thesis as areas in which women could develop their class and civic identities.

As well as attending lectures, Fanny had been a member of the Leeds Musical Soirée since before her marriage. Afterwards, Heaton recorded that she continued to take part and that occasionally the society held its meetings at their house.<sup>15</sup> She took an active interest in contemporary events, going down to London to witness Wellington's funeral in 1852 and to the International Exposition in Paris in 1854, accompanied on the latter occasion by her aunt and sister-in-law, as well as her husband. Fanny's marriage to Heaton opened up a cultural world beyond Leeds and the West Riding, and she often accompanied her husband to the meetings of various scientific societies, including the British Association and, in 1861, the Royal Geographical Society.<sup>16</sup>

Fanny was also involved in a number of philanthropic causes on her own account. This began in a small way, by taking an interest in the welfare of patients at the Infirmary, where her husband was the senior physician. In 1858, at Fanny's suggestion, Dr Heaton began to form a library at the institution. Fanny and a number of her friends covered the books that Heaton procured, overseeing their first distribution.<sup>17</sup> Her organisational and needlework skills were put to good use in the support of bazaars in aid of various objects, both national and local. The causes she supported in this way included such civic-minded and patriotic ones as the provision of an exercise ground for the local rifle volunteers in 1862.<sup>18</sup> Later, she took on more responsible committee roles, being secretary of the Leeds Ladies' Cotton Famine Relief Association and president of the Leeds Soup Kitchen.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Reid, *Memoir of J. D. Heaton*, pp. 132-4.

<sup>15</sup> 'Journal of J. D. Heaton', i, p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 261-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-5 and 191.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>19</sup> For information on the Soup Kitchen, see B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', pp. 137-9.

However, the overriding concern that linked most of her public activities was with education, both that of the poor and that of middle-class girls. The first volume of Heaton's journal, which goes up to 1863, reveals Fanny expressing an interest in or working for St George's Sunday School, the Burmantoft's National School, the Female Schools of Art in London, the Mill Street Sewing School for Factory Girls and the Adel Reformatory School.<sup>20</sup>

From the mid 1860s onwards, Fanny's activities in this field took on a more openly feminist dimension. In 1866, a meeting of governesses was held at Claremont to lobby for the opening of the University Middle Class Examinations to women. The meeting included reformers from Liverpool and Manchester, as well as Mr Fitch of the Schools Commission. This occasion saw the formal establishment of the North of England Council for the Promotion of the Higher Education of Women. Heaton was also in charge of an *ad hoc* committee created to oversee the university examinations in Leeds in the late 1860s. This committee eventually gave rise to the Leeds Ladies' Educational Association (1869), which in turn provided the core of the Yorkshire Ladies' Council of Education (1871).<sup>21</sup> Heaton's daughter Marian sat the examinations in 1869.<sup>22</sup> When another daughter, Lucy, completed her education, Fanny even persuaded Dr Heaton to allow her to take up a paid position as a teacher, although this eventually proved too much for Heaton's pride and he insisted on her resignation after two years.<sup>23</sup>

Fanny's interest in such matters had been encouraged by her correspondence with Emily Davies, later founder of Girton College. Davies visited Claremont in 1865, bringing with her (to Dr Heaton's surprise) Elizabeth Garret Anderson, the first English woman to

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<sup>20</sup> 'Journal of J. D. Heaton', i, pp. 191, 231, 263, 337; B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journal of John Deakin Heaton', pp. 109-10 and 121-2.

<sup>21</sup> Isobel Jenkins, 'The Yorkshire Ladies' Council of Education, 1871-91', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LVI (1978), 27-71, esp. pp. 29-31. Further information on this organisation and the activities of Fanny and Ellen Heaton in relation to it may be found in Lara H. Kreigel, "'Encouraging Success Within the Limit of our Actions": The Yorkshire Ladies' Council of Education, Catherine Buckton, and Leeds Domestic Reform, 1870-1922' (unpublished MA Dissertation, University of York, 1991), esp. chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', pp. 130-31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-2.

qualify as a doctor.<sup>24</sup> It was also through Davies that Fanny and Ellen became involved in the collection of signatures for the first women's petition on the suffrage, making a smooth connection between improved educational opportunities and the extension of women's political rights (a connection long made by the supporters of working-class education).<sup>25</sup>

Her positions with the Cotton Famine Relief Association and the Soup Kitchen gave Fanny first hand experience of male hostility to female philanthropic effort. She was even forced to defend the latter in the local press from charges of extravagance, a duty which she discharged with aplomb, pointing out her critic's ignorance of poverty and sickness in the process.<sup>26</sup> Through her philanthropic and political activities, she was therefore actively engaged in contesting the gender boundaries of public and social life. Moreover, she achieved all of this while maintaining her position as the wife of a highly respected professional man, including carrying out her maternal and domestic responsibilities. However, it is significant that when she fell ill, her husband measured her recovery in terms of her resumption of activities *outside* the home: 'Fanny continued to be quite an invalid & was chiefly confined to the house; but before the end of January she improved so much as to be able to go to church, and to one or two public meetings.'<sup>27</sup>

It is clear from this short biography that despite being denied access to vast swathes of public and political life, women like Fanny and her colleagues were able to develop and nurture a sense of wider civic responsibility. Arguably, it was this sense of a duty to society beyond the domestic circle that fuelled the commitment of many women to the early campaigns for female rights. This brings us to the second question, the extent and nature of women's contribution to the ideal of an improving middle class. Women's early experiences of association and organisation can be traced to the initiative of female reformers, inspired by a mixture of belief in the Enlightenment doctrine of progress and the moral imperatives of evangelicalism. These women were keen to assist their male counterparts in the 'civilising mission', which became the cornerstone of Victorian 'middle-

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>25</sup> Ann Dingsdale, 'Generous and Lofty Sympathies', pp. 126-7.

<sup>26</sup> Fanny Heaton to the editors of the *Leeds Mercury*, 23 December 1869, printed in B. and D. Payne, 'Extracts from the Journals of John Deakin Heaton', pp. 137-8

<sup>27</sup> 'Journal of J. D. Heaton', i, p. 119.

class' identity. Many believed that better female education, access to the professions and limited political rights would enable women to take a fuller and more responsible role in this work, particularly as the work itself became more scientific and professionalised. Moreover, the very nature of women's claim to such opportunities was rooted in class identity. When women such as Fanny Heaton talked of women's higher education or the vote, they were usually thinking in terms of propertied and genteel women, of the kind who might be identified as 'ladies'. Generally speaking, it was the succeeding generation who linked gender emancipation with class emancipation, via the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party. In fact, it could be argued that women initially sought such opportunities as a way of gaining greater recognition for their other public activities and of making their voices heard in public debates on social policy and action.

In conclusion, despite their uneven access to the levers of social power, middle-class women were able to develop a lively sense of their civic responsibilities and duties.<sup>28</sup> Although they were mostly excluded by law from exercising direct political rights, women were able to mobilise contemporary discourses of femininity, such as the evangelical language of 'woman's mission', or the extension of their domestic roles as wives, mothers and household managers, in order to extend their sphere of competence. This could include such diverse activities as appealing to parliament on questions of great moral importance, or doing their bit for the maintenance of stable class relations and the improvement of society through charitable work. In this way, the early pioneers who set up missionary and visiting societies, who ran bazaars and organised collections or political campaigns, ensured that women would never be entirely excluded from civil society. At the same time, elite women claimed a place in the public consciousness through demanding their own space in the audiences at civic ceremonial occasions, forcing male observers to write them into the narratives of such events as the bearers and custodians of civic virtue. It cannot be disputed that these discourses could be limiting. Nevertheless, women's active engagement with the rhetoric and reality of civic virtue and duty throughout this period enabled many of them to make a positive contribution to Victorian society and to the triumph, no matter how contingent or transient, of the mid-Victorian middle class.

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<sup>28</sup> Using the IEMP model of social power (Ideological, Economic, Military and Political) as described in Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, Introduction.

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