

Taming Modernity: The Rise of the Modern State in Early Industrial Manchester

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Abstract

Why do we have a modern state? This big sociological question is the departure point for this thesis. In its pages, however, the issue is distilled down to a discrete historical inquiry, one that might be subjected to an archivally rooted methodology: what were the conditions in which “modernity” in the state first arose, what were the social pressures fostering this transformation, and what were the structural dimensions of modern society that enabled this state form’s institutionalization and reproduction? Returning to the first historical society in which the modern state appeared – nineteenth-century Britain – this thesis finds that the process of industrialization, and more specifically, industrial urbanization, must be considered the first and necessary cause of state modernization. The task is therefore to understand why, in a concrete and granular fashion, the distinctive social effects of industrialization should promote an interventionist, expansionist state form, one wielding immense infrastructural power. This thesis approaches this task in the form of a case study. It is not, however, a study of a typical or “representative” case, but of an exemplar: early nineteenth-century Manchester, the world’s first and most concentrated experiment in industrial urbanization. Using a cross-sectional variety of archival sources – both the records of the state itself, but also those that allow us to see the state from the outside, from “below” – this thesis descends to street level to ask when expansionist and interventionist patterns first appeared in the local governance structures of industrial Manchester and what social dynamics fostered their implementation and perpetuation. It finds that “class”, in the broad sense of overlapping cultural and economic patterns, and more particularly class tensions and even conflicts must be considered crucial structuring dynamics in modern state formation. Departing from idealist models, however, it also insists that in the final analysis, no particular class “won” in the social struggles surrounding state modernization; indeed, the modern state itself is not a completed and stable project. Rather, the story of the modern state is the story of the establishment of a monopoly by one particular system of social authority and mediation – the state – as the legitimate arena for political contestation and arbitration, a process which in Manchester entailed a turn toward the state by multiple social groups, possessing varying degrees of social power. It is the perpetuation of a series of imbalances and social inequalities – a disequilibrium, rather than an equilibrium – that explains the continuing strength and significance of this arena in the societies in which it has taken hold.

Résumé

Pourquoi l'État moderne existe-t-il? Cette grande question sociologique est le point de départ de cette thèse. Dans ses pages, cependant, la question se résume à une enquête historique circonscrite, qui pourrait être soumise à une méthodologie d'archives : quelles étaient les conditions dans lesquelles la « modernité » de l'État est apparue pour la première fois, quelles ont été les pressions sociales qui ont favorisé cette transformation, et quelles étaient les dimensions structurelles de la société moderne qui ont permis l'institutionnalisation et la reproduction de cette forme d'État ? En revenant à la première société historique dans laquelle l'État moderne est apparu – la Grande-Bretagne du XIXe siècle – cette thèse démontre que le processus d'industrialisation, et plus précisément, l'urbanisation industrielle, doit être considéré comme la cause première et nécessaire de la modernisation de l'État. Il s'agit donc de comprendre, de manière concrète et granulaire, pourquoi les effets sociaux de l'industrialisation ont favorisé une forme d'État interventionniste et expansionniste, détenant un immense pouvoir infrastructurel. Cette thèse entreprend cette tâche sous la forme d'une étude de cas. Il ne s'agit cependant pas d'une étude d'un cas typique ou « représentatif », mais exemplaire : Manchester du début du XIXe siècle, la première et la plus concentrée des expériences d'urbanisation industrielle au monde. En utilisant une variété de sources d'archives – les archives de l'État lui-même, mais aussi celles qui permettent de voir l'État de l'extérieur, « d'en bas » – cette thèse descend au niveau de la rue pour demander quand les instincts expansionnistes et interventionnistes sont apparus pour la première fois dans les structures de gouvernance locale du Manchester industriel, et quelles dynamiques sociales ont favorisé leur réalisation et leur perpétuation. Il trouve que la « classe » - au sens large du chevauchement des motifs culturels et économiques - et plus particulièrement les tensions et conflits de classe, doivent être considérées comme des dynamiques structurantes dans la formation de l'État moderne. Or, en s'écartant des modèles idéalistes, il insiste également sur le fait qu'en dernière analyse, aucune classe particulière n'a « gagné » dans les luttes sociales entourant la modernisation de l'État ; en effet, l'État moderne lui-même n'est pas un projet achevé et stable. L'histoire de l'État moderne est plutôt l'histoire de l'établissement d'un monopole par un système particulier de médiation et d'autorité sociale - l'État - en tant qu'arène légitime de la contestation et de l'arbitrage politiques. À Manchester, ce processus a consisté en un tour vers l'État par de multiples groupes sociaux, possédant des degrés différents de pouvoir social. C'est la perpétuation d'une série d'inégalités sociales – un déséquilibre plutôt qu'un équilibre – qui explique la force et l'importance continues de cette arène dans les sociétés où elle s'est implantée.

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I have been a student at McGill nearly as long as Napoleon was at war (though, like Napoleon, with some breaks). This seemingly never-ending campaign has left me with a list of teachers, comrades, well-wishers and dear friends deserving of thanks that is far too long to be contained here. From the dim past of my undergraduate experiences, I must particularly thank Brian Trehearne, my first supervisor, and the community at the McGill Daily, the paired forces that taught me to research and to write. More recently, my life at McGill has been enriched by my peers in the history department, in particular Jessica Rose and David Aitkin, both of whom have spent long hours discussing history with me over breakfasts not eaten at breakfast time. I would also like to acknowledge the rich and warm academic community I have enjoyed with Cynthia Tang, Vinny Mazzeo, Shawn McCutcheon, Felicia Gabriele, Vlad Solomon, Angela Tozer, Stephan Pigeon, Fariduddin Attar, the members of the MBHS, and many others.

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The staff of the McGill History and Classical Studies Department have been heroic since I first stumbled through the door in 2013. Two people in particular – Mitali Das and Jessica Ward – have helped me emerge from innumerable bureaucratic trials and tribulations unscathed.

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I would also like to spare a moment in these acknowledgements for the figures from two centuries ago whose stories I have borrowed for this dissertation – the many hundreds of thousands of people who migrated to the Manchester area as industrialization took hold. The further along I got in the research for this project, the more I was struck by the extent to which, in the long sweep of history, it is only the blink of an eye since they moved to Manchester and the world changed. I cannot imagine what they would make of the work that follows, but for whatever it is worth, I have done my best to keep faith with them. To my friends in the Manchester of today, most of all Adam, who made my landing there such a gentle one: I miss you all, and I cannot wait to return.

I have been nourished by my relationships with dear family and friends throughout this project; my parents, my grandmother, my brother – who more than once did his best to patch my

economic and statistical ignorance. My beautiful community in Montreal has truly been a haven for me during this work; I will not name individuals, as it would be too painful to leave anyone out, but I must of course thank Zoë Thomas, who was for seven years my and my work's constant companion. To the rest, I will have to express my gratitude in person. Any friend outside of academia with sufficient dedication to make it through an acknowledgement page is at the very least deserving of a drink on me – consider this your token, but no telling.

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Introduction

On the morning of June 23, 1842, the charity worker John Layhe paused in his rounds on Manchester's Thursday Street to converse with some of its residents. There were few more desolate corners of England at the time than this newly laid out alley of mud, its few feet of breadth lined with cheap, flat-fronted housing for weavers. Aside from its poverty, Thursday Street was isolated; situated in the furthest reaches of Manchester's north eastern working-class suburbs, it was hemmed in by wasteland on one side and the banks and workshops of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway line on another. Conversation turned to the immense challenges facing Manchester's hundreds of thousands of working poor, most of them migrants to the industrial boom town. Layhe was an educated man, a friend and correspondent of Manchester's great and good, but he was also sensitive and dedicated, and in his diary he made frequent mention of small encounters and moments of cross-class exchange like these. Unlike many men of his status, he engaged with and allowed himself to be challenged by working-class radicals. On the evening of June 23, for example, he recorded in his diary, "Had a conversation with J. Smith, Thursday Street, about the evils of the times and their remedies. Had to defend freedom of opinion against a Chartist."¹

The purpose of this journal, so far as one can tell, was for Layhe to track his progress as the chief visitor for the Ministry to the Poor, a Unitarian charity which distributed goods and services to Manchester's slum dwellers. From September 1, 1842 onward, the journal became more of a simple catalogue of households visited and services offered. For the first three months, however, Layhe left quite detailed and subjective entries, some of them multiple times a day,

¹ University of Manchester Archives (UMA), "Memoranda of Visits and Observations made as a Minister to the Poor of Manchester," GB 133 UCC/3/1/49. The notebook does not contain Layhe's name, but is reasonably attributed to him by the archive due to dates.

producing a kind of prolonged meditation on the conditions and ideologies of the world's first industrial working class. Manchester, at this particular juncture in history, seemed to many observers like a great machine built for consuming human life. The central irony of Mancunian society was that the town was also in the midst of the greatest economic miracle in a few millennia of history, playing host to the world's first growth-based, mechanized production economy. While the cotton boom driving this growth flourished, endemic volatility wreaked havoc on the workforce the boom had assembled. Edwin Chadwick, in 1842, notoriously calculated the average age of death for a Mancunian casual labourer at 17, a figure more redolent of an atrocity than a public health crisis. Chadwick's methodology has since received criticism,² but more recently, Simon Szreter and Graham Mooney have asserted with some confidence that the average life expectancy for the town's total population in the first half of the century was around 25, an astonishing figure which stands at roughly half that of the poorest nations and warzones in the world today.³ As a charity worker, it was Layhe's task to trudge through these desolated working-class districts, praying with the dying, distributing coupons for soup kitchens and hospital admittances, and hearing tales of woe:

Heard that some persons had been seen at the soup kitchen who came for it from Bury and that one man was there who stated that having no money to pay for lodgings, he had slept in Granby Row Fields and that his brother had picked his pocket of some soup tickets which were given to him.

² See Michael J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain :The Foundations of Empirical Social Research* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1975): 60; Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 97-103. A rare modern defence of Chadwick's methodology by James Hanley damns with faint praise, as Hanley argues for Chadwick's rhetorical and activist credentials, not the reliability of his data. Hanley, "Edwin Chadwick and the Poverty of Statistics," *Medical History* 46.1 (2002): 21-40. Nonetheless, the general critique is that Chadwick's data was insufficient to mount the claims that he did, and not that the claims themselves were implausible.

³ Simon Szreter and Graham Mooney. "Urbanization, Mortality, and the Standard of Living Debate: New Estimates of the Expectation of Life at Birth in Nineteenth-Century British Cities" *The Economic History Review* 51.1 (1998): 93. For recent contemporary figures, see "Life expectancy and Healthy life expectancy: Data by country," Global Health Observatory data repository, World Health Organization, updated December 4, 2020, <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.SDG2016LEXv?lang=en>.

... Mrs. Meek told me that from Wednesday to Friday of one week they had no bread in the house and only a few potatoes some neighbours had sent them. For a day and half, they had no fire.

Manchester was not, however, quiescent. On the morning of August 12, Layhe recorded,

Turnout still engrosses public attention. Handloom weavers begun to be turned out. People feel very anxious about the loss of income in consequence of cessation of business. Saw William Evans, who is very ill and anxious about his spiritual condition and wished me to call again soon.⁴

That afternoon, he was caught up in the action himself while out on his rounds:

Made 7 visits in Newton – saw mob in Junction St. turning out weavers, also in Sudell St. turning out girth and trace makers. Heard complaints of people turning every trade out forcibly. Mrs. Nelson told me of a lodger of theirs who is not jannock⁵ since while he talks of reforming government, he is drunken and dishonest, and would be a thousand times worse than the government if he had the power.

Layhe was clearly affected by what he had seen in the slums, and wrote about his charges with empathy and sorrow. When it came to the turnouts, the outbreaks, and the claims of socialism and Chartism, however, he seemed somewhat at a loss. He once spent the entire day in fraught conversation with a shoemaker tempted by radicalism:

Had some interesting conversation with a shoemaker about attending public worship: he said religion was all very well for those who could attend to it, but poor people were so harassed that they could not. He himself was too proud, he said, to go out on a Sunday, and many more were in a similar case, but after all, many people made themselves much worse off than they need be. He thought it would be a good thing if there were only 2 or 3 religions, and people could settle to them and make themselves comfortable with them. I reminded him of the importance of religion to the poor as a source of consolation in their trials, and endeavoured to show him what cheering considerations they lost by giving up all thoughts of the subject. This he owned was true and admitted that if he could not go out to worship, he might and should serve God at home.⁶

⁴ Layhe: June 27, July 8, and August 12, 1842.

⁵ Lancashire dialect term for honest, fair, or authentic (see John Howard Nodal, *A Glossary of the Lancashire Dialect* (Manchester: A. Ireland & Company, 1875): 168).

⁶ *Ibid.*: June 24, 1842.

In numerous exchanges like these, Layhe revealed himself to be unable to accept working people's radicalism on their terms, but incapable of dismissing their anger; he had, after all, familiarized himself intimately with its causes.

As a wealthy, educated Mancunian, and one with a somewhat public role, Layhe could not escape being caught up in these conflicts over social power. In times of social unrest, propertied male residents of Manchester were expected to enroll to be deputized as "special constables"; accordingly, on August 13, Layhe recorded, "Morning very fine. Enrolled as special constable for 1 month." Serving as a "special" was not light nor easy work, involving long hours of patrolling at night to protect property. It was also not guaranteed to be peaceful; in cases of large turnouts or protests, specials were often called upon to participate in street battles against working people. We don't know where Layhe served or exactly what he was required to do, but confronting working people must have been deeply uncomfortable for someone in Layhe's position; on August 16, just two days after enrolling, he recorded, "Engaged in measures for pacification of town. Made no calls. Dislike being employed as special constable. Hate patrolling." A few days later, he noted, "Owing to being unsettled on acct of popular outbreaks, I have neglected for several days to keep this journal."⁷

Rich primary sources like these provide the historian a number of interpretive avenues to pursue. Many historians have studied the economic development of the industrial urban city in the nineteenth century, and the plight of Lancashire's handloom weavers in the 1830s and 40s has itself been the subject of a small historiography.⁸ Visiting activity like that which Layhe

⁷ This remark is undated; the following entry is dated August 22, 1842.

⁸ Work on industrial urbanization will be cited throughout, but some important studies include Alan Kidd, *Manchester: A History* 4th ed. (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2011); *City, Class, and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester*, edited by Alan Kidd and Kenneth Roberts (Manchester: Manchester

engaged in – a hallmark of middle-class Victorian culture (Layhe knew and worked with the more famous Gaskells) – has also received recent compelling cultural-historical scholarship.⁹

This dissertation, however, is about a subject which at times can fade to the background of historians' attention, but is nonetheless woven through and among all these other narrative strands. As Layhe's journal reminds us, the new industrial society did not just settle passively into place; from the beginning it was fraught with danger, prone to novel forms of upheaval and crisis. The focus here will be on the urgent administrative project which arose in these years, and which Layhe in fact found himself unwillingly caught up in as a Special – the need to tame modernity. In particular, this dissertation explores the specific *way* that modernity was to be tamed: a dramatic, unprecedented expansion in state power. According to the sociologist Michael Mann, in 1881 the British government devoted more funds to civil than to military expenditure. In 2021, this ratio seems mundane, but it in fact marks one of the major, if lesser-known, milestones in the organization of human societies. As Mann writes, 1881 was “probably the first time in the entire history of organized states that the greatest power of an era devoted more of its central state finances to peaceful than warlike activity.”¹⁰ Out of the dynamic British nineteenth century, the modern state form was to be born.

University Press, 1985); François Vigier, *Change and Apathy: Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970); Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). On handloom weaving and its decline, see Duncan Bythell, *The Handloom Weavers: A Study in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Geoffrey Timmins, *The Last Shift: The Decline of Handloom Weaving in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); John C. Brown, “The Condition of England and the Standard of Living: Cotton Textiles in the Northwest, 1806-1850,” *The Journal of Economic History* 50.3 (1990): 591–614; Clark Nardinelli, “Technology and Unemployment: The Case of the Handloom Weavers,” *Southern Economic Journal* 53.1 (1986): 87–94.

⁹ See Martin Hewitt, *Making Social Knowledge in the Victorian City: The Visiting Mode in Manchester, 1832-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019) and “The Travails of Domestic Visiting: Manchester, 1830–70,” *Historical Research* 71 (2002): 196–227; Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Vanessa Heggie, “Health Visiting and District Nursing in Victorian Manchester; Divergent and Convergent Vocations,” *Women's History Review* 20.3 (2011): 403–22.

¹⁰ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Volume 2: the Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 376-77.

This landmark, however, was really the endpoint of a process, one which had begun in the closing years of the 1700s. In the eighteenth century, Britain began to industrialize – or rather, the lowlands of southern Lancashire began to industrialize, fueled by a historic boom in the cotton market. By the close of the 1780s and 1790s, what had been a rural, outwork-based system began to centralize in urban areas, and forms of economic production, exchange and labour management which had hitherto been less important – the free labour market, the money wage – began to become hegemonic in the industrial towns.¹¹

Urban industrial capitalism changed the way people lived, worked, related to one another. Few changes, though, would be as dramatic as the way industrialization was to alter the meaning, scope and purpose of the state and state action. As J.S. Mill said of the nineteenth-century masses, in a sentiment which is rarely interpreted as literally as perhaps it should be: “those were indeed new men, who insisted upon being governed in a new way.”¹² From the 1790s onward, a marked and accelerating transformation was effected in the structure and action of the British state. Processes, institutions, and positions which had lasted since the Tudor era, some of them even dating back to twelfth-century Henrician reforms, were swept aside and replaced with new models. Britain gained the first modern police forces, the first modern sanitation systems, the first modern prison network; it widened its streets, ensured they had names, and placed numbers on all its houses. As radical as this process was, it had no single author and belonged to no single

¹¹ The most important twenty-first century work on British industrialization is Stephen Broadberry, Bruce Campbell, Alexander Klein, Mark Overton, and Bas Van Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth, 1270-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2014), which will be used as the most up-to-date reference work throughout. Other standard texts include Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Martin J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Roderick Floud, *The People and the British Economy 1830-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1983).

¹² J.S. Mill, “The Spirit of the Age, I”, in *Newspaper Writings: Volume 12*, eds. Ann P. Robson and John Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1986): 228.

political program. Rather than being a national project, it almost always began with experimentation and initiative at the local level. It was also not a homogenous or undifferentiated process; though by the end of the century, every decent-sized village would have its bobby and its post office, change tended to originate in and occur fastest in places feeling the full brunt of the new economy and its distinctive pressures.

This dissertation is a history of this transformation, the rise of the first modern state, localized to one highly significant setting: Manchester and its surrounding districts. It tells this story through a close examination of the real, tangible moments in which some of the first people to live with a modern state and some of the first to man it learned their roles. In such moments of negotiation, conflict, and collaboration, real individuals hashed out both what it meant to govern and to be governed in this new way – how to live under, with, within a modern state.

Needless to say, the choice of setting is not random. Manchester was more than just precocious in modernizing its governmental practices. Rather, as was widely understood at the time, Manchester was the first place where the circumstances arose which were to make the modern state seem necessary – that is, it was the first local environment to experience rapid industrial urbanization. Manchester was not always the first site of state innovation; still, there can be little doubt that when state modernization projects were undertaken in Manchester, this was done in an original context – that is, the projects were not simply best practices adapted from the capital or elsewhere, but were seen as uniquely suited to local circumstances. This urgency came from the kind of social uprooting, human devastation, and dynamic instability that one finds recorded in the journal of John Layhe and proto-social workers like him, in the voluminous court reporting and other primary sources from the period, in the awestruck impressions of

foreign observers – most famously, the German cotton heir Friedrich Engels, who believed from experience that “The degradation to which the application of steam-power, machinery and the division of labour reduce the working-man, and the attempts of the proletariat to rise above this abasement, must [in Manchester] be carried to the highest point and with the fullest consciousness.”¹³ Even for national-level reformers, industrial Manchester more than any other place embodied the chaos, the conflict, and the enormous potential that made a new mode of governance necessary.

Manchester is also significant for the distinctive pace and nature of its development. Many of the nineteenth century’s other cities and large towns – most famously London, but also Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Liverpool – had first blossomed in the early modern period or even earlier. The innovations of the nineteenth century, in these towns, were thus grafted onto established and often change-resistant contexts. Even today, explaining the complex pageantry of local governance in London to a newcomer can be a challenge.

Manchester, by contrast, was a boom town that became a metropolis. In a very short period of time – roughly 1780 through 1850 – a surge in cotton profits caused the old commercial village of Manchester to be destroyed and a new city put in its place. This was true quite literally, in that Manchester has today next to no architectural legacy of its pre-industrial self.¹⁴ But it is more significantly true socially, culturally, and economically. Cotton drew a new elite to the town, and a workforce which within a decade or two swamped the comparatively

¹³ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, trans. Florence Kelly Wischnewetzky (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1892): 42.

¹⁴ To my knowledge there remain a grand total of five entirely pre-industrial buildings in the city centre (Manchester Cathedral, St. Ann’s, Chetham’s Hospital, the Old Wellington Inn, and Sinclair’s Oyster Bar), the latter two of which have been deconstructed and moved from their original site. A handful of others date from the initial late-18th century expansion.

minute community of artisans and labourers which preceded it. As the second Superintendent of Police, Sir Charles Shaw put it:

While the face of these districts is entirely changed, and its population has increased and is increasing, we must recollect that greater moral changes have taken place in that population, than even in the artificial changes which have been made in the features of the district which they inhabit.
It is a new class of men – a peculiar race.¹⁵

There was no one birthplace of the modern state, no single site in which an entire early history of the modern state can be written. Still, in early nineteenth-century Manchester the pressures which generated state modernization and the process of state-building itself are apparent in particularly bare and unfettered form. In this dissertation, I will therefore trace the parallel development of the modern state and industrial capitalism here, following closely the city's development from the late eighteenth century through to the height of the British industrial revolution at the outset of the Victorian period. I will ask why these two world-historical forces that called this strange new environment home – the modern state and industrial urbanization – were born together and seem to have always needed one another.

The problem of the modern state in British historiography

One historiographical peculiarity must be dealt with at the outset, as it will influence the tone and approach of this dissertation: in general, nineteenth-century historians of the UK have had little to say about this world-historical evolution that happened during their period. The purpose of this dissertation is not only to argue for the significance of the modern state; still, in a context in which this significance is not assumed, some brief analysis of this apathy must be offered. I say “peculiarity” because this apathy makes nineteenth-century British historiography

¹⁵ Charles Shaw, *Manufacturing Districts: Replies of Sir Charles Shaw to Lord Ashley, M.P., Regarding the Education and Moral and Physical Condition of the Labouring Classes* (London: J. Ollivier, 1843): 43.

odd amongst its peers: one does not have to demonstrate the importance of the state in any number of adjacent fields – historical sociology, early modern history, post-colonial history.¹⁶

All the same, there is not one single reason that state history has failed to take hold in modern British historiography; rather, the distinctive instincts, investments, and prejudices of the field have tended to cause the question to fade ambivalently in and out of view, leaving us with a series of unfinished or ambiguous proposals and unresolved scholarly debates.

The most sustained scholarly exchange on state expansion occurred several decades ago – the rather inconclusive “Revolution in Government” debate. The initiator of this debate, Oliver MacDonagh, first summarized the conceptual issue in 1958:

Most historians take it for granted that the function and structure of executive government changed profoundly in the course of the nineteenth century...If my hypothetical (but, I trust, existent) historians were asked why they believed the nineteenth century change to be revolutionary, they would very likely think of the terminal conditions – the *ancien regime* of the early nineteenth century and the current paraphernalia of the collectivist state – and truly observe that so extraordinary a contrast implies a revolution in the middle. But if they were pressed to explain its cause or nature, they might well find that the answers sleeping in their minds were uncoordinated and interminable.¹⁷

¹⁶ As is being suggested, these literatures are too extensive to be meaningfully glossed here, but significant works for the current dissertation include Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990); Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). For early modernists working in history departments, see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); M. J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c. 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); likewise, for studies of colonial and post-colonial states, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); H.J.A. Bellenoit, *The Formation of the Colonial State in India: Scribes, Paper and Taxes, 1760-1860* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); E.A. Heaman, *A Short History of the State in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Oliver MacDonagh, “The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal”, *The Historical Journal* 1.1 (1958): 53.

The ensuing exchange soon devolved into an argument strictly over the influence of Jeremy Bentham on nineteenth-century high politics – an intellectual-historical question of some importance, but much too narrow a framing to capture the full complexity of the question of state modernization generally. The consensus which emerged, such as it was, stipulated that while Bentham was forward-looking and influential in some aspects of reform, in other regards he was strongly opposed to the direction state development ultimately took, and in any case, the larger social-historical question of the reasons for the spread and adoption of more or less “Benthamite” ideas cannot be resolved within the limited methodology of intellectual history.¹⁸ In other words, when the debate fizzled out in 1980, it left the field not much further ahead than when it began, and perhaps with something of a distaste for the question.

Sporadic attempts have been made since. A handful of authors have offered primarily high-political, parliamentary accounts of the trajectory of nineteenth-century reform.¹⁹ The best of these works would make good companions to a true granular history of the state. An exclusive focus on the national level, however, is simply not an appropriate methodology for historicizing state modernization, as it was at the lower and mid-tiers of the state that change originated, and that its impact was most profound. As Mann noted, “a division of labor devolved [in the nineteenth century]: most of the new civil functions devolved to local or regional governments,

¹⁸ See Henry Parris, “The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal Reappraised”, *The Historical Journal* 3.1 (1960): 17-37; Jenifer Hart, “Nineteenth-century social reform: a Tory Interpretation of History”, *Past & Present* 31 (1965): 39-61; L. J. Hume, “Jeremy Bentham and the Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government”, *The Historical Journal* 10.3 (1967): 361-75, Anthony Brundage, “The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Reappraisal of the Revolution in Government”, *The English Historical Review* 87.342 (1972): 27-48; Peter Dunkley, “Emigration and the State, 1803-1842: The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government Reconsidered”, *The Historical Journal* 23.2 (1980): 353-80.

¹⁹ See, for example, Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783-1870* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Philip Harling, *The Modern British State: An Historical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); *The Waning of “Old Corruption”: The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Philip Harling and Peter Mandler, “From ‘Fiscal-Military’ State to Laissez-Faire State, 1760-1850.” *Journal of British Studies* 32.1 (1993): 44-70.

with the central state retaining its historic militarism.”²⁰ It is perhaps unsurprising that these top-down historians tend to offer rather tepid and half-convinced accounts of state growth, stressing the Victorian state’s relative minimalism (through terms like “night watchman state”, *laissez-faire* state) when compared to its twentieth-century descendants. Reading these works, one must often remind oneself that, while the Victorian state was nowhere near so large as the British or other first-world states today, it was still the largest and most intrusive civil governance system attempted up until that point. In a revealing if minor inconsistency, the so-called “night watchman state” in fact was the first to abolish the limited medieval institution of the night watchman, replacing him instead with much larger numbers of much better trained and better paid constables.²¹

At the opposite end of the spectrum, each of the constituent institutions of the nineteenth-century British state – the “New Poor Law” workhouses, the “New Police”, sanitation, infrastructure, etc. – has been the subject of sustained and sophisticated scholarly discourses.²²

²⁰ Mann: 375.

²¹ See Chapter Eight below.

²² On the New Police, see David Churchill, *Crime Control and Everyday Life in the Victorian City: The Police and the Public* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Stanley H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780-1850*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Elaine A. Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Carolyn Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984); on the Poor Law, see M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982); Felix Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Peter Dunkley, “The ‘Hungry Forties’ and the New Poor Law: A Case Study,” *The Historical Journal* 17.2 (1974): 329–46; Anthony Brundage, David Eastwood, and Peter Mandler, “Debate: The Making of the New Poor Law *Redivivus*,” *Past and Present* 127 (1990): 186-201; David R. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Samantha A. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2017); on prisons and punishment, see V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); on sanitation and public health, see Cullen, *The Statistical Movement*; Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice*; more recent works include Matthew Newsom Kerr, *Contagion, Isolation, and Biopolitics in Victorian London* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Krista Maglen, *The English System: Quarantine, Immigration and the Making of a Port Sanitary Zone* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Graham Mooney, *Intrusive*

British historians tend to embrace focused, institutional studies such as these, and this genre certainly contains British historiography's most cohesive and insightful work on the state. As a general rule, however, these studies have kept their focus tightly on the institution at hand, eschewing lengthy consideration of the broader state development context – the historian of prison construction, for example, rarely addresses the question of why the Penny Post was being developed in the same period, and according to very similar administrative and actuarial instincts. At times this aversion to the state history frame blossoms into an outright antagonism. One recent historian of modern policing has directly critiqued what he has termed the “state monopolization thesis” of policing: in fact, he is skeptical that the advent of modern policing marked a significant expansion of state power at all.²³

The only historical discourse to explicitly and proudly adopt the mantle of state history as such in recent years is a curious and special case: a highly theoretical strand of scholarship following in the footsteps of French philosopher Michel Foucault. The child of a bureaucrat, Foucault was plainly dazzled by the elaboration and sophistication of modern governance. Toward the end of his life, he gave a series of lectures and interviews employing a heightened, almost mystical language to evoke the transcendent ideological essence of modern governing, what he punned “governmentality”.²⁴ Followers of this late Foucault have echoed Foucault's

Interventions: Public Health, Domestic Space, and Infectious Disease Surveillance in England, 1840-1914 (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015). Once again, the above is a small sampling; one could also compile similar historiographies for physical infrastructure, criminal law reform and trial procedure, the post office, and so on.

²³ See Churchill, *Crime Control*, and “Rethinking the State Monopolisation Thesis: The Historiography of Policing and Criminal Justice in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Crime, History & Societies* 18.1 (2014): 131–52. The analytical tensions between Churchill's work and my own are addressed in Chapter Eight, below, and a forthcoming article on Manchester's New Police.

²⁴ In some ways, this work is a continuation of Foucault's classic account *Discipline and Punish*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977). However, though I am not a specialist, it seems to me that the “governmentality” thread is consistent and self-referential enough to be considered a separate line of inquiry, and

evocation of a kind of transcendental quality of modernity, though often making some effort to tie it down to more tangible case studies.²⁵

This is an idiosyncratic, self-referential, and in some ways quite self-contained scholarship. Its eschewal of conventional methodologies and modes of argument has given it some charismatic monopoly over the scholarship of the modern state in the history department. As an evocation of ruling-class ideologies, it is often apt enough. Patrick Joyce, for example, the most devoted Foucauldian of nineteenth-century Britain, has pronounced the Victorian state a “liberal state”, a perfectly adequate description of the self-image of the broadly “liberal” governing culture which took hold in forward-thinking places like Manchester in the nineteenth century.²⁶

The problem, however, is that these works claim to do something more than this – that is, they claim to provide a holistic historical account of the state. It is here that they fall short; most importantly, little is revealed of the modern state’s origins and original contexts in the Foucauldian mode. The Foucauldian gaze remains characteristically fixated upon the modern state as a fantastical ideological creation, and thus is often allergic to materialist questions and

seems to usually be treated as such by Foucauldians; in any case, the term “governmentality” does not appear in *Discipline and Punish*. This slightly later material has filtered into the anglophone world in bits and pieces. The completist will find Foucault’s entire thoughts on “governmentality” and related subjects in the several published volumes of his lectures at the Collège de France, in particular *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); most anglophone students encounter this phase through the curated volume *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

²⁵ A useful overview of this scholarship is given in Patrick Joyce, “History and Governmentality,” *Análise Social* 49 (2014): 752–56; some prominent works include Nikolas S. Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Books, 1999); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999); Mitchell, *The Rule of Experts*; Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal Du Midi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003) and *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁶ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom* and *The State of Freedom*.

connections – “modernity” in the state and in general is largely unhistoricized, serving as a kind of deus ex machina intervention *upon* history, not a creation *of* historical processes.²⁷ At times, the archive is even treated with a kind of impatience, almost as an impediment to free historical analysis.²⁸ The historian Theodore Koditschek once observed of Joyce’s *The Rule of Freedom*: “Although Manchester is one of the case studies that Joyce draws upon, an ignorant and inattentive reader might scarcely notice that it was the center of the Industrial Revolution.”²⁹ For a work claiming to be a “socio-cultural history” of nineteenth-century Manchester, the critique is, I think, both just and fatal. We will encounter Joyce and the Foucauldian ethos at various points in this work. For the moment, it will suffice to say that the Foucauldian approach is, in the final analysis, unconvincingly historical because it is shy of causation, of historicization and origins.

As British historians, then, we stand rather empty-handed in front of sociologists and historians from other fields who have every right to demand some qualitative account from us of the birth of the modern state. Nineteenth-century historians generally have been unable to approach the subject with a sufficient level of both theoretical and definitional openness on the

²⁷ One extreme iteration of this epistemological problem is the recent suggestion by one Foucault-influenced scholar that modern cultures and mentalities did not arise from industrialization, but rather the reverse: “[Traditional scholarship] invariably assumes that not only did the Industrial Revolution usher in the modern world, but that it determined the shape of our modern social and political conditions. In contrast, I follow those who have reversed the explanatory tide by positing that changing patterns of social organization were the harbinger of the great economic transformation that became known as industrial capitalism. Simply put, Adam Smith was wrong. He believed that the growth of commercial activity had created the society of strangers, whereas I suggest that the society of strangers restructured the practice of economic life” (James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain became Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014): 100-1).

²⁸ E.g.: “Perhaps I might add here that while this book has been based on a large amount of reading in primary and secondary sources, much of it takes the form of an exploration of certain key texts and instances, so that I have felt it appropriate to limit reference to these, rather than to the whole range of material I have consulted, much of which has indeed not served the purpose of this extended worrying away at the historical utility of the concept of governmental freedom” (*The Rule of Freedom*: 17).

²⁹ Theodore Koditschek, “Review: *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*,” *The Journal of Modern History* 78.1 (2006): 183.

one hand, and empiricist confidence – the modern state *was*, after all, born at this time, and this place – on the other. Surveying this ambivalent and disconnected field, one is left with the distinct impression of a historiography that is oddly alienated from its subject. Most obviously, as Koditschek’s comment indicates, none of these studies, whether traditional/empiricist or Foucauldian, aims to draw substantive and concrete connections between state growth and its apparent *prima causa*: mass industrialization and industrial urbanization. This connection is the most basic question of the British contribution to the modern state form, but it has yet to be explored with a granular, social-historical research methodology.

Given this ambivalent scholarly ground, I approach the subject with caution, and with values of clarity and simplicity. For the most part, this dissertation will be heavily primary-source focused and often narrative in form. In the remaining pages of this introduction, however, I would like to sketch some necessary theoretical frameworks so as to embark upon my discussion of the state with some parameters established. First, I think it is pressing to establish what is meant, finally, by the term “state”, and also what is meant by the state’s modernity. I will then lay out my approach to the state as a historical phenomenon, and the methodology this approach engenders, as well as offer a comment on a somewhat indirect but unavoidable theoretical inquiry – the question of class. It is only then, having honed these tools, that we can move on to the material. Like many state historians, I am somewhat in awe of the magnitude of state development in the past 200 years, and I feel we are only in the beginning stages of understanding the consequences of this change. As much as we valorize the exploration of unknown terrain in academia, however, venturing off the beaten path entails definite epistemological and methodological risks. The ambivalent legacy of the Foucauldian approach seems to me an object lesson in this regard. If the discipline of history, as opposed to sociology

or political science, is to offer anything to the study of the modern state, it must retain its relentless tendency to historicize, to demystify, to make concrete. If anything, the scale and scope of the question make these values more urgent.

Definitions

Historians mean different things when they say “state”. A small number of theoretically minded historians, close to and in dialogue with their social-science peers, view “the state” as a discrete and identifiable historical phenomenon, a specialist subject of study. On the other hand, “the state” is often treated by academic historians generally as a kind of abstract essence of the entire nation in its politicized aspect. This is the state that is the ostensible universal subject of history, that historians speak of as if it had human desires, fears, predilections, character; that was once even conventionally gendered as feminine (“Britain had no territorial ambitions on the continent, though she preferred to keep control or a protective hand over points of maritime and commercial importance;” “Russia, the decisive military power on land, satisfied her limited territorial ambitions by the acquisition of Finland...”).³⁰ Plainly, this work belongs to that small historiography which treats the British state as a specialist subject, analogous to “the British economy” or “gender in Britain”. If one wishes to adopt this pose, however, one should be able to define with some clarity what this thing at the heart of one’s study is – and reliable scholarly definitions of the state in history are, in fact, rather difficult to come by.

At one time, the predominant definition was that, as Weber proposed, a state was an entity “which lays claim to the monopoly on the legitimated use of physical force.”³¹ Though still

³⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1964):128-9.

³¹ Max Weber, “Politics as Vocation,” in *Weber’s Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification*, eds. Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015): 136.

in wide circulation, this insight has lost its aura of authority; as the leading eighteenth-century historian John Brewer rather tactfully wrote, “The notion that the state has a monopoly of physical violence seems extremely problematic, unless it is qualified by some indication of the character of that violence.”³² To put a finer point on it, all states at all times have tolerated, facilitated, or simply shown no apparent interest in a host of alternate forms and agents of physical violence – from violence against slaves, to violence against outlaws, to the corporal punishment of legal dependents and boxing matches. Weber’s definition gestures at the state’s tendency to regulate and the prominence of violence in the assertion of state authority, but otherwise illuminates little.

As an alternative, Brewer offered the following mouthful, which has become fairly widely-quoted in the field: “[a state is] a territorially and jurisdictionally defined political entity in which public authority is distinguished from (though not unconnected to) private power, and which is manned by officials whose primary (though not sole) allegiance is to a set of political institutions under a single, i.e. sovereign, and final, authority.”³³ There is little to object to in this summary, and it seems to answer many historians’ purposes admirably well. The field of historical sociology has produced a host of analogous models, each adopting a similarly exhaustive and catalogic approach, though with somewhat varying emphases.³⁴ For my purposes,

³² Brewer, “The Eighteenth-Century British State: Contexts and Issues” in *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815*, ed. Lawrence Stone (London: Routledge, 1994): 54.

³³ Brewer: 252. Brewer’s definition is invoked in Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000): 19; Philip Harling, *The Modern British State: An Historical Introduction*: 1; Simon J. Potter, “Richard Jebb, John S. Ewart and the Round Table, 1898–1926,” *The English Historical Review* 122.495 (February 2007): 105–132; Aaron Kitch, *Political Economy and the States of Literature in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): 4.

³⁴ For instance, Mann: “[A state is] a) a *differentiated* set of institutions and personnel embodying b) *centrality* in the sense that political relations radiate outwards from a centre to cover c) a *territorially-demarcated area*, over which it exercises d) a monopoly of *authoritative binding rule-making*, backed up by a monopoly of the means of physical violence” (“The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results,” *European Journal of Sociology* 25.2 (1984): 188). Walter Scheidel provides a thorough survey of mainstream historical sociology definitions of the state in “Studying the State,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, edited by Peter Fbiger Bang and Walter Scheidel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 5–41.

however, this genre of “definition” still suffers from the weakness that it describes more than it defines. In a work seeking to sketch a granular portrait of the state, I require something better able to capture the state’s *mechanism*, its essence.

This is why in this work, I will adhere to a principle of simplicity and follow (with due critical distance) the state’s own sole definition of itself, and this is that the state is *law* – or rather, the totality described and defined at any one given moment in time by a particular, complete body of law. This insight was proposed once before – by the Austrian legal theorist Hans Kelsen, in his 1934 magnum opus *Pure Theory of Law* – but its value has heretofore been ignored by historians.³⁵ Importantly, “law” here means something specific yet expansive: not merely rules and statutes, not the limited field of “legal” matters that is tried in courts and forms the professional expertise of judges and lawyers, but an integrated, self-referential, and superficially consistent description of a system of order, originating from the pronouncements of a sovereign authority – in Britain’s case, the rightful holder of the British throne. In fact, one could say what we call a state is the unity between what is done in courts, what is done in parliaments, and what is done at the lowest bureaucratic level of formal authorization; a state is present when these are treated as one apparatus put in motion by the exercise and interpretation of sovereign authority. As Kelsen put it, “the state – which one speaks of as the aggregate of official state organs, the bureaucracy – shows itself to be a system of legally particular functions. These are, namely, those functions that are to be performed by individuals qualified in a specific way as state officials by the legal system.” Or, more simply, “every state is only a legal system”.³⁶

³⁵ Hans Kelsen, *Introduction to the Problems of Legal Theory: A Translation of the First Edition of the Reine Rechtslehre or Pure Theory of Law*, translated by Max Knight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 103, 105.

Kelsen guides us through some qualifications. In history, such apparatuses have always involved authorized delegation to less formal structures, a necessity for any functional bureaucracy. This does not mean such less-regulated activities are not “legal functions” – they do need legal authorization, after all – but it does mean that in day-to-day operation, the “legal” aspect of any given realm of state activity might well be largely concealed from those who participate in or interact with it. The important point is that all this activity is drawn together, theoretically, by a principle of sovereign will. Something like this principle must operate in any coherent, stable state system – is, indeed, implied by the term “sovereignty” itself – yet it is perhaps most easily demonstrable in a monarchical system like Britain’s, in which it is the same *Rex* or *Regina* who prosecutes felons, who appoints judges, whose voice Acts of Parliament are written in, and whose crown is stamped on the local post box. The sovereign’s word moves through the system – or so the fiction goes – like breath animating a body.

Conversely, the state historian might distinguish state from non-state by tracing an upwards legal thread. Take a given constable patrolling the streets of Manchester in 1835: they would have been hired by the Manchester Police Commissioners; this body had been given the authority to create such positions by the 1828 Manchester and Salford Police Act, itself an extension of a 1792 Act of the same description;³⁷ Parliament, which passed these acts, had been granted the authority to pass such legislation in the constitutional settlements of the fourteenth century – and so on. When such threads lead back to some larger architecture claiming sovereignty, one can safely assert one is in the presence of the state.

This is not to say matters are always black and white: the edge of the state is a gradient, not a line. In nineteenth-century Manchester, for example, a number of institutions and actors

³⁷ Arthur Redford and Ina Stafford Russell, *The History of Local Government in Manchester, Vol. 1: Manor and Township* (London: Longmans Green, 1939): 204.

(banks, crown corporations, “official” charities) operated in a semi-official liminal zone, seemingly without provoking any great identity crisis on the part of the state. This is a note which has been portrayed as confounding in the Foucauldian literature; Timothy Mitchell, for instance, in a passage referenced approvingly by Joyce, observed:

Take the example of banking: the relations between major corporate banking groups, semipublic central banks or reserve systems, government treasuries, deposit insurance agencies and export-import banks, and multinational bodies such as the World Bank, represent interlocking networks of financial power and regulation. No simple line could divide this network into a private realm and a public one, or into state and society.³⁸

To the reader of Kelsen, however, the root analytical problem is not apparent; the intuition that these institutions are implicated in the state arises from the fact that they are (to varying degrees) legally enmeshed in it. No “simple line” does separate state from society, then, but the legal definition does describe the gradient of institutions’ involvement with the state in a perfectly convincing and coherent way. Similarly, there have been innumerable formulations of human society that have resembled states to varying extents without mobilizing the particular technology of written law. Still, it is a strength of the law-centred definition of the state that it sorts these liminal cases and exceptions with both flexibility and clarity, allowing one to usefully map varying levels of integration of institutions into the state and varying degrees of state-like social ordering in history.

Thus far, however, the definition is programmatic, diagnostic; a mobilizable scholarly approach is still needed. The expansion of the state form which we call state modernization required the activity of not just parliamentarians, lawyers, and technocrats and ideologues like Bentham: it required local landowners and magnates to increasingly seek legal legitimation for

³⁸ Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *The American Political Science Review* 85.1 (1991): 90; Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, 17.

their traditional patronage; it required the partisans in local political squabbles across England to move their conflicts indoors, and to contest mayoralties, parliamentary seats, and judgeships as the highest tactical victories for any political endeavour; it required innumerable functionaries, inspectors, and constables to take up the mantle of state agents, to feel some identification with and loyalty to these posts – and it required generations of ordinary British people to recognize and respond to them as such. The modernization of the state form was significant, in the end, because it was a social upheaval, a reordering of daily life that required the active participation and agency of millions. If Kelsen’s definition allows one to identify and situate this process with greater clarity, one still needs the tools of a more broad-based social-historical analysis to inquire into it in a concrete fashion.

For this reason, this work tends toward what I will call the “diachronic” approach to the state – an emphasis on the state as a process that happens in time, between human beings, rather than as an abstract, theoretical object. This insight is not my own, but is a traceable theoretical lineage, originating in the work of unorthodox Marxist historians in the 1960s, and continuing through to many Foucauldians today. One of the older diachronic formulations, and one which is rather appealing in its frankness, came from the sociologists Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer:

[The state] is not a thing, out there, to be used, captured, or come to that smashed, much as the whole trajectory of state formation and its theorizations from Fortesque to the Fabians has been to represent it as such, as impersonal power, as Mortall God. What is made to appear as 'the State' are regulated forms of social relationship; forms...of politically organized subjection. The enormous power of 'the State' is not only external and objective; it is in equal part internal and subjective, it works through us.³⁹

Michel Foucault adopted a diachronic pose at times, and the model has its most ardent contemporary advocate in British history in Joyce, who subtitled his second work on the state “A Social History of the British State”. In defining the state, Joyce has spoken of “processes rather

³⁹ Philip Richard D. Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch*: 180.

than structures, and so of the state in ‘network’ terms, as something like an ‘assemblage’, which is held together (sometimes very uncertainly) at particular key sites or nodes and through the actions of key actors and processes, human and non-human.”⁴⁰ Indeed, this framing is the closest affinity between Joyce’s work and my own.

To return to the legal definition asserted above: much as the British state may be predicated on the written technology of the law, the only material existence this system has ever attained is when it has been animated in actual exchanges and relations between human beings. I think that as a theoretical exposition, Kelsen’s observation about the state is unimpeachable. In a strict historicist sense, however, it is not quite right to say the state is the law, period: rather, the state is the law *enacted*. This enactment has often operated with a rather striking freedom from the written frameworks which ostensibly pin it down, as the Common Law’s immense corpus of “legal fictions” attests. What’s more, the rudimentary written bodies of states have themselves always been the subject of larger, external discourses which were vital to granting them their legitimacy – in the nineteenth-century English context, the framework of the Constitution leaps to mind. Finally, the real-world exchanges and relations which have brought the law to life have in turn been influenced or determined by a complex intersection of other meanings, identities, and discourses. In short, it has always been the enactment that matters, that has formed the state in history as opposed to the theoretician’s mind – and this enactment cannot take place isolated from the gendered, racial, sexual, religious or whatever other variety of power regimes that saturate a given polity. Most fundamentally, thinking about the state in this manner means thinking of it *relationally*, as something that only attains existence when it is enacted through human beings. The early modernist may speak of “Versailles” as having been the nerve centre of

⁴⁰ Joyce, *The State of Freedom*: 19.

the French state, the heart of its power – but today, though the stones and mirrors are the same, the palace is nothing more than a museum. The Versailles that mattered, then, was never a palace, but the exchanges, relationships and actions of the people within it.

As mentioned, this is an inherited theoretical insight, and I offer only one departure – though being a methodological point, it is a significant one. To my mind, the diachronic insight about the state should not simply be an abstract or theoretical proposition: rather, it determines the appropriate approach to the archives. By and large, historians espousing more diachronic emphases have still carried forward the traditionalist assumption that the state’s internal archives should be the state historian’s primary place of work – though one must credit them with shifting focus to the “middle” (the bureaucracy, the technocracy) rather than “above” (the executive, diplomats, etc.). External views of the state, however – the state as it was experienced “from below” – have suffered recurrent neglect. In a particular moment of hubris, Joyce once pronounced that “the responses of the governed may not always be as important as some accounts imagine.”⁴¹ This seems to me a plainly inadequate methodology – particularly if we consider the primary purpose of the state’s archive-keeping, which is never to do kindness to the future historian, but is rather to allow the state to provide an internally consistent account of itself to itself. One must assume such sources systematically overlook gaps between ideal and enactment.⁴²

⁴¹ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, 184.

⁴² At times, controversy causes the state to circle around and give a second account of itself through inquiries, commissions, investigations and the like. These certainly are the richest sources the state intentionally provides its historians. Still, such investigations are rare in the grand scheme of things, and have, perhaps, distorted perceptions by drawing disproportionate attention to themselves. Nineteenth-century historians are, for example, generally well informed about the indignities of the perennially investigated and reported-upon workhouses; the much greater quotidian violence of the prisons and constabularies has, at times, almost escaped from view; see Chapter Seven below.

My contention is, therefore, that if the state exists only in its enactment, an adequate account of it must approach it not just from above, nor just from the middle; rather, we must do our best to find incidental sources that allow us to see the state from the outside and from below. History “from below” can be sentimentalized, but this is not a moral imperative, but an epistemological one: it is only with such external views that the state begins to emerge not just as idea or ideal, but as social, historical reality. Since the state’s own archives tend to be overwhelmingly the largest and best kept in modern societies, a strong second-best genre of source is incidental or casual internal sources, those which might capture state action but not for the state’s own purposes of self-construction: incidental record-keeping, passing remarks by one department of state on another, etc. The urgent point is that the state historian needs to know not just how the state was conceptualized, or the effects the architects of various institutions or systems had planned, but how the British state actually existed as historical phenomenon *in* British society in the nineteenth century. One needs to go ranging across the archive, searching out moments when the state was encountered by chance, as it were – the felon who gives some account of their arrest in court, the newspaper report on the opening of a new workhouse, the diarist who is called up to serve as special constable. The conventional “official sources” are, of course, inimitable, but if we do not understand them to be radically incomplete, we become simply compilers of the state’s authorized biography. As social historians, we need the unauthorized version.

Nonetheless, all this breadth should not mean that state history has no specific subject. At times, past advocates of the diachronic approach have come close to characterizing the state as almost mystically undefinable, a kind of social-historical Tetragrammaton. Mitchell, for

example, suggested the weakness of existing definitions should be taken as “a clue to the state’s real nature”: “[the state] should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist.”⁴³ The Marxist sociologist Philip Abrams even argued scholars of the state should make a conscious decision not to believe in the state: “The task of the sociologist of religion is the explanation of religious practice (churches) and religious belief (theology): he is not called upon to debate, let alone to believe in, the existence of god.”⁴⁴ The problematic analogy is inadvertently revealing of state scholarship’s often-shaky definitional foundations: a sociologist of religion, after all, who was unable to define the *concept* of “god” would be in a rather embarrassing position.

There is, then, nothing about the diachronic, historical nature of the state that precludes its definition, and in fact we define abstractions like “god”, “gender”, “economy” without hesitation – even if, as abstractions, their definitions are intellectual constructions that therefore must remain amendable. Furthermore, if we do not retain some definitional foundation, we risk placing *nothing* outside of the state historian’s orbit, and thus reducing the exercise of state history to a generalist theory of society – or, even worse, giving the individual historian complete authority to pick and choose what is and what is not relevant to their task.

Thus, a due clarity about the contiguity of the law and the state is necessary here. Even if one’s end goal is (as mine is) to map the broader context, to resituate the state in society, one still needs the specificity of understanding the state as a particular technology, a particular strategy of rule, to so situate it. This work is not general; it is about a particular terrain of human action, one with a specific history and a recognizable identity. To reiterate, that terrain – the state – is

⁴³ Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”: 94.

⁴⁴ Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977)” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1.1 (1988): 79-80. A note on dating: this paper was written in 1977 and published posthumously.

understood here as enacted law, as the mobilized effort across time to order human activity around a written system citing a sovereign secular authority.

Unwieldy as this definition might seem, it allows one to witness some striking facts with greater clarity. This quite specific technology of order co-existed and overlapped with many others in the centuries and millennia leading up to the British nineteenth century. It was the sudden expansion and dramatic development of *this* unique strategy of rule – secular law – which is the story of the state in nineteenth-century Britain. This process had no single author, was the product of no single political movement, yet was one of the most significant outcomes, in terms of human experience, of the process of industrial development, one that a large majority of the globe's inhabitants live with today.

The second, narrower definitional issue is what is meant by the *modern* state, or the modernity *of* a state. Modern states are fantastically complex historical phenomena, institutions that influence and even determine lifestyles and expectations in the societies they persist in to an astonishing extent. Modern states tend to enforce hard borders, they possess central banks, they mobilize large bureaucracies, and generally speaking, they make some claims to fulfill a quasi-democratic or representative principle, however farcical or corrupt the claim may be; all these things make them more or less distinct from any historical precedent for ordering human societies. They are, however, secondary characteristics – outcomes of the modernity of the state, not causes – and if a definition hangs on any one of them, it is bound to generate some unsatisfyingly arbitrary exclusions.

If the term “modern state” is intended to apply to all states which merit the descriptor – from nineteenth-century Britain, to the USSR in the 1950s, to modern day South Korea, North

Korea, or New Zealand – it can only refer to two things absolutely. First of all, there is scale. As noted earlier, in simple terms, the civil – that is, the inward-turned – state exploded in size in the nineteenth century, and has never meaningfully deflated. Indeed, the “public sector” – which, in 2020, employed roughly 17% of the British workforce, and spent an equivalent of 38% of the UK’s GDP – would be a problematic conceptual category to apply to most world states before 1800.⁴⁵ Secondly, and by extension, there is the modern state’s unparalleled investment in and command over what Michael Mann called “infrastructural power” – that is, the material, quotidian enactment of power in society.⁴⁶ The term is usefully contrasted to “despotic power”, which is perhaps how power is more commonly rationalized. Despotic power describes the theoretical limits of state power – what the state entitles itself to do – and in a perfectly absolutist system, would be limitless. Infrastructural power, on the other hand, might be thought of in terms of probabilities or reach: it is the certainty state managers can have that their decrees will actually be effected. Despotic power, insofar as one can generalize, has actually declined in modern states on average. Infrastructural power, however, has been expanded and interpolated into daily life to an extent that pre-industrial tyrants could only have dreamed of. I write this in an apartment electrified by an immense hydroelectric power grid entirely under state control, in a room whose dimensions and ventilation have been determined by state regulations; a moment’s phone call would bring police, ambulances, or the fire brigade to my door. This expansion in the practical power of the state, beginning in Britain in the nineteenth century, is *the* story of the state in the past two centuries, and is all that is consistently meant, in the final analysis, by the state’s “modernity”.

⁴⁵ United Kingdom, Office for National Statistics, *A01: Summary of Labour Market Statistics*, dataset, May 18, 2021; United Kingdom, Office for Budget Responsibility, *Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2019*, dataset, March 2019.

⁴⁶ Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State”: 185–213.

To those used to less minimalist scholarly approaches, these definitions may seem rather reductive, even banal. I offer only two observations in response. Firstly, the brilliance of Kelsen's original essay on "Law and the State" is less that it puts forward an original theoretical proposition than that it makes a simple observation with clarity: in every historical example the full, enacted extent of a body of law is utterly contiguous with its state, like a perfect map reproducing the geography of a terrain down to the last grain of sand. In the end, law and state are indistinguishable – the same object viewed from different angles. One should not therefore fear the legal definition of the state. It is not reductionist, as it does not reduce; it might not even tell us anything we do not already intuitively know. It simply clarifies, making a diagnostic observation about whatever realm of state activity one might happen to be interested in.

Secondly, the skeptic who finds the unparalleled growth of the state in the nineteenth century an underwhelming subject and an unenticing definition of the state's modernity simply does not understand the fantastic rarity of such a phenomenon in the *longue durée*. We tend to speak of state "growth" and "development" in the modern world as natural, even expected phenomenon; to historicize the state properly, one must reverse this emphasis, and instead come to terms with the immense entropy which governs the history of the state. States are complex, fragile human constructions, ones that require unimaginable scales of human collaboration: all states, therefore, fall eventually, whether through revolution, conquest, or simple dissolution, and the typical status of any given state at any given point in time is some degree of crisis.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁷ Michael Mann traces these challenges across several millennia of history in *The Sources of Social Power Volume 1: History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); the counterintuitive average frailty of modern states was revealed in two classic works by Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

odds stacked against state growth are more fundamental than this, however. As a rule, states enforce inequality, and they constrain human choices – in short, they impose discomfort, if not pain.⁴⁸ The law which never needs enforcement is, after all, no law at all in any material sense. Whenever possible, then, individuals have voted with their feet by simply escaping state power for anarchy. Mann has asserted that this was the central challenge facing early state forms in the iron age, one that was only resolved as irrigation agriculture “tied” former nomads to the land, while James C. Scott has reproduced this research and traced such impulses – and the state’s need to counter them – through the modern era.⁴⁹

In short, entropy has been the habit of *individual* states ever since “the state” has been in existence. Charles Tilly, John Brewer, and others have persuasively argued that it required the cataclysmic scale of European warfare to bring about the initial early modern growth of the state.⁵⁰ When examining the much greater civil expansion of the state in the nineteenth, twentieth, and now twenty-first centuries, we should expect upheaval on a similar scale. The expansion and dramatic strengthening of the state in response to industrial urbanization is not, then, an outcome one should passively accept; it should draw our attention immediately as a profound expression of the unique character of a new arrangement of human affairs.

The pragmatist’s approach to the state also has one final attraction: once one has a coherent sense of what the modern state *is*, it comes into view as a discussable and analyzable

⁴⁸ It would be possible, perhaps, for an optimist to imagine a polity containing all the gentle, social assistance capacities of the modern state – healthcare, education, old-age care, and so on – and none of its coercive institutions: police, prisons, the military. Without commenting on the likelihood of such a thing coming to pass, I would suggest that such an entity would have a limited claim to being called a “state” at all, as it would lack the ability to enforce any law.

⁴⁹ Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Vol. 1*; James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); *Seeing like a State; The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

⁵⁰ Tilly, *Capital and Coercion*; Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*.

object. It is, in large part, through a pragmatic instinct and an adherence to the archive that I aim to begin to thaw modern British historiography's apathy toward the history of the state. There are other ways to order societies than the legal form, and there have been many other sources of social power at work in historical modern states (patriarchy, religious hierarchies, racial regimes, etc.) than the state. What happened in the nineteenth century was a radical and unprecedented expansion of a specific form of exercising social power, one that can be traced in the archives and historicized in granular fashion. I have already said that the problem of the state in British history is an inability to establish the connection between industrialization and state modernization. Expanding this claim using the definitions sketched above, one could say that what historians have failed to explain is why the social pressures generated by industrialization caused a massive growth in the specifically legal exercise of authority and power in Britain, and conversely, why legally legitimated environments were increasingly asserted as the most appropriate – even the *only* appropriate – spaces in which politics might occur.

The question of class

One final conceptual comment is necessitated as much by the peculiarities of the historiographical terrain as it is by the intrinsic nature of the subject: the question of class in the nineteenth century. Few issues have caused such anxiety and polarization in nineteenth-century British historiography. Still, I take the question up with some optimism here. The heat of the class debate in British history has now been cooling for roughly two decades, and my hope is that it is becoming more possible to take stock of the scholarship and adopt an evidence-based, pragmatic usage of the term.

First, a note on how the subject enters the present study. I have already stated that this account of the state will be relational and social in its approach, remaining attentive to what demographics and social relations were implicated in state growth. We know from existing scholarship that Manchester grew rapidly in size in the period of this dissertation, and that it did so not because of any leap in birth rates, but because of rapid migration into the town.⁵¹ The major changes in social relations of this period and place, in other words, were at root a function of the arrival of large numbers of people, and the resulting formation of new communities, patterns of exchange and interaction, and power dynamics. The early chapters of this dissertation therefore pose a simple, answerable inquiry as a departure point for my analysis of the origins of the modern state: who moved to Manchester in our period, and why?

A more complex response to this question will be offered in the relevant chapters, but the broad strokes of this migration can be sketched here. On the one hand, Manchester's propertied elite witnessed a dramatic renovation from the 1780s onward. Prior to industrialization, a stable network of power had gravitated for centuries around the institution of the Manor and its Court Leet, owned by the Mosleys from 1596.⁵² Some families in this elite traced their presence in the area as far back as post-Conquest grants, but faced with encroaching industrialization, they generally receded from active involvement in local affairs. Many of them – including the Mosleys themselves – sold off their estates and retreated to still-green parts of England elsewhere. In their place, a complex new community of wealth moved in, at first literally buying up or renting the old homes of the elite in the stately cores of both Manchester and Salford, before later sifting outward to Ardwick Green and other inner suburbs.

⁵¹ See Chapters One and Two below.

⁵² See Thomas Stuart Willan, *Elizabethan Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).

This new demographic was broadly liberal in its politics, and often (though far from exclusively) Unitarian in its religious beliefs. It possessed a politically organized minority core which sought, from the 1790s onward, to stage a takeover and renovation of local governance structures, a project which it largely achieved with the town's incorporation in 1838.⁵³ The only thing firmly uniting this emerging elite, however, was what had brought them to Manchester in the first place – participation in ownership of the new forms of capital generated by industrialization. This is not to say that the elite did not contain more doctors, lawyers, priests, ministers, and female philanthropists than it did warehouse owners and cotton masters. Rather, it is merely to point out that the cotton boom was the *occasion* of this particular elite's rise;⁵⁴ even those who did not own controlling shares in textile-industry businesses usually participated in the boom in industrial capital via family and personal connections and the opportunity for capital investment in shares of both textile and dependent-industry firms.⁵⁵ Then, as in all industrialized societies, a large and stable wealth gap remained the most reliable metric for separating the elite from the rest: in the aggregate, these people moved to Manchester to see their capital grow.

Secondly, and on a far larger scale, the town saw an explosion in the size of its population of working poor from the late 1780s onward.⁵⁶ This marked the advent of a proper

⁵³ The in-house history of this set is Archibald Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester: Intended to Illustrate the Progress of Public Opinion from 1792 to 1832* (3rd ed., London: Cass, 1970); more recent scholarly work includes Redford and Russell, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, *Borough and Township*, and Michael J Turner, *Reform and Respectability: The Making of a Middle-Class Liberalism in Early Nineteenth-Century Manchester* (Manchester: Carnegie, 1995).

⁵⁴ See Roger Lloyd-Jones and M.J. Lewis, *Manchester and the Age of the Factory: The Business Structure of Cottonopolis in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); Anthony Howe, *The Cotton Masters, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁵⁵ Notable figures who would fit this counter-intuitive profile include Edward Herford, Manchester's first public prosecutor and later borough coroner, the Gaskells (both of them inheritors of industrial money), Thomas Percival, Archibald Prentice, and, of course, Friedrich Engels and by extension Karl Marx.

⁵⁶ Two contemporary studies have become standard reference works, namely James Phillips Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London: Ridgway, 1832) and Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*; for more recent scholarship, see Frances Collier and R. S. Fitton, *The Family Economy of the Working Classes in the Cotton Industry, 1784-1833* (Manchester: MUP, 1965); Ruth-Ann Mellish Harris, *The Nearest Place That Wasn't Ireland: Early Nineteenth*

mass labour market in Manchester, in contrast to the relatively small number of servants and artisans who had serviced the old elite. This new unpropertied and labouring culture first appeared in the northeast of the city and pushed contiguously outward, while gradually filtering into the abandoned inner city and staging a takeover of a number of the southern suburbs as well. For those who took up the task of governance reform, the town's new working poor were unmistakably and explicitly understood as the primary problem that state development was to solve; it was they who were Chief Constable Shaw's "peculiar race", those who he even argued should be placed "under modified colonial government."⁵⁷

Despite this perceived unity, these people came from all over. Their initial ranks were fed by the large numbers of textile workers sloshing around the volatile labour markets of late eighteenth-century south Lancashire, but throughout the period large numbers moved straight off the land from rural England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (in that order). Many only occupied Manchester as part of a rotation of seasonal labour. Sporadic references in baptismal records confirm that black people were present in Manchester from the eighteenth century, and by the end of our period, Jews and other immigrants had begun to filter in from continental Europe as well.⁵⁸ This labouring group was, therefore, linguistically, ethnically, and religiously diverse, and they were heterogenous in the employable skills they brought with them, too.

As with the elite, then, it was brute economic factors that served as the organizing force for this diverse community: men, women, and children – as a general rule, all of them worked.

Century Irish Labor Migration (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994); Colin G. Pooley and Shani D'Cruze. "Migration and Urbanization in North-West England circa 1760-1830" *Social History* 19, no. 3 (1994): 339-58; W.J. Lowe, *The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working-Class Community* (New York: P. Lang, 1989).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁸ See "Early Black Presence," Manchester Archives and Local History, accessed June 21, 2021, https://www.manchester.gov.uk/directory_record/212557/early_black_presence/category/1373/view_all_records; Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740-1875* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).

Some historians have attacked what they see as a prevalent caricature of this population as an undifferentiated industrial workforce of cotton factory hands.⁵⁹ It is doubtless true that labour in industrial Manchester involved, in combination, more sex work, child-minding, dyeing, warehousing, carting, cooking, pint-pulling, singing, dancing, street sweeping, and stall-minding than it did spinning and weaving. On the other hand, of course, all members of the new popular culture *did* share the universal experience of selling their labour; it was this, the development of the fastest-growing labour market in the world at the time, that drew them to Manchester. Like the elite, not much else reliably united them – not religion, ethnicity, language, politics, nor gender. They came to Manchester to work.

In other words, the social developments I am interested in involved the intersection of economic factors and complex social and cultural developments that occurs when hundreds of thousands of people find themselves living in a quite novel economy. The English word for such intersections is “class”; taking the average of all existing scholarly definitions of the term, “class” refers to forms of cultural and social identification or categorization with roots in or strongly correlated to empirical economic realities. It would seem appropriate, then, to assert that the generation of the modern state in Manchester was powerfully influenced by changes in class relations.

In sociology, this is a fairly uncontroversial insight, tied to no particular political agenda or ideological tendency. In the specific field of nineteenth-century British history, though, the very invocation of the term “class” can raise hackles, due to the scars still borne from the vociferous class debates of the 80s and 90s. Feeling stifled by the Marxist hegemony over class

⁵⁹ See Kidd: 17; V.A.C. Gatrell, “The Commercial Middle Class in Manchester, C.1820-1857,” PhD Dissertation (University of Cambridge, 1971): 59-62.

analysis in British history in the 1960s and 70s, a number of young liberal historians sought to displace the certainties of the Marxist tradition with a vigorous revisionist push.⁶⁰ In the heat of these class wars, several major works brought the revisionist critique to the very brink of its logical extreme: that “class” itself was a meaningless and arbitrary category of analysis – a dead word.

Few historians writing in 2021 would reopen this particular Pandora’s box without some trepidation. At the same time, any history which seeks to meaningfully assess the sociocultural impacts of industrialization would be deeply hobbled without an ability to write frankly and clearly about class. It is not that class analysis has been abandoned altogether – indeed, I am encouraged in my own work by the free and intuitive usage of the term in an increasing number

⁶⁰ If one were to attempt to cite every work tangentially involved in this debate, one would have to cite a very large portion of the published work in the field for certain years. Still, on the side of class analysis, some touchstones include Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Eric Hobsbawm, “The Making of the Working Class 1870-1914,” in his *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Ross McKibbin, “Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?” *English Historical Review*, XCIX (Apr. 1984): 297-331; Neville Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class: Labour in British Society, 1850-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); and, foundationally, Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963). On the skeptic side, important works include David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language, and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, *The Death of Class* (London: SAGE, 1996); William Reddy, “The Concept of Class,” in *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification*, edited by M.L. Bush (London; New York: Longman, 1992): 13-26; and, in a complicated way, Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). A third relevant body of scholarship is the feminist class analysis of the closing decades of the 20th century, which bears a complex relationship to the debate more broadly. Revisionists often claimed these works as allies, as the feminist scholars subjected older Marxist approaches to strong gender critiques. To my eye, this has always been an incomplete reading, as the greater part of these works sought to expand class analysis, not to bury it, though one should perhaps place them upon a spectrum. Certainly, in their research methodologies and the way they deployed the term “class” itself, most of them resembled conventional historical materialist scholarship more than they did the revisionist style. Relevant texts include Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Sally Alexander, *Women’s Work in Nineteenth-Century London: A Study of the Years 1820-50* (London: Journeyman, 1983); Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

of works since the beginning of the millennium.⁶¹ Still, there is a certain anxiety surrounding class in nineteenth-century British history today; the term functions best when it is interrogated least, used largely undefined and sotto voce. Given how structurally vital the intersections of economic and sociocultural patterns were to the formation of the state in the nineteenth century, I am not confident that this elision is possible in the present study.

How did the historiography which should have the most to say about modern class arrangements arrive at this impasse? I offer my diagnoses here as a younger scholar, a reader of but non-participant in the class historiography of the last half of the twentieth century. As an outsider, several aspects of this debate are puzzling today. First, the notion that British historiography was ever dominated by a doctrinaire and orthodox Marxism seems empirically problematic. The handful of Marxist historians who did obtain some prominence in British intellectual life in the 60s and 70s – Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, Dorothy Thompson, Christopher Hill, and a few others – were hardly paragons of doctrinaire reductionism; their anti-orthodoxy, of course, is why they were termed the “New Left.”⁶² What’s more, the hegemonic institutions of academic history remained largely resistant to their influence throughout their careers.⁶³ Conspicuously, the same cannot be said for the revisionists, who were absorbed in

⁶¹ Among other works, I am thinking here of Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Malcolm Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill, and the Politics of Labour* (London: Routledge, 2017); and Emma Griffin, *Liberty’s Dawn: A People’s History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven: Yale, 2013). Navickas provided a historiographical summary of these newer, freer approaches as they relate to “labour history” in particular in “What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain,” *Social History* 36.2 (2011): 192–204.

⁶² Academic nineteenth-century British history has received a couple of rare contributions from somewhat more traditional Marxists, notably John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London: Methuen, 1977). While this work has been fairly widely read, however, citations have generally been hostile, and one could hardly say it has exercised a dominant influence on subsequent scholarship.

⁶³ Other than Hill, neither Oxbridge nor the Ivy League employed these figures even at the peak of their influence; Richard J. Evans’ recent biography of Hobsbawm portrays a scholar who worked for decades on the margins of

quantity by the UK and the US's top institutions; David Cannadine and Linda Colley were named by New Labour's Gordon Brown as his favourite historians, receiving a knighthood and a CBE, respectively, for their efforts.⁶⁴ It would seem, then, rather unnecessary to fret over a possible return to the bad old days of institutional orthodoxy; even at the height of public interest in historical materialism, academic history as an institution remained largely in the grips of the same undogmatic liberalism that has dominated it in every other period of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

As for the presiding claims put forward in the debate, they have aged indifferently as well. The revisionists are to be thanked for doing away with the most unhelpful intellectual cul-de-sac of the Marxist class historiography: the never-ending search for a narrowly pre-defined "class consciousness" in the nineteenth century. To a novice, the term might seem perfectly plausible and adaptable – is it not legitimate to interrogate people's consciousness of their class position? – but in twentieth-century Marxist hands, it developed an oddly narrow definition: class consciousness would only truly be attained with the mass mobilization of a revolutionary political movement of workers, taking as its primary object and discourse an explicitly class-oriented programme. The problem is not just that, plainly, no such program ever appeared in Britain; the very expectation of it alienated these scholars from the flexibility, indeterminacy, and strategy of the political discourses of the disenfranchised. British workers simply did not think or speak in these constrained terms.⁶⁵

academia, only achieving intellectual prominence in his 70s by first attaining popular acclaim (Richard J. Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm: A Life in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)). In general, the intellectuals of the New Left are known for making their own way, founding journals and embracing the new universities of the 1960s.

⁶⁴ Editorial, "In Praise of ... Linda Colley and David Cannadine," *The Guardian*, January 3, 2009.

⁶⁵ That the English working class had attained a degree of class consciousness during the first industrial revolution was, to some degree, the central thesis of Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*; Hobsbawm then pushed the dates back to the 1870s in "The Making of the Working Class 1870-1914" in *Workers: Worlds of Labour* (New York: Pantheon, 1984): 194-213; Neville Kirk returned consciousness to the 1830s-40s in "In Defence of Class: A Critique of Recent Revisionist Writing Upon the Nineteenth-Century English Working Class,"

Beyond this achievement, however, one must charge the skeptics with having demolished an edifice without building anything inhabitable in its stead. Reading through the major works of revisionism, it can be difficult to discern a theoretical continuity, other than a shared frustration with Marxist certainties. The kind of shorthand one sometimes encounters – that, while Marxists had assumed class was economically determined, the revisionists revealed that it was a cultural phenomenon – seems inherently problematic.⁶⁶ In every other context, class refers to the confluence of economics *and* culture, making an argument over whether class is really “about economics” or “about culture” akin to a debate over whether cars are all about engines or all about wheels. The most damaging effect of this disorganized critique would seem to me to be a lingering caginess around class – a common anxiety about examining the influence of economic forces on society, politics and culture in a confident and deliberate fashion.

I suspect much of this incoherence of the class debates of yesteryear derived from a failure to consistently disentangle two very different questions: class as a historical discourse – that is, how people thought and talked about class during the period being studied – and class as an external analysis applied *to* a period by scholars. In the revisionist scholarship, one often finds an inexplicable fear that these two perfectly compatible points of discussion must exist in competition with one another; that, for example, if people did not refer to themselves as “working class”, it might be intellectually illegitimate to categorize and analyze them as such.⁶⁷

International Review of Social History 32 (1987): 2-47. Meanwhile, in a triumvirate of studies, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), and *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Ross McKibbin asserted class consciousness to be a decidedly twentieth-century phenomenon. That otherwise complementary studies could disagree so profoundly on the chronology of the phenomenon would seem to raise inherent doubts about its utility as a historical framework.

⁶⁶ See Cannadine, Reddy, Joyce, *Visions of the People*. A recent iteration of this thought is Robert Poole’s comment that “Cultural history makes class appear as just another form of self-expression” (*Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)).

⁶⁷ E.g., Stedman Jones’ famous critique of class-centered analyses of Chartism: “An analysis of Chartist ideology must start from what Chartists actually said or wrote, the terms in which they addressed each other or their

To a frustrating extent, this confusion has carried forward. While it is true that people's explicit perceptions about and languages of class often correlate very poorly to empirical patterns of production, exchange, and ownership, historians do not and should not speak in the terms of the subjects they study – history is something more, after all, than a *précis* of archival sources. A reluctance, then, to identify plain and apparent class dynamics, cultures, and conflicts in what was a phenomenally unequal and class-segregated society must be counted as a significant intellectual frailty of nineteenth-century British historiography today.

I cannot claim that this survey of the class debates leaves me neutral. Even the sympathetic historian today must acknowledge the New Left's shortcomings; nonetheless, the flaws of the revisionists – like much of the “End of History”-era liberal scholarship of which they were a part – seem to me more fundamental and epistemological.⁶⁸ Still, the hope here is perhaps to borrow something from each camp. On the one hand, the New Left insistence that empirical economic factors have a potent effect on cultural and social development is well taken

opponents. It cannot simply be inferred – with the aid of decontextualized quotation – from the supposed exigencies, however plausible, of the material situation of a particular class or social group” (“Rethinking Chartism” in *Languages of Class*: 94). This same essay served as one of the great dragon-slayers of the class-consciousness debate, and Stedman Jones himself played a complex role in the class exchanges, being certainly among the more cautious of the revisionists. It does seem to me, however, that two archives – the qualitative and the quantitative – are being placed in competition here for reasons that seem less obvious in 2021. “What Chartists actually said” has, one could argue, been largely lost to the sands of time; generalizations about it must therefore be carefully generated, maintaining a high tolerance for doubt and contradiction. In staging such reconstructions, the deployment of a multiplicity of source types – linguistic, pictographic, statistical, archaeological, or whatever else – in the quest for context is, surely, an unmitigated methodological virtue. In any case, no informed nineteenth-century historian can start their analysis of Chartism with a pure encounter with Chartists texts: we simply know too much already. My own discussion of Mancunian Chartism at the close of this book arises much more from a comprehensive sense of the trajectory of working-class politics in these years than it does Chartist speeches or publications; I will deploy a multiplicity of textual sources to develop my account, but they are not uniformly Chartist texts, nor even texts by which Chartists might have wished for their movement to be memorialized. I leave it to the reader to determine if this methodology is sound.

⁶⁸ This context was cited by the revisionists themselves as occasion for their intervention: “In the new historical epoch which we appear to have entered, in which a whole set of conventional beliefs about working-class politics have been put into doubt – both nationally and internationally – a critical scrutiny of some of the intellectual premises upon which these beliefs have been based can only be a gain” (ibid.: 1).

here, as is the methodological imperative to combine an empirical and qualitative source base in order to evaluate these intersections. On the other hand, the revisionist insistence that nothing should be assumed – that, as Patrick Joyce, one of the leading class skeptics, put it, “the class connection needs to be shown” – will be honoured as well.⁶⁹ This work will use a freer and less self-conscious class language than would have been possible, certainly, in the late 1990s, but the approach here will not allow “class” to explain much on its own. What is being proposed is a stripped-down, archivally rooted form of class analysis which assumes as little as possible, one which uses the term itself simply to describe demonstrable cases in which economic factors influence cultural formations, patterns, and identities. No class, therefore, will be given an appointment with destiny, neither will it be assumed that class was “prior” to gender, religion, nation, race, or whatever else in determining an individual’s actions or beliefs. I will retain a clear conceptual distinction between my own deployment of class as a category – an analytical construct applied *to* a society, in order to understand it better – from the heterogenous collection of class discourses which existed at the time. The entire question of class consciousness, which formed the main sticking point of the class debate in British historiography, will be left to one side.

It seems to me that there are great untapped possibilities for class analysis in the nineteenth century, if one can retain the analytical confidence of classical social history while cutting loose from its intellectual peculiarities and deterministic hang-ups. As we shall discover, the story of state modernization is very much a story of class: more than this, it is a story of class tension, class conflict. To trace these contradictions with clarity, a rough and ready language of class is absolutely vital, and no apology is made for employing such a language here. The

⁶⁹ Joyce, *Visions of the People*: 14.

occasional revisionist suggestion that one replace empirical class language with ostensibly neutral terms delineating a power differential – “elite” and “popular” or “rich” and “poor” – is of little use in a context where the genesis and nature of that power differential must necessarily be interrogated and explained.⁷⁰

All the same, the animating principle here is *not* that class analysis has a mystical explanatory power that other intellectual frameworks lack; rather, I am asking a very precise and concrete question: what social developments, actions, or events – whether they be conceived as economic, cultural, or political – led to what dramatic evolutions in state procedures, and why. It will certainly be claimed that powerful economic forces shaped people’s behaviours in the aggregate in these years, and that these influences provided the substantive cause for the expansion of the state and influenced the form it took. It will not be argued, though, that in the conflicts and tensions which generated modern statehood any one tendency finally and definitively won out; rather, each has left its mark in distinctive and significant ways. This complex legacy is possible, of course, because the British state in the nineteenth century was not a perfect, internally consistent machine, but an ongoing human process, a set of relations and interrelations, in which a number of conflicts, incongruities, and collaborations were embedded.

Methodology

The plan for the present dissertation thus begins to take shape. Drawing our focus to Manchester, the initial home of the industrial urban form, this dissertation will begin in the late eighteenth century, as industrial urbanization began to take off in the lowlands of south Lancashire. Combining the traditional official records with a richer qualitative record of the

⁷⁰ See Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*; Joyce, *Visions of the People*.

dominant demographics of the industrial migration, this work will be attentive to how this complex process of social crystallization led to early experiments in governance reform. It will then trace the maturation of the industrial city, from the hectic years of the French wars through to the 1820s and 30s. As the population of the Manchester area reached toward a half a million people, the cotton textile industry – the world’s first industry to be subjected to large-scale industrialized production – finally achieved full mechanization of its manufacturing process, causing a concentration of capital and a ratcheting-up of social inequality with a rapidity that no local economy had previously experienced. In this environment, the reforming impulse was applied with renewed vigor to local governance, and permanent structural changes in Manchester’s governance were effected, culminating in the incorporation of the former Manchester parish as a borough in 1838. By the close of this dissertation, a remarkable transformation will have been effected, and a newly powerful local state in novel form will depart on some remarkable experiments in social engineering. The goal here, however, will be to historicize and contextualize this institutional triumph, directing our gaze from the florescence of the bureaucratized, professionalized state down to its historical roots.

Following the precepts just laid out, when it comes to sources I have sought to both match the traditional state historians’ familiarity with the official archive while expanding beyond its limits to encounter the state as frequently as possible at work within its society. In terms of official records, Manchester’s complex administrative trajectory in the decades of this study draws in a number of institutional archives, the most important of which are the Court Leet records, the Police Commission minutes, and the voluminous minutes of the Borough Council and its committees from 1838 onward. I have done my best to read through this material cross-sectionally, though I cannot claim to have detailed notes on each committee resolution.

Alarming, however, large quantities of vital material have gone missing in the past century, much of it likely destroyed during the Manchester Blitz – for instance, the entire first five years of the minutes of the Manchester Police Commissioners. Things were much better in the interwar period when Arthur Redford and Ina Stafford Russell completed their three-volume survey, *The History of Local Government in Manchester*. Due to the crucial continuity gaps in the institutional archive today, Manchester historians are now often forced to rely on this work as a quasi-primary source; simply put, the state of the archive is such that Redford and Russell's research can no longer be replicated.

There are some significant national official archives as well. I have made some use of the Home Office records, as Manchester was notoriously spy-ridden in these years; little of this research is original, however, as these records have been a common archive of social historians for several decades. Finally, a number of parliamentary commissions directed their attention toward Manchester in the decades of this study, and some of these were surprisingly granular in their findings.

It is the unofficial records which have required more dexterity on the part of the researcher. I wish to embed the nineteenth-century state in Mancunian society, and this has meant dealing primarily with a population – the urban poor of the industrial period – which was not generally literate, and whose personal and institutional records were rarely valued enough to merit preservation. This creates an interesting and somewhat challenging archival issue, to be sure. Still, the time is long gone when the nineteenth-century social historian could allege a lack of sources as an excuse for paying little attention to the working poor. The poor may have been less literate than the privileged, but at any one time many thousands of them did read and write, and some of this material has survived. Secondly, there are vast reams of material in which one

can find the perspectives and even the speech of the nineteenth-century working poor reported by others with a fair degree of accuracy. These sources certainly require critical reading, as they are filtered through more privileged perspectives and mentalities; more than this, they were usually more or less casually recorded, and often enough anecdotes about working-class people are reproduced with values (humour, the illustration of a political argument or a moral point, etc.) other than strict journalistic accuracy. They are a rich resource nonetheless, particularly when assembled as a composite image.

Since John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall's *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography* was first published in 1984, the working-class memoir has been a cornerstone of social historical research.⁷¹ Very few of the surviving autobiographies were written by long-term residents of central Manchester, and almost none in the time period we are concerned with in this study. Still, the geographic and chronological neighbourhood, as it were, of this study contains some of the richest working-class memoirs – for instance, the Oldham weaver William Rowbottom's diary, or the early twentieth century classic memoirs of Robert Roberts of Salford and William Woodruff of Blackburn. Furthermore, perhaps the most readable and compelling working-class memoir of the nineteenth century – Samuel Bamford's multi-volume autobiography – falls squarely into the purview of this study.

When it comes to second-hand recording of working class perspectives and speech, one is confronted by a wealth of material which, again, I have tried to read cross-sectionally across the period being studied. Manchester possessed quite excellent local newspapers throughout the period of this study, and local reporting often drew attention to the lives of the working poor:

⁷¹ John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall, *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated, Critical Bibliography* (New York: New York University Press, 1984). Recently, Griffin's *Liberty's Dawn* has expanded this catalogue.

crime reporting, industrial accidents, labour tensions, and folksy man-on-the-street observations were stock entries in each issue of Manchester's nineteenth-century papers. Secondly, there are the diaries and letters of middle-class figures who witnessed working-class lives, and even at times recorded working-class speech. Certainly, the richest sources of this type are the records of charity visitors and evangelicals like Layhe, whose particular focus was recording the views of the poor, but a fascination with working-class life was one of the distinctive attitudes of the Mancunian industrial middle classes, and working-class figures pop up in each one of the middle-class correspondences and diaries I have consulted in the form of chance anecdotes and exchanges.

Then there are the court archives; these deserve some special comment. Manchester's lower courts have suffered the same neglect and destruction as its other official records, leaving their archive a minimalist and patchwork affair. The records of the largest felony court with jurisdiction over Manchester, however – the Crown Court of the Palatinate of Lancaster – are hosted not in Manchester, nor, like in other counties, at the County Record Office, but at the National Archives, for arcane reasons that ultimately have to do with fourteenth-century royal politics. This has allowed them to escape both the Luftwaffe and, apparently, the attentions of most nineteenth-century historians.⁷²

⁷² The unusual history of this court stems from the fact that when Edward III granted Henry Grosmont the Dukedom of Lancaster, as an extra honour for his greatest soldier he granted the county as a County Palatinate; this meant that Grosmont held theoretical sovereignty in Lancashire, while still owing fealty himself to the crown. With sovereignty came all of the courts held before a sovereign under Common Law at that point – a Crown Court, an Exchequer, and even a Chancery. Lancashire's unique status fast became a matter of arcane trivia, as Grosmont had no descendants and the Palatinate was folded back into the holdings of the Crown. Still, its administrative distinctiveness was preserved, and traditionalists in Lancashire today will still toast "the Queen, the Duke of Lancaster." The idiosyncratic courts also survived into the 1800s, though the Crown Court fast became identical in procedure and jurisdiction with Assize systems elsewhere; by the nineteenth century, those who worked there referred to it as the Lancashire Assizes. When the Court was finally wrapped up in 1873, however, its records were not sent to the common destination of Assize records – the County Record Office – but rather the appropriate resting place for a Crown Court of the monarch of the UK: the UK Public Record Office, now the National Archives ("Records of the Palatinate of Lancaster," *Discovery*, The National Archives, accessed June 23, 2021, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C228>).

Among the contents of this archive one finds an extensive series simply catalogued as “depositions”, containing documents of various kinds gathered prior to Crown Court trials – coroner’s reports, inquiries by magistrates, and so on. The depositions relating to the nineteenth century fill 18 large boxes, with the typical bundle containing perhaps 7-8 pages of first-hand testimony; some cases run to dozens of pages. The witnesses in these cases were almost uniformly from the working poor, and the fact-finding process around any given felony could draw in the minutiae of witnesses’ lives. For instance, a female weaver in 1816 witnessed the purchasing of a dose of rat poison that was later used for murder; she was therefore compelled to recount, over pages of testimony, a typical weekend-afternoon shopping trip she had taken with her roommate, the murderer. This included the routes the pair walked, the supplies they each purchased, the pubs they stopped in for refreshment, and who paid for the drinks.⁷³ The value of this archive therefore extends far beyond the strictly criminological. In these depositions, we are invited into working-class kitchens, bedrooms, and even privies; we are brought into the smoke-filled backrooms of numerous pubs and beer halls; we hear from the musicians who played there and the boxers who fought in the alley behind. This collection is, in my view, far and away the largest and richest primary-source collection we possess of the world’s first industrial working class.

The Palatinate itself is not unknown, being a somewhat obscure point of local pride; there even exists a published guide to the Palatinate Records, written for the benefit of family historians.⁷⁴ Medieval and early modern historians, perhaps more used to records not being

⁷³ The National Archives (TNA): PL 27/9, “The Examination of Maria Oxenbould of Manchester.” Note: the inquests and depositions themselves are not individually catalogued, and because this archive contains many kinds of document, it is not possible to cite them in an entirely consistent style (say, by date, name of accused, etc.). Most have some description written on the outside by a nineteenth-century clerk, and I have identified them by this text where possible; in cases like this one, where no such tag exists, I have identified them according to the opening words of the inquest.

⁷⁴ Mike Derbyshire, *Introductory Guide to the Palatinate of Lancaster* (Lancaster: Rowton Books, 2016).

where they strictly should be, have made occasional use of the Palatinate court records from their periods.⁷⁵ It remains the case, however, that aside from a very small number of studies focusing on political radicalism and collective action, the nineteenth-century depositions have remained largely untouched, and to my knowledge no nineteenth-century Manchester historian has made a comprehensive survey of this, the richest working-class archive in their field.⁷⁶ By way of comparison, the Old Bailey Proceedings – the equivalent archive for London – have now been digitized and made fully searchable online; the project’s editors estimate around 650 publications have cited the Old Bailey Proceedings in the less than two decades since the site was first published.⁷⁷ When I first visited Kew, I required the services of an in-house paper specialist to physically open many of the Palatinate depositions, as pages had to be pried apart which had been creased and folded together two centuries ago. Hundreds of these bundles have suffered severe damage from mould and will need to be restored before any historian can review them. Working through the entirety of this material in detail would be several years’ work; for the

⁷⁵ E.g., R. Somerville, “The Duchy of Lancaster Council and Court of Duchy Chamber: The Alexander Prize Essay,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (1941): 159–77; S.K. Walker, “Lordship and Lawlessness in the Palatinate of Lancaster, 1370–1400,” *Journal of British Studies* 28.4 (October 1989): 325–48; David Harley, “The Scope of legal medicine in Lancashire and Cheshire, 1660–1760,” in *Legal Medicine in History*, edited by Michael Clark and Catherine Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 45–63.

⁷⁶ Four such studies citing quasi-political trials in PL 27 are Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism and Protest and the Politics of Space and Place 1789–1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Alan Booth, “Food Riots in the North-West of England 1790–1801,” *Past & Present* 77 (1977): 84–107; and David Walsh, “The Lancashire ‘Rising’ of 1826,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 26.4 (1994): 601–21. There may well be other references I have missed lying, for the moment, beyond the reach of digital searches; I base my assertion that the archive is underutilized on a general familiarity with the scholarship, but also upon the physical condition of the depositions when I reviewed them, described above. A handful of historians have also made use of the court rolls without apparently referring to the depositions, e.g. Jacqueline Fellague Ariouat, “Rethinking Partisanship in the Conduct of the Chartist Trials, 1839–1848,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 29.4 (1997): 596–621. Two extraordinary volumes from 1851–2 of Manchester’s original coroner’s records also survive; these were discovered by the late family historian Gerard Lodge, but have otherwise been similarly neglected by academic historians. They cover a very brief time frame and fall outside of the main chronological focus of this study, but they are invaluable nonetheless, as unlike the Crown Court’s records, they include cases that may not have gone to trial (Manchester Central Library (MCL), Witness depositions (GB127.M381/1/1).

⁷⁷ Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, “Old Bailey Online - Publications that Cite the Old Bailey Proceedings Online,” *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* version 7.0, accessed June 23, 2021, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Publications.jsp>.

purposes of this study, I found it appropriate to read every openable case from Manchester and Salford between PL 27/7 (1791-1800) to PL 27/15 (1859-1861) inclusive. I also consulted a fair sampling of cases from surrounding townships, biasing myself toward those closest to Manchester, but extending as far as Liverpool.

As this is a specialist study, with a narrow and particular research question, only a small fragment of the material I surveyed has found a place in this dissertation, though in the process of this research, a subsidiary study of the practice of neonaticide in this period also resulted in one article.⁷⁸ I hope to do better justice to this remarkable collection in future publications. The untapped richness of the Palatinate depositions, however, is an indication of the unexplored level of immersion in nineteenth-century working-class culture it is possible to achieve. Using this level of immersion, this dissertation will be able to mount an evidence-based, archivally rooted case for how working-class people experienced and interacted with the state which was designed to govern them.

The following is not an institutional history of particular departments or technologies of the state, like policing or coroner's courts. Neither is it a study of the abstraction understood as "the state" by the era's leading politicians and political philosophers. Finally, it is not a "local history", which I understand as a detailed chronicle of a particular region, intended first and foremost, perhaps, for the benefit of a readership from that community.

Rather, this work insists on being generalized and specific at the same time: it is a localized case study of the early days of the modern state in its totality, choosing as its focus not a representative sample or "typical" case, but an exemplar. If something called "the modern

⁷⁸ Ian Beattie, "Class Analysis and the Killing of the Newborn Child: Manchester, 1790–1860," *History Workshop Journal* 89 (2020): 45–67.

state” arose in the nineteenth century, as most historical sociologists agree it did, to be historically significant this process *must* have had tangible and identifiable effects at the ground level, at the moments where state intervention transformed individuals’ and communities’ lives. And if this process was intimately linked to industrial urbanization, then our test case should be an environment in which the distinctive social tensions and forces of industrialization were felt particularly strongly. Combining, then, a traditional archival base of official documents and data with a wide array of social interactions preserved in a rich but largely untapped qualitative archival record, this work will ask: how and why did this state form first take shape in its earliest environment? And if we understand why and how this distinctive state form first crystallized, does this change our conception of the character of the modern state as a historical continuity?

Structure and limitations

The work that follows has been organized into three broad sections. In Part One, I call the cast of characters to the stage, examining the complex economic developments which called Manchester into being as an industrial-urban space at the close of the eighteenth century and the new demographic forms which coalesced there. In Part Two, I examine the fraught years which served as the crucible of state formation in the industrial period: the three-decade-long period of the French wars, first against Revolutionary, then Napoleonic France. During this era of heightened political conflict, tensions which had been present since the outset of the industrial era were exacerbated, and experiments which had not seemed possible in earlier centuries were considered in earnest. Though much of the political thought of this period was specific to a unique historical interlude, reading through the archives one can discern the first appearance of later trajectories the modern state would be launched upon – most importantly a tendency toward

rapid expansion, professionalization, and systematization on the one hand, and on the other, an opening and levelling of state power and the beginning of the democratic ethos. The final section follows the full flowering of the modern state form in Manchester in the 1820s and 30s, a process which was coincident with the full mechanization of the northern industrial economy and Manchester's maturation as a city. For a brief period in the decades in which this dissertation closes, the conurbation of which Manchester was the centre was the largest human settlement on the face of the earth. Its contemporaries viewed it as a snapshot image of the future. To some extent, they were right.

Cautious of a subject which has a propensity to become unwieldy, I have kept my sights narrow, my goals and methodologies as explicit as possible. I believe this to be the approach most bound for success with the task I have set for myself, but it comes at certain costs – or perhaps, simply, every study must have its boundaries, its limitations. A few of these I would like to address at the outset.

The first is less of an apology than a clarification: Manchester here is intended as an *exemplary* case study, emphatically not a “representative” sample of what nineteenth-century British governance was generally like. Indeed, by most metrics, Manchester was quite an oddity in Britain throughout the nineteenth century; a historian seeking to reconstruct governance styles in 1830s Cambridgeshire would find fairly little to assist them in the following. Neither am I claiming that Manchester was the origin point of all relevant or significant state institutions. Certainly, Manchester made some notable original contributions, the most impressive of which was likely the world's first public gas infrastructure, a system with a fair claim to being the first modern utility.⁷⁹ Most of the time, however, Manchester was not “first”, and typically we can

⁷⁹ See Leslie Tomory, *Progressive Enlightenment: The Origins of the Gaslight Industry, 1780-1820* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

find Manchester's governors frankly adopting practices from other jurisdictions. What I am claiming is that the forces which drove modernization in Manchester were those which drove modernization elsewhere, and that these forces were particularly unfettered – and therefore particularly apparent in the archive – in Manchester. Manchester is, then, a peculiarly appropriate subject for the historian of the origins of the modern state, and peculiarly significant to state history in general.

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, this dissertation posits without proving the influence of the British state on later models. I think this is not just a justifiable but a wise limitation on a study of origins, and in a very broad sense, to prove the point one need only prove primacy. The question of diffusion is not just compelling in itself, however; it raises significant interpretive questions that I can only briefly and inadequately address.

The first case is what one might consider “peaceful” diffusion: the deliberate adoption of British models by states that understood themselves to be peers to or competitors with the United Kingdom, particularly those that industrialized in the latter half of the nineteenth century in the quasi-global process sometimes called the “second industrial revolution”: the United States, the wealthier countries on the continent, and in a more complex fashion, the areas of the settler colonies where settlers lived. This diffusion was often deliberate and explicit, and one could conduct a compelling and granular study of it by archivally tracing the study of British sources by continental and American technocrats, even fact-finding missions sent to the UK and the hiring away of experienced British personnel. I cannot apologize for not conducting this study here – that would be another book, and a lengthy one – but I take it as a given that the British model that is my focus underwent radical transformations and transmutations as it was adapted to the exigencies of other countries, other inequalities. Very likely, a sophisticated study of this

process of diffusion would influence through refraction the way we understand the British example.

The more complex consideration is the much more common case in which facets of the “modern” expansionist state were imposed upon an unwilling, colonized population by violence and coercion – often enough, by the British themselves. Seen from this vantage point, one might think that Britain appears as a decidedly atypical – even a unique or idiosyncratic – example of the “modern state”; the more representative example would be a state where modernization was imported or imposed. I would, I think, thoroughly agree; I would only add that, as with Manchester itself, the case’s oddity does not diminish its influence or significance. I intend for this work to complement, not compete with the post-colonial historiography of the state, which is generally more expansive and developed than its domestic British counterpart, and indeed, I must acknowledge a debt here: my scholarly ambition to approach the state in a holistic yet granular way – and, I am sure, my dissatisfaction with existing British models – arises in no small part from a familiarity with the achievements of post-colonial scholars. Still, I think it is useful for the post-colonial historical project itself to interrogate why British state ideology took the form it did: what shaped the expectations, instincts and systems which were aggressively foisted upon the rest of the world in the last few decades of the imperial era. When the domestic British state is mentioned in the post-colonial historiography, it is often portrayed as a relatively consensual, liberal, even quasi-democratic affair, held up in contrast to the inequality and violence of the colonial model. This is a problematic characterization, and to the extent that it is a foundational thought of the post-colonial analysis, its revision might be worthwhile. I think my emphasis on social tension and inequality as crucial contexts for the emergence of the domestic British state could be a friendly and useful amendment to the post-colonial scholarship.

One final note: this study has changed substantially in the writing of it. When I began this work, I imagined a two-fold study, addressing first the industrial origins of the modern state, and secondly its character – what it was *like* to live with this new state form, how it impacted daily life for those it was designed to govern. I was spurred in part by the remarkably untapped richness of the Manchester archive. As I wrote, however, I came to realize that the question of origins was primary, and complex and unexplored enough to require sustained and resolute focus; the question of character therefore had to come later. Oftentimes these lines of inquiry entangle themselves, and the discussion that follows is by no means inattentive or indifferent to the impact of the state: experiences of the state rebounded upon state development, influencing its future course, and thus I will often have occasion to mark them here. Still, if a historical project is to maintain coherence, it must be clear about its own priorities and emphases, and for the present work, this has meant drawing back from the question of impact for its own sake. This was to no small degree a painful decision, as it left untapped hundreds of fascinating primary documents. I leave this material to a future study.

Part One: The Social Foundations of Industrial Manchester

Setting

On November 28, 1745, Charles Stuart marched out from Preston to continue an uneventful conquest of the south of Lancashire. Gentry in the area were notoriously Jacobite in their sympathies, and most of those who were not ready to join Stuart's army had fled to join the Royal forces. The company spent a night in Wigan then headed east on November 29, passing through a flat, green, lowland landscape that continued up to the banks of the meandering River Irwell. Here they encountered Salford – a triangle of merchant's homes arranged around a patch of small fields and gardens – before crossing the bridge into Manchester.¹

Manchester by this point was nearly a millennium old. Like other inland northern centres (Chester being the prominent surviving example), the dominant aspect of the town was Tudor: whitewashed buildings constructed around massive age-blackened oak timbers. It was essentially triangular in form, and roughly a mile across. At the northernmost point of the triangle stood the gothic Collegiate Church, looking across the Irwell at Salford with Manchester's one-time manor house, now "the Hospital" (in fact a library and a school) at its base. Deansgate, a thin medieval commercial thoroughfare, formed the western face of the triangle along the Irwell; the winding lane variously called Fennel Street, Withy Grove, and Shude Hill in its short run led off to the east, somewhat south of the narrow River Irk. At this point Manchester could boast only one properly Georgian and Georgian-looking district, the small but stately square and feeder streets around St. Ann's Church, constructed in 1712.

¹ See Christopher Duffy, *The '45* (London: Cassell Military, 2003): 261-271. Famously, Manchester was in fact claimed for Stuart on November 28 by a vanguard consisting only of one Sergeant John Dickson, his girlfriend "Long Preston Peggy" and a drummer boy, a provocation presumably intended to illustrate the town's tacit support for the uprising.

The town was and had long been a thoroughly commercial place in its identity. On a 1750 map produced by the grocer John Berry, certain buildings are blown up and presented to the viewer in a ring around the margins.² Among the buildings given this pride of place, 10 of 19 were the grandiose homes of merchants, all clustered around the St. Ann's and King Street area. Nonetheless, its form of commercialism was heavily gentrified; the true elite of the town lived in a number of massive medieval and early modern stately homes scattered within an hour's walk of the Collegiate Church – notably Ancoats Hall, Strangeways Hall, Kersal Cell, Hulme Hall, Platt Hall, Ordsall Hall, Cheetwood Old Hall, Smedley Old Hall, and Slade Hall.³

This small mercantile hub nurtured its own, inward-looking high society. One excellent document of this world is the lively diary of the 19-year-old Elizabeth Byrom, kept from 1745 to 1746. Even as the Jacobite army loomed, Byrom led an active social life, spending her days flitting by carriage or foot between a fairly large cluster of wealthy families in the area. The diary's opening entry describes a tour which would be tiring enough by modern transportation:

August 14th: went with my brother to Preston; we went through Wigan and Chorley; went the next day to Kirkham, stayed there till the Tuesday following; on the Monday we went to Lytham and Blackpool, ten mile off Kirkham, for a ride by the sea side; and the next day went to Liverpool with Mrs. Roughsedge, in the chair, dined at Ormschurch; on Friday rode to see Miss Greens at Childa, they were gone to Lord Mullinax's, so we rode round Childa hills, the pleasantest prospect I ever saw, and then rode to see Outon, Lady Molineaux's, where my papa was a fortnight with Mr. Carryl. On Monday the 16th of September my papa, mamma, brother and sister, came for me home...⁴

Few of the people mentioned were wealthy or powerful enough to make a national name for themselves or participate in the London season, but locally, they formed a relatively stable and

² John Berry, *A Plan of the Towns of Manchester & Salford in the County Palatine of Lancaster* [map], 1:3168 (Manchester, John Berry, c. 1750).

³ Mansions such as these can be found on numerous contemporary and later maps; see also John Aikin, *A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles Around Manchester* (London, J. Stockdale: 1795): 207-212. Perhaps a dozen or so are still standing today in Manchester's suburbs.

⁴ Elizabeth Byrom, *The Journal of Elizabeth Byrom in 1745*, ed. Richard Parkinson (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1857): 3.

self-aware elite. The cohesion of this culture is evident in the way Byrom refers to local Jacobite heroes with personal familiarity, rendering the strains and tensions of the era as gossip: “[The Jacobites] were directly joined by Mr. J Bradshaw, Tom Sydall, Mr. Tom Deacon, Mr. Fletcher, Tom Chaddock, and several others have listed, above eighty men by eight o’clock...”⁵

The crushing of the Jacobite rebellion dealt a heavy blow to Byrom and her circle. All five of Byrom’s peers mentioned in the passage above were caught and executed; several heads – including Sydall and Deacon’s – were impaled and left to rot outside St. Ann’s. The Victorian notes to the edited version of this journal capture memories of a traumatized generation – for example, the historian George Ormerod’s boyhood memories of John Bradshaw’s cousin Ann Townley:

I remember Mrs. Townley on the verge of eighty, seated by her fireside in fatuous dotage, grasping, as an amulet or holy thing, a crown piece of James II. She only suffered it to be removed when she was dressing, retaining habitually the deeply rooted political feeling which had survived all recollection of what it sprung from. This continued until her death, for she died grasping it. The impression was worn from the coin, and a hardened furrow indented in the palm of her hand was cut deeply into by the nails of the curved fingers.⁶

For Manchester perhaps more than any other English town, the Young Pretender’s defeat meant the violent end of a decades-old political ideal. The irony was, however, that it was not the Hanoverian army that finally closed the book on the old Manchester elite, but a threat which arose suddenly from a very different direction: new money. Theirs was already a world on the decline; before the century was out, another would rise up to take its place.

In 1794, Samuel Bamford made his way into Manchester for the first time, a young boy of six holding onto the hand of his father, who had just been hired to oversee the town’s

⁵ Ibid.: 8-9.

⁶ Ibid.: 7.

workhouse. Like the Stuart Army a half-century earlier, the Bamfords made their way down through bucolic landscapes and over Smedley Field, as yet undeveloped. Past this point, however, they were confronted with a new sight:

Next we passed over ‘The Butter-style’, and turned on our left, a vast gloom darkening before us as we advanced. Then we heard the rumbling of wheels, and the clang of hammers, and a hubbub of confused sounds from workshops and manufactories. As we approached the ‘Mile-house,’ human shouts and cries in the streets became distinguishable; and on the top of Red Bank, the glare of many lights, and faint outlines of buildings in a noisy chaos below, told us we beheld Manchester.⁷

Bamford’s description is doubtless coloured by the experience of later years, but it would have been accurate at any point in the century following the 1780s. It captures a transformed urban landscape, the drowning of an antique trading centre in the rushed construction of the cotton boom. Elizabeth Byrom, by then an aged spinster, still lingered in Kersal Cell, but the Mosleys had abandoned Ancoats Hall. The medieval pairing of the Collegiate Church and Chetham’s Hospital still dominated the town centre, but around them now spread an ever-expanding profusion of northern industrial construction, the red brick palette which was to dominate the city until the slum clearances of the 1960s.

Elizabethan Manchester had been home to roughly 2000 people; its population climbed up to a respectable 15 or 20,000 by the mid-eighteenth century. The latter half of the century, however, saw a sudden spike in numbers; as Alfred Wadsworth and Julia de Lacy Mann described, “with no pretensions to statistical exactness, we may perhaps assume that the population of Manchester and Salford doubled between 1660 and 1717; doubled again between 1717 and 1758; rose by a third between 1758 and 1773-4; and trebled between 1773-4 and 1801.”⁸ The town, now home to the greater part of 100,000 people, was still only a fraction the

⁷ Samuel Bamford, *Early Days* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1849): 54.

⁸ Willan, *Elizabethan Manchester*, 38-9; Alfred P. Wadsworth and Julia De Lacy Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire, 1600-1780* (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1968): 510.

size it would reach in a few decades, but the growth deeply impressed contemporaries. As early as 1783, its earliest tourism guide opened by stating “The large and populous town of *Manchester*, has now excited the attention and curiosity of strangers, on account of its extensive trade, and the rapid increase of its buildings, with the enlargement of its streets”.⁹ Another in 1804 marvelled at “the number of strangers who are constantly settling in Manchester, to say nothing of the concourse of occasional visitors [*sic*]”.¹⁰

With this accelerating growth came a shift in the town’s centre of gravity. A series of short medieval streets and squares clustered along Deansgate – King Street, Queen Street, the marketplace, and after 1712, St. Ann’s Square – had long served as the town’s mercantile district. By the turn of the century, the ancient residential district around the foot of the cathedral had been flattened, and new brick warehouses sprung up in its place. Now Cannon Street, Market Street, High Street, and Marsden Square were the places to be, and Deansgate began a long process of social decay. Great merchants’ houses were built along newly laid out, ruler-straight avenues to the south: Mosley Street, George Street, Faulkner Street, and Portland Street. The overwhelming majority of the town’s tens of thousands of new residents, meanwhile, had been crammed into hastily-built cottages to the northeast, in what had been the green fields surrounding the manor: New Cross, Ancoats, and Newton. The gentleman doctor and amateur historian John Aikin, writing in 1795, strained to communicate to his readers the essential strangeness of the place, the sense of chaotic improvisation:

The new streets built within these few years have nearly doubled the size of the town. Most of them are wide and spacious, with excellent and large houses, principally of brick made on the spot; but they have a flight of steps projecting nearly the breadth of the pavement, which makes it very inconvenient to foot passengers. When two people meet one must either go into the horse road, or over the flight of steps, which in the night time is particularly dangerous, as the lamps are not always lighted... But very few of the

⁹ James Ogden, *A Description of Manchester* (Manchester: Wheeler, 1783): 3.

¹⁰ Joseph Aston, *The Manchester Guide* (Manchester: Aston, 1804): “Preface”.

streets are yet flagged, which makes the walking in them, to strangers, very disagreeable.¹¹

It was a place that was manifestly unfinished: thrilling, but with little sense of itself *as* a place. There are few visual representations of Manchester in this era, but when one thinks of it, one should imagine constant construction, a rising tide of fresh brick free of patina, and new roads laid out across empty fields.

It was this world, the brick-built boom town of late eighteenth-century Manchester, which forms the first setting for the present history. A more institutional history of governance might begin with a survey of existing governance bodies in the town at the opening of our period: the Court Leet, a hodgepodge of criminal courts with overlapping jurisdictions, the parish vestry, and from 1792 on, the Police Commissioners. As this history is intended to capture the state as a product of human social relations, however, it will open instead with two chapters calling a certain cast of characters to the stage. Our basic question in this first section is who moved to Manchester in its rapid years of growth, between 1780 and 1830, and why.

Already, it has been stated that the influx of migration which built the new Manchester was caused by two social desires: one for the town's growing capital market, the other for the town's growing labour market. Powerful intersections thus existed between the economic, the social, and the political in this era, and these intersections were to have profound impacts on the manner in which governance structures were to develop. As already noted, it would be justifiable to describe "class relations" in the broad sense as central to the evolution of the modern state form in Manchester.

¹¹ John Aikin, *A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles Round Manchester* (John Stockdale: London, 1795): 192. On Aikin himself, see Lucy Aikin, *Memoir of John Aikin, M. D.* (Philadelphia, A. Small, 1824).

The broad sense is not always available, however, in a discourse with a long and fraught relationship to class like nineteenth-century British historiography. Furthermore, the exact nature of the links between the economic, the social, and the political can only be evaluated in practice, through an encounter with the archives. For this reason, a more flexible terminology has been adopted for these initial stages; we will approach turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Manchester first as a “world of wealth”, then as a “world of work”. These are not meant to be new sociological models, but invitations to flexibility and openness in our approach, while still keeping sight of the central economic facts which dominated the place and period in question.

Chapter One: The World of Wealth

In his 1795 *Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles Round Manchester*,

John Aikin reflected on the previous century of Mancunian history:

The trade of Manchester may be divided into four periods. The first is that, when the manufacturers worked hard merely for a livelihood, without having accumulated any capital. The second is that when they had begun to acquire little fortunes, but worked as hard, and lived in as plain a manner as before, increasing their fortunes as well by economy as by moderate gains. The third is that, when luxury began to appear, and trade was pushed by sending out riders for orders to every market town in the kingdom. The fourth is the period in which expense and luxury had made a great progress, and was supported by a trade extended by means of riders and factors through every part of Europe.¹

Four stages: the first, a kind of early modern antediluvian era, then from 1700 onward, three steep steps in a rapid commercial and productive climb. The comment provides an important snapshot of the historical sense of capitalist Manchester in this era: to the nineteenth-century historian of urban Manchester, 1795 is the very dawn of things, but for those alive at this period, the turn of the nineteenth century itself appeared to mark the end of a process of rapid development and transformation. In this chapter, I will pursue the notion that Aikin's passage captures the collective memory of the formation of a particular "world of wealth" in Manchester, the episodic growth of a particular societal grouping of individuals and families drawn to the town by the prospect of a newly generated market for free investment. In later chapters, we will see how crucial a role this cultural coalescence was to play in the renovation of local structures of state.

Aikin's gloss makes clear that this world was understood to be tied to trade, and one trade in particular – the expanding cotton manufacture. Nonetheless, already at the turn of the

¹ Aikin, 181-2.

nineteenth century this world was diverse, stratified, and often fractious; it contained arch Tories and radical liberals, and local grocers whose fortunes were as “trade”-dependent as the great manufacturers. This chapter will not seek to locate or ascribe “class consciousness” to this group; rather, it will assume that economic factors at all times and all places influence social and cultural developments. If, in the present case, Manchester’s capitalists had some kind of social or cultural identity, this was simply a derivation of the fact that the strains and possibilities of industrial expansion acted on pooled capital in certain ways that threw its legal owners together. In other words, I will not seek to identify a moment of true becoming for this group, but rather from its earliest days, I will seek to trace the outlines of a whole social, political, and cultural sphere generated by particular forms of capital-holding – a world of wealth.

Any discussion of this world of wealth must centre upon a new elite body which gradually appeared in Manchester over the course of the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, and in the last quarter began to throw its weight around in local affairs: the cotton masters. This was the most visible and self-aware “capitalist” culture to leave a substantial legacy in the archives. Its interests formed the core of Manchester’s economic dynamism, and it was this community which elbowed aside the Byroms, Traffords, and Mosleys at the pinnacle of Mancunian society, in some cases taking over their very homes. Historians have long considered it the ruling class of the industrial north.

Though strongly associated with Manchester in the historiography, this cotton interest was not a product of urban developments, but was rather an urbanized outgrowth of primarily rural developments in the northwestern textile industries which unfolded over the course of the eighteenth century – the complex process intimated by Aikin’s four-stage model. Fortunately, these developments are clearer today than ever before. Since C. Knick Harley, N.F.R. Crafts, and

E.A. Wrigley in the 70s and 80s began the process of expanding our understanding of the industrial revolution back into the decades and centuries of development before the nineteenth century, this process of rural evolution has become the subject of one of the most sophisticated and significant bodies of scholarship in British history, one which continues to grow today.² To get the details right, then, the first part of this chapter will retell this story with an eye on present interests, spelling out how seemingly innocuous developments in a single regional trade – south Lancashire’s textile industry – generated new patterns of wealth and wealth-holding, which were ultimately responsible for the sudden urban expansion of Manchester at the close of the 1700s.

In setting its sights on Manchester’s turn-of-the-century world of wealth, however, this chapter must take in more than just the elite or cotton capitalism. For one thing, while elite culture was based around cotton manufacturing, even for the elite cotton manufacturing was not everything. One of the most important dynasties in nineteenth-century Mancunian history, the Heywoods, were bankers much more than manufacturers; other elite players were bleachers, dyers, machinery manufacturers, real estate speculators, and so on. Around these people, there orbited a further ring of professionals – lawyers, clerics, intellectuals and doctors (like Aikin himself) – who were often as if not more significant than the true cotton lords in elite cultural life. As Roger Lloyd-Jones and M.J. Lewis illustrated in *Manchester and the Age of the Factory*, even “cotton” was not always a homogenous interest until the 1820s or 30s, with often-bitter

² See N.F.R. Crafts, “British Economic Growth, 1700-1831: A Review of the Evidence,” *The Economic History Review* New Series 36.2 (1983): 177-99; C. Knick Harley, “British Industrialization Before 1841: Evidence of Slower Growth During the Industrial Revolution,” *The Journal of Economic History* 42.2 (1982): 267-89; E.A. Wrigley, *People, Cities, and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987); Jan De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson seem to me to provide a helpful nuance to the findings of Craft and Harley in “Growth and Change: A Comment on the Crafts-Harley View of the Industrial Revolution,” *The Economic History Review* New Series, 47.1 (1994): 147-49; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) is likewise a later part of this discourse, while Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth* represents the most recent extensive work on the subject, and broadly validates the Crafts/Harley view.

divisions remaining between spinning and weaving masters.³ At the very least, one should think of the cotton masters as merely the major element in a broader world of the wealthy.

Secondly, below these upper tiers of wealth there orbited an upward-looking mass of medium and small capitalists who, while not wielding the same material power as their wealthier counterparts, were every bit as much hooked into and dependent upon the possibilities and perils of industrial capitalism generated by cotton manufacturing. Indeed, as one of the major outcomes of the cotton boom was capital accumulation, the circulation of a wider world of wealth around the region's boom industry was essentially inevitable. Observers have long split over how to view this group, with some sorting them downward into a common mass of "the people", others viewing them as bastardized capitalists or capitalists-in-training, and still others casting them as a unique social force in their own right.⁴ Since the causative factors which led to the rise of the world of wealth being examined here affected them just as much as their wealthier contemporaries, no such taxonomy will initially be attempted; rather, we will try to portray a world of wealth flexible and expansive enough to incorporate them fully.

Such an empirical but open-ended approach can be suggestive. At the close of this chapter, we will meet one George Heywood (no relation to the bankers), an interesting and unusual case study both of the diversity of the world of wealth and its essential integrity as a category. A journeyman grocer, he was small fry in business terms and uninvolved in cotton; he thus may not seem an obvious icon of industrial capitalist culture. And yet Heywood very much was part of the world of wealth; he felt its interests, followed its instincts, and participated

³ Roger Lloyd-Jones and M.J. Lewis, "Schisms in the Cotton Trade: The Political Economy of Factory and Warehouse" in *Manchester and the Age of the Factory: The Business Structure of Cottonopolis in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1988): 63-84.

⁴ See discussion of George Heywood below, in particular note 67.

actively in its distinctive cultural tendencies. People like him can be found throughout this work, behaving in consistent, if not entirely predictable ways.

In time, some reflection will be appropriate on the significance of assembling a more diverse picture of Manchester's world of wealth than some models would allow. We first turn our attention to cotton, to describe the beating heart of Manchester's industrial economy. The hope is not to let the cotton masters rule everything, but by better understanding them, to put them in their proper place. I will then situate them in a wider context where their lives and actions will hopefully be better understood.

The Cotton Boom

If one went looking in early modern records for the dynasties that would later go on to form the cotton elite in Manchester – the Heywoods, McConnells, Potters and their ilk – one would be hard-pressed to locate many of them in Manchester before the mid-eighteenth century. Certain families, such as the Butterworths, Bayleys or Faulkners, held a long attachment to the area, but one would find the larger part missing. Casting a net more widely across south Lancashire, one would begin to reel more of them in; expanding one's search to Cheshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire, one would catch most, though not quite all. Still, very few of the cotton elite's ancestors worked in textile manufacturing, and almost none were weavers.

One would find the greater part of the antecedents of these leading families dispersed across the towns and textile districts of the North West, ensconced in various positions of privilege, but not great landed wealth. The Heywoods traced their name to the Heywoods of Heywood Hall north of Manchester, but by the seventeenth century were better known as prosperous dissenting ministers dispersed around Lancashire and Yorkshire. In the eighteenth

century, the family became first merchants then bankers, initially financing colonial traffic in Liverpool, before being drawn to greater investment opportunities in Manchester.⁵ The Peels were prosperous yeoman farmers in Oswaldtwistle outside of Blackburn, who moved into Calico printing in the 1760s.⁶ Similarly, the Potters were well-off farmers in Yorkshire, who shifted into textiles by apprenticing out the family's sons to drapers, then opening their own shop in Tadcaster.⁷ Joseph Brotherton's father was a Derbyshire exciseman who opened a mill in Salford. John Edward Taylor was the child of a Unitarian divine and a popular poet from a linen-draping family.⁸ The story of Manchester's elite formation, in short, is one of migration; of wealth and power being drawn into the gyre of industrial urbanization. So, what caused this rather sudden circulation of medium wealth-holding? What granted late-eighteenth century Manchester a gravitational pull on capital such as no northern town had exercised before?

Before the period of this history, in the early eighteenth century, Manchester was merely one centre among many in a primarily rural regional economy based on textile production. Nineteenth-century historians have tended to be somewhat vague about this earlier rural structure of the textile industry across England, referring obliquely to "cottage industry", "outwork", and the "domestic system", often without a great deal of clarity about whether these refer to separate phenomena or describe the same thing. Whatever terminology one uses, the rural system was not static, undergoing important structural changes from the moment when textile production first

⁵ Edith and Thomas Kelly, introduction to David Winstanley, *A Schoolmaster's Notebook: Being an Account of a Nineteenth-Century Experiment in Social Welfare*, eds. Edith and Thomas Kelly (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1957): 2.

⁶ T.A. Jenkins, *Sir Robert Peel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999): 4.

⁷ H.R. Fox Bourne, *English Merchants: Memoirs in Illustration of the Progress of British Commerce*, Vol. II (London: Richard Bentley, 1866): 266-267.

⁸ See respective entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

slipped free of guild control in England at the close of the middle ages and moved out into the countryside.⁹ These changes were not complete at the time the industry urbanized; rather, urbanization was in part a function of the ongoing process. They form, then, the first part of industrial Manchester's story.

The first stage in the rural development of British textiles is also the cloudiest in the literature, but might generally be referred to as the "artisan" system. The broad structure of artisan production was consistent across textiles and regions and resembled other industries: it involved firstly, either the importation of the raw fibre, or its production by British farmers; secondly, the purchase and marketing of this fibre by merchants; and thirdly, the purchase of the raw fibre by artisan – that is, independent – weavers. At this third stage, the product entered a complex household economy, the lynchpin of the whole industry, in which it underwent multiple stages of production all performed under the same roof. Specifically, this compound process involved the cleaning and alignment of the fibres (carding), the spinning of the loose fibres into usable thread, the coating or treatment of this thread to prevent breakage (sizing), the winding of this thread onto bobbins and the setting-up of the thread on the loom, the weaving of the raw cloth, the cutting of the cloth from the loom, and a host of "finishing" practices, including washing, fulling, bleaching, dying, and so on, many of which were specific to a particular fibre, fabric or style. Finally, in the fourth and last stage of the industry, the finished cloth was sold by the weaver to another merchant, who might sell it locally, sell it at a higher price to another merchant, or arrange for its export.¹⁰ Wadsworth and Mann described such a dynamic operating

⁹ Needless to say, this was not a single moment, but a series of regional developments.

¹⁰ This narrative leaves out the whole other set of industries – tailoring, dressmaking, sailmaking, upholstering and so on – waiting at the tail end of the process; a large portion of the finished cloth at this time would also be bought directly by households and cut and sewed at home. The convention in textile historiography seems to be to largely ignore the diverse demand side of the industry and treat the woven textile as a finished product.

in the woollen and worsted industries which dominated south Lancashire and the Manchester area in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, “a society mainly composed of small independent producers” operating on their own account in the market. “Neither in Lancashire nor Yorkshire,” Wadsworth observed, “is there much evidence to show that the large employer was anything but the rare exception.”¹¹

Of necessity the above summary is a simplification; notable variations occurred. As John Smail’s excellent study of the Halifax woollen and worsted industries has shown, perhaps the most important source of diversity was, in fact, “the variations within the ranks of the domestic clothiers” themselves.¹² Within a single region there could be a wide variation in the scale of manufacture by different artisans and the level of their commitment to the industry. A moderately prosperous farming family might keep a single loom as a part-time occupation for one of its members, while their poorer neighbours worked two or three looms full-time. Finishing processes were also commonly taken on by the merchants rather than the weavers, or farmed out to yet another artisan specialist.

Despite this variation, certain facts dominated the domestic system, and gave rise to particular cultural formations over centuries of consistent activity. First, while there was certainly opportunity for large profits and speculation on the part of merchants, control of an important production bottleneck lay in the hands of the weaving households. As a general rule, weavers bought yarn and sold cloth; in between, while the material was being worked, it belonged to them. With limited debt burdens and possessing the property rights to their own stock and capital, weavers could thus vary work pace and even cease production within the

¹¹ Wadsworth and Mann: 7.

¹² John Smail, “Manufacturer or Artisan? The Relationship between Economic and Cultural Change in the Early Stages of the Eighteenth-Century Industrialization,” *Journal of Social History* 25.4 (1992): 796.

limitations set by their own needs. Weavers understood the significance of this power, and sought to protect it; Wadsworth detailed one of a number of legal cases in which Lancashire's weavers aggressively (and for a time, successfully) resisted the rise of middlemen looking to farm out yarn to weavers as a speculative enterprise, thus interposing themselves between weavers and cloth buyers. In the weavers' own words, they were animated by the fear that "the pore shall not be paide for their worke, but as it pleaseth the ryche, and the cloth shall reste in their hands to sell at their pleasure."¹³ There was always a wealth disparity between producers and merchants, but so long as rights to the stock they worked "rested in the hands" of weavers, they exercised some meaningful, legally protected control over their labour patterns.

Second, the fact that the artisan weaving system was everywhere deeply embedded in local agrarian economies had a major influence on its structure and the course of its development. On the one hand, the ability to also farm gave many weaving households a secure base – an option not to weave – that substantially emboldened them in negotiations in the market. On the other hand, while the domestic system over time doubtless led to increased production, it did not lead to a meaningful local capital market, as profits were frequently ploughed back into land, still the safest investment prospect. Smail was able to find numerous real instances of this choice being made around Halifax: "Inventories suggest that for all clothiers, the primary determinant of wealth – and thus social status – was their holdings of agricultural goods and by implication the land on which those agricultural goods were used and produced."¹⁴ This fact resonates with the gentrification of the Manchester old guard, one-time merchant families like the Mosleys and Traffords who by the eighteenth-century appeared to a

¹³ Wadsworth and Mann: 7.

¹⁴ Smail: 797.

new generation of capitalists as backwards-looking country gentlemen. This slow gentrification of the top end of the artisan system seems to have meant its internal inequality had limits.

Sixteenth and seventeenth-century Manchester thrived under the artisan system of linen and woollens production, but primarily as a mercantile site of exchange. As Thomas Stuart Willan wrote of this era,

[Manchester merchants] might prosper through dealing in linen yarn and linen cloth or through finishing and marketing woolen cloth. Activities of this sort needed contact with a market, often a distant market, and with sources of supply which were usually nearer at hand. They made, or helped to make, a town into a regional centre where the urban production of cloth was supplemented by a rural industry which sought an outlet for its products in town.¹⁵

There were certainly weavers in Manchester, and a handful of tanners, blacksmiths, and cobblers – but the town retained a marked rural personality: most people kept an animal or two or tended a market garden, and every morning the public swineherd gathered up the town's hundreds of pigs and drove them to Collyhurst Common.¹⁶ The textile town in these years cannot be conceptualized separately from its rural situation.

After the artisan system came outworking. This simple statement, though true in any individual regional market, is much more difficult and contentious when generalized, due to the diversity of the British textile trade. Classical artisan production had all but disappeared in some places by the sixteenth century, or had never been present at all before outworking took hold. In other areas, though – notably Lancashire – artisans remained prevalent for a century or more after this.

¹⁵ Willan: 63.

¹⁶ Ibid: 13-14.

Still, over the course of the second half of the early modern era, broadly speaking, a parallel production process developed and took over most English textiles – a different path from raw fibres to marketable cloth. In the outwork system, the crucial distinction was that the thread on the loom was no longer the property of the weaver working it, but was rather a speculative investment on the part of a figure variously called a “master manufacturer”, a “merchant-manufacturer”, and later, a “warehouseman”.¹⁷ This figure purchased the fibre directly then loaned it or “put it out” to a weaving household, who would contract to work it up for a fixed wage within a specific time frame. When the work was done, the finished product was brought back to the warehouse of the manufacturer, who then brought it to market. Disruptive innovations are, of course, easiest to implement with new products, and in the case of Lancashire, outworking increased dramatically with the growing adoption of cotton production in the seventeenth century:

The closing years of the sixteenth century and the first years of the seventeenth saw changes which, for their importance in determining the course of the economic history of Lancashire, were second only to those of the last third of the eighteenth century. New branches of manufacture, cotton among them, were introduced, which fell naturally under more advanced forms of capitalistic organisation. While production remained based on the small landholder, opportunities for industrial employment greatly increased, especially for women. Spinning and weaving came to form a more vital part of the small-holder’s economy than agriculture; a growing class of cottagers arose which was almost wholly dependent on industry.¹⁸

In its early stages, the division between outwork and domestic production could be relatively minor and technical. Smail has shown how outwork often arose from contingent business decisions made by figures who were otherwise fairly securely embedded in a domestic

¹⁷ All these terms are liable to cause confusion, having been used to refer to quite different roles both in the nineteenth century and by historians. Both large artisans and later factory owners have been called master manufacturers, while “warehouseman” could just as easily refer to manual labourers in the warehouse. The important thing is the actual business structure.

¹⁸ Wadsworth and Mann: 11.

production ecosystem: a large weaver in possession of surplus work for whatever reason might choose to loan out portions of his yarn on credit, coming to an arrangement with an experienced but impoverished weaver who was unable to buy his own yarn but was willing to take on debt.¹⁹ Wadsworth and Mann point out that even in the 1600s, the very anxiety expressed by Lancashire's weavers about middlemen indicates putting-out was already practiced in the county on a moderate scale.²⁰

Nonetheless, over time the outwork system matured into a potent social and economic solvent, breaking down centuries-old systems of domestic manufacture, and driving a growing inequality between merchant-manufacturer and weaver. Maxine Berg's work shows that over the long run – that is, the roughly 200 years from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth – the practice of outwork put every regional textile industry in Britain on one of two paths: either industrialization or extinction.²¹ Outworking also resulted in a marked rise in production, allowing Britain to gradually outpace – again, before “industrialization” proper set in – the growth rate of any other economy, contemporary or historic.²²

Why did a superficially slight variation in the chain of production have such revolutionary effects? One tendency is to simply credit outworking's innovations to, as Joseph Aston put it, “the active industry, and the superior genius” of the merchant-manufacturers, freed

¹⁹ Smail: 797.

²⁰ Wadsworth and Mann: 7.

²¹ Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700 – 1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 202. It should be noted that Berg strongly emphasized the fact that different industries took different paths to reach a point of industrial production, an insight which she argues was lacking in prior accounts. Still, the end point (save, perhaps, a few tourist-oriented holdouts) was the same.

²² See Broadberry et al.: 276

from the traditionalism and parochialism of earlier weaving communities.²³ A more recent iteration of this thought is François Crouzet's hedged remark that "entrepreneurship is not a cipher but a major determinant of growth, both at the micro- and at the macro-economic level."²⁴ The manufacturers certainly did pursue two tendencies which had only been present in moderation before: division of labour (in other words, farming out the myriad tasks of the "weaving" household to different households), and mechanization. Both, particularly the latter, were to have world-changing effects by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Still, if we do not assume a higher intelligence on the part of manufacturers – who, after all, knew far less about weaving than their artisan predecessors – the appearance of these tendencies remains an uncaused cause.²⁵ What's more, recent research suggests outworking's greatest early modern impact was simply getting weavers to work more for less pay, a central part of what has come to be called the "industrious revolution".²⁶ Stephen Broadberry offers a before-and-after snapshot: "Whereas fifteenth-century labourers could afford to work for less than half the days in the year and still meet their subsistence needs, early nineteenth-century labourers were working a six-day week in order to do so."²⁷ The economy certainly seems to have been responding to more than simply an influx of new ideas.

²³ Aston: 3.

²⁴ François Crouzet, *The First Industrialists: The Problem of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1985): 1.

²⁵ This observation on manufacturers' relative ignorance may seem derogatory or subjective, but there is in fact solid evidence for it, and it implies nothing more than that roles in the trade were specialized. The question of how much the typical manufacturer understood weaving practices was a recurrent issue in parliamentary inquiries into disputes in the trade. In 1802, for example, one manufacturer, Thomas Cooke, claimed that "there are very few Manufacturers but what have learned to weave, though they are People of Property, and have been brought up to the business". This may well have been true, but even Cooke frankly acknowledged that this brief exposure was insufficient to determine the cause of faults in a fabric or like questions, necessitating the common practice of masters calling in experienced weavers to examine disputed fabric. In practice, no one seems to have doubted the skill exercised in most forms of pre-Jacquard handloom weaving when making real-world decisions. See *Select Committee on Petitions Relating to an Act for Settling Disputes between Masters and Workmen in Cotton Manufacture*, Parliamentary Papers 1802–3, vol. VIII (889), June 16, 1803: 52.

²⁶ See De Vries, especially 104–113, 133–144.

²⁷ Broadberry et al.: 415.

In the early 70s, Stephen Marglin reframed the discussion in a provocative article entitled “What Do Bosses Do?”, arguing that proto-industrialization’s success was at root all about power relations. Some claims in this article have fallen by the wayside, but Marglin’s larger point has never been meaningfully challenged: the reasons commonly cited for outworking’s greater productivity (longer hours, division of labour, mechanization) were themselves functions of the fact that ownership of the stock now rested firmly in the hands of speculative figures uninvolved in productive labour. In short, important decisions had been placed into the hands of different people with different incentives.²⁸

Various well-established trends – the industrious revolution, the increasing impoverishment of weaving communities, and the rise of an increasingly wealthy new elite – speak to the applicability of Marglin’s insight to Lancashire cotton weaving. Weavers were now as a group bound by debt, significantly eroding their negotiating power and autonomy, while merchant-manufacturers were advantageously positioned as middle-men, possessing both the ability and incentive to increase production at the expense of weavers’ leisure and well-being. The outcomes of this circumstance, repeated across generations and regions, were predictable and observable. On the one hand, weavers adopted painful tactics in order to keep a leg up in a steep competition for work, notably abandonment of farming for longer weaving hours and working for lower wages. On the other hand, merchant-manufacturers implemented strategies intended to accentuate, from a position of considerable strength, their own bargaining power – that is, their ability to exercise discipline: greater mechanization, standardization, and division of labour. In aggregate and over time, it was this socio-political circumstance that created the dramatic increase in productivity upon which later industrial gains would be built, and created

²⁸ Stephen Marglin, “What Do Bosses Do? The origins and functions of hierarchy in capitalist production, Part I,” *The Review of Radical Political Economics* 6.2 (1974): 60-112.

the two signature figures of the nineteenth-century textile industry, both of whom had been largely absent from British textile production two centuries previously: the waged piece or hourly worker, and the capital-investing manufacturer.

By the late eighteenth century, extensive outworking had resulted in a stratified and markedly capitalized cotton industry in the Manchester area, one with a clarity about who was a master and who was a worker which might surprise those who associate these roles primarily with later factory contexts. A series of Parliamentary inquiries into weaving disputes in the area illustrates this well: masters and workers were treated as entirely separate, autonomous communities, and representatives were called upon to speak on behalf of each. The power dynamics of the industry were not abstract or ideological, but rather arose predictably from practical decision-making on the part of numbers of individuals responding to similar circumstances:

[Q.] What creates the Necessity of submitting to the Decision of your Masters, when Disputes happen between you and them?

[A.] A person may be employed in working a kind of Work, when to change to another, neither his Time nor his Circumstances would perhaps permit; and in some cases, the Manufacturers are in the Habits of lending to their Men a certain Sum of Money to purchase Utensils. In such a case, not having the Money to repay, and the Utensils perhaps thrown on their Hands useless, they chuse rather to submit to their decision, than to run the risk of their Displeasure.²⁹

Though outworking was still a “cottage industry”, rural in nature, it was a world away from Smail’s image of a prosperous artisan offloading excess yarn on a fellow-worker in order to help him get weaving again. Lancashire’s cotton industry was now defined by stratification, a binary relation between an increasingly flattened band of textile workers (though now broken up into

²⁹ *Report on Petitions of Masters and Journeymen Weavers*, Parliamentary Papers 1799-1800, vol 130, May 14, 1800: 6.

pickers, spinners, weavers, bleachers, dyers, and so on) and a fast-rising group of merchant-manufacturers, increasingly aware of themselves as “the cotton interest”.

This dynamic set of human circumstances formed the occasion for the rise of “new Manchester”, starting with moderate population growth from migration in the early part of the eighteenth century, and irrevocably and rapidly from the 1780s onward. Outworking increasingly urbanized, with warehouses moving to Manchester and other population centres in a bid for efficiency and centralized supervision of labour. They quickly consumed a large majority of the town’s capital investments; Lloyd-Jones and Lewis found that they represented a full 42.7% of Manchester’s property assets even in 1825, at the height of the “classical” phase of industrialization – more than double any other sector.³⁰ These warehouses are significantly misunderstood if they are conceptualized as places only of storage and sale: rather, as lynchpins of larger outworking networks, they were key to the production cycle itself. Warehouse owners employed weavers both in Manchester and its surroundings, and the warehouses themselves hosted a significant manual labouring population of their own dedicated to packing, carting and the like.

Important as they were, the growing number of warehouses in Manchester were the result of the centralization and urbanization of an institution which had long been the focal point of the outwork system. As the industry became more organized, however, certain pioneering manufacturers – at first exclusively in the spinning side of the industry – brought their workers in-house, responding to the same incentives as all other cotton masters: centralization and mechanization. Once this organizational Rubicon had been crossed, the archetypal factory – mechanized, centrally powered, systematized, purpose-built – was close to an inevitability. Three

³⁰ Lloyd-Jones and Lewis: 105.

massive leaps forward in industrial spinning technology – the spinning jenny, water frame, and spinning mule – were all invented and put into practice in the Manchester area in the space of 20 years. By the first decades of the nineteenth century, though warehousing remained the greater investment pool, spinning mills employed the largest number of individuals, drawing thousands more workers to Manchester.

Together, these two cylinders – warehouse-based outwork weaving and factory spinning – powered the engine of the cotton boom, the expansion of a regional textile industry such as the world had not yet experienced. As Aikin remembered, the market for Manchester goods shifted from being primarily local in nature, to London-centric, to genuinely international in the space of a century. Those with the good fortune to be sitting astride this particular horse found themselves moving at quite a pace indeed.

New Masters

The urbanization of the outwork system and the attendant slow growth of the factory system together forged the new elite in Manchester. As was already noted, inequality had certainly been a feature of Lancashire's once-thriving wool and fustian trades. The dynamics of the developing cotton economy, however, had by the eighteenth century attained an ability to generate fortunes at a rate which was hitherto unfamiliar. In Aikin's chronology, he noticed with some apprehension the "gradual advances to opulence and luxury" in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, as wealth began to trickle out and provoke a broader cultural change: "the town has now in every respect assumed the style and manners of one of the commercial capitals of Europe."³¹ The mechanism upon which this engine of growth operated was novel, and

³¹ Aikin: 181, 184.

occupies a far slimmer place in the non-econometric historiography than it deserves: capital accumulation.

As already noted, Smail could find little evidence of capital accumulation in the modern sense in his survey of the artisan system. In the unreformed Halifax woollens trade, those who became wealthy almost immediately sought to purchase land, and artisans starting out in business carried no substantial debt burdens, meaning there was little desire and therefore little opportunity for outside investment in the trade. Limited capital accumulation was certainly a feature of the early modern British economy, but in its early stages was typically a function of colonial expropriation and organized in the metropolis.³²

This was soon to change. As Marglin observed, the outwork system flattened the worker's benefits from their labour via the wage, and thus created a concentration of capital in the hands of merchant-manufacturers. The overall value of the industry also increased as workers sacrificed leisure time for longer working hours. For Marglin, this meant that capitalists were little more than extortionist middle-men, shearing a larger and larger quantity of circulating capital from the labour of others. Some have objected to the moral critique implicit in this description, but even if one remains neutral over whether capitalists deserved this larger share, there can be little doubt that inequality of benefits was a feature of the outwork system, and thus

³² Peter J. Cain, and Anthony G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850," *Economic History Review* 39.4 (1986): 501-525; "Gentlemanly capitalism and British expansion overseas II: new imperialism, 1850-1945," *Economic History Review* 40.1 (1987): 1-26; Daniel Carey and Christopher J. Finlay, eds., *The Empire of Credit: The Financial Revolution in the British Atlantic World, 1688-1815* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011); Bruce G. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1999); P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London: Melbourne, 1967). The ignominious collapse of Spain's expropriative economy, or the stagnation of the Dutch and Venetian models of managing trade between such economies, perhaps demonstrate the limitations of "gentlemanly capitalism" as a modernizing force; see Broadberry: 425-6.

capital concentration among a group of investors and owners a predictable function of its operation.

Accustomed as we are to a world in which free and easy flows of liquid capital are the norm, it is easy for the contemporary reader to miss the significance of this by-product of the cotton boom. Arguably, it was the rapid capital accumulation generated by Lancashire's cotton manufacturing industry which gives it its greatest claim to a broader historical importance. Cotton served as an incubator for technological development to an extent (though most of the scientific principles involved in first-wave industrial technologies were of medieval or ancient provenance), and certainly provided an important demand stimulus to secondary industries – coal mining, machining – which were to be of enormous importance later in the nineteenth century. Still, what the early modern north lacked more than anything was free flows of capital liberated by increased production, the key leavening agent of growth-based economies. In a meaningful sense, the industrial revolution was not the spinning mule or the steam engine – it was capital accumulation.

In the mature Lancashire cotton industry of the mid-to-late 1700s, the merchant-manufacturers were no longer simply prosperous artisans or merchants with a handful of smaller weavers in their debt. Rather, they were full-time managers of a far larger reserve of capital than most of their employees would ever possess. These larger enterprises, soon joined by semi-mechanized mills, gave rise to opportunities for non-landed capital investment on a previously unknown scale. While Victorian Mancunians loved the idea of the “self-made” cotton man – the weaver who, through reserved wages and reinvested capital built his business up from nothing – this figure was mythical by the point at which Manchester's urban growth took off, the capital costs of even the smaller cotton businesses being many times the amount that could be

accumulated in a lifetime of these strategies.³³ Katrina Honeyman, in a survey of the occupational backgrounds of 92 Lancashire factory owners in 1787, found that 93% of them had come from business, professional, and landowning backgrounds, 4% from independent artisan backgrounds, and 3% - that is, four people – had come from labouring families.³⁴

Save for the odd exception, however, the cotton masters were not aristocrats or great landowners either. While one needed to be in the top percentiles of wealth to pay the entrance fees to the cotton boom, within this smaller world of relative privilege, the cotton economy was doubtless destabilizing and even redistributive. As the earlier gloss of some of Manchester's leading families suggested, neither were the benefits restricted to the narrow set of merchant families with a historic involvement in the textile industry; the range of individuals in provincial early modern Britain who had excess capital to invest included wealthy clergymen, second sons of landholding families, attorneys, bankers, and merchants – both from textiles and other industries. In one landmark study, Pat Hudson went looking for the sources of capital investment in outwork-based wool production in the West Riding between 1750 and 1850. Most of the money was raised locally – Hudson produced interesting instances of local attorneys acting as important local brokers between creditors and debtors – but landed capital, mercantile capital, capital raised by larger artisans, and funds from early provincial banks all went into the initial pools of money that placed new entrepreneurs in business: “New entrants to the factory industry generally had to call upon resources from a vast array of sources.”³⁵

³³ Considering the clarity of the data, this point has proved oddly controversial. See Chapter Two for a slightly extended discussion.

³⁴ Honeyman, *Origins of Enterprise: Business Leadership in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983): 71.

³⁵ Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 267.

In other words, and from all appearances, this was an environment in which figures who had benefitted to some degree from the economic growth of the eighteenth century, but were not themselves in possession of large land-holdings – prosperous mercantile and professional families, mixed in with a smattering of better-off artisans and gentry second sons – took advantage of the investment opportunities of the region’s boom industry. Capital flowed into cotton, and capitalists flowed into Manchester.

The question remains open, however, as to how far this was a culturally or socially significant migration – whether the late-eighteenth century arrivals formed a distinct group, or if they remained a disconnected assemblage of individuals and sub-communities, identifiable only in the abstract, and with no discernible influence on the existing community of wealth in the town. Indeed, the fact of the very diversity in backgrounds of the new arrivals would perhaps militate against the expectation that they formed a coherent cultural sphere. Here, one must turn to the qualitative archives. In what ways was the arrival of this new group visible to those who did not follow the trade reports and population estimates printed in the guidebooks and the *Manchester Courier*?

The simple answer is a fair amount. Indeed, the holders of Manchester’s new money seemed eager to show themselves to themselves in organized and semi-organized occasions and venues. The old elite gravitated around the Court Leet and its offices, the institution which gave them material power; they were also active in a number of ancient charities – small endowments that were annually distributed to the poor – and the local Church of England.³⁶ The new elite, on

³⁶ For a detailed breakdown of these charities, see Gordon Hindle, *Provision for the Relief of the Poor in Manchester, 1754-1826* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1975): 133-159. The largest group of these, known as the “boroughreeve’s charities”, possessed an annual income of £1,879.4.8d to dispose of by 1825, according to Hindle’s research (ibid.: 134). This would have been a relatively significant contribution to the

the other hand, was characterized above all things by its adoration for public meetings, lectures, and genteel, apolitical clubbing. They gravitated toward the theologically advanced Unitarian Church, and by the end of the century, the first of many posh amateur intellectual societies: the Literary and Philosophical Society, or the Lit and Phil. This was not, perhaps, the creation of a coherent and consistent political project tied to capitalist enterprise – a self-aware class-consciousness in the mid-twentieth century sense – but economic and socio-cultural patterns were hardly unrelated. A brief examination of a couple of the new organizations will provide some idea of the new style.

First, Unitarianism. Manchester Unitarianism developed from an earlier tradition of religious dissent in the town. The first cultural challenge which the old forces of order in Manchester had faced was in fact a religious, far more than an economic or political one. During the era of the Commonwealth in the seventeenth century, Presbyterianism had experienced a brief moment of supremacy within the Church of England, one of the by-products of which was the appointment of the Reverend Henry Newcome to the College of Christchurch in Manchester. After the Restoration, like most of his Presbyterian peers, Newcome refused to conform to the Anglican service and was expelled from the established church. He remained, however, in Manchester and retained the adherence of a surprising number of the town's population. Accordingly, a small Presbyterian congregation continued to meet illegally in back rooms and barns, before finally risking a meeting house on Cross Street in 1694.³⁷

benevolent landscape, though hardly a poor relief program in itself. Others – such as the “St. Thomas's Charities”, with an annual income of £92.2.6d (ibid.: 139) in the same year – made, by the turn of the century, very small contributions relative to the size and needs of the poor population, and must have served chiefly as vessels of local tradition and occasions for conspicuous philanthropy.

³⁷ See Sir Thomas Baker, *Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel, Its Foundations and Worthies: Being a Sketch of the Rise of Nonconformity in Manchester and of the Erection of the Chapel in Cross Street, with Notices of Its Ministers and Trustees* (Manchester: Johnson and Rawson, 1884): 4-17.

This series of events, dramatic as it was, had little theological impact on Manchester. Newcome seems to have been above all a charismatic figure, retaining a strong hold over his congregation during his lifetime, but with little enduring intellectual influence. The important legacy of these initial upheavals was the creation of two religious poles in Manchester: one manifest in the ornate, Gothic traditionalism of the Collegiate Church, the other in Cross Street Chapel – spacious, Neo-Classical in its design, and open both to new intellectual currents and new arrivals.

As the eighteenth century wore on, wealthy merchants, manufacturers, and provisioners increasingly migrated to town as a result of the developments in the countryside, and many of them came from districts in the North with powerful dissenting traditions. Cross Street Chapel became a natural home for such individuals, being both wealthy and non-traditional; it is at this point that one can begin, with some confidence, to consider the Chapel as a point of affinity for a new elite.³⁸ Until the mid-eighteenth century, Cross Street remained in some ways an outsider institution, subject to occasional populist attacks. It was never, however, a poor or populist place. Rumour had it that its spectacular pulpit had been intended for St. Ann's, but the Anglican magnates had balked at the exorbitant cost – a rumour which, whether true or not, conveys something of the Chapel's reputation.³⁹

As for this gathering community's beliefs, the religious life of Cross Street was shaped by a complex interplay between leading intellectual currents in the countryside and the increasing gravitational pull Manchester exercised on Lancashire's moveable wealth. On the one hand, twenty miles to the west of Manchester lay Warrington Academy, the cradle of

³⁸ John Seed, "Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830-50," *Social History* 7.1 (1982): 1-25.

³⁹ Baker: 56.

Unitarianism in England. Outside of Oxbridge, there are few intellectual institutions of eighteenth-century England with comparable profiles; its instructors included John Taylor, John Aikin, and most famously Joseph Priestley, while its graduates included Thomas Barnes, John Simpson, and Thomas Malthus. At a time when dissenters were barred from Oxbridge, the traditional national mechanism of elite formation, Warrington's significance was more than merely intellectual. Few of Warrington's graduates went on to careers in national politics, but most did go on to positions of influence and wealth in the textile districts, maintaining their social and intellectual connections well into adulthood. On the other hand, the fact that the Unitarian demographic was also the same as that which tended to benefit from the cotton boom created an inevitable shift toward Manchester. The Academy effectively colonized Cross Street Chapel as the cotton industry took off, with a host of Warrington-educated clerics leading the Chapel from 1770 on. In 1776, the Academy itself moved to Manchester, and the town became the unrivalled hub of Unitarian belief in the British Isles, with Cross Street now northern Unitarianism's Mecca.⁴⁰

The importance of Unitarianism to industrial capitalist culture in Manchester has been recognized by a diverse cross-section of historians. Patrick Joyce is one of these; he noted how "the influence of the denomination in fact extended into most of the reforming initiatives in the society". Though he cautioned the Unitarians "should not be thought of as a class", he went so far as to suggest "They might be thought of as the makers of a class, perhaps, those who helped create the epistemological foundations upon which forms of social identity could be based".⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Herbert McLachlan, *Warrington Academy: Its History and Influence* (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1943); Padraig O'Brien, *Warrington Academy, 1757-86: Its Predecessors and Successors* (Wigan: Owl Books, 1989). Felicity James and Ian Inkster provide a case study of this culture via the Aikin family in *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbould Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴¹ Joyce, *Rule of Freedom*: 28-9.

For one of Britain's leading class skeptics, this is strong language indeed. At the other end of the spectrum, John Seed laid out a complex Marxist model of Manchester Unitarianism as the site *par excellence* of capitalist ideological formation and struggle during the industrial revolution:

Bluntly, a church is as real as a factory and the system of ideological production requires an analysis no less materialist and no less social than economic production. In trying to explain the historical transformations of ideology therefore it is important to place at the methodological centre the precise institutional matrices and social relations through which meanings were reproduced and developed.⁴²

There is a wealth of evidence to illustrate the particular kind of importance Cross Street had for the new elite in Manchester. In 1884, Sir Thomas Baker, a congregant, boasted the chapel had been the worshipping place of seven county High Sheriffs, 11 MPs, and 10 boroughreeves and mayors.⁴³ Its wealth and power, however, was always of a distinct variety: of the 73 trustees Baker recorded as serving in the first century of Cross Street's existence, 9 were listed as "gentlemen", two were doctors, and a full 62 were merchants, bankers, capitalists, and prominent tradesmen, almost all of them dealing in one way or another in the textile industry.⁴⁴ Nearly every leading figure of industrial Manchester who a non-specialist might be aware of worshipped at Cross Street: the list includes the Heywoods, Sir Thomas Potter, James Philips Kay-Shuttleworth, John Edward Taylor, and, of course, the Gaskells, as William was the Chapel's long-time minister. Richard Cobden attended the occasional service. In the early years of Manchester's growth, Cross Street's famous ministers – Ralph Harrison, Thomas Barnes – made important connections between wealthy families. By the 1840s, the mayor as well as the chairs of most of the leading committees on the newly-formed City Council could chat about the

⁴² Seed: 2-3.

⁴³ Baker: viii.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 69-97.

day's issues after Sunday service, along with leaders of all the town's major civic-society institutions and scientific bodies.

There is a risk in being too mechanistic about the role of religious institutions as sites of cultural formation. The period of Unitarian hegemony in Manchester was also one of decreased elite sectarianism, and there were Anglican and agnostic members of the new cotton set. Some of them, like Thomas Walker, were prominent leadership figures.⁴⁵ Seed's effort to trace direct connections between the upheavals in the cotton industry and the minutiae of Unitarian infighting often strains the available evidence. It also misses the religious life of the chapel itself, a highly academic religious milieu in which abstract theological points were more often the subject of sermons, debates and lectures than politics or cotton. Still, Cross Street Chapel's recurrent prominence shows that there was a certain social and cultural structural integrity to the new elite, certain points of affinity, though this culture was never static or homogenous.

The history of Manchester's Literary and Philosophical Society captures a slightly more deliberate process of elite formation, membership in the organization being wholly secular and voluntary. In its early days, the "Lit and Phil" was largely the creature of one man, Thomas Percival, who founded the society as a discussion group and left an enduring organizational and intellectual stamp upon it. Percival was emblematic of elite cultural formation in Manchester, one of the drifting privileged figures who made their way to the town as intensive urbanization took hold. Though not a significant capitalist himself, he was, like Aikin, a gentleman doctor from a commercial family, and fully and actively integrated into the town's capitalist social networks. True to form, he was also a Unitarian and an alumnus of Warrington Academy.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See Chapter Three.

⁴⁶ Edward Percival, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival, M.D.* (London: J. Johnson, 1807).

Percival first arrived in Manchester in 1767 to set up a medical practice. This practice was apparently quite successful, but Percival's wider reputation developed from the fact that he was one of the first physicians in England to wed the developing scientific method to the practice of medicine. He understood this approach as key to his own professional success, and within only a few years of establishing himself as a physician took it upon himself to spread the word about his approach by publishing a collection of *Essays Medical and Experimental*:

Reason and philosophy are [the rational doctor's] guides; and under such direction there is at least a probability that he will not mistake his course. And by thus treading occasionally in unbeaten tracks, he enlarges the boundaries of science in general, and adds new discoveries to the art of medicine.⁴⁷

Percival's major legacy to the early Manchester cotton elite was to crystallize its burgeoning cultural identity through intellectual leadership. On the one hand, he brought to this provincial town a genuine depth of elite learning; in addition to defences of the scientific method, each of his collections contained essays on a wide range of intellectual interests, especially the classics, moral philosophy, and nature and biology (*cf.* "Speculations on the Perceptive Powers of Vegetables").⁴⁸ At the same time, he largely seems to have disdained the call of the metropolis and the most rarefied elite circles of science in Georgian Britain, having cultivated a sense of himself and his circle as virtuous outsiders, excluded from the usual paths of elite education in Britain by religious discrimination. Hived off in its own little world, the Manchester intelligentsia was to define itself by a deep and instinctive pragmatism. Throughout Percival's career he married an interest in ancient systems of knowledge to a strong sense of the need for science and philosophy to have immediate, practical applications – a sympathetic ideal for a growing industrial town.

⁴⁷ Thomas Percival, *Essays Medical and Experimental* (London: T. Lowndes, 1770): 57-58

⁴⁸ *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester*, Vol. II (Warrington: W. Eyres, 1785): 114-130.

After the appearance of the *Essays*, a small discussion circle began to gather weekly in Percival's home, made up of "literary characters, the principal inhabitants and...occasional strangers."⁴⁹ The popularity of the group soon forced it to transfer its meetings to public places, and in 1781, it formally organized itself as the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society; Percival was unanimously elected president each year until his death in 1804. In 1785 the Society began publishing its lectures and found a wide audience. For the next century or so, this would remain the preeminent intellectual institution in Manchester, a necessary pilgrimage for anyone who wanted to be seen as seriously interested in the town's civic life. Every two weeks, a member or visitor would present a paper on a topic which had been announced to members through a circular, and then a debate would ensue among the members, a method of operation which was essentially a continuation of Unitarian pedagogy.⁵⁰ The breadth of topics continued to reflect Percival's own ecumenical spirit, but a consistent strain remained an attention to "practical" science, medicine, economics, and industrial management. It was also plainly a social space, somewhere for Manchester's forward-looking wealthy to gather. The first Heywood bankers joined soon after their arrival in town; by 1793, Nathaniel Heywood was married to Ann Percival, Thomas' daughter.

A Lit and Phil talk given by Cross Street's minister, Thomas Barnes, published in the Society's first *Memoirs*, shows the close interconnection of these two institutions and the social world of which they were already twin pillars. Intended to celebrate the virtues of practical education, it is emblematic of what one might call the Warrington style – the inflexibly upright morality and the impressive but exhausting level of diction expected at these gatherings:

If we recollect a moment the exceedingly difficult points, to which education should be directed, we shall perhaps rather wish, than expect, to see any scheme, in which they may

⁴⁹ Edward Percival: lxvii.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Baker: 59.

be all accomplished. To keep up the continual impression of reverence, without intimidating – to restrain the spirits, without depressing them – to inspire courage, without turbulence – vivacity, without forwardness – and diffidence, without dejection – to administer praise, without puffing up – correction, without exasperating – and steady discipline, without enfeebling the mind in its best energies. – these are some of the grand objects of education.⁵¹

Barnes' lecture gives the impression, first, of a community that was coming to see itself *as* an elite, fit to weigh in on and seek to direct public affairs. Barnes and Percival both were already actively involving themselves in certain “public questions” – especially education, urban planning, and proletarian morality – which forecasted the civic involvement of later generations of cotton lords and fellow travellers. There is an intellectual performativity in Barnes' prose, and members of this culture were not averse to the Oxbridge technique of arbitrarily deploying Latin and Greek phrases to test their audience's education. There is also evidence of the instinctive affinity for self-restraint, moderation, and reason which was to typify “Victorian” culture. This was the rarefied, public face of the upper reaches of Mancunian society at the turn of the century. Flipping through the archival presence assembled by this group's members – the proceedings of the Lit and Phil, a handful of “memoirs” (in the earlier sense of a biography) of leading members, published minutes of philanthropic societies' Annual General Meetings – one gets a fairly coherent picture of an upright, fairly closely-knit, and self-consciously forward-thinking community.

The narrative thus far seems straightforward enough. To summarize, since the late seventeenth century, a religious polarity had divided Manchester that from its earliest stages had something of the character of a struggle between tradition and innovation. From the early 1700s onwards, developments in the countryside chiefly revolving around the process of cotton

⁵¹ Thomas Barnes, “A Brief Comparison of Some of the Principal Arguments in Favour of Public and Private Education”, in *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester*, Vol. II, 14-15.

production had created a new class of cotton entrepreneurs, internally divided between spinners and merchant-manufacturers, but in unity gaining in wealth and influence as the cotton boom took off. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, the increasing centralization of both sides of the cotton industry, but especially spinning, had increasingly made it rational for members of this elite to migrate to large population centres, and Manchester, historically being the local marketing centre of the trade and with no intrinsic administrative or geographic features to disqualify it, fast gained the strongest gravitational pull in the region. In a few short decades the dynamic young capitalist class of eighteenth-century Lancashire in large part urbanized, settling the new posh districts of Manchester.

The religious polarity already extant in the town doubtless fed into a sense of a certain cultural cohesion on the part of the cotton elite in new Manchester, not least its pervading sense of being a persecuted, if wealthy minority, even after it had outgrown the old families in numbers and wealth. Similarly, cultural proclivities and tendencies among this new group – a Dissent-derived intellectual inclination, a pragmatism and valorization of work and self-restraint derived from the world of eighteenth-century business – led to a degree of self-recognition. Finally, a small number of elite institutions with widespread, normative participation and membership, foremost among them the Unitarian Church, and to a more rarefied degree the Lit and Phil, provided places for repeated social interaction and the forging of an identity and a style. We seem, then, to have a fairly clear picture of class formation – the increasing social and cultural cohesion, even self-recognition of an economically generated demographic.

The coherence of this image, however, is in part a symptom of its curation – it is a legacy of an aspirational self-image of the community's most privileged or best-connected members. It

is unlikely, then, to say everything about this group that a historian might like to know. In the remaining part of this chapter, the image of the world of wealth will be both expanded and complicated somewhat. Two main correctives deserve emphasis. First of all, the immense good fortune of the cotton interest was both dependent upon, and fed into the development of a broader capitalist sphere, a more diverse and less absolutely wealthy group that fed the elite from its bottom margins. Secondly, the forms and modes of behaviour acknowledged and valorized publicly by the elite need to be contrasted with less practiced or overt behaviours and attitudes. If one wishes to understand an ideal, after all, not just on its own terms, but as an organizing principle of a society, one must have a picture of how people related to it not just when succeeding, but also while failing to achieve it.

A Broader World of Wealth

In 1815, while living in the crowded warehousing core of Manchester, 27-year-old George Heywood bought himself a large-ish square notebook for five shillings in which he planned to keep a record of his own life. “For a long time,” he wrote, “Indeed, for many years, I have had a wish to preserve some record of what passes under my notice, particularly as to what relates to myself.” This was to be an exercise in self-improvement, a kind of agnostic’s

Confessions:

This is more likely to answer the purpose of an examination of our conduct and actions than so much Praying which I often see practiced to so little purpose that it becomes merely a ceremony, a form, and as soon as it is over is no more thought of, this cannot be the case in this plan, this leads to serious meditation, and a circumstance once wrote over leaves more impression upon the mind than five times read or heard.⁵²

⁵² University of Manchester Special Collections (UMSC) GB 133 Eng MS 703, *Accounts and Journal of George Heywood*: f7 v.

What follows is an edited collage of diary entries and occasional editorial interventions, roughly assembled into an autobiography. It is a complex text, and not altogether transparent – Heywood frankly acknowledged editing or omitting less savoury details. Still, it gives valuable insight into the mindset and life trajectory of an ambitious member of the north's middling classes as the urbanized phase of the industrial economy began to take flight.

Certain superficial details would seem to initially militate against Heywood being categorized as part of a capitalist culture at all. While hardly proletarian, his background was modest; he came from a middling clothier family in Huddersfield, a Yorkshire town a long day's journey from Manchester. The Heywoods were prosperous enough that George was educated to a fairly high degree of literacy and set up in an advantageous apprenticeship, but George's father seems to have dropped out of the family business and died when George was still young. After finishing his apprenticeship, the son was forced to seek salaried labour. During the years covered most closely by the journal, Heywood was a grocer's clerk in Manchester, surviving off roughly 30/ a year plus bed and board.

Still, if Heywood had to work for his first years in Manchester, work is not what drew him there. Rather, from his teenage years onward, Heywood had kept his eyes trained steadily upward on the world of wealth. For someone like Heywood, with a small inheritance and well-off familial and professional connections, but without a sufficient fortune to leap immediately into substantial investments, salaried work was a life-stage activity, a kind of second apprenticeship with certain cultural connotations and expectations – for example, boarding for housing and refraining from marriage. To such a person, Manchester's gravitational pull was irresistible. Before Heywood's Yorkshire apprenticeship was over, he had made up his mind to move there: "I was not well satisfied with my present situation I desired to see more business, to

get more experience and thought Manchester a busy place and a good deal to be seen and learnt there". Heywood thus worked his family connections, having a respectable sister ask around for a place for him, and by April 1809, he had left Huddersfield for good. Years later, on a return visit, he was struck by how dull the place seemed in comparison to his new home: "I cannot help noticing how rough and slovenly the shops appear in Huddersfield from what they are in Manchester."⁵³

By 1815 or so, Heywood considered himself sufficiently experienced to begin looking to strike out on his own. In some ways, he was an ideal self-made man, having lived a regime of self-imposed austerity for several years, and having saved a modest sum to put toward a new business. He had encountered bad fortune and hardship in his youth, and put in his time doing heavy lifting in grocers' cellars and eating at servants' tables. Still, what opened the world of wealth for Heywood was unmistakably reputation and connections: "I thought I would go to Huddersfield about March and try to borrow £50 or £100 from Uncle J.S. Crowther and some from Thomas Cliffe."⁵⁴ He kept an ear out for open storefronts, and asked his employer Mr. Roylance, a real-estate speculator and one of Manchester's largest provisioners, for help in finding a lease. A spinster aunt gave him a further £36, which, together with his total life savings amounted to roughly £90. In the end, it was Roylance's own shop which he was to take over when the elder partner wished to retire, as one half of a partnership which Roylance negotiated for him.

There is nothing thrilling or indeed terribly surprising in Heywood's business biography; rather, he serves as an interesting but ordinary example of the figures floating on the inner

⁵³ Ibid.: F11 v; F48 r.

⁵⁴ F42 v.

margins of the world of wealth. Heywood was not in cotton and he was not wealthy, and certain pressures he felt keenly – the difficulty of finding adequate rental housing in inner-city Manchester, the need to manage his daily budgets carefully – were shared with Manchester’s workers. Still, there is much that was distinctively unproletarian in Heywood’s cultural attitudes and expressions. His utilitarianism was extreme, even for the times. As he was falling for his future wife, Betty Bowyer, he noted in his journal,

She is certainly no beauty, she has certainly no property, which are generally the first accomplishments, but I have the evidence of my senses to say she is possest of care, industry, sensibility, frugality, honesty, sincerity, these are much more durable than either riches or beauty.

When Luddite disturbances began in Manchester in 1812, he volunteered as a special constable, and was “out several nights”. This entailed a willingness to engage in a fair amount of anti-worker violence – the Manchester specials were to play a key role in the Peterloo massacre a few years later – but to Heywood it was an entirely natural and apolitical thing to do, chiefly remembered for the respectability he associated with the uniform: “I thought much of this it was a higher office than I had ever fill’d before.” And though Heywood considered himself an atheist, even expressing a fairly regular disdain for Manchester’s religious communities, he found himself drawn to the cultural sphere generated by Cross Street Chapel, attending a number of Reverend John Grundy’s public lectures, and eventually leveraging social connections to get himself a coveted pew: “I ask’d Mr. Barton on the 22nd if he would let me a sitting in Cross St. Chapel as I understood he had a seat, he said he has half a seat and none of his family goes but himself, he gave me leave to go in his name and he would not charge me anything. I thought it was very good of him and would save me about 10/ a year.”⁵⁵ He thus became one of the many upwardly mobile shopkeepers and better-off artisans who made up the bulk of Manchester’s

⁵⁵ Ibid.: F52 v; F22 v; F44 r.

Unitarian congregation, but who remain largely behind the scenes in the chapel's histories. The chapel for him was clearly above all a sympathetic and perhaps aspirational cultural and intellectual setting, a place where even a non-believer of a certain level of respectability could hope to belong.

In other words, everything militates in favour of George Heywood, and figures like him, being included in the broadly capitalist sphere of early industrial Manchester, what I have tagged here as the "world of wealth". Others might taxonomize him more narrowly. He would seem to some to be a type case of the nineteenth-century stereotype of the petit bourgeois, much-derided in the nineteenth century by Kierkegaard and others. The only other historian to have cited the journal, Hannah Barker, has used it to interrogate a more particular lower-middle class masculine profile, following a schema proposed by Geoffrey Crossick, A. James Hammerton and others.⁵⁶ Heywood certainly did not move in the same immediate social spheres as, say, the wealthy bankers who shared his name. Still, if we are interested in the intersections of economics and culture during the early industrial phase, we would do well not to hive off the liminal cases who experienced the same aspirations and anxieties about the maturation of the industrial economy as the richer Heywoods, who subscribed to the same distinctive patriarchal, utilitarian ethical framework, who even attended the same chapel, and were disturbed by the same stirrings of dissatisfaction among the working poor.

Most importantly, the unique process of capital accumulation which was driving Manchester's frenetic growth had no hard and fixed borders around it. Occupations and investments for all capital holders in this environment were fluid and dynamic: Heywood

⁵⁶ See Hannah Barker, "A Grocer's Tale: Class, Gender and Family in Early Nineteenth-Century Manchester," *Gender and History* 21.2 (2009): 340-57; "Soul, Purse and Family: Middling and Lower-Class Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Manchester," *Social History* 33.1 (2008): 12-35; *Family and Business During the Industry Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

considered going into the corn trade, and could well have gone into the cotton trade had circumstances suggested it. One could also point to figures like Percival and Aikin as reminders of diversity, small landholders with professional careers, who nonetheless dabbled in capital investments and tended to express the aspirations of the cotton interest in the first person plural. The advantages of conceptualizing the world of wealth as a loose whole will become clearer as the narrative proceeds, but briefly, it allows us to engage with the class realities of a deeply divided society without falling into the presumptive habits of determinism. The world of wealth was a broad church, but its congregation shared certain quite definite things in common.

Heywood's journal also serves as a corrective to more idealized visions of the turn-of-the-century world of wealth in another regard. Since Davidoff and Hall published *Family Fortunes* in 1987, a distinctive set of gender ideals has been understood to be central to capitalist middle-class formation in these years.⁵⁷ Heywood's journal exposes the complicated reality of this insight, providing a window into the fraught lived experiences that operated behind the façade of a rigid gender regime and a public ethic of restraint, self-control, and abstention from bodily violence.

In part, this is because Heywood allows us an insider's view of the actions of others of his circle, and thus provides glimpses of unspoken norms, as opposed to spoken ideals. The journal demonstrates both that men in Heywood's upwardly mobile milieu hired sex workers, gambled, and drank, but also that such activities were repressed and figured as deviant, despite their frequency. On holiday, for example, Heywood noted of a travelling companion that "E.C. went home with 2 girls. I did not like him to do this and did not go with him." When his

⁵⁷ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, revised edition (London: Routledge, 2002).

landlord's alcoholism became obvious, Heywood was unimpressed: "Drunkenness [sic] always makes things uncomfortable besides the person who is so neglects their duty to their family, their business and in short to everything they out [sic] to do." Despite this disapproval, though, Heywood considered the home otherwise respectable, and he stayed on for several years. The journal suggests a world in which the social rigidities of Austen novels or later Victorian moralists had some analogue in reality, but where those who strayed from them were more subjects of gossip, judgement or shaming than social isolation or abandonment. When Heywood himself was involved in a rather scandalous tryst with his elder female employer – of which more shall be said shortly – they would go on excursions together to friends' homes in the countryside to avoid the prying eyes of town. A comment of one of these collaborators, a Mrs. Howard, is revealing: "She always liked such things as this because she was once in the same circumstances herself."⁵⁸ Trysts like this were awkward, one could gather, in need of concealment – but familiar enough to be generically referred to as "such things".

It might be thought that the relative failings of Heywood and those around him were characteristic of those occupying a "lower" place on the social scale than the cotton lords, but other evidence suggests this was not the case. Many of Heywood's wayward companions were well-off enough – he complained of raucous parties thrown by rich employers, and his alcoholic landlord was a respectable excise officer. Furthermore, cases from the Crown Court depositions sometimes also capture the elite in less guarded moments than the *Transactions* of the Lit and Phil. Thomas Duxbury was a turn-of-the-century manufacturer, listed in Dean's *Directory* as running his own enterprise at 51 High Street, and sufficiently wealthy to be walking around Manchester in 1805 with a £20 bill of exchange in his pocket, the equivalent of several months'

⁵⁸ *Journal of George Heywood*: F33 v; F41 r; F24 r.

salary for a typical worker at the time. When a sex worker robbed him of the money, he seems to have had little compunction about pressing charges, a course of action which necessitated implicitly acknowledging the context of the crime in the public setting of the coroner's court: "...when he was crossing Ancoats Lane the prisoner Margaret Rowbotham overtook him, asked him where he was going he said not far, will you give me something to drink, says he took the prisoner into the house of William Young the Sign of the Edinburgh Castle."⁵⁹ Duxbury's case was not unusual; in the same year, an Ormskirk hatter visiting town pressed charges in almost identical circumstances, and more can be found down through the decades: in 1831, the *Guardian* reported on Thomas Owen, "a middle-aged man" being robbed of £10 in "a house of ill fame" in Salford.⁶⁰ Alcohol and gambling were endemic features of capitalist culture in this period, and public houses like John Shaw's Punch House were as central institutions of elite culture as Cross Street Chapel, allowing businessmen to congregate and encounter one another outside the confines of the home or office.

One saga in Heywood's own life serves as an even stronger reminder of the hidden elements of the rigidly masculinist culture of the world of wealth. For the first half-decade or so that he lived in Manchester, Heywood exhibited a disturbing dynamic in his relationship with his one-time employer, Mrs. Owen. Owen seemed to have initially felt some attraction to him, and in 1810 Heywood confided an apparent romance to his journal in conventional terms: "how comfortable and happy it should be my study to make the family, and in doing all this how happy I should be myself with an industrious managing and agreeable wife like this to assist me."⁶¹

⁵⁹ TNA: PL 27/8, "Informations against Margaret Rowbotham."

⁶⁰ TNA: PL 27/8, "Informations against Betty Shonworthy and Margaret Hullham for robbing James Twist at Manchester"; "Robbery from the Person", *The Manchester Guardian* (Manchester), June 11, 1831.

⁶¹ *Journal of George Heywood*: F15 r.

Nonetheless, and for whatever reason, the relationship became uncomfortable, and Owen asked him to move out.

Here the first signs of trouble appear in the journal. Heywood took a post at a rival grocer's shop only four doors away; he noted frankly in his diary, "Mrs. Owen said she would rather I went anywhere else". In 1811, he began to keep "a Book of Memorandums and Observations all respecting Mrs. Owen's conduct towards me", parts of which he later transcribed into the journal. Entries suggest he followed her around town throughout these years, keeping a close eye on her movements: "I saw Mrs. Owen come home on the 22nd about ½ past 9 she came to make the door about 10 but would not stop with me a moment. She said how dare you come here, and run and left me"; "I went to meet Mrs. Owen towards chapel, I saw her coming with a man, it was the same person whom I saw getting supper with her one night."⁶²

Heywood made little effort to hide his behaviour: once, when Owen claimed to not be seeing any other men, he recorded, "Here I interrupted her by saying I saw somebody come home with her last Monday night, she said then why do you come near me." In the most baldly threatening encounter, Heywood appeared at Owen's house unannounced: "I call'd upon Mrs. O she was left at home alone, she would not open door nor see me. When I saw this I went in at parlour window she run upstairs and I followed her but she made herself in a room and would not see me. I stopt a considerable time, at last she came down." With a striking lucidity, he noted she "said everything she could for me to go away". At times, their relationship could take on the dynamic of a consensual tryst (as in their visits to the Mrs. Howard mentioned above), but Heywood himself more than once recorded Owen unequivocally breaking off the relationship: "I must never come near her again if I would not do this she would expose me"; "she said she

⁶² Ibid.: F16 r; F27 v; F35 r; f47 v.

would never go with me again”; “she was now come to tell me she could not see me any more”. He continued relentlessly pursuing her and watching her movements. As he noted after the incident at her home, “This ought to have been enough to have satisfied me, but finding her temper vary so much towards me I thought she did not mean all she said.”⁶³

Heywood’s pathological behaviour cannot be taken as straightforwardly representative of people in his position. Some people seem to have clearly found his behaviour around women unsettling; he was ejected from a living situation at an employer’s for lurking around the household’s female servants, a confrontation which he transmitted into his journal in excruciating verbatim: “I don’t say it is criminal, I don’t say you have any bad intention, but I say it is highly unbecoming and has the appearance of evil.”⁶⁴ Heywood retained his position, but largely because the employer in question, a Mr. Jones, was the lesser half of a partnership with a man who was fond of Heywood. The temptation might be to dismiss Heywood’s stalking behaviour as an outlier – Baker, in three separate studies of the journal, decided not to mention it.

All the same, the Owen episode is illuminating of a particular gendered cultural context, one in which a seemingly rigid code of behaviour for men co-existed with structurally enabled violence and harassment against women. One thing which is clear is how powerless Owen was to protect herself from a much younger journeyman grocer, despite being one of Manchester’s wealthiest independent businesswomen. Heywood noted blandly in his journal “she talked of exposing me, but I don’t know of anything she could expose me in”, and events seem to have proved him correct. Repeated threats, confrontations, cajoling and pleading had no effect in keeping Heywood at bay. Heywood’s attachment to Owen was known, and was, in fact, seen by her family and male business partners as transgressive. However, this disapprobation came

⁶³ Ibid.: F 36 v; F28 r; F21 r; f22 v; f29 r.; F23 v.

⁶⁴ Ibid.: F37-8.

mostly from the fact that his attachment to a wealthy and much older widow was perceived as unbecoming and grasping for a man at his stage in life. In 1813 Heywood even ventured independently to write a letter to Owen's chief business partner, John Walker, to try to win him as an ally. He received a polite but strained reply, objecting firmly to "So very unlikely and inconsistent a match"; Walker made no mention of the stalking and harassment. Indeed, he reassured Heywood, "with regard to the motives by which you are activated I know nothing off." If anyone was put at risk in this exchange, it was Owen; Walker threatened to seek to dispossess her of the enterprise she had run successfully for years – in his words, "the property of that family earned by the hard industry of their departed father" – if it seemed the match was going to go ahead.⁶⁵ In the end, Heywood's upward mobility into the world of wealth was secured. He became a successful grocer and business rival to Owen, even inheriting the shop co-owned by the Mr. Jones who had once evicted him.

Problematic figures like Heywood, while not "representative" in a statistical sense, are thus useful when approaching a complex human environment like Manchester's early capitalist culture. The leaders of the world of wealth, in the archives they compiled themselves, constructed an idealized self-portrait of codes and behaviours, an image of forward-thinking, commercial refinement. This is certainly an interesting archival artifact, not least because it is suggestive of a certain structural integrity and unity to the world of wealth (a group must have some kind of existence to maintain such a self-image). Nonetheless, Heywood's journal reminds us that a public ideal should not be mistaken for a reliable picture of historic realities; we must leave room for the world of wealth to surprise us. At times in the succeeding chapters, the class

⁶⁵ Ibid.: F22 v; F26 v.

structure of Manchester's elite will seem quite loose and flexible, little more than a rough parallel alignment of habits, interests, and certain instinctive beliefs.

Still, such alignments matter when they are animated by economic and social transformations as potent as those shaping the new society of Manchester at the turn of the nineteenth century. Already, as our story of the state begins, we have an interested party arrayed to one side, disparate, frequently divided, but bound to each other by a strong enough gravitational pull to grant them some power and visibility. The particular form of bonds which strung them together would also occasionally pull them in certain political or ideological directions with marked strength, as we shall see, leading to a particular influence on the unstable structures by which Manchester and broader industrial England were governed. There was, in simple terms, a developing class dimension to capital ownership in the industrial town – a clear and observable set of cultural and social patterns accruing to a demographic connected in the first place by the mode in which they participated in the emerging economy.

But the world of wealth was not everything. Perhaps the strongest argument for not making too much of the interior boundaries of the world of wealth is that they did not compare, in terms of outlook, lifestyle, and daily experience, to those which surrounded it. In other words, the turn-of-the-century world of wealth had an outside. There was another, larger side to the new Manchester, one subject to quite different forces and currents: the world of work.

Chapter Two: The World of Work

Much has been written about the unusual openness of cotton manufacturing to newcomers in the late eighteenth century. In comparison to other industries, fixed capital costs in Lancashire's dominant trade were low – for the merchant-manufacturer, they could in theory amount to little more than the rent on a warehouse floor, as weavers were expected to own and maintain their own machinery and tools. This has resulted in a certain idealism about the cotton industry and early industrial Manchester in general as sites of organic, meritocratic capitalism. One early historian, Herbert Heaton, estimating that a new mill could be started up for only £5000 in 1821, enthused that “the textile industry was *the* land of opportunity for the energetic and ambitious man with little capital.”¹

It is certainly true that early cotton was generally not a playground for the uber-rich, but rather a pioneering field of investment for those who might have some wealth but little land. An undue emphasis on this optimistic framing bears the risk, however, of distorting the larger social context. According to Frances Collier's classic study, in 1819, the fine spinners in McConnel and Kennedy's mill made 32s a week. Heaton's £5000 was therefore equivalent to 60 years of continuous daily labour for these individuals, more than a couple typical working lives.² These spinners represented the cream of the crop of factory labour in England at the time, the highest-paid employees at a high-paying mill. Most of McConnel and Kennedy's adult employees made

¹ Herbert Heaton, “Financing the Industrial Revolution,” *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 11.1 (1937): 2-3. It should be noted that somewhat more recent and complete numbers by Gatrell and Lloyd-Jones and A.A. Le Roux suggest that the 5000l estimate is rather high for an average cotton enterprise (V.A.C. Gatrell, “Labour, Power, and the Size of Firms in Lancashire Cotton in the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century,” *The Economic History Review* 30.1 (1977): 95–139; Roger Lloyd-Jones and A. A. Le Roux, “The Size of Firms in the Cotton Industry: Manchester 1815-41,” *The Economic History Review* 33.1 (1980): 72–82). The point here is simply about what historians have been willing to accept as “low” entry costs.

² Frances Collier, *The Family Economy of the Working Classes in the Cotton Industry, 1784-1833* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965): 60.

a third to a half this wage; female spinners made exactly half, while male weavers made between 6s and 10s 6d a week.

The inevitable conclusion has never been better summarized than by, ironically, François Crouzet, an otherwise optimistic historian of industrialization's "self-made men": "Whatever the opportunities for 'small capitalists', however low the capital necessary to set up a small factory the overwhelming majority of wage-earners had no capital, no savings at all. It is rather unrealistic to write that any operative weaver who had saved a few hundred pounds could start a powerloom business – at a time when wages of £1 per week were considered to be high".³ Put bluntly, for the vast majority of people alive in England during the industrial revolution, the entry costs to the world of wealth were not low at all; they were stratospheric.

The present chapter refocuses our attention on the world of work, the great mass of Manchester society that circulated, for all intents and purposes, outside of the sphere of capital ownership. This was the majority culture of Manchester from the last few decades of the eighteenth century onward, the one with the greatest claim to representing the default ethos and aesthetic of Manchester street life throughout the industrial era. Of course, the economic barriers separating this society from the world of wealth were not universally as insurmountable as those surrounding the cotton industry itself. Certain theoretically viable entry-points to capital accumulation – pubs, grocery stalls, very small shops – existed; some Manchester weavers may have dreamed of opening a shop or pub, and some certainly could have eventually managed it.⁴ And while most artisan activities of the early modern economy were rapidly subsumed by mechanization, a select few remained sites of small-mastership and persistent financial

³ Crouzet: 96-97.

⁴ Lest the framing here seem too pessimistic, one must recall from the previous chapter that a medium-sized grocery shop like that first acquired by George Heywood cost more than £100 in 1815, much more than the life savings of a typical textile worker.

independence for decades to come.⁵ Still, the preponderance of both primary evidence and recent secondary scholarship paints an unambiguous picture of a society starkly divided in its economic orientation between the world of work and the world of wealth. Caution and nuance are necessary, but we should not let them distract us from the greatest demographic fact of Manchester history in the industrial era: the mass migration into the town of people seeking to sell their labour. Understanding the lifestyles, mentalities, and diversity of this population is absolutely vital for the present study; it was among this fledgeling working class that the modern state form was to make its first appearances.

Early Workers

In early winter of 1790, Margaret Pemberton and her friend Esther Cavanaugh left Manchester, presumably on foot, heading west. A long but manageable day's walk took them to Warrington, where they spent the night before carrying on to Liverpool. In the port city, the young women "went into the employ of one Jackson, to pick and shake cotton" for a week. During their limited time off, which they seem to have made the most of, Pemberton ran into Patrick Savage, who she was "before acquainted with...at Manchester," and he introduced them to William Haslam and John Wood. The group formed a small social unit in their downtime; Pemberton recalled that she "saw all three...at Liverpool frequently together, and was herself with them." The testimonies capture the easy heterosociality of this scene, but perhaps some

⁵ On the possibility of apprenticeship and trades as mechanisms of upward mobility, R.W. Malcolmson has written: "Some trades, those requiring premiums of ten or twenty pounds, were obviously out of the question for laboring families. In other circumstances, where a boy might be apprenticed to a master for around 2, 3 or £4, plebeian parents were sometimes able to find suitable positions for their sons – perhaps with a weaver, a shoemaker or a tailor... However, it should also be recognized that, in general, only the least attractive trades were open to such boys: trades that tended to be overstocked, trades with rather uncertain career prospects, trades in which low earnings were usual, and trades that were dangerous or unhealthy. The more desirable the trade, the higher the entrance premium" (R.W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England: 1700-1780* (St. Martin's: New York, 1981): 64).

gender tensions as well: Pemberton seems to have drawn attention to Wood's spousal abuse unprompted, saying his "wife is particularly known by the thickness of her lip, as she has heard him say." At the close of the week, when the women headed back to Warrington to take up another job, Savage and Wood accompanied them on the journey to sell some hardware and hosiery before returning to Liverpool. Come early December, "Savage, Wood & Haslam called on her last night at her lodging and took her and Cavanaugh to Maguire's Alehouse." The next morning, the group splurged on a canal boat ride back to Manchester together.⁶

As with most people from the majority culture of south Lancashire at this period of whom we have any qualitative record, we only know of this group because they ran afoul of the law, having later been arrested for dealing in various trifling small items, chiefly textiles – a few handkerchiefs, a shawl, a gown, a tablecloth, and so on – that were suspected of being stolen and fenced during their meanderings around south Lancashire. It is unlikely, however, that the group's travels concealed extensive black market activity, as the goods they pawned were worth less than each would have made from the "legitimate" work they also detail during this period.⁷ Though there is much we don't know, the testimonies thus offer a rare glimpse into a few nomadic weeks in the lives of a handful of fairly ordinary late-eighteenth century south Lancashire workers.

In one sense, the early world of work these young people inhabited is already well understood. From the 1780s onward, Manchester's growing labouring population became one of

⁶ TNA PL 27/7, "The examination of Margaret Pemberton of Manchester."

⁷ If the goods were stolen, only a portion of the group may have been aware of the fact; during the heaviest decades of the cotton boom, textile goods had such reliable value that they were carried around as minor investments or travellers' cheques. Even George Heywood, when returning to Huddersfield to meet investors, picked up a small quantity of cloth, carried it home on the coach and resold it in Manchester to cover the costs of the trip (*Journal of George Heywood*: F36 v).

the first subjects of sustained statistical inquiry in the West. Manchester's true reputation as the heartland of British statistics was cemented in 1833 with the founding of the Manchester Statistical Society, but this institution had important precedents from the 1770s onward in the work of Thomas Percival, James Ferriar, and other Lit and Phil alumni.⁸ For decades, educated, wealthy men ventured into the residential districts of Manchester's working poor to measure and to count. This habit of thought – in which the town's working people were configured as a unitary subject about which scholars would make certain numerical forms of inquiry – exerted a palpable influence down through Manchester's twentieth-century historiography. From Collier's early *The Family Economy of the Working Class* through to the more sophisticated entries in what came to be known as the “standard of living” debate, British historians have treated Manchester's world of work as a peculiarly appropriate subject for quantification.⁹ Information is widespread in the literature about the average annual earnings of Manchester's early industrial workers, the number of rooms in their houses and the number of people to each room, how many of them typically shared a privy in which neighbourhoods when, and the manifold internal subdivisions in each trade between different tasks – between skilled and unskilled, permanent and itinerant, male, female and child labour.

In another sense, however, Manchester's early workers remain obscure. By far the single largest qualitative archive of Manchester's world of work is the pre-trial witness statements

⁸ Foundational studies include Thomas Percival's *Observations on the State of Population in Manchester: And Other Adjacent Places* (Manchester, 1789) and *Further Observations on the State of Population in Manchester, and Other Adjacent Places* (Manchester, 1774), as well as John Ferriar's *Medical Histories and Reflections* (Warrington: Eyres, 1792).

⁹ E.g. John C. Brown, “The Condition of England and the Standard of Living: Cotton Textiles in the Northwest, 1806-1850,”; Richard K. Fleischman, *Conditions of Life among the Cotton Workers of Southeastern Lancashire, 1780-1850* (New York: Garland, 1985); Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, “Old Questions, New Data, and Alternative Perspectives: Families' Living Standards in the Industrial Revolution,” *The Journal of Economic History* 52.4 (1992): 849-80; Simon Szreter and Graham Mooney, “Urbanization, Mortality, and the Standard of Living Debate.”

gathered for the purposes of the Crown Court of the Palatinate of Lancaster, held at the National Archives. As I described in the Introduction, when I began research for this dissertation, I found the Crown Court depositions from the industrial era essentially unopened, save for a few Chartist cases. Other known sources – the charity visitor’s diaries, journalistic reporting – have largely remained the province of localist specialists. Despite the scholarly habit of relentless quantification of this population, then, surprisingly little qualitative interest has been shown in early working people’s cultures in Manchester at all. At the height of the 70s and 80s social-history wave, many might have thought of Manchester’s workers as the best-known and most studied working population in British history. Today, in comparison to the micro-histories and other narrative studies of post-colonial and European early modern historiographies, they seem surprisingly unknown.

The Crown Court cases, then, along with newspaper sources, memoirs by wealthier Mancunians, and other qualitative scraps and pieces will help us to plot a new approach toward an old subject, illuminating aspects of the lives of the world’s first industrial workers about which we remain quite ignorant. This was a world of youth, one inhabited predominantly by women, in which young labourers like Margaret Pemberton and Esther Cavanaugh lived with a degree of freedom and mobility which perhaps had not yet been reached in their nation’s history. Nonetheless, it was also a world wracked by precarity, violence, and early death, one in which a novel assemblage of human beings stepped sideways into a future that they could only half perceive.

A world on the move

As with the world of wealth, the entry of the world of work onto the pages of Manchester history was accomplished not by “natural increase”, but by rapid migration. By the turn of the century, the entire area long referred to as “Manchester” had become little more than a neighbourhood, covering less than half of the overall urbanized area of the historic Parish of Manchester. To the north and east sprawled new streets piled with rows of just-assembled cottages, presenting a common aesthetic of flat, brick fronts, small windows, and doors opening directly onto the street. Further out, new streets were being cut along field after field awaiting construction, appearing on maps as blank lines with the odd vestigial inn or farmhouse scattered among them. Even in the centre of town, gaps between warehouses and spinning mills were rapidly infilled with the same short, square buildings. Joseph Aston was particularly struck by one example:

If oddity of situation for the habitations of mankind is sought after, it may be met with on the banks of the *Irwell*, in that part of the town called *Parsonage*. The approach is down some steps called Press-house-steps, opposite Parsonage-lane, and the curiosity of the place extends till, by a curious outlet, the explorer (for none ever could get to this populous quarter by accident) finds himself emerging to the more common haunts of men, in the vicinity of Saint Mary’s Church.¹⁰

Four tiers of two-room houses had been built into the riverbank, creating an isolated cluster of low-rent housing in the heart of the old city. According to Aston, these were all “inhabited before they were finished.”

In later decades, Manchester’s growth would be fed by a greater diversity of sources: Ireland most of all, as well as the emptying Highlands of Scotland and still later various parts of northern and eastern Europe. The initial tens of thousands of people who flooded into late eighteenth-century Manchester, however, were by and large merely an exceptional concentration of the growing number of landless and underemployed workers who populated the early modern

¹⁰ Aston: 276-277.

English countryside. Historians' picture of this accumulation has not changed radically since the work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure some decades ago.¹¹ As E.A. Wrigley wrote in 1985, "The pace of English population growth in the early modern period was exceptional. Between the mid-sixteenth and the early nineteenth century England's population grew by about 280 percent... Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Italy all grew by between 50 and 80 percent over the same period."¹² Even more impressively, "The great bulk of the overall increase took place in that part of the population which made its living *outside* agriculture. This was what made England so distinctive." Even in the countryside, larger and larger numbers of rural people made their living in non-agricultural labour. Rather astonishingly, by 1800 a mere 36% of England's workforce was employed in agricultural labour.¹³

This created a situation in which areas – both rural and urban – with developed non-agricultural economies exerted a strong gravitational pull on the nation's labour force. As cotton centralized in the Manchester parish region, drifting labour poured into the area like water flowing downhill.

To understand this monumental demographic shift as a human experience, it is necessary to appreciate its particularities. This was not a situation in which workers commonly made lengthy, once-in-a-lifetime exoduses across the country, or whole communities packed up and

¹¹ A number of publications stemmed from this work, though the texts of record are typically considered E.A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), and E.A. Wrigley, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹² E.A. Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15.4 (1985): 723.

¹³ *Ibid.*: 704.

left for Lancashire and the mills. The migration in question was both less spectacular and more widespread than this. Colin Pooley and Shani D'Cruze have emphasized that most migration in the period followed “a circulatory pattern of movement within a well-defined region rather than the constant shifting of population from countryside to town.”¹⁴ This does not mean that large numbers did not eventually become permanent town-dwellers, but that this was a multi-stage process which took time. As Pooley and D'Cruze put it, “Although, ultimately, the balance of population shifted from country-side to town, this was achieved by a complex process of interdependent moves, with industrial villages playing a key role in the transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial and urban economy.”¹⁵ One should picture a slow settling of people in urbanizing industrial areas, resulting from a general habit of movement combined with a tendency in the direction of concentrated labour markets.

As for the root forces granting these movements their direction of flow, it is not necessary to rehash the lengthy regional economic history already covered in the preceding chapter – from the 1780s onward, the mechanization and urbanization of the spinning side of cotton production spurred a rapid acceleration of an already-occurring urban concentration. Still, it is doubtless worth emphasizing that, just as was true of Manchester's new capitalists, the growing world of work was far from purely an affair of cotton. The testimonies of Margaret Pemberton and company capture the chaotic fluidity of this labour market, and the importance to many young workers of keeping up some kind of side hustle. In the space of five weeks, Pemberton worked full-time as a cotton picker, a metal wire puller, and a courier for the men.¹⁶ Patrick Savage

¹⁴ Colin G. Pooley and Shani D'Cruze. “Migration and Urbanization in North-West England circa 1760-1830,” *Social History* 19.3 (1994): 348.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 349.

¹⁶ That Pemberton was a wire puller is inferred from the fact that she worked for Ainsworth and Co. in Warrington. Thomas Ainsworth is listed in the 1784 *Bailey's British Directory* as a brazier (William Bailey, *Bailey's British Directory*... (London: J. Andrews, 1784): 723), and in 1803 George Ainsworth was advertising in the *Gloucester Journal* for “sober steady hands” to work as iron and steel-wire pullers (*Gloucester Journal*, July 11, 1803).

identified himself as a “labourer”, but kept up a trade in silver buckles. All five certainly traded and travelled with small items of “fancy” textile goods, whether stolen or not. A larger spinning population also meant a larger carting population, a larger warehousing population, more work in food and clothing markets, a growing sex trade, and so on. In a town with no charter and comparatively weak guilds, labour forms and forces were mixed promiscuously from an early stage.

In sum, as the eighteenth century wore on the lowlands of southern Lancashire increasingly hosted a mobile, youthful, impoverished but untethered working population, habituated to selling its labour in more and more capitalistic ways, and gradually shifting their centre of gravity toward the towns, and Manchester in particular. Provincial England – provincial Europe, even – had never experienced such rapid change. As Wrigley noted, “The upsetting of the old urban hierarchy in England was, at the time, an event without recent precedent in European history. Elsewhere the exact ranking of major cities in each country varied from time to time, but it was rare for tiny settlements to develop into major centers... The progress of the new centres in England was such, however, that not merely had Liverpool and Manchester outpaced all of their English rivals other than London in 1800, but by 1850 they were the seventh and ninth largest cities in Europe, and the largest anywhere in Europe other than those which were capital cities”.¹⁷ Industrialization’s great migration had begun.

Migration, urbanization and loss

Surveying the inner districts, Aston remarked that “The increase of trade...has materially altered the appearance of the older part of the town.”¹⁸ New residents made their homes in a

¹⁷ Wrigley: 724-5.

¹⁸ Aston: 271-2.

landscape clogged with ongoing demolition and construction, typically to streets that had experienced overwhelming resident turnovers or informal “rezoning” in the recent past. Most of the printed sources from the time, intended as business guides, were more interested in charting the movements of profitable business centres than the living areas of the poor, but they were unanimous in evoking a ubiquitous pattern of abrupt changes in land use:

Thirty years ago, the neighbourhoods of Saint Ann’s-square, King-street, and Saint James’-square, were the best situations for warehouses of consequence. High-street, and Cannon-street, contained nothing but dwellinghouses; Peel-street, and its neighbourhood, were then quite remote from business, and the major part of the land, which Peel-street stands upon, was rented by a Dyer, with his house, dye-house, &c. for £14 a year. At that time a man would have been thought mad to have spoken of ‘Aldred’s dye-house’ as a good situation for business. It is now the centre of it.¹⁹

In tracts which were being urbanized for the first time, the loss of particular character, remembered history and sense of place was even more drastic. In 1787 the poet James Ogden described an area he had known as a child as a semi-rural district of wild streams and suburban small industry: “[The] part of the town about Tib-lane, was formerly taken up by fustian dyers crofts, for the convenience of water issuing from the springs which served the conduit, and from that rising ground on the left hand to Deansgate, called the Mount.”²⁰ Already, one could only speak of these landmarks in the past tense, as by the time Ogden wrote, the dyers’ crofts, the springs, the Mount, and indeed, the River Tib itself were largely gone. In the 1790s, no one who lived in the several acres of dense construction formed by the Y of Shude Hill and Swan Street – a fair proportion of the town’s working population – lived in a house more than a couple decades old. Gibraltar, a row of timber-framed merchant houses that had at mid-century looked out over a row of gardens lining the river Irk, was by 1800 submerged in a sea of working-class housing, and was repurposed for slum living itself.

¹⁹ Ibid.: 272.

²⁰ James Ogden, *A Description of Manchester...* (Manchester: C. Wheeler, 1787): 9.

This form of urbanism – in which a built environment is shorn of its past and represented as a consumable product to a hyper-mobile, delocalized population – was, needless to say, precocious. It is one of the elements that made Manchester life more meaningfully “modern” than experiences in earlier large towns like Norwich, Edinburgh, or much of the metropolis. The aspects of this new environment which related to work were, in a way, much more accessible than other places. In Manchester, the young worker did not need to interact with complex trade rules and fearsome guilds; one could simply walk around town and ask for work. All the same, all migrants experienced a loss of cultural memory, of multi-generational attachment, and of extended family networks – at least for the duration of their stay. Young arrivals in Manchester who shared little else in common might well have commiserated over the absence of breathable country air, familiar routines and rituals of home, the convenience of having family close for living arrangements or childcare, and simple homesickness, the irreplaceability of a particular sense of place.

Attention to this aspect of the migration experience might be chastised as a sentimental projection of the historian. Recent scholarship, however, has developed sophisticated ways to think empathetically but clearly about the significance of communal memory (and its loss) to human cultures. Of particular interest in the British case is the work of Andy Wood, who has produced an illuminating study of the importance of popular memory across the centuries in early modern England. In describing English working cultures before the era of industrialization, Wood has written how,

Custom defined the rules of parish organization, fed into artisanal practice and identity and, in its hazier, folkloric sense, helped to provide order to patterns of festivity, ritual, play and belief. As *lex loci*, it was mixed up with everyday life. As a force for regulating access to resources, it underwrote economic practice and the village politics. Based as it

was in shared memories and senses of place, it structured the mental worlds of ordinary people.²¹

Wood describes a world in which custom and communal memory were intentional, shared projects, a strategy for group guidance and continuity which would be encountered and engaged with daily. The emotive core of this was profound, but it was not simply a matter of emotion:

Custom made the past usable.... The common people of early modern England told one another about the history, laws, customs and boundaries of their communities because this knowledge had a *utility*: it allowed the rights that flowed from knowledge of those things to be retained, or even extended, and that those claims had their origins in the distant past.²²

When communal rights to pasture, deadfall, foraging and the like were challenged in early modern courts, the personal recollections of elderly community members became key evidence.

Just because a place was urban, of course, did not mean it was bereft of tradition. Early modern England had been far from an entirely agrarian society, and Wood in fact pays particular attention to the complexities of urban custom and memory as a unique traditional force:

Urban custom...allowed a way in which poorer people could participate in the affairs of the town or city as a whole. It shaped ordinary people's perception of the urban environment and informed their relationships with one another. And, just like in rural areas, urban custom was constantly shifting and changing: it had a historical dynamic.²³

Urban custom, Wood notes, was particularly focused around the written word, in particular the town charter. Wadsworth and Mann identified Preston and Wigan as two northwestern places in which, from the early date of the 1500s, local traditions were powerful and well-maintained, and thus these towns succeeded in sustaining economies based around corporate charters for more than a couple centuries.²⁴

²¹ Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 111.

²² *Ibid.*: 14.

²³ *Ibid.*: 120.

²⁴ Wadsworth and Mann: 56-68.

Crucially, however, what set much of early modern Lancashire apart – and in this Manchester was the most notorious example – was the lack of such mechanisms of local customary power and organization: “The main growth of industry lay outside the corporate towns, and the struggle between town and country interests was less acute in Lancashire than in the older clothing counties. The principal market areas were those served by Manchester, Bolton, Rochdale, Bury, and Blackburn, and in these there were no special restrictions on trade other than market regulations, concerning weights and measures, conditions of sale, and the like.”²⁵ When the poor arrived in late-eighteenth century Manchester in their thousands, then, they removed themselves from the kinds of environment described by Wood and set themselves down in a town with a minimal, atrophying system of manorial governance, few regulations to speak of, and no meaningful protections for the poor. The survival skills which English working people had been developing for centuries were rendered suddenly irrelevant, and this unsurprisingly resulted in a fair degree of shock and dislocation. In the world of work, mass migration and urbanization had rendered the past useless.

There is perhaps no richer documentation of this transition than the initial chapters of Samuel Bamford’s *Early Days*, in which Bamford describes his childhood in Middleton. Now an outer suburb of north Manchester, Middleton was a medium-sized weaving village in the 1790s, situated in the uplands where the Pennines just begin to wrinkle the landscape, and was still surrounded by fields and country lanes. Bamford remembered and presented Middleton as a place with a spiritual geography so dense that it seems almost claustrophobic to the modern reader:

²⁵ Ibid.: 55.

Ruffian-lane – the old road to Hopwood Hall – was one of these haunted places: haunted once, as its name would purport, by less harmless beings than “boggarts.” A foot-path, leading through certain fields belonging to the Black Bull public house, was notoriously the resort of “fyerin” (spirits): and here, indeed, there was reason to be shewn why it should be so, since that ominous and awe-creating plant, Saint John’s Wort, grew there in its pale, feathery pride. The present road – then a retired one, and overshadowed by a tall hedge and spreading trees – which leads from the bottom of Church-street to the Free School, was then nightly traversed by the appearance of a large four-footed animal, sometimes in the likeness of a dog or a bear, with great glaring eyes; at other times it would start up like a beautiful child, and moving before to a certain place, would disappear.²⁶

The catalogue goes on for pages more, through highways, lanes, and, unsurprisingly, the churchyard. Reading it, one might well imagine an expansive spiritual landscape filled with eerie settings. Do the walk today, however, and one realizes that these manifold spiritual sites are now contained within three or four suburban blocks; one can walk from the former Black Bull to St. Leonard’s Parish Church in just over ten minutes.

Just as custom and memory could grant legal right, the shared spiritual geography of this place served as a way of processing personal experiences. Bamford’s aunt was unable to visit her sister, Bamford’s mother, on her deathbed, leaving her with a painful sense of guilt for years afterward. One night, lingering in the haunted churchyard, she encountered her sister’s ghost passing by, visibly at peace in death: “I seed a very fine, tall woman dresst o’ I’ sparklin’ white, come through th’ gate and’ walk deawn th’ steps past me, and go straight under th’ trees tow’rd Summer Heawse.”²⁷ It did not matter, seemingly, that her sister was not actually buried there, having died miles away in Manchester: it was the resonance of the site which generated the experience. At such moments, individual and communal senses of self were irreversibly comingled.

²⁶ Samuel Bamford, *Early Days* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1849): 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 165-166.

Coming to Manchester initially appeared to be a prudent financial move for the Bamfords, and Samuel's childhood memories of the workhouse where his father worked were positive, even nostalgic. Living in the workhouse placed the family in the oldest part of Manchester, and Bamford's first description of the environment emphasizes age:

the huge pile of the Old Church – blackest amid the blackness – inspired me with feelings of disquietude and wonder... on our right, the walls and pinnacles of the old Baron's Hall were dimly visible, and before us, washing the base of the ancient edifice, hurried another stream.

Still, Bamford's prose describing Manchester lacks the sense of historicity and geographic specificity which fills his writing about Middleton. His father pointed out that the "stream" at the base of Chetham's Hospital was the same River Irk which flowed through Middleton, but Samuel still felt bereft: "I looked over the battlement, wishing to behold it as I would a dear companion, but it was lost in the darkness, and a slight murmur was the only response to my fond regret."²⁸

Manchester soon pummelled the remaining threads of familiar fabric out of the Bamfords' lives. A fever swept through the town's working districts, killing Bamford's mother, his uncle, and two of his siblings. Bamford's father remarried, but his new wife quarrelled with other staff at the workhouse. Empowered by a labour market governed by limited contractual obligations, the overseers responded by simply firing everyone involved and rehiring for their positions. Bamford described the culmination of his father's migration experience in ferocious terms:

My father had lost a wife, a brother, two children, and nearly his own life and that of a third child, in the service of the township of Manchester; and though, as I have good reasons for supposing, no valid impeachment was made against either his capacity or his integrity, he got nothing by way of 'indemnity,' when a party in the town's office thought fit to dispense with his services. There was no 'retiring pension' for him; no 'compensation' for irreparable losses. If this was scarcely just towards himself, as an

²⁸ Ibid.: 54-55.

individual, it was still less so towards his children who were turned into the world, ‘shorn to the quick;’ fatherless now, as well as motherless; for in most essential matters he was no longer a guardian to them. Two of the three never afterwards had a home under the same roof with him.²⁹

In a few short years, the Bamfords had lived through the promise and the perils of industrial migration. Young Samuel was sent back to Middleton, and for decades afterward, he did his best not to leave.

Common experiences

Thus far, the temptation to essentialize the culture of the world of work, to assess the soul of England’s first industrial laboring class, has been held at bay. In particular, I have not speculated about the psychology of this group by generalizing about the factory labour experience. This understandable inclination has gotten historians in trouble in the past. In *The Making of the English Working Class*, for example, E.P. Thompson commented: “It is neither poverty nor disease but work itself which casts the blackest shadow over the years of the Industrial Revolution... New skills were arising, old satisfactions persisted, but overall we feel the general pressure of long hours of unsatisfying labour under severe discipline for alien purposes.”³⁰ Emma Griffin has perhaps rightly taken Thompson to task for these broad strokes, but her own generalizations must be considered a strong over-correction: “opportunities in the workplace were brighter for adult men in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than they had been at any other time in the eighteenth century or before.”³¹ Insofar as either of these claims is falsifiable, Thompson was on much firmer empirical ground: all evidence suggests that nineteenth-century workers on average worked longer and less varied hours than their

²⁹ Ibid.: 97.

³⁰ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*: 446-7.

³¹ Griffin: 26.

predecessors.³² The issue, however, is that the factory experience, while chilling in its novelty, was only the experience of a minority of Manchester's labourers at any one time. It certainly cast a long shadow on workers' perceptions of their condition – even Griffin provides plentiful evidence of this.³³ If one generalizes about what it was like to be part of the nineteenth-century working class based purely on the factory experience, however, one does not only leave oneself vulnerable to death by a thousand counter-examples; one risks making the problematic implicit assertion that the diverse labour experiences of a majority of the working population were somehow less real, less significant, or less “modern” than those of the factory floor.

What follows, then, is a more open preliminary effort to gloss the common experiences of the early world of work in industrial Manchester – one based upon a subjective reading of qualitative sources, but hopefully informed and structured by an awareness of broader empirical contexts. Whatever the distortions of prior historiographies, the fact remains that there were strong cultural, social and economic bonds which, at the end of the day, bound this demographic together in a realm of experience which made them recognizably distinct not just from wealthier society in Manchester, but from the labouring populations elsewhere from which they themselves had been drawn. Manchester's workers may not have all worked in spinning mills, but there are a multitude of experiences they shared in common. The claim here is not that the threads identified below necessarily capture entirely empirical or quantifiable phenomena; rather

³² See Chapter One, note 13 above.

³³ Griffin comments, “Yes, working hours were extended. Yes, the position of the traditional artisan and skilled labourer was eroded. Yes, factory discipline and new working methods rendered workloads more intensive and relentless. And yes, punitive criminal sanctions were used to coerce labour from a supposedly ‘free’ labour force” (Griffin: 24). She also notes that for the minority that survived, mill experiences were generally better for adults than they were for children, that many found skilled mill labour rewarding and lucrative, and that some nineteenth-century diarists seem to have preferred the industrial labour they found to the agricultural labour they were offered. To my eye, the concession rather conspicuously outweighs the argument, though the matter is to some degree subjective. For a longer engagement with Griffin's book, see Beattie, “Review: Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution by Emma Griffin,” *Cercles: Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone*, 2016, <http://www.cercles.com/review/r76/Griffin.html>.

they are lenses or approaches to a complex array of experiences, axes of interpretation which can fruitfully be picked up again for guidance in later chapters. One could think of them as different views of the same object: the root condition of working-class life in the early industrial urban space.

The first defining element of the world of work that leaps from the sources is an ever-present quality of precarity and improvisation. Risk and an inability to predict the future were structural, unavoidable features of working people's lives from the outset of the industrial era. This is a separate consideration from the older question of whether living standards as a whole improved via industrialization, and in making sense of actual lifestyles and psychologies, it is equally, if not more significant. As Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries have written, "Even for workers in occupations that clearly gained from industrialization, like the miners, the nineteenth-century earnings experience was a lot like a roller coaster."³⁴ The rational response was an ethos of flexibility, opportunism, and a strategic focus on the short term.

This improvisational capacity, in itself, was not new. Speaking of the eighteenth century, R.W. Malcolmson has written,

[W]e should emphasize, I think, the diverse character of most plebeian household economies. A laboring family around 1700 normally got its support, not from just one or two sources, but from a variety of activities. Its productive economy, one might say, was extensive rather than intensive. People tried to knit together a viable sustenance from a wide range of employments.³⁵

Medieval and early modern economies, though, had preserved a number of ways for working people to retreat from the market when labour was not being sought or paid for: villagers with access to land could feed themselves from their own plots or gardens; others could glean or

³⁴ Horrell and Humphries: 857.

³⁵ Malcolmson, 45.

gather; deadfall could often be picked from forest floors to eliminate fuel costs. Such insurance policies were even a feature of town life – recall the public swineherd who drove Manchester’s many pigs to Collyhurst Common every morning during the early modern period; pig-keeping was a notorious insurance strategy of Irish families even into the industrial era.

In the growing industrial town, though, opportunities for perquisite-based survival strategies were sharply curtailed, and the rights they were based on contested or forgotten. Even if wages were higher in Manchester – and for many they were – risk was much higher too. Living conditions were such that every household regularly experienced crisis. The vast majority experienced the death of a child and the attendant trauma, many lost a wage earner to disease, industrial accidents and injuries were common, buildings were frequently sold or knocked down and their tenants evicted. In an environment in which even a fully employed household could be spending roughly 100% of its income, any one of these regular occurrences had drastic and immediate effects on living conditions and standards.³⁶ If a family broke even for a few years, or even managed to save a few pounds, in the long run, this good luck could be rendered immaterial by common, expected misfortunes. As John Broad has written, “For most cottagers and labourers the battle to retain a respectable independence was a basic instinct.”³⁷ From the fully employed to the homeless, all of Manchester’s working poor were familiar with a sense of precarity and doubt.

One potent analytical tool for analyzing working people’s response to this circumstance is a phrase first suggested by the French historian Olwen Hufton in 1974: “the economy of makeshifts.”³⁸ According to the editors of a British volume subtitled with this term, it describes

³⁶ See Collier, Malcolmson.

³⁷ John Broad, “Parish Economies of Welfare, 1650-1834,” *The Historical Journal* 42.4 (1999): 987.

³⁸ Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France 1750-1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

the “patchy, desperate and sometimes failing strategies of the poor for material survival”.³⁹

Across Britain, the poor cobbled together subsistence incomes from a careful but opportunistic blending of parish relief, charity funds, labour wages, unions and friendly societies, pawn shops, black market activity and crime, and certain communal or traditional gathering activities like gleaning or poaching. As Broad describes, “Families drew on various sorts of credit – they fell into arrears of rent, they borrowed from shops, dealers, and neighbours. They drew on village doles and other charitable resources. When they grew old and gave up the battle to mix and match a whole variety of facilities their final rite was the decision to put themselves in the hands of the parish.”⁴⁰ In the case of early industrial Manchester, “the economy of makeshifts” was not just a strategy of desperation or acute poverty. Rather, it was a governing logic and ethic, an adaptive stance which helps us makes sense of the economic rationale of the world of work as a whole. To the young worker waking up on their first morning in Manchester, there were very few, if any ways immediately available to make *enough* money – but there were myriad options for making not quite enough. Workers therefore threw themselves into the morass and grabbed hold of what they could touch. Even mature, stable households patched together seemingly infinite arrangements of exhausting, multi-job days to make ends meet. Risk, strategy, and adaptation filtered the working poor’s experience of their world.

A second fundamental aspect of the world of work that seems crucial to come to terms with is disempowerment. In saying this, however, the intention is not simply to make a diagnostic observation about working people’s political circumstance – that is, to observe that

³⁹ Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, *The Poor in England, 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003): 1.

⁴⁰ Broad: 986.

they lacked power. Rather, it is to suggest an experience, a first-person feeling of disempowerment which working people knew and shared. Secondly, the intention is not to suggest a static or passive circumstance, an absence – it is for this reason that the term chosen is disempowerment, not powerlessness. Working people’s relationship to social power was not simply the perception of a lack of it, but a feeling of being actively denied agency or having agency taken away from them in their lives. This is a crucial distinction in assessing the impacts of these experiences. One insight that we must borrow from the historians of the Subaltern Studies School is that a significantly compromised social agency causes people to exercise different rationales in making significant decisions; it structures and determines people’s engagement in the public sphere; and it disrupts and shapes the languages with which people express their subjectivity, particularly in their engagements with official, record-keeping bodies – meaning their appearances in the archive render differently as well.⁴¹ Disempowerment, in short, both was a fundamental aspect of the life experience of the disenfranchised and is a pragmatic interpretive issue for their historians.

If the intended point is a specific one, however, it is equally claimed that disempowerment defined a wide multitude of working people’s experiences. It reared its head at the individual level, in day to day life and work; it penetrated and fragmented relationships and households, and it operated at the social and community level as well, roiling the body politic of

⁴¹ The paradigmatic exploration of this issue is Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271-313. Other classic explorations include Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983) and Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) pursues the problem still deeper by contending with records of slavery. If it has become something of a cliché to cite this lesson as post-colonial scholarship’s broader contribution to historical methodologies generally, it remains the case that Western historians could stand to learn the lesson better.

working and poor people. Responses, of course, were far from uniform. Still, to be a member of the world of work was to find that disempowerment was neither negotiable nor avoidable.

The extent to which working people were disempowered in the political sphere is well known, but is still deserving of emphasis in a work about the state. From at least the Paineite moment in the early 1790s onward, the notion of a functional English state with a universal manhood suffrage had irrevocably entered the political discourses of the world of work. In characterizing the relationship of working people to their state in these decades, then, it is not quite enough to simply say that the franchise was restricted; rather, working people were explicitly refused a level of control over their own governance which had been demanded. The British state was not just undemocratic; it was avowedly and at times violently *anti*-democratic. Furthermore, if disempowerment was widespread, it was not equally distributed, and defined the political experiences of one half of the working population even more thoroughly than the other. Women's exclusion from the mainstream of the working people's suffrage campaign was not passive, but active; a deliberate decision undertaken again and again, and increasingly bolstered with misogynistic and ideological justifications as the century wore on.

Similarly, disempowerment tinted the sphere of labour for all working and poor people. In Stephen Marglin's pointed formulation,

...the origin and success of the factory lay not in technological superiority, but in the substitution of the capitalist's for the worker's control of the work process and the quantity of output, in the change in the workman's choice from one of how much to work and produce, based on his relative preferences for leisure and goods, to one of whether or not to work at all, which of course is hardly much of a choice.⁴²

The economic disempowerment experienced by early industrial workers was not a matter of unethical incidents and "bad" employers: it was a definitional underpinning of the system which

⁴² Marglin: 62.

created the industrial town. In generating a particular, widening wealth gap, it structured the labour market in Manchester far outside of the factory gates.

Perhaps the most profound experiences of disempowerment that working people shared, however, were intimate and embodied, having to do with their health and well-being. Some of these experiences were the result of human agents, rendered through acts of violence; others arose from less clearly personalized or politicized circumstances. Still, every member of the world of work experienced their body as something over which they exerted a deeply imperfect control and autonomy.

As soon as industrial urbanization began to swell Manchester, the life expectancy of the town plunged. Death saturated working people's lives in the industrial urban north to an extent which was not matched by their rural peers, nor by residents of older town, and most particularly, not by the inhabitants of the world of wealth.⁴³ Circumstances combined to accentuate the trauma implicit in this environment. Death was constant, but it was not cloistered in sick rooms, and while the poor sometimes died in hospitals – particularly in times of contagious outbreaks – working and poor people underwent the convulsions, expulsions, and unanesthetized pain of nineteenth-century illness in rooms crowded with family members and lodgers. A passage from the unpublished autobiography of the physician James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth conveys something of the intimacy of working people's experience of sickness and death:

On my arrival in a two-roomed house, I found an Irishman lying in a bed close to the window. The temperature of his skin was somewhat lower than usual, the pulse was weak and rather quick. He complained of no pain. The face was rather pale, and the man much

⁴³ See Introduction, note 2; Edwin Chadwick's finding that the suburban wealthy lived significantly longer than the urban poor is one aspect of his research which is generally accepted today.

dejected... His wife and three children were in the room, and she was prepared by us for the too probable event.⁴⁴

These four family members sat and watched the man die, then presumably made their beds and went to sleep in the same space. At work, too, violation was common and intimately witnessed or experienced. A number of trades devastated their workers' bodies over time, lacerating lungs and esophagi, withering skin, and destroying sight and hearing. The gigantic gears, pistons, and pulleys of early industrial equipment largely went uncased and unguarded, meaning workers watched their friends and co-workers lose digits, limbs, and sometimes their lives. Carts flipped, cables snapped, and mills burned.⁴⁵

Importantly for the present analysis, early industrial society did not have an ordered status quo in which bodily integrity and autonomy was respected and affirmed. Rather, the endangerment and violation of working and poor people's bodies was publicly and emphatically legitimated by the activities of the state. Children growing up in the world of work saw working and poor adults whipped, humiliated, and hanged. As we will explore in Chapter Five, throughout the period of the French wars, young working men lived in fear of press gangs and crimping. Meanwhile, as Deborah Valenze notes, any migrant woman who left a marriage lost her right to live where she chose: "A married woman derived her settlement from that of her husband, even when living apart, so the unattached woman was a particular target for the zealous overseer attempting to keep down the rates."⁴⁶ At various points in the 1790s and 1810s, even the

⁴⁴ "Sir James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth, draft manuscript of his unpublished autobiography, *To review the sources of the chief impulses which have governed a life without egotism*," UMSC: GB 133 JKS/1/2/61, 15-16.

⁴⁵ The Crown Court cases contain some detailed inquests into industrial accidents, such as PL 27/7, "Informations on view of the body of John Berry," in which a man was crushed by a passing cart. Similarly, "catastrophes", "disasters", and "tragedies" in the workplace were stock items in local reporting.

⁴⁶ Deborah Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 15.

general legal protection from arbitrary imprisonment was formally suspended. Disempowerment stalked working people in every aspect of their embodied lives.

To characterize the world of work through the lens of disempowerment is, of course, a subjective choice, one that might well be accused of rendering an implicit moral judgement. It is also one which must be qualified so as not to suggest problematic equivalencies: women were disempowered in ways men were not, and no sector of the working poor of Manchester was disempowered in the same manner or to the same degree as the enslaved and colonized people also living under the influence of British state power. Still, the hope here is not to mount a moral claim, but to make sense of aspects of working and poor communities which can seem inscrutable when we assume that historical subjects act in the world with unproblematic and equal agency. Not least among these aspects is the intimate violence and alcohol addiction which plagued the world of work throughout the industrial era. As Judith Herman wrote in *Trauma and Recovery*, “Traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail.” The forms of disempowerment common in the world of work were not always traumatizing in the clinical sense, but Herman reminds us that the recurrence of even seemingly apolitical, private moments of pain and violation is a fully social and cultural fact:

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis. The damage to relational life is not a secondary effect of trauma, as originally thought. Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community.

The contemporary language of trauma pioneered by Herman is, of course, a historically contingent analysis, one that will change over time, and one must therefore be careful of anachronism when adapting it to a historic context. Still, to assume that disempowerment and

trauma had no impact on the world of work would be more unrealistic; few would disagree with Herman that “People who have endured horrible events suffer predictable psychological harm.”⁴⁷ In a broader social sense, we must remember that the political and communal claims of working people were a perpetual uphill battle in this era; whether as workers, democrats, or even as loyalists, they participated in the public sphere in the face of exclusion, derision, and condescension. In shifting our view back and forth between the worlds of wealth and work, we must recalibrate our sense of what is normal, and be willing to think both expansively and critically about how the human beings we study experienced their world.

The final aspect of the world of work that will be useful to carry forward is the sense of collective existence and interest which saturated and structured working and poor people’s lives. This communalism could be and was mobilized as a virtue or ideal, in the form of solidarity and group loyalty. The intention here is not, however, to mount a values-based, laudatory claim: once again, a basically communal existence was an unavoidable and non-negotiable dimension of working people’s lives. It was present even in experiences that would have felt strongly negative, even violent for the people involved: children were beaten to work to contribute to the household income, homes and people were attacked to maintain discipline in strike actions. More mundanely, the material conditions of the early industrial town made some degree of communalism the only viable means of getting by for most. Strategies like taking in lodgers, sharing beds, being generous with food staples and household items, and solidarity in labour actions were key components of the economy of makeshifts, often the only way to make insufficient incomes add up to sums greater than their parts. Across a wide range of experiences,

⁴⁷ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. (New York: BasicBooks, 2015): 34, 51, 3.

the subordination of individual to group interest was a characteristic and recurrent life pattern for all inhabitants of the world of work.

Though this may seem something of a common-sense intervention, it helps us to attain clarity and specificity about matters which have at times been confused in the historiography. A sensitivity to the basic collectivity of working and poor people's lives is an essential bulwark when approaching the nineteenth-century archives, as nearly all of the official records which capture working and poor people's lives impose an individualizing lens on their subjects. This distorted lens has its analogue in the historiography, where the conventions of Western social science have allowed the individual, self-interested rationale to stand as the default assumption about people's decision-making, even absent any strong evidentiary basis. One cannot impose an analysis on material which does nothing to suggest it, but equally one must be aware of the biases of one's materials in order to avoid naïveté when approaching the archives.

The migration patterns of the late eighteenth century provide a pertinent example of the necessity of this critical awareness. The individual motivations for these migrations might seem opaque; workers broke free of strong communal and traditional attachments to take up gruelling work in the industrial towns, often enough only to die soon after arrival. More careful migration historians have recognized that the rationale for eighteenth-century labour movement cannot be conceptualized without some sense of the habitual collectivity of working people's lives. As Pooley and D'Cruze put it, "Most migration decisions were taken jointly by husbands and wives to maximize benefits for the whole family and, particularly in a domestic economy, household heads could be dependent on their kin."⁴⁸ Ready work or high wages for one family member might not have been sufficient motive either to stay in or to move to a given place, if the

⁴⁸ Pooley and D'Cruze: 348.

household as a whole was in the red. Complex but localized production economies – exactly like that of industrializing Lancashire – could thus present themselves as the only option, despite horrendous living conditions. In these areas, different stages of the production process and subsidiary processes variously offered work to children, adult women, and adult men; over time, households which wished to remain together were bound to gravitate to them. The contingent, collective dimension to this complex decision is lost if we simply assert that people voted with their feet for the industrial town. In short, we can only understand working and poor people when we hold in mind that they did things together.

So how much did this broad range of common cultural patterns cohere into an identifiable class experience? The fact remains that this was a boom culture – not a complex cultural tradition developed and handed down over generations, but rather a heterogenous mass of people, coming from relatively diverse environments, thrown into the industrial maelstrom together. One peculiar testament to the “shock of the new” felt in early industrial Manchester can be found in the Palatinate depositions in the form of a series of cases of traffic accidents involving carts and young children. Throughout the 1790s and 1800s, infants were killed when their mothers set them down to play in the busy streets unattended. In 1794, for example, one-and-a-half year old James Whitelogg was struck by a runaway coal cart in Causy Street, Manchester; in 1802, Susannah Carr was killed in Angel Meadows; one-year-old Thomas Daniels was killed in Garret Lane in 1804, and in 1805, two-year-old Samuel Plimmer was run over while playing in Newton Lane, one of the busiest stretches of road in the British Isles at the time. Eight-year-old Thomas Daniels was run over in Booth Street by a cart that he did not hear

coming, being deaf.⁴⁹ These children's mothers do not seem to have been particularly negligent – all were present at the scene, and neighbours apportioned no blame to them in their testimonies – but none of them were physically closest to their child at the time of the accident, suggesting they mistakenly thought they were safe. Similarly, the carters in these cases often behaved in ways more appropriate to a country lane than a dense urban district. According to a witness named Simon Davies, who witnessed Thomas Daniels' death,

...the driver came up in a short while, a few minutes he drove his cart away, nobody told him he had killed a child. Says the appearance of blood from the child's leg made him [Davies] sick, as soon as he got better he followed the cart, saw the man now in custody, Joseph Lowe. He then told the said man that he had hurt a child, he said he could not help it, examinant swore at him and asked why he was so far behind his cart, he said he stopped to show a man the road to some place which he does not himself recollect.

In his own brief testimony, Lowe clarified that the stranger had been looking for "Mr. Pickford's warehouse near Garret Lane"; he estimated he had allowed the animals to walk on two blocks ahead of him while he pointed out the way.⁵⁰ In other words, while attempting to show kindness to a stranger, Lowe had simply left his horses to pick their own way through the packed streets – as if they were making their way back to a country barn at end of day. These cases remind us that in dealing with the early industrial phase in Manchester, we are dealing with a culture that was new and unsettled. The chapters that follow chart an exploration, a process of discovery and development, as those drawn to Manchester to sell their labour made sense of their strange new world.

Still, if one cannot speak yet of an explicit identity or culture, let alone the contentious image of "class consciousness" generated by some twentieth-century historians, the world of

⁴⁹ TNA, PL 27/7, "Informations agt William Pemberton for manslaughter;" "Informations against Robt Mollolue for manslaughter"; PL 27/8, "Informations of witnesses...touching the death of Samuel Aspinall;" "Informations of witnesses...touching the death of Susannah Carr;" "Informations on view of Thomas Daniels."

⁵⁰ Ibid., "Jo. Lowe's Examin'on."

work was not a totally undifferentiated and chaotic mass. Thrust together for similar reasons and from similar backgrounds, and buffeted by powerful forces, these people from an early stage displayed common rationales, repeated patterns of behavior, and instinctive affiliations. In this chapter, the three axes of precarity and improvisation, disempowerment, and collectivity have been put forward as possibilities for clarifying and aligning our understanding of this developing world. We will continue to keep a close eye on this coalescence as working-class identities became more fixed and contentious in later decades in Manchester. If state development was a relational process, this emerging culture was to be one of its central participants.

Part Two: Politics and Reform in the French War Era

Setting

On August 16, 1819, Middleton's radicals gathered early in the morning to prepare for their march into Manchester, ready to join what was to be the largest democratic rally in British history. In the cotton district's weaving villages, the radical agitation of the 1810s had all but unified the working classes behind it, and the Middleton march was less of a sectional gathering of activists than a community parade. Samuel Bamford – the boy who had grown up happily in Manchester's workhouse, but whom time and circumstances had returned to Middleton to take up his family's tradition of cottage weaving – was one of the principal organizers. His description of the departure is often quoted:

First were selected twelve of the most comely and decent-looking youths, who were placed in two rows of six each, with each a branch of laurel held presented in his hand, as a token of amity and peace, - then followed the men of several districts in fives, - then the band of music, an excellent one, - then the colours: a blue one of silk, with inscriptions in golden letters, 'UNITY AND STRENGTH.' 'LIBERTY AND FRATERNITY.' A green one of silk, with golden letters, 'PARLIAMENTS ANNUAL.' 'SUFFRAGE UNIVERSAL;' and betwixt them on a staff, a handsome cap of crimson velvet, with a tuft of laurel, and the cap tastefully braided with the word, LIBERTAS, in front.¹

Once the several thousand marchers had assembled, Bamford addressed them as a group:

I reminded them, that they were going to attend the most important meeting that had ever been held for Parliamentary Reform, and I hoped their conduct would be marked by a steadiness and seriousness befitting the occasion, and such as would cast shame upon their enemies, who had always represented the reformers as a mob-like rabble: but they would see they were not so that day. I requested they would not leave their ranks, nor shew carelessness, nor inattention to the order of their leaders; but that they would walk comfortably and agreeably together. Not to offer any insult or provocation by word or deed; nor to notice any persons who might do the same by them, but to keep such persons as quiet as possible; for if they bugun to retaliate, the least disturbance might serve as a pretext for dispersing the meeting.²

¹ Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical, Vol 1* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1844): 197-198. One's faith in the accuracy of this description is bolstered by the miraculous survival of the "Liberty and Fraternity" banner, which is as Bamford described it.

² *Ibid.*, 198-199.

With this warning in mind, the group set off. They wove through the cottage villages, adding to their ranks with each stop. Coming into Manchester through Newtown, the town's youngest and poorest settlement, they were greeted with the sight of thousands of Irish weavers coming out of their cottages to cheer the marchers on. They progressed, to similar fanfare, through the new factory and working-class residential districts of Ancoats and New Cross, then down fashionable Mosley Street to St. Peter's Field at the southwest end of town.

Despite extensive precautions and preparations, they were headed for disaster. The famous Peterloo massacre, the largest state-directed bloodletting on English soil of the modern era, began nearly the moment the marchers had assembled. In the days afterward, the peaceful rally's organizers – including Bamford and celebrity speaker Henry Hunt – were rounded up and imprisoned.

Peterloo shocked the nation, marking the first time that the evolving political landscape of the industrializing north fully captured Britain's attention. In a strange way, however, the event was less of a surprise to its participants, for whom it marked the culmination of decades of political strife. Take, for instance, the careful choreography of the town contingents, epitomized by the Middleton example. The historian Robert Poole has traced the cultural origins of this festive language to Whit week processions, the distinctive Lancashire tradition of the rush-cart, and so on. He makes a compelling case for the localism and traditional morality on display.³ What is equally striking, however, is the anxiety which pervaded this procession – the effort to persuade the intended audience that the marchers came in peace. Given the opportunity to address his troops, Bamford did not seek to rally their spirits, or inspire them with the promise they would one day have the vote, but rather begged them to restrain themselves from retaliating

³ Robert Poole, "The March to Peterloo: Politics and Festivity in Late Georgian England," *Past & Present* 192 (2006): 109–53.

against the attacks he was certain were coming. In front of the “comely youths”, Bamford placed one or two hundred young women, including his own wife, presumably hoping that this would forestall attack. He told the crowd to lay down their sticks and cudgels, and not, apparently, without reason – “In consequence of this order, many sticks were left behind”.⁴ Indeed, the previous afternoon, Bamford and other leaders, hearing of the mugging of a government spy by radicals a few nights before, had considered arming their marchers with non-lethal weapons.⁵ In short, the entire shape of the Peterloo processions speaks to a tense, deeply divided political culture in which violence was understood to be immanent.

The following chapters will examine this fraught and contentious political culture that characterized Manchester and its surroundings during the French war era. The years 1789 to 1819 were not merely transitional years between a proto-industrial and a more fully mechanized economy: they represented a fairly stable arrangement of historical factors, which in many ways made these decades distinct both from those that came before and those that came after. The first and most obvious structuring factor was that Britain was preparing for, engaged in, or recovering from quasi-total warfare throughout the period.⁶ Secondly, the cotton industry itself – now the dominant structuring factor in the economy of the Manchester area – retained a distinctive hybrid shape in these years, characterized by the coexistence of mechanized spinning with outwork weaving.⁷ The final distinguishing feature was a prolonged and apparently continuous political

⁴ Bamford: 199.

⁵ Ibid.: 197.

⁶ See Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Jennifer Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution, 1785-1820* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*, edited by H.T. Dickinson (Houndmills: Macmillan Education, 1989).

⁷ Mechanized looms were first patented in 1784, but economic historians agree they remained a niche technology well into the 1820s; see Lloyd-Jones and Lewis: 64, 103-130; Duncan Bythell, “The Coming of the Powerloom” in *The Handloom Weavers*: 66-93; Michael M. Edwards, *The Growth of the British Cotton Trade, 1780-1815* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967): 200. D.A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market, 1815-1896* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979): 280-284.

struggle, lit by off-cast sparks from the French Revolution in 1789, and terminating in the bloody chaos of Peterloo. There are many terms for the controversies of these years: loyalism vs reform, “Church and King” vs the “English Jacobins”; in these years one can also begin to discern the outline of the major political dynamics of nineteenth and twentieth century industrial-capitalist culture – though as yet only in embryonic form.

In the political heat of this environment, the first motions toward radical state expansion and renovation were made. The most significant development of these years for our narrative was therefore the gradual political orientation of all the migrant cultures introduced in the previous section toward the local secular, legal infrastructure – a unanimous, upward-trending valuation of the significance of the state in urban British society. One distinction is, however, crucial: the relationship between the high political drama of these decades and state development was not linear, but complex. It was not the case, for example, that any single political leader laid out a coherent plan for state expansion, which an organized party or movement then carried out; multiple political orientations and centres of gravity contributed in ways both direct and indirect.

I will therefore approach these highly politicized decades with the distinctive investments and emphases of the state historian, not the political historian in the traditional sense. If we wish to locate the origins of the modern state in industrial society, we must understand the full complexity of these strange wartime decades, in which the world’s first experiment in industrial urbanization began stumbling toward a wholesale renovation of its state structures. Most importantly, as we shall see, the political discord and division which raged in Manchester in these years, rather than stymying state development, often served as its quickest conductor, whatever the perceptions of those who took part in the battles. State development as configured in this dissertation was not the project or achievement of any single party: one cannot expect any

given cause or movement to pick up history and carry it forward on its back. Instead, one must retain an awareness of the innate agency of all actors, one must read propaganda critically and closely, and one must always remember to take a step backward, away from the noise and chaos of political battle, to examine context.

Chapter Three: Early Partisanship in 1790s Manchester

The roughly three decade long local conflict of the French war years in the North began nearly as soon as Manchester had coalesced as an industrial-urban space. The first sign of a hardening partisanship came when Manchester's conservatives organized themselves into a Church and King Club (CKC) on March 13, 1790, gathering together for a boozy, all-male dinner which was to become an annual occasion throughout the war years. In a sign of the local currency of national affairs, the pricey medals they struck for the occasion bore on one side a picture of the monarch of the realm, George III, and on the other an image of Manchester's own Collegiate Church. The immediate cause of the occasion was somewhat vague. It was ascribed to a recent parliamentary effort to grant greater political rights to non-Anglican Protestants through the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, but the repeal had been abandoned by the time the dinner was called; the ongoing upheaval in France also doubtless cast a shadow on the occasion. A list of the toasts drunk at the dinner speaks to a generalized reactionary belligerence:

The King, and health and long life to him...
 May the Corporation and Test Acts, those Bulwarks of our excellent Constitution, ever continue unrepealed...
 May the united Efforts of Manchester and Salford, ever prevail in repelling Innovations...
 The Lancashire witches...
 May the Blessings of our glorious Constitution, be handed down unimpaired, to the latest Posterity...
 The Town and trade of Manchester and Salford...
 May the Avowers of '*Hypocrisy*' ever meet their just Reward...¹

¹ "Manchester," *Manchester Mercury* (MM), March 16, 1790. The above is a sampling of a long list. While the "Lancashire witches" were specific historical figures famously prosecuted for witchcraft during the early seventeenth century, the term had passed into folklore and come to be used as a term of affection for Lancashire women in general.

In response, a group of leading reformers formed the elite Constitutional Society (MCS), espousing broad ideals with a clear affinity with the French revolutionary government's

Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen:

“Resolution I. – That in every civil Community, the legitimate authority of the *Governors*, can only be derived from the consent of the *Governed*.
II. That the happiness of the people governed ought to be the sole end and aim of all civil government.²

For all its grandiloquence, this document's authors intended the “civil government” it mentioned to refer equally to the government of the United Kingdom and the local bodies which caused them more immediate problems: the Court Leet of Manchester, the Hundred of Salford, and various other jurisdictions and associations dominated by local Tories. Indeed, both groups – loyalists and reformers – intended to speak in two registers at once: on the one hand, a dramatic, cosmopolitan political language found across Europe during the years of the French Revolution, and on the other, a decidedly local idiom of partisan politics and personal resentment.

The semi-formal organization of the town's two camps – already called “parties” – was in a way, a partisan dam breaking. For several years, as capital moved to Manchester, tensions over political philosophy, national political allegiances, religion, and local politics had steadily been sifting the world of wealth into two sides. On the one hand, there was a circle which one might call the Establishment, the generally Anglican leadership group who filled most of the town's offices. One often finds them referred to as “Tories”, though in this era the connection between local political bases and national political parties could be rather abstract, nothing like the modern party system being yet in existence. The other side one might call the Opposition, generally Unitarian in its beliefs and more taken with Enlightenment thought. These figures

² Thomas Walker. *A Review of Some of the Political Events Which Have Occurred in Manchester, during the Last Five Years...* (London: J. Johnson, 1794): 17.

broadly aligned themselves with the Whig party, and were much more likely to receive a sympathetic audience from Whig politicians when seeking favours from London. Here, however, the party-political alignment was quite uncomfortable, as a number of Opposition members chafed at the parliamentary Whigs' moderation and aristocratic associations, and thus understood themselves to be above parliament's two-party binary.

Each side had its advantages in their struggle with one another. The Establishment benefitted from the institutional advantage of its offices, and enjoyed the emphatic backing of the local Anglican Clergy – many of whom should be considered active Establishment members themselves. By contrast, much of Manchester's economic, intellectual and cultural leadership sorted themselves into the MCS camp, in no small part due to the distinctive moral and intellectual influence of Unitarianism in south Lancashire. The most important Opposition figure of the 1780s and early 90s, the cotton magnate Thomas Walker, had in fact just been elected boroughreeve despite his radical sympathies, and five years previously had led the town's delegation to parliament during a confrontation with the government over taxation of the textile industry.³

So if the cotton capital migration had created two bases in town, in March 1790, events on a national and international scale – the French Revolution, the related controversy over

³ The boroughreeve performed duties similar to that of a mayor, though the position was meant to be apolitical, and was filled only for a one-year term. Walker's tenure as boroughreeve is mentioned in his *Review*, as well as the official Court Leet records and newspaper coverage of the relevant year. Walker's role as lobbyist is detailed in Knight, "The Fustian Affair" in *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*: 26-34; his testimony before the Lords Committee can be found in *Minutes Of The Evidence Taken Before A Committee of the House of Lords, Being A Committee Of The Whole House, Appointed To take into Consideration the Resolutions come to by the Commons, relative to the Adjustment of the Commercial Intercourse between Great Britain and Ireland* (House of Lords Sessional Papers Volume 1, 1785): 78-206, and his Commons Committee testimony in *Minutes Of The Evidence Taken Before A Committee of the House of Commons, Being A Committee Of The Whole House, To Whom It Was Referred To consider of so much of His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, on the 25th Day of January 1785, As Relates To The Adjustment of the Commercial Intercourse between Great Britain and Ireland* (House of Commons Papers (HC) volume 51, 1785): 47-69.

toleration of dissent – spurred these bases to coalesce around coherent organizations and causes: the CKC and the MCS, the nation-wide causes that would soon be known simply as “reform” and “loyalism”. The localized conflict over these complex political signifiers was not, however, going to be a fair fight. The Establishment, warming naturally to loyalism as the voice of politicized Anglicanism in the town, increasingly had a nervous and deeply reactionary national government on their side, giving substantial judicial cover for their actions. From the French Revolution onward, top-level cabinet ministers, wary of the instability of the booming cotton districts, corresponded personally with obscure local Tory henchmen across Britain, and threw their weight behind their schemes.⁴

Before Britain had even declared war on Revolutionary France, a concerted campaign therefore began to push any scent of Reform out of public life in Manchester. Thomas Walker was replaced by the arch-loyalist Nathan Crompton in 1791; he was to be the last boroughreeve with reform associations until incorporation more than four decades later.⁵ Anonymous threats of violence were issued in handbills and graffiti, while publicly, Establishment groups tried to rally a wartime mentality:

This Society beholds with infinite concern the many dangerous plots and associations that are forming in different parts of this kingdom, for the avowed purpose of disseminating discord, and for subverting the order of one of the most beautiful systems of government, that the combined efforts of human wisdom has ever yet been able to accomplish.⁶

⁴ Frida Knight traced the correspondence between the Cabinet and Reverend John Griffith as Griffith tried to engineer a series of dubious charges against local reformers; see Frida Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker: Ten Years in the Life of a Manchester Radical* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1957): 115. Benjamin Booth, a victim of this scheme, wrote to Walker of his interrogation by government lawyers; see Walker, *Review*: 107-8. The general national dynamic of collaboration between Tory ministers and local partisans is well-established in the historiography, and indeed continued through the war years; see, for example, the essays in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, edited by Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*. Selected letters between Manchester magistrates and cabinet members can be found in Arthur Aspinall, *The Early English Trade Unions: Documents from the Home Office Papers in the Public Record Office* (London: Batchworth Press, 1949); much more is to be found in the Home Office correspondence for these years (TNA: HO 42, 44).

⁵ Manchester’s boroughreeves are listed in William Axon, *The Annals of Manchester: A Chronological Record from the Earliest Times to the End of 1885* (Manchester: Heywood, 1886): x-xii.

⁶ Walker, *Review*: 17.

A chill settling over the town can be traced in the local papers, where anxiety over the reform question and the threat of revolution gradually became the paramount issue of local political concern. By 1792, none of the papers would publish reformers' writings, even though it was still legal to do so. Also that year, perhaps the most punitive exclusion yet was announced in the *Manchester Mercury* on the morning of September 18, in a front-page letter from the town's innkeepers and pub landlords:

And we do hereby solemnly declare, that we will not suffer any Meeting to be held in our Houses, of any CLUBS OR SOCIETIES, however, *specious or plausible* their Titles may be, that have a tendency to put in force that those INFERNALS so *ardently* and *devoutly wish for*, namely, the DESTRUCTION OF THIS COUNTRY, and we will be ready on all Occasions, to cooperate with our Fellow Townsmen, *in bringing to Justice* all those who shall offend in any Instance against our MUCH ADMIRER AND MOST EXCELLENT CONSTITUTION.⁷

The town's landlords signed their names (some of them, it was suggested, under some level of coercion), so that reformers could go down the list and find their local pub turned against them. This was more than a closing of social spaces: "public houses" in this era still lived up to the historic roots of the name, hosting everything from club meetings to coroner's inquests and land sales. Despite the influence and wealth of its members, then, by 1792 the MCS and their newer working-class counterparts the Reformation Society (MRS) and the Political Society (MPS) had nowhere to meet but Thomas Walker's own warehouse.

On June 4, 1792, a sectarian mob attacked the town's elite Unitarian chapels on Cross Street and Mosley Street, chanting loyalist slogans. After a lull of a few months, the mob was raised again on December 10. Meeting by the Collegiate Church, a local loyalist icon, a couple hundred people rallied behind a banner painted "Church and King" – an intimidating and

⁷ *MM*, September 18, 1792.

unmistakable link between this extra-judicial activity and the legitimate face of loyalism in the town. Heading off from the Old Church in the afternoon, they marched on a handful of reformer properties, smashing windows and starting fires. At one point, the parish beadies attempted to intervene but were called off by the deputy constable Richard Unite. Reformers claimed that he opined, “‘it is good to frighten these people;’ or words to that effect.”⁸ Thomas Walker’s warehouse formed an obvious next target, and so arms were brought in and a round-the-clock watch was begun by MCS members, joined by their new colleagues from the MRS and MPS. On the afternoon of December 11, a crowd was again raised with Unite’s blessing and marched on the warehouse.

The pitched battle many expected, however, was avoided. Walker appeared at the door of his warehouse unarmed and walked directly into the loyalist crowd to remonstrate with them. His words were not preserved, but Walker was a well-known figure locally, recognizable by face even to many of the town’s working residents, and he was able to have some impact.⁹ The crowd left for a time then returned, and Walker repeated this dramatic performance twice more. Finally, on his fourth appearance Walker was struck in the head by a rock; he scattered the crowd by firing a gun over their heads. The Janus-faced nature of loyalism in Manchester was revealed when, within a few minutes, two of the town’s leading officials – Chief Constable Joseph Hardman and a magistrate named Bentley – appeared and awkwardly asked Walker to avoid firing at the crowd; as Walker described, “I reproached these Gentlmen [sic] with what I considered as most negligent conduct, at least, when our manufactures and warehouses were in

⁸ Walker, *Review*: 56.

⁹ In Walker’s 1794 trial, John Twiss and Esther Ottey, two fustian cutters who had taken work from Walker’s warehouse but who had never met or been introduced to him, spoke casually of being able to recognize him upon sight and assumed others would be able to do so as well; see *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of Indictment Against Thomas Walker of Manchester, Merchant...* (Manchester: T. Boden, 1794): 98.

danger of being destroyed, and the lives of ourselves and families left to the mercy of an unruly mob.”¹⁰ They assured him that if the mob made a *fifth* appearance, he would finally be protected by civil authorities. The mob did not return that night.

Thomas Walker’s coolness of action made an immediate impression on his movement. James Roberts, a warehouse worker who had followed the mob out of curiosity, became a convert to reform on the spot. As he said in 1794, “I saw such conduct in Mr. Walker and the people that were there, that it made me determine to enter among them.”¹¹ Walker himself was soon charged with sedition, accused of having expressed treasonous thoughts at MCS meetings and having fired unprovoked upon an unarmed crowd. The radical cotton magnate poured all of his considerable wealth into mounting a defence and publicizing it through pamphlets. Thomas Walker thus became something of a national reform hero, even as he went bankrupt and retreated from public view, living on donations in Longford.¹²

This arrangement of facts adds up to what we might call “the Walker episode”, the first mythologized saga of Manchester politics in the industrial era. The drama of these few years (1790-1794) made a deep, lasting impression on the town’s wealthy liberals. Attending a foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Withington Workhouse sixty years later, Charles James Stanley Walker, Thomas’ son, regaled the company with stories of being snuck out through the back garden by his nurse while the house was under attack in 1792.¹³ The Walker episode thus marked the opening of a frenetic period in Manchester’s public life, one which was to last through to 1819. In the historiography, these years are remembered above all for one

¹⁰ Walker, *Review*: 64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 69.

¹² Knight: 178.

¹³ Josiah Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago* (Manchester: J.E. Cornish, 1881): 110.

thing: a dramatic and often violent political culture which became endemic to the industrializing north. Throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, political life in Manchester was frequently accompanied by fires, riots, and occasionally pitched battles in the streets. At various points in the 1790s, 1800s, and 1810s, Manchester was placed under a state of military occupation.

Most of the controversies of these years gravitated around the broad nexus of political, economic, and philosophical concerns captured imperfectly under the umbrella term “reform”. These were the years, though, of reform frustrated: first in the aftermath of the French Revolution, when the enlightenment-inspired “Societies” were put down by a paranoid wartime government; next, in a prolonged, grinding and often petty political warfare over the town’s own government; next in a rising wave of working-class political ambition, national in scope but increasingly centred in the north – an ambition which was smashed in the spectacular violence of St. Peter’s Field. Archibald Prentice, northern liberal radicalism’s in-house historian, framed the period in stark terms in the very first line of his *Historical Sketches and Recollections of Manchester*:

The terror occasioned by the revolution in France, artfully used and kept in constant excitement by persons who had a deep interest in the conservation of existing abuses, delivered Manchester over, for thirty years, to the domination of the enemies of reform, in either Church or State.¹⁴

For Manchester’s nineteenth-century liberals, then, the Walker episode was a parable which conveyed certain common wisdoms and obligations to the listener: that reformers in Manchester had fought early, fiercely, and with dignity for a coherent set of liberal goals; that they had been thwarted by enemies who were violent, vulgar, corrupt and backwards; and that unless this torch were picked up by later generations, industrial society could sink backwards into the tyranny of

¹⁴ Prentice: 1.

ancien regime Toryism. Walker himself, an ardent self-publicist, was the first to craft this narrative in a series of fiery pamphlets.¹⁵ These then formed one of the major sources for the early chapters of Archibald Prentice's *Historical Sketches*, though Prentice also knew some of its principals firsthand. Prentice's work took up the parable and translated it for the Victorian age, casting Walker indelibly as the martyred ancestor of northern liberalism.

As a political saga, then, the "Walker episode" contains a fair portion of high drama. The Walker episode also marks an important turning point for our interrogation of the rise of a novel state form in Manchester. It is surely relevant to the current study that as soon as the complex social arrangements laid out in the preceding chapters were in place – the rise of the cotton industry and its partial mechanization, the late-eighteenth century urbanization of Manchester and the development of the worlds of wealth and work – the question of how society was to be governed and by whom moved abruptly to the center of local politics.

There is, however, in the seeming clarity of this moment, a set of narrative and interpretive temptations which I would like to cautiously resist; indeed, in this partial refusal, one might differentiate this dissertation's distinctive narrative trajectory.

In the previous chapters, we examined the arrival of parallel migrant communities in Manchester – the worlds of wealth and work – drawn by the capital investment and labour market opportunities cracked open by industrialization. The prior existence of a traditional merchant community in Manchester was also mentioned, a high-Anglican, deeply conservative commercial body, many of whose leading families could trace their names back through the

¹⁵ These are Walker, *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of an Action Brought by Thomas Walker, Merchant, against William Roberts, Barrister at Law, for a Libel* (Manchester: Charles Wheeler, 1791), and the *Review and The Whole Proceedings...Against Thomas Walker* already referenced, both of 1794.

town records as boroughreeves, constables, and various other official posts for centuries. In looking for signs of the early growing pains of the modern state in early industrial Manchester, then, there is an easy temptation to imagine the political conflict of these years as a binary clash between old and new, and as a consequence, to consider political and state history in this case as identical. The old guard had their Court Leet, their parish vestry, and so on; New Manchester, led by heroic figures like Walker, swept in, brushed out the cobwebs of these archaic institutions, and erected a new state system in their place.

This narrative certainly has some precedent in the historiography. Redford and Russell's foundational *History of Local Governance in Manchester* made no apologies for frankly espousing such a teleology:

The correspondingly rapid growth of industry, trade and population in the town of Manchester led inevitably to increased discontent with the quasi-medieval framework of its local government, which had been inadequate for several generations and was now becoming a farcical anachronism.¹⁶

The leftist historian Frida Knight, meanwhile, a veteran of the Spanish civil war, wrote the most extended treatment of Manchester liberalism, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, and it is an unabashed hagiography, in which a near-saintly, modern man struggled against forces of medieval darkness.¹⁷

And yet there are simple factual problems in upholding this account, or even in discerning a clear and contiguous political program maintained by either “the Opposition” or “the Establishment” throughout the French War years. Leading characters on both sides often

¹⁶ Redford and Russell, 192. One could find other examples; for instance, page 187: “Without unfairness or exaggeration, it may be said that the whole system of local government at Manchester, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, had been out of date for several generations.”

¹⁷ E.g. “Walker’s generosity was almost proverbial. He never failed to help anyone in need, or turned away from poverty or distress. Wealth did not blind him to social injustice, but rather increased his awareness and horror of it” (Knight: 18).

refused to play the roles one would expect them to have played, and the sides themselves often seem to have lacked sufficient unity or coherence to carry this narrative. The remainder of this chapter will therefore seek a new interpretive frame in which I will locate the broader basis for this partisan struggle, focusing in on the few years when the struggle was most intense: the early years of the 1790s when Thomas Walker was a dominant and divisive figure in Manchester's public life. Certainly, migration and culture clash were major contextual factors for the clashes of the French War years, but the political terrain generated by this friction was a complex landscape of power and interests, rather than a binary axis between novel and archaic. We will emerge with a narrative in which the personal heroism or villainy of major figures plays a less causative role, and the profound, society-wide social, economic and demographic shifts Manchester was undergoing plays a stronger one. There are good reasons not to think of one side of this conflict as the modern state's original authors, but rather think of the conflict itself – that is, the activity, tactics and strategies of *both* sides – as a formative occasion for the increasing strength and significance of local state systems.

“Church and King” and the Establishment

First, there is room for some demythologization when it comes to this drama's main players. One might begin unpicking the threads of the Walker episode with the figures known to historians as the Manchester loyalists, and to their contemporaries usually as “the Tory faction” or “Church and King”. This group fulfills expectations more than their opponents, though qualification is still necessary. In the *Review*, Walker initially defined them as simply “the party in Manchester who opposed [Test and Corporation repeal]”. In the anniversary-dinner toasts the group published each year, religious chauvinism was unsurprisingly apparent, with dissenters

invariably being cautioned to remember the relative toleration England had afforded them.¹⁸ In their iconography, this group retained a particular fondness for the Collegiate Church, *the* symbol of Old Manchester. Clearly, a traditional, localized Anglicanism was important to their ethos.

One does, however, begin to encounter some incoherence when it comes to the question of this group's socioeconomic profile. There have been a number of characterizations of the loyalists in languages of wealth, profession, and class, but these have often been problematic and contradictory, and thus deserve a critical review. The group has been portrayed as both steeped in ancient privilege and as an uneducated rabble, neither of which stereotypes is strongly supported by the evidence.

On the one hand, there is strong evidence of extensive participation by wealthy Mancunians in loyalist agitation. Loyalist pageantry generally spoke of relative privilege: the well-crafted silver medals struck at the CKC founding, the 5s anniversary dinners. And yet while in a very localized sense one might think of the loyalist leadership as "old money", the common association between early modern wealth and privilege and an agrarian economics dominated by landed wealth simply does not apply to the Mancunian case. Manchester's leadership had always been at least partially commercial in its makeup, and there are indications that this group was less conservative in their business practices than they were in their religion, politics, and culture. Doubtless, they were swamped by new arrivals in the eighteenth century, but this does not mean that as individuals they avoided the new cotton industry itself – far from it. John Bohstedt, in his still-vital 1983 work *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810*, was

¹⁸ The numerous toasts of 1791 were representative: "May the Corporation and Test Acts, those Bulwarks of our happy Constitution, never be repealed"; "May the seditious opinions of the Old Jewry [a Presbyterian sect], be opposed by every friend to this country"; "May the Enemies of our Religious and civil Establishment become sensible of the blessings they enjoy in this Land of Toleration" ("Manchester", *MM*, March 8, 1791).

perhaps the first to take a hard look at the evidentiary basis for liberalism's origin story in industrial Britain. Devoting several chapters to early industrial Manchester, Bohstedt demonstrated that the Establishment and Opposition resembled one another far more than any existing narrative of Manchester's political development would suggest: "The great majority of both the Tory oligarchy and their opponents were merchants and manufacturers, the vigorous men who led Manchester's economic growth and established volunteer organizations to supplement the town's formal institutions."¹⁹

What empirical research can be done on the subject tends to bear Bohstedt's findings out. An illustration of this can be found in a volume held by Chetham's Library. As Walker's home was under attack on the evening of December 11th, 1792, more than 100 of Manchester's business leaders gathered at the Bull's Head Inn in the town centre. In a rather brutal signal of broken class solidarity, they gathered not to condemn the rioting, but rather to form an "Association for Preserving Constitutional Order and Liberty, as well as Property, against the various Efforts of Levellers and Republicans" (APCOL), signing their names to the minute book now held by Chetham's.²⁰

When this list is cross-referenced for unique names against a roughly contemporaneous trade directory, they appear as a not terribly exceptional group of rich Mancunians for the time: 29 of the 56 attendees with unique names were textile manufacturers, merchants, or both (the

¹⁹ John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810*, (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983): 101.

²⁰ *Constitution and minutes of Committee of the Association for preserving constitutional order against Levellers and Republicans*, Manuscripts/1/387, Chetham's Library. The model was an imported one, having been begun by London lawyer John Reeves; over the next few years, a handful of such Associations would spring up in the Manchester area. See Austin Mitchell, "The Association Movement of 1792-3" in *The Historical Journal* 4.1 (1961): 56-77; and Mark Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3," *The English Historical Review* 110.435 (1995): 42-69.

distinction still being an ambiguous one).²¹ This is obviously a rough exercise, but the size of the merchant community and the easy identification of some of the more prominent names suggests the identification is accurate more often than not. By subjecting a list of leading reformers to the same rough treatment, one can at least establish a comparison. The largest such list I am aware of is a 1795 petition against the Pitt government's repression, signed by 51 men including Thomas Walker. Nearly the same ratio of textile capitalists to others appears when the exercise is repeated (18 out of 32).²² The remaining semi-identifiable men on both lists would seem to be an analogous mix of capitalists and professionals – provisioners, ironmongers, a few attorneys, and up to seven men identified simply as “gentlemen”. In short, there is no reason to conceptually exclude the loyalist leadership from the economic innovations of the cotton boom; within Manchester's elite, the “old vs new” conflict emerges as a cultural or associational rivalry, not an economic or material one.

Other patterns in the loyalist leadership conform more to expectations. The most striking difference between the two lists above is the APCOL's connection to local office: the signatories included both the town's MPs, the then-boroughreeve and both constables, the magistrates of the Hundred of Salford, the elder Robert Peel, the first master of the Free Grammar School, and pretty well the entire College of the Collegiate Church. Interestingly, 81% of the APCOL names can be found practicing the same trades (or leisure) in an earlier directory from 1781.²³ In a town doubling in size every decade, this might suggest a fairly strong local connection; the same is true of only 59% of the reformer list. Prominent Establishment members we know of tended to

²¹ John Scholes, *Scholes's Manchester and Salford Directory* (Manchester: Sowler and Russell, 1794). Attendees were counted if only one person was listed in Scholes under that name, or if all who were counted practiced the same trade.

²² John Harland, *Collectanea Relating to Manchester and Its Neighbourhood, at Various Periods* (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1866): 127.

²³ Elizabeth Raffald, *The Manchester and Salford Directory* (Manchester: Raffald and Harrop, 1781).

have deep Manchester roots, and given the informal and self-selecting nature of local governance, one could reasonably assume that those in civil service were more likely to have longer-standing family and personal connections in the area. It seems reasonable, then, to consider the loyalist leadership as the Establishment in partisan form.

On the other hand – and kept distinctly separate from the leadership in most renditions – one finds the loyalist “mob”, the extra-judicial ground troops of conservatism. It is here that existing accounts, both primary and secondary, begin to really fail to cohere. The terms applied to this group carry clear class connotations implying a plebeian identity. Thomas Walker especially sought to paint them as poor or working class, calling them “a deluded, ignorant, and lawless banditti” and “the misguided multitude”.²⁴ Anonymous wealthy eyewitnesses of the 1792 mob, whose letters Walker reprinted in *The Review*, used similar terms to imply poverty, ignorance, and an inability to act independently: one called them “The unthinking and imprudent part of the populace”, another “a number of men of the lowest order”.²⁵

Historians have generally echoed this chorus. Geoffrey Best’s 1965 characterization of popular loyalism as “the flag-saluting, foreigner-hating, peer-respecting side of the plebeian mind” is still often quoted.²⁶ Alan Booth called this group “the plebeian loyalist mob”, while denying, like Walker, a plebeian political agency to it: “the best-documented disturbances reveal more than a faint trace of upper-class influence. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the Manchester riots of December 1792.”²⁷ Even Bohstedt assumed that each side in the Reform

²⁴ Walker, *Review*: 72, 73.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 59, 57.

²⁶ Geoffrey Best, “Review: *The Making of the English Working Class*,” *The Historical Journal* 82 (1965): 278.

²⁷ Booth: 296, 299.

conflict carried with it a larger group of propertyless followers.²⁸ Historians' enthusiasm for this picture reached a peak in the 80s and 90s, when Ian R. Christie and H.T. Dickinson championed the revisionist view that loyalism and conservatism were *the* default political stance of English workers, in Manchester and elsewhere – an argument based fundamentally on the assumption that the sheer volume of propaganda aimed at this group must have worked.²⁹ A corrective series of studies applying a more rigorous archival methodology has since embarrassed this claim.³⁰ Nonetheless, the clear lesson one would take from the scholarship as it stands is that there was some mass working-class buy-in to Anglican loyalism in the early 1790s.

There are some important analytical implications embedded in this belief. There can be little doubt that the working-class masses hewed heavily radical-reformist (that is, Chartist) by the peak decades of industrialization in the 1830s and 40s. If the industrial district's workers were heavily loyalist during the initial migration period, this would imply they learned their reformism later than the Unitarian middle classes, and presumably did not arrive at its principles organically.

²⁸ In fact, Bohstedt wisely hedged his bets on this point, first noting that “there is no evidence to support the contention that the crowds were a lumpenproletariat made up of the least skilled, least educated, and poorest workers in town... We simply do not know precisely who the rioters were.” Based on Mitchell's “The Association Movement of 1792-3,” however, Bohstedt ultimately came down on the side of the “popular loyalism” picture: “subsequent developments suggest that Manchester's Church and King clubs could successfully compete with the democrats in recruiting fustian cutters, shearers, shoemakers, and other tradesmen in Manchester.” See Bohstedt: 112. For a more detailed critique of Mitchell's article, see note 40 below.

²⁹ See Ian R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), and H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), for the strongest statements of the claim. Two other works that are commonly placed in this camp are J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure, and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Thomas Philip Schofield, “Conservative Political Thought in Britain in Response to the French Revolution,” *The Historical Journal* 29.3 (1986): 601–22.

³⁰ Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3”; Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism*; also several essays in Philp's *The French Revolution and British Politics*, notably J. Dinwiddy, “Interpretations of Anti-Jacobinism”: 38-49.

There is neither time nor space here to devote sufficient attention to the historiography of loyalist mobs in Britain in general; I can only acknowledge the problematic scholarly context, and ask what the specific sources for Manchester allow us to say.³¹ It is striking, however, that beyond Walker's polemics, the primary evidence for major working and poor people's support for loyalism in Manchester dries up quickly. Eyewitness estimates of the Church and King mob put its numbers around 200. For unclear reasons, this has been treated as quite a crowd. In fact, it represents a number equivalent to roughly 0.0025% of Manchester's population at the time, meaning any direct working-class participation in this fever-pitch of loyalist enthusiasm was proportionally negligible at best.³² No source speaks of any mass working-class support in Manchester for the Establishment from 1800 onward, an ostensible ideological about-face with no archival record and no obvious explanation. The skeptic might even note that few scholars have made any serious suggestions about what *would* have drawn Manchester's burgeoning world of work to loyalism. While historians have proven quite ready to assume that extra-judicial loyalist violence must have been working-class in origin, the question of what attractions

³¹ The statistical and primary source base for the picture of widespread, working-class Church-and-King loyalism is overdue for a critical re-exploration – to the extent, that is, that there ever was one. Many of these scholars pointed to the Walker riots as a paradigmatic example (e.g. Dickinson: 277). While I am not a specialist of the other often-cited cases, if this is symptomatic of the quality of the evidence as a whole, the burden of proof still lies heavily on this scholarship. A more plausible framing, pursued of late by Philp and Navickas, has traced a strong and definite working people's *patriotism* (expressed or contained most fully in an aversion to a French invasion), which was not in any way mutually exclusive with, and indeed could complement, working-class radicalism, union activity, and belief in democracy. Something like this claim was made in the chapter "Manpower" of Colley's *Britons*, which intersects in a complex manner with this debate in general. The irony is that this is a thoroughly Thompsonian claim (see *The Making of the English Working Class*: 189-90, 496-7; and *Whigs and Hunters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975): 258-69), though Thompson ostensibly established the orthodoxy that both Colley and revisionists like Dickinson and Christie sought to topple.

³² It should be stressed that no estimate for the mob places it in the same category of collective action as the working-class mobilizations to which it is routinely compared, such as the 1808 weaver's turnout (estimated at between 3,000 and 10,000 by various witnesses in *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of an Indictment Against Joseph Hanson, Esq: For a Conspiracy to Aid the Weavers of Manchester in Raising Their Wages* (Manchester: T. Gillet, 1809)), the Blanketeers March (5,000-10,000, according to Robert Poole in *Peterloo*, or, of course, *Peterloo* itself (40,000-50,000; *ibid.*: 363). As we shall see in Chapter 5, there were single-mill armed turnouts in the early 1790s, never mentioned in the historiography, that brought out crowds several times the size of the Church and King mobs.

loyalism held out to newly arrived workers is rather in need of an answer. In general, Manchester “Church and King” tended to speak in a distinctively archaic symbolic language (the Old Church, the Manor, “Down with the Rump”, “Down with the Levellers”) that one would not intuitively expect the heavily migrant world of work to have shared.

Even the *Review* itself is a problematic source on this point. Crucially, in claiming the mob was working class, Walker intended to delegitimize it – to assert that it was made up of people who were incapable of acting as meaningful political agents. As he put it, he “look[ed] upon the misguided multitude, not as my enemies, but as wretched tools, in the hands of a more wretched and most unprincipled faction.”³³ It was, in other words, a tactical and valuative claim to call these people “low” as much as it was a descriptive demographic observation.

Furthermore, for wealthy observers in late-eighteenth century England, crowd action was an intrinsically plebeian phenomenon: participation in an urban mob was, for people of Walker’s demographic, paradigmatically low-class behaviour.³⁴ One of Walker’s correspondents tells us as much: “My previous knowledge of mobs being entirely conjectural, I had always conceived them to be composed of men unprincipled, unlettered, and destitute of property”.³⁵ There is thus a bootstrap paradox here: while modern historians have used such observations as evidence of the class-makeup of the mob, for these observers themselves, the mob itself *was* the indicator of the class makeup.

One thing is certain: the use of extra-judicial violence was not in reality restricted to working people in this period. Despite the stereotypes, there is plentiful evidence elsewhere that

³³ Walker, *Review*.

³⁴ This belief was not blindly ideological, but was based on a familiarity with the widespread and common adoption of the riot as a pressure tactic by working people. Manchester experienced an anti-corporal punishment riot in 1780, and food riots in 1795, 1797 and 1798. *Riots and Community Politics* contains a number of excellent chapters on provisions riots, and Bohstedt has more recently published its sequel: *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, C. 1550-1850* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016).

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 58.

members of the “polite” classes in 1790s Manchester did engage in extra-judicial political violence from time to time. The unnamed correspondent above actually recognized wealthy figures in the crowd;³⁶ and in a jeering letter to the *Mercury* after the riots, the APCOL essentially stamped their approval on the mob, desiring “that the Thanks of this meeting be given...to the Inhabitants in general for their peaceable Behaviour; and to those few who had collected from Motives of Curiosity, for their readiness to disperse, upon being applied to for that Purpose.”³⁷ A couple years later, the Loyalist Associations mooted the idea of arming themselves on the front page of the same paper.³⁸ And in a final lesson that we should not equate the bourgeois mores of the past with our own, Thomas Walker himself engaged in a little public violence once, having notoriously “collared” Lawrence Peel during a heated public meeting in 1788, thereby sparking a brawl between the high elite of Manchester’s fustian and textiles-printing trades.³⁹

This is a point that could be taken too far: it is entirely possible that there was some working-class presence in the Manchester loyalist movement. Austin Mitchell, in a 1961 article that several times asserted the “plebeian” essence of Manchester Church and King, was able to locate possible evidence of exactly three wage-earning men in later loyalist associations (though not in December 1792): a fustian shearer, a rope-maker, and a cabinetmaker.⁴⁰ However, the

³⁶ Amusingly, the correspondent did not revise his basic assumptions – rather, he split the crowd into two, accepting that mobs must have wealthy leadership, but retaining his assumption about those he did not recognize completely untroubled: “I have demonstrative evidence that a mob consists of two parts, viz. the managers and the actors; or it may be compared to a puppet-show, which exposes to view and urges to action the senseless images, while the crafty agents lurk behind the scene!”

³⁷ *MM*, December 18, 1792.

³⁸ *MM*, November 11, 1792.

³⁹ Witt Bowden, *Industrial Society in England Towards the End of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Cass, 1965): 168.

⁴⁰ Mitchell produced more evidence than others have, but there are some justifiable objections to his interpretations of what he found. Like myself, he cross-referenced the APCOL membership with a directory – likely *Scholes* as well. He presents his findings that the list included “a shoemaker” or “a fustian-shearer” as evidence of proletarian participation (Mitchell: 66). At the time, however, these terms referred both to employees in such businesses and to their owners; to be listed in a directory, these men would have had to have been the latter. Mitchell does not tell us

stronger implication that loyalist conservatism was a major, animating force within Manchester's working and poor communities is unsupported by any substantive evidence. In the final analysis, the numbers are simply not there to view any possible working-class rioters as anything other than an eccentric minority.

Recent scholarship affords another possibility: in his study of the correspondence of the original APCOL in London, Mark Philp has suggested that loyalist activism in the 1790s served as a prominent means by which middling folk such as shopkeepers and poorer professionals made a bid for respectability and upward mobility.⁴¹ Mitchell, Bohstedt and myself have all found evidence of "victuallers", grocers and butchers in Manchester's Association movement. By far the most striking and unequivocal loyalist action taken by any identifiable demographic was the pub landlords' ban on reform meetings, and the named figures we know of willing to do violence in the name of Manchester loyalism – from Richard Unite through to his successor Joseph Nadin and the yeomanry at Peterloo – were overwhelmingly drawn from the world of small or middling business. Anecdotally, then, it seems reasonable to suggest that Church and King claimed a particularly strong and vociferous loyalty from the lower rungs of the world of wealth.⁴² Beyond this, all evidence presently available on Manchester loyalism points generally upward in socioeconomic terms.

where he found the fustian shearer, rope-maker, and cabinet-maker, but it is likely a similar problem applies. The majority of those Mitchell assumed were working class were those whose names *Scholes* does not list: Mitchell concluded they were "too humble to find a place in the directories". All we actually know is that these men either did not live in Manchester, or were not the chief partners in acting firms; many were presumably sons, clerks, junior partners, or retired. For instance, identifiable APCOL members not listed by *Scholes* include Lord Grey De Wilton, among the wealthiest men in the county, and future boroughreeve Nathan Crompton, while unlisted MCS members include Thomas Cooper and James Watt Jr.

⁴¹ Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism."

⁴² Some of the wiser recent proponents of the "popular loyalism" narrative have simply redefined the term thus, e.g.: "what might be termed 'popular conservatism' was a significant development during the 1790s. In many towns, loyalist associations attracted far more members than did radical ones... They attracted substantial support not only from landowners and the upper middle classes but also from far more modest property owners, such as small shopkeepers." (Eric Evans, *William Pitt the Younger* (London: Routledge, 1999): 58) The term "popular" here, however, seems needlessly vague if it really means something so specific as "modest property owners."

A different and more precise picture of Manchester loyalism thus emerges. Few historians have explicitly identified Manchester loyalism as essentially a propertied, if not a wealthy social phenomenon, but I would argue the evidence is fairly clear for this designation. Indeed, there is no real evidence to characterize Manchester loyalism as anything other than an opportunistic project of the Establishment, aided, perhaps, by some upwardly mobile hangers-on. For obvious reasons, this group likely skewed more Anglican than Dissent, though there were, as we shall see, notable exceptions. There was a clear pattern of civil service – Church and King supporters would have seen themselves as those who had been responsible for the town, who had kept the local machinery of governance running through the chaos of the cotton boom. Still, despite the feudal names attached to this machinery – the manor, the Court Leet – the brief tallies above fully bear out Bohstedt’s more extensive work: any notion that the Establishment was aristocratic, anti-commercial, or even anti-cotton is uninformed. Instead, the Establishment is best understood as a particular arrangement of religious, personal and narrowly political affiliations *within* a more or less capitalist, more or less cotton-affiliated world of wealth.

“Reform” and the Opposition

How about Walker’s reform movement? The 1795 rollcall mentioned above (admittedly an incomplete roster) suggests the leadership of the movement – the men who would have joined the MCS – were drawn from the same economic strata as their Establishment counterparts. In fact, this group perceived itself as skewing even wealthier and better educated than Church and King’s leaders. Walker himself characterized the formation of the Constitutional Society as being based around class and the cotton interest: they were “several merchants and

manufacturers in Manchester, together with some members of the learned professions.”⁴³ Knight described Walker’s eminent inner circle with a characteristic enthusiasm for their achievements: “Dr. Ferriar, one of the chief physicians at the local Infirmary, who was an excellent doctor with advanced ideas; Joseph Collier, the surgeon; Samuel Jackson, a progressive cotton merchant like himself; Thomas Cooper, brilliant lawyer and research chemist in a local bleachers’ firm”.⁴⁴ Most of the leadership were also active in the Lit and Phil, and Unitarianism was almost certainly over-represented in the MCS. These men could safely be characterized as the more combative and politically active members of an existing male leadership group: a generally dissenting, cotton-affiliated and wealthy community of relative newcomers, the same set who patronized Manchester’s prestige institutions and presided over Cross Street. One could also simply consider them the organized wing of the Opposition.

The erudite, propertied MCS, however, was not the whole of the Reform movement in Manchester. The complex class language of the Society combined a performance of masculinist, commercial respectability among the leadership with a quasi-democratizing claim to representing the poor in the movement more broadly. In a polemic issued after the riots, Walker was bellicose about his credentials as an advocate for working people:

Is it a crime to glory in the title of being the Friend of the POOR? I am guilty of it, for I do, and shall, ever glory in a title so respectable.
Is it a crime to wish the more indigent members of society eased from some of the numerous taxes, which they pay in the purchase of every necessary of life? To wish them better lodged, and better fed, and *better instructed*? I am guilty of these crimes.⁴⁵

Unlike Church and King, the Reformers could point to specific, unadulterated working-class participation in their movement in the form of the Representational Society and the Patriotic

⁴³ Walker, *Review*: 16.

⁴⁴ Knight: 13.

⁴⁵ Walker, *Review*: 70.

societies, working-men's groups who, following the pub ban, were invited under Walker's roof. The numbers were still not nearly large enough to consider organized reform as a major component of working and poor people's culture – at Walker's trial, prosecutor Edward Law attempted to shock his listeners with the suggestion that 100 people may have attended.⁴⁶ Still, it was a defining feature of Manchester reform that it allowed for autonomous engagement by members of the world of work, not just in the form of shared ideals or aspirations, but in the form of actual participation in the movement's institutional machinery.

Needless to say, there is a contradiction here. Even as Walker claimed that the mob at his warehouse was dismissible as a political body *because* they were poor, he made similar claims of plebian authenticity, with very different connotations, for his own movement. This dissonance, however, is not a source problem – that is, the reader should not seek to choose between these two images of Manchester reform. Rather, it accurately reflects a dissonance or incoherence within the movement itself, one for which there is an abundance of evidence.

This is an important distinction, and one which differentiates the current analysis from its predecessors – both from the broadly liberal tradition which saw Walker as unproblematically representing the working-class interest, and more gently from Bohstedt, who asserted few major differences between the internal class relations of the Establishment and the Opposition.⁴⁷ The Establishment may have made occasional populist gestures, but actual working and poor people's participation in Church and King activism was so minimal as to leave no reliable record. "Reform" in the 1790s, in contrast, was defined by an uncomfortable internal relationship between the Opposition and a working-people's movement which was real enough. Still, the

⁴⁶ Walker, *The Whole Proceedings...Against Thomas Walker*: 3.

⁴⁷ See note 28; Bohstedt generally writes of both movements being defined by analogous "'vertical' networks of ideology and affiliation connecting the authorities and the plebs" (Bohstedt: 112).

effort to fuse these energies was, in the end, a failure: while the MCS and the MRS and MPS collaborated on particular actions, the movement as a whole never developed a cross-class political language, and it remained rigidly divided by socioeconomic status. The elite-dominated organized reform movement, then, did not represent an erosion or evasion of class tensions, but is rather best understood as a distinct approach *within* the world of wealth to the problem of the possibility of working-class politicization, an approach predicated on concession, containment, and appeasement.

Evidence for the persistence of class tensions which were internal to the reform side can be found throughout the documentation of the Walker episode. The first MRS meeting at Walker's warehouse, for example, coincided with the riot of December 11, and a number of members took part in the defence. As mentioned previously, several working men emerged from this experience with a strong emotional attachment to Walker. Despite this cross-class friendliness, however, the Societies maintained distinct existences. At Walker's trial, George Wakefield, an MCS member, surprised the prosecution with how sharply this line was drawn:

Mr. Law. Do you mean to say the Reformation Society and the Constitutional Society met at the same place and time under the roof of Mr. Walker?

A. Yes, occasionally; I have seen the Reformation Society there at the same time, and in the same room.⁴⁸

We don't know at which side's insistence this separation was maintained. However, while MRS and MPS members were never invited to MCS events that we know of, Walker and other MCS leaders would occasionally make appearances at MRS events. The MRS members who testified characterized these interventions in the same way – as nervous pleas to refrain from irrational violence:

I have heard Mr. Walker many times advise us to be peaceable, and say many times he had no doubt we should be peaceable...

⁴⁸ Walker, *The Whole Proceedings...against Thomas Walker*: 53

When Mr. Walker came to our meetings he generally addressed us to attend to peace and good order.⁴⁹

This refrain might seem innocuous enough, particularly in the trial context: these men were sympathetic witnesses in a sedition trial, incentivized to say Walker had counseled peace. These witnesses also, however, remembered not just being counselled to be peaceable, but having had a paper on the subject read to them. In his transcript of the trial, Walker obligingly printed this paper as an appendix. It was an epistolary pamphlet, originally addressed anonymously to the Reforming Societies of Sheffield, and reprinted for the benefit of societies in need of similar advice.

An overriding fear of imminent working-class violence was, it can be fairly said, the dominant theme of this address. It opens with a plea: “Allow a sincere well-wisher to the liberties of mankind, and particularly to the happiness and freedom of this country, most earnestly to exhort you, his fellow-townsmen to continue to testify by the whole of your behaviour, that ‘the true spirit of liberty is a spirit of order,’ as your Society for Constitutional Information has well expressed it.” For two pages, it proceeds to beg its listeners to avoid violence, using sometimes strategic, sometimes moral claims:

You may be assured that nothing will chagrin such as are your enemies, so much as to find that you keep steadily, on all occasions, to a strict observance of the laws, and a peaceable conduct; nor would any thing gratify them more, or be so essentially injurious to the cause of that Reform which you wish to obtain, than for you to be so far misled as to commit any act of riot or tumult...

Do nothing which can be conceived by others *except from wilful perversion*, to be inimical to that constitution, one branch of which you profess it to be your design to restore to its purity by constitutional renovation...

Leave all tumult and disturbance, all injury to those who differ from you either in Politics or Religion, to men of a very different description from yourselves – to men who level the property and endanger the persons of innocent and meritorious citizens, for exercising the right of private judgment, to those who oppose it...

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 65.

From your general behaviour, let no one be able to point out a Reformer, or a member of one of your Societies, without at the same time he should point to an industrious, regular man, of sober manners, and an orderly, peaceable disposition...⁵⁰

This is only a selection. The working-class witnesses who were read this document by one of their wealthier counterparts did not, in the trial, say anything about their impression of it.

Reading it with the benefit of some critical distance, though, one senses not just the distrust of one wing of the movement for the other, but genuine fear – a pervading sense that destructive violence was immanent in autonomous working-class action. This was not a cohesive, classless movement, but an uneasy alliance between members of two discrete cultures.

Even as wealthy reformers made genuinely transgressive gestures of collaboration and solidarity, then, a frequent mental block arose at the prospect of working-class societies acting independently of their better-off counterparts. Figures like Walker repeatedly reassured one another that working-class violence could be contained, that the poor would relax into a position of tutelage. A perfect expression of this ambiguity can be found in a letter Walker wrote in the lead-up to the riots: “all is quiet and I have no doubt will continue quiet if the people are left to themselves; or rather the Mob, as the people, in my opinion, are with us.”⁵¹ This hesitancy and revision, this withdrawal from a view of the mob *as* “the people”, is exemplary of the MCS vision.

Aided by a more critical analysis, one can thus paint a more reliable socioeconomic portrait of the Establishment-Opposition confrontation in the early 1790s. Some suggestive revisions emerge. The Establishment was not radically conservative, and their world view was certainly not in any way agrarian, feudal, or “medieval”: even if there were subtle socioeconomic

⁵⁰ Ibid.: Appendix x, xi.

⁵¹ Knight: 101.

differences between the two groups, and wider religious and party-political ones, the Establishment in general should still be characterized as a forward-looking, economically innovative, commercially minded group dominated by capitalist interests. In any other context, a 1790s group with a more than 50% representation of cotton masters would be seen as highly economically progressive indeed. On the other hand, evidence of mass working-class buy-in is thin at best, despite the contradictory reform trope of working-class gullibility.

The reform movement, on the other hand, while dominated by the same cotton-elite class, did find a place in its ranks for a certain group of working-class activists. And yet despite this undoubted fact, one cannot validate the claim put forward by the Opposition leadership that the MCS represented, in any free or straightforward way, distinctively “working-class” claims or interests. To understand the public thoughts, feelings, and ambitions of Manchester’s growing community of working poor, we will have to approach them from another angle, in a later chapter – expressions of working-class sentiment in organized “reform” during the war years were conditioned by the deep distrust and conditional acceptance with which they were brought into the movement.

For our present narrative, the significance of these nuances is that the political landscape of the 1790s existed on a complex triangulated, rather than binary axis, leading to a greater quantity and complexity of possible interactions and outcomes. The partisan alliances forged in the heat of battle do not tell us everything we need to know about attitudes toward the major political dynamics and questions of the day, nor toward the limited local state structures in general.

Having made some effort to qualify our portraits of the main participants in the Walker episode, the paradigmatic instance of early industrial politics, we would do well to turn our attention to the question of what outcomes these participants actually sought. The Manchester Establishment and Opposition's goals are generally interpreted in a wider national context of Enlightenment-inspired reform vs Pittite loyalism. It is doubtless true that "Church and King" and "reform" were powerful shibboleths in 1790s Manchester, terms that, to both supporters and detractors, said all that needed to be said. One could also trace a plausible intellectual history for each movement in national context, drawing links to post-Jacobite Toryism on the one hand, and Foxite proto-liberalism on the other.⁵² Still, if there is good reason to revisit our understanding of who these movements were, there is equally good reason to reassess what we imagine they wanted. While Manchester was doubtless an outward-facing city, and its wealthier citizens well-informed of national discourses, there was a cutting local edge to the 1790s clashes that must be given its due role. What's more, because later British liberals claimed Walker so strongly, historians are liable to back-project anachronistic "liberal" ideas or sentiments onto reform. State formation as a unified and eminently liberal project can therefore be granted some kind of ideological continuity from the 1790s down through the decades of the nineteenth century. The more one critically engages with the textual legacy of these movements, the more the clarity of this impression fades.

There was, for example, a single political goal that floated ostensibly at the centre of all the reform struggles: the titular reform of the British Parliament. As any political historian of

⁵² This is, broadly, the arc traced by most major studies with an intellectual-historical strain; cf. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People*; Christie, *Stress and Stability*; Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism*; Dinwiddy, *Radicalism and Reform in Britain, 1780-1850* (London: Hambledon Press, 1992).

these decades will know, this was a particularly loose and ill-defined project, despite the venom that was often attached to it. Moderate Tory and Whig MPs had toyed with a redistribution of seats and a corrective check on the more florid forms of *ancien regime* corruption in the 1780s, and Manchester's Establishment had not been particularly concerned – indeed, not particularly involved.⁵³ For reasons that cannot be explained in policy terms alone, the same cause became toxic in the more pressurized atmosphere of the 1790s. The particular reforms that some of Manchester's radicals put forward in the Revolutionary years did, of course, go beyond those broached by Christopher Wyvill or William Pitt. In the slim record we have of Establishment political philosophy, however, these distinctions were never made. The one consistent Establishment stance on reform in the 1790s was in fact a refusal to know what it meant, an aggressive ignorance of particular policy proposals – recall that sweeping CKC toast, “May the united Efforts of Manchester and Salford, ever prevail in repelling Innovations.” This is further evident in the universal use of hyperbolic exonyms like “Levellers” and “Jacobins” for the reform movement – one infuriated MCS pamphlet begged, “let us hear no more of LEVELLERS and LEVELLING SYSTEMS”, obviously without effect.⁵⁴ The founding resolutions of the APCOL, who used the “Levellers and Republicans” slur in their very name, characterized

⁵³ This effort reached a head when Pitt put forward a bill for limited reform measures in April 1785, which proved unsuccessful. The *Mercury* carried coverage of the bill's progress in its “Evening Post and Daily Papers” section, the way it might for any legislation of some importance, and printed the full debate on April 26. Manchester, however, would not have been enfranchised under the proposed Act, and Manchester's merchants' minds were elsewhere – this was the same month that Walker made his name by lobbying Pitt's government over the fustian tax. The correspondence and original coverage in the *Mercury*, insofar as it noticed national affairs at all, was exclusively devoted to fustian tax issues. Axon's *Annals* for this year describe Walker's return in a kind of public triumph and a dinner given to Lancashire MP Thomas Stanley for his own fustian-tax lobbying, making no mention of Pitt's reform bill. For scholarly treatments of Wyvill and Pitt's efforts, see Ian R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform: The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics, 1760-1785* (London: Macmillan, 1962) and J.R. Dinwiddy, *Christopher Wyvill and Reform, 1790-1820* (York: St. Anthony's Press, 1971). Wyvill and Pitt's project may have attracted a certain amount of attention in elite Radical circles, but largely in the form of derision; according to Dinwiddy (*ibid.*: 7), Thomas Cooper's denunciation of “half-measured reformers” in their 1792 pamphlet *A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective against Mr. Cooper and Mr. Watt in the House of Commons on the 30th of April, 1792* (Manchester: Falkner, 1792: 72 and 79) was directed at this effort.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Walker, *Review*: 47.

reformers only as “restless and disaffected persons tending to subvert the happy rights and liberties equally enjoyed by all Descriptions of Persons under the auspicious protections of a long experienced and universally venerated constitution of government.”⁵⁵ This caricature, doubtless intended to make its subjects howl, is about as close as the APCOL ever came to direct engagement with the reams of detailed constitutional arguments formulated by reformers. Reform, in Church and King circles, was a Trojan Horse, an opening of a door which had to remain shut – to know anything more about it was to fall for the trick.

To be fair to the Establishment, on the other hand, it is not always clear from the written record that there *was* a clear, dominant reform proposal in Manchester to oppose. Reformers left a more abundant ideological record behind them, being more inclined to weaponize the written word on behalf of their cause. Throughout all of these newspaper editorials, pamphlets, letters to the editor, Lit and Phil presentations and Society pronouncements and declarations, one concept unites the reform side absolutely: the need for a pragmatic, functional change in the way the British electorate was structured, and the manner in which British elections were won.

This was, however, a problem identified, not a vision of the state in and of itself. Beyond such generalities, there was no single reform policy proposal, either at a national or local level. Manchester reform’s public pronouncements called for eased taxation, a vaguely rationalized voting system, and more public access to institutions of justice.⁵⁶ Some reformers were clearly in it for a commerce-driven pacifism, others were most exercised by local corruption in the institutions of the Manor of Manchester.⁵⁷ This last point might call to mind the later

⁵⁵ *Constitution and Minutes...*

⁵⁶ Walker reprinted what seems to be a fairly complete compendium of pamphlets in his footnotes; see *Review*: 17, 29, 34; 46, 47, 67, 72, 74-80, 92; also Cooper, *A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective*.

⁵⁷ For the former, see Joseph Hanson, *A Defence of the Petitions for Peace, Presented to the Legislature: Addressed to the Merchants, Manufacturers and Others of the Counties of Lancaster, York, and Chester*, (London: J. Ridgeway, 1808). See chapter four for a detailed exploration of Reform’s attention to local corruption.

incorporation battle, but there was in fact no consensus over the solution to corruption in these years – even Opposition leaders tended to oppose incorporation, which in the 1790s was still associated with early modern guild commerce. Walker’s only published comment on the subject would have been anathema to the later figures like Prentice who claimed him as a political ancestor: “If this were the proper place, I think I could shew that the town of Manchester owes much of its wealth and importance to its unincorporated character, and that, [by adopting Reform principles], public order might be as fully maintained as it ever was in the best regulated corporations in England.”⁵⁸ Similarly, the Police Commission created by the 1792 Manchester and Salford Police Act would form the chief reform weapon of the 1810s and 20s, but reformers of the 1790s had an ambivalent opinion of it.⁵⁹

Most fundamentally – and this in particular is where older accounts lead one astray – it would be inaccurate to depict the early Radical movement in Manchester as unproblematically “democratic”, and to use this to contrast them with their loyalist counterparts.⁶⁰ The issue is confused by the problematic haziness surrounding contemporary academic usages of the descriptor “democratic” itself. Liberal historians, sociologists and political scientists have generally assumed in their work that “democracy” today refers to the specific representative state system set up by liberal-capitalist constitutional states like the United Kingdom.⁶¹ While these

⁵⁸ Walker, *Review*, 23.

⁵⁹ In the same footnote opposing incorporation, Walker does critique the contemporary police establishment as too narrow, but he does not seem to have had anything to do with the Police Act. Comments made during the subsequent corruption battles make clear that at first, reformers assumed the Act was just another mechanism of the establishment: the Associated Ley-Payers wrote in 1794 that “Your committee have not been able to discover any utility that has resulted to the township since this act was obtained” (*A Report of the Committee of the Associated Ley-Payers in the Township of Manchester Appointed to Enquire into the Accounts of the Churchwardens and Overseers and Other Matters* (henceforth *ALP Report*) (Manchester: The Society for the Information of the Ley-Payers, 1794): 10). Indeed, the formation of the Associated Ley-Payers was in itself a repudiation of the Police Commission. Again, a fuller discussion can be found in the following chapter.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Knight: 17; Redford: 244.

⁶¹ See, for example, Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

states may represent the current outcome of discrete national struggles for democracy, however, they hardly contain or embody the fullness of the democratic trajectory in history – a much broader and more pre-institutional phenomenon. “Democracy” in a historical sense must then refer, in the end, not to particular, nationally contingent constitutional arrangements, but to an *ethic* – a value system asserting a universal right to participation in political decisions. It was and is therefore entirely possible to advocate an expanded franchise or a rationalized electorate while opposing the democratic ethic more broadly. We will have a number of occasions to return to this point in later chapters, as the process of “democratization” interacted in a complex and decidedly non-linear fashion with the institutional trajectory of expansion and renovation I am calling state modernization here. In the case of the 1790s, questions of representation and the right to a voice in government doubtless were central to French war-era political conflicts – but if one assumes that one side fought simply for a maximal right to participation and the other a minimal one, one puts words in mouths.

One of the most interesting early Lit and Phil presentations, for instance, is Thomas Cooper’s “Propositions Respecting the Foundations of Civil Government.” Writing in 1787, Cooper – a wealthy reform activist and cotton-industry chemist – anticipated the core moral arguments in Thomas Paine’s 1792 *Rights of Man*, and indeed, even the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen”: no generation has the right to force its edicts and errors upon its successors, no violent or corrupt regime can be legitimate, the end purpose of all government is increased happiness.⁶² Cooper tacitly supported the right to revolution “after every peaceable method” had been exhausted; even more strikingly, he endorsed the legitimacy of vanguard actions: “any number of men however small are justified in making a beginning, where a

⁶² Thomas Cooper, “Propositions Respecting the Foundations of Civil Government,” reprinted in *Reply to Mr. Burke’s Invective*: 93-109.

beginning must necessarily be made.”⁶³ Few British reformers would ever reach this level of committed radicalism. All the same, however, Cooper was, when he wrote this, also explicitly opposed to democracy:

It is a question, however, much more difficult to determine, whether the right of suffrage, should be in any degree regulated by the possession of *property*, or be considered as a right simply attached to the *person*. For my own part, after much consideration, I incline to think that a line of exclusion *may* be drawn, and that no injustice is done by debarring those from voting in the choice of national representatives, who on account of their poverty, are exempted from the payment of all taxes.⁶⁴

Cooper himself would go on to change his position on the vote; by the time he reproduced his Lit and Phil presentation in a 1792 pamphlet, he footnoted it with an apologia: “I leave the passage here as it stands, because it contains a summary of the arguments on the side of the question which I have abandoned.”⁶⁵ Still, the earlier paper shows us concretely that even in one of the Opposition’s most radical iterations of the “reform” vision, the universal right of all to participate in governance decisions was by no means a given. Reform of the franchise and even the lowering of the property barrier could exist in – indeed, could be products of – the same mind that refused workers a right to political autonomy and participation in the state.

Among Cooper’s generally more moderate peers, the question of the right to suffrage remained very much a live one: no Manchester reform society of the 1790s ever came out firmly for democracy, and Walker never publicly clarified his stance on the issue.⁶⁶ An exchange

⁶³ Ibid.: 108.

⁶⁴ Ibid.: 105.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁶ The preferred characterization of the reform goal in Manchester, as elsewhere was “an equal representation”. To a modern ear, this may well seem like a description of universal suffrage, and the phrasing may have borne the influence or at least quieted the protests of pro-suffragists like Cooper. As reform rhetoric was so focused on the arbitrary nature of the contemporary system, however, it could as easily refer to a rationalized system in which everyone had equal right of *access* to an electorate that was limited via a standardized property qualification. It was, of course, just such a system which Cooper defended in 1787 and which would ultimately emerge in 1832. An apparently clear indication that this was the intended meaning can be found in a 1792 publication of the Patriotic Society, complaining that “as *often* as the question of an equal representation in parliament has been agitated, so *often* has it been negatived” (Walker, *Review*: 35) – universal suffrage had never been proposed in Parliament at that point, but several efforts at redistribution had been struck down (see note 53 above). Perhaps the closest Walker

between the prosecution and witness and MCS member and cotton merchant George Wakefield at Walker's 1794 trial speaks volumes:

What was the reform that you sought, and by what means?

A. That is a point upon which few people are agreed; but it was a parliamentary reform.⁶⁷

Given the centrality which the historiography has given the democratic ethos in characterizing reform, this may be surprising – but given the actual class tensions within the movement and mentioned above, it should not be surprising at all. Even Thomas Cooper's later-career argument for universal suffrage denied any intrinsic right to political participation: rather, Cooper accepted that the working-class vision for the future was childish and untenable, and needed to be frustrated by an elite minority. The only distinction was that he believed the best mechanism for dismantling autonomous plebeian political agency was, paradoxically, the granting of the vote: "let [a poor man] know that you place confidence in his Integrity, that he *has* a Character to lose by improper behaviour, and that you expect as a matter of course, that he will act as he ought – the chances are, that he will feel his own Dignity, and justify the expectations you entertain of his good Conduct. Laws make Manners."⁶⁸ As we shall see in later chapters, if there was a division over the broader concept of democracy, it occurred within and around the reform movement, and occurred over class lines. When the MCS sought to contain or redirect

came was a footnote citation of a Liverpool pamphlet entitled "Equality" which characterized the Reform claim as "every person...may *equally* have a voice in the election of those persons who make the laws by which he is affected in his liberty, his life, or his property" (ibid.: 46). Not only is this a fabulously indirect treatment of the issue; the use of the term "voice" in place of "vote" renders even this borrowed declaration unclear. The final printed declaration of the MCS insisted that "a parliamentary REFORM. – To this single point are the efforts of the Manchester societies directed", yet left this "single point" finally vague: "when the will of the people shall be fairly expressed in the House of Commons of Great Britain, by means of representatives equally elected, and under the *due* controul of the electors" (ibid.: 92-3). Three possibilities present themselves: it may be Cooper was in a small minority, and the non-democratic meaning of reform was essentially accepted; it may be that as universal suffrage seemed so far off, clarity on the issue did not seem pressing to the movement; finally, it may be that the recurrent ambiguity of these texts reflected a live debate within the reform movement itself. All three would support the conclusion reached here, that "reform" as a movement was a venue for, not an embodiment of the democratic struggle writ large.

⁶⁷ *Proceedings Against Thomas Walker*: 51.

⁶⁸ Cooper: 71.

autonomous working people's political energies, or sought to gain a moderate monopoly over what "Reform" itself meant, the Reform movement served not as the agent for democratic struggles in Manchester, but as an arena in which they played out.

Neither the loyalist nor the reform side of the 1790s division in Manchester, then, rallied for purely intellectual purposes around a coherent political campaign or program. The macro-historical trajectories that each have been placed within – the movement toward democracy, the movement toward incorporation – are anachronisms when applied to the Walker era. Even the immediate causes of the polarization of Mancunian political life into the CKC and the MCS – the French Revolution and the furor around the Test and Corporation Acts – are insufficient explanations of this fraught period: in time, they faded from view, while Establishment-Opposition hostility and conflict raged on for another 40 years.

This absence of clarity or ideological coherence pushes us away from a conception of the Walker episode as a clash of ideas, and toward a narrative centered around a division within the wealthy community in Manchester over emotive attachments and identity – a division that hovered over and at times intersected with a simmering dissatisfaction among the growing working population. Among the elite, the fact that such an abundance of political claims and resentments was ready to emerge as a point of conflict in 1790 is strong evidence of existing tensions, an existing negative image of another side. As Katrina Navickas has noted in a sympathetic recent study of this period, "Radical and loyal political movements were associational cultures, expanded through friendship networks and personal connections as well as by more formal societies and activities such as drawing up addresses and petitions."⁶⁹ When one

⁶⁹ Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*: 26.

asks who the sides in these clashes were and what they wanted, then, the best answer might be that these are, in a sense, the same question. Both sides – a more Tory-friendly, Anglican commercial subculture with deeper roots in the town, and a younger, more purely cotton-based, highly educated, and generally dissenting subculture – fought for *themselves*: for a right to political power and representation, for the ability to define the town's emerging nineteenth-century identity.

This intimate, deeply personal framing of the divisions of these years perhaps best explains what is surely the most striking aspect of the Walker episode: the extraordinary vitriol and interpersonal aggression and cruelty which defined it. Walker's first published trial, for instance – a libel case Walker brought against a lawyer named William Roberts while still serving as boroughreeve – typically receives less attention than his second, but it provides striking evidence of the bitterness of the division. After confronting Walker over his partisanship when hosting public meetings as boroughreeve, Roberts papered the business district of Manchester with broadsides attacking Walker's leadership.⁷⁰ Considering how seemingly small the conflict was – Roberts was incensed that Walker had not moved quickly enough to silence a partisan song at a public meeting – they make for a rather bizarre read:

Mr. THOMAS WALKER
Commenced his virulence against me
Like a...BULLY
Has conducted it like a...FOOL
Has acted in it like a...SCOUNDREL
Has ended it like a...COWARD
At last has turned...BLACKGUARD
And unworthy of association with, or notice of any Gentleman, who regards his own character.

⁷⁰ It seems likely that this was the same William Roberts, also a barrister, who subjected the Court Leet to a 34-page disquisition on the value of the Court and its Saxon roots; this Roberts may also have been a son or relation (William Roberts, *A Charge to the Grand Jury of the Court Leet for the Manor of Manchester...* (Manchester: J. Harrop, 1793)). If the identification is correct, this enthusiasm for the Court would place Roberts very squarely in the Establishment camp.

WILLIAM ROBERTS⁷¹

Each one of the carefully mounted insults was actionable. The term “blackguard” was at the time a fairly strong expletive, sometimes replaced with asterisks in polite literature; Walker’s lawyer opined, “Now this is not an expression that finds itself in the mouth, or at the end of the pen, of any Gentleman of *liberal habits or education* – and I am really sorry that any Gentleman belonging to the same profession with myself should have disgraced himself by writing anything so illiberal and indecent”.⁷² Roberts continued his campaign of harassment against Walker for months, publishing letters Walker had sent him without his permission, only stopping after Walker finally brought a successful libel suit against him in 1791.

On the other hand, the consistent religious dimensions of the controversy might lead one to assume that, if the political positions of each side were somewhat inconsistent, the clarity of the struggle at root derived from theology and sectarianism, not personal or cultural animus. But if it is significant that the initial CKC/MCS division occurred over Test and Corporation, it is also significant that this religious fracture dissolved immediately into two overdetermined discourses stacked with diagnoses of what was wrong with England. As John Bohstedt perceptively put it, “Perhaps because repeal of the acts would make little practical difference in Manchester’s informal politics, the issue took off into boundless realms of ideological abstraction as Tories and Dissenters competed to win over public opinion.”⁷³ In listing their principles, the CKC did not reach Test and Corporation until the seventh item. The first two capture something of what stood behind the repeal signifier:

It is a principle of this Society, to revere the Constitution and obey the King, according to the Laws of that Constitution.

⁷¹ *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of an Action Brought by Thomas Walker*: 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 24.

⁷³ Bohstedt: 105.

It is a principle of this Society, to reprobate the wild theories and seditious doctrines respecting the Rights of Man, which have been lately promulgated by the enemies of our most excellent constitution in church and state, as they are subversive of all civil authority; and that, if they were put in practice, would tend to nothing but anarchy and confusion, which is contrary to all order.⁷⁴

The mere threat of repeal touched off a whole chain reaction of associations and resentments: a fear of Tom Paine, a fear of the Revolution, an emotive religious chauvinism all added up to or were intermingled with a powerful distaste for a certain kind of neighbour. This perhaps explains why, while political affiliation seems to have been heavily correlated to religious belief, the association was not absolute: even leadership figures could have unexpected religious affiliations, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Finally, the manner in which Walker came to be indicted for sedition in 1792 is equally illustrative of the ill feeling in Manchester. In the days following the riot, several leading loyalists – the Reverend John Griffith, a magistrate and Collegiate Church chaplain, future boroughreeve Joseph Hardman, and deputy constable Richard Unite, among others – began a half-covert campaign to manufacture sufficient evidence to have Walker hanged, taking advantage of the uncritical Cabinet support they enjoyed. Under Griffith's direction, they began casting around for reformers they could bully or bribe into becoming prosecution witnesses. In a letter to Walker, a victim of theirs named Benjamin Booth described the violence of his arrest:

I was then conducted by Mr. Unite through the most public streets in our way to the New Bailey, though I desired to the contrary several times. He kept discoursing to the crowd, that it was such people as me who had occasioned the war, and he would expose me, wishing at the same time we were all hanged: this was his continual language. Now and then the rabble shouted.⁷⁵

Fortunately – and consistent with the impression that the majority of the Manchester populace was uninterested in the loyalist cause – this effort seems to have had little substantial effect on

⁷⁴ Walker, *Review*: 17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 98

the “rabble”, and Booth made it through several exhibitions like this unharmed. He was then held in solitary confinement for several weeks, threatened with hanging, and plied with hard liquor. By the end of his captivity, his family was in desperate straits, and in a conference with his wife, Booth decided to testify against Walker. He was brought before a Home Office agent who had come down from London especially for the occasion. His letter to Walker well evokes the trauma of the moment:

I then said I would let him know what I had to say upon the business. – Here he wrote down what I said, which if it never appears I hope my friends will excuse my relating, and if it ever does, I declare it was the extorted efforts of a poor man to save himself and his family, as I thought then, from shame and misery; encouraged thereto by the promises of persons, whom even then I held in abhorrence, but thought I had no refuge else.⁷⁶

Two things are striking about this campaign. The first is the intimacy of the interpersonal hostility and violence involved: when Benjamin Booth was first brought to the New Bailey, Griffith acknowledged that they had known each other all their lives before sending him off to the cells; Booth’s own brother seems to have been complicit in the effort to turn him.⁷⁷ Similarly, Walker’s friends and associates were well aware of Griffith going about his work, and Walker heard of the indictment before it went through.⁷⁸

The second striking feature is how futile and basically incompetent Griffith’s campaign was, despite the active support and engagement of a wartime government. Immediately upon his release, Booth rescinded his entire testimony and wrote a sworn statement for Walker’s use in the trial. This left the prosecution’s case hanging entirely on a second informer, the Irish weaver Thomas Dunn, who had only been in Manchester for a couple years. There cannot have been many more vulnerable figures to pick on; Dunn was a severe alcoholic and various courtroom

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 108.

⁷⁷ Walker, *A Review*: 103.

⁷⁸ See Walker’s panicked letters to Secretary Dundas as he heard of the charges, published as an appendix to *The Whole Proceedings...Against Thomas Walker*: 107-113.

outbursts suggest a sad but unclear history of degradations and misdeeds.⁷⁹ Like Booth, Dunn was arrested, held in the New Bailey, and plied with copious amounts of alcohol. He signed his name to a series of charges against Walker, saying Walker had uttered various treasonous oaths against the King. At one point, he frankly admitted to a gaoler that he hoped to die by alcohol poisoning.⁸⁰ At the trial, Dunn testified twice, but got so drunk in the short time between his statements that the judge cut him off.⁸¹ Shortly thereafter, multiple witnesses testified that Dunn had arrived drunk at Thomas Walker's brother Richard's house days before the trial and confessed all, begging for the family's forgiveness. In one of the more spectacular implosions in English legal history, the prosecution attorney Edward Law stood and rescinded his entire case:

⁷⁹ The 1794 trial contained an odd moment in which Thomas Erskine, Walker's lawyer and future Lord Chancellor, pressed Dunn about his real name. Dunn flew into a temper: "I am speaking now, that my name is Thomas Dunn, and upon my oath I am speaking, I know what you are upon Mr. Erskine; I tell you in this place, that I defy you, though the learned Mr. Erskine is come down here to insult me" (ibid.: 15). He was then silenced by the presiding magistrate. At Benjamin Booth's trial, George Lloyd, Booth's lawyer seemed to know more about Dunn's past than has been preserved:

"Q. Was you ever employed by the East India Company?

A. No.

Q. Was you ever employed as a crimp?

A. No.

Q. Not to pick up soldiers?

A. No.

Q. I believe you are not a Protestant?

A. No—yes—I was a Roman Catholic.

Q. Was you excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church?

A. No, I defy any person to prove it."

After this, Lloyd dropped the line of inquiry (Walker, *Review*: 110-1, 114).

⁸⁰ "As soon as Mrs. Robinson missed the rum, she went into Dunn's room, and accused him with stealing the rum, and asked him, if he was not afraid it would kill him; he answered, he wished it would, for he wished he was dead. Dunn was not well for two or three days after" (ibid.: 119).

⁸¹ The trial transcript captures the moment at which the court realized how drunk Dunn was, surely one of the stranger moments in nineteenth-century English legal history:

"Mr. Justice Heath: Well, Dunn, you have heard this evidence; did that pass, or any part of it?

Dunn: No, nothing at all – Yes, something of it passed.

Heath: How much of it passed?

Dunn: I went there when I was intoxicated, the same as I am now.

Mr. Law: Have you been out of the court?

Dunn: Yes, I have.

Mr. Justice Heath: How long have you been intoxicated?

A. Not very long; I have my recollection about me, though it may seem to the court that I may be ill, or may not" (ibid.: 90).

Mr. Law: I know the character of several of the gentlemen who have been examined, particularly Mr. Jones; I cannot expect one witness alone, unconfirmed, to stand against the testimony of these witnesses; I ought not to expect it.

Mr. Justice Heath: You act very properly, Mr. Law.

The Jury immediately gave their verdict NOT GUILTY.⁸²

There are two possibilities when considering this bizarre episode. The first is that despite months of effort and unlimited legal cover, the prosecution was foiled by an ironclad discipline on the part of reformers. The very looseness of the Manchester movement, of course, militates against this interpretation, as does everything we know from the *Review* and the two printed trials. The other possibility is that the goal of Griffith and his associates was less to win a court case than simply to goad and wound a hated opposition; Griffith's allies in London may likewise have been as content to embroil northern liberals in a prolonged, expensive, and dispiriting legal proceeding as to secure an airtight conviction. In this case, the prosecution was an unqualified success.

We are, perhaps, used to reasonably assuming that the ferocity of a dispute is a function of how much each side believes in a clear goal. In this frame, the extreme vitriol of the Establishment/Opposition division is something of a mystery. Not only did both sides fail to elaborate on a clear political desire; the strategies which they adopted do not seem to have been obviously calculated to achieve what slim goals they did express. Thomas Walker ground his

⁸² Ibid.: 105. An exchange from pages 85-8, in which Law invited Erskine to complete his evidence, makes plain that Law had no idea what was coming. Hanging his entire prosecution on a plainly volatile witness, questioning that witness only to find he was too intoxicated to respond, and then somehow being publicly blindsided by that witness's perjury were not Law's only humiliations in this case. He attempted to use the timing of the wars against the French as a dramatic point in his opening speech, but could not remember the relevant dates; he was also abruptly admonished midway through the trial by Heath for bringing the case as a misdemeanor rather than a felony (ibid.: 3, 85). Nonetheless – and perhaps in a sign that the real intent of these prosecutions was to harass and obstruct – he continued to prosecute high-profile sedition cases throughout the 1790s; within a decade, he had been made Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, sitting as the first Baron Ellenborough. He later served on the Privy Council and even, briefly, as Chancellor of the Exchequer. See Michael Lobban, "Edward Law, first Baron Ellenborough" in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford, 2004).

substantial business empire into the ground turning his trials into high-profile test cases and publicizing them to humiliate his enemies. Despite having shown a great capacity for leadership, he thus did not seek to energize or lead a national or even local movement in the later 1790s. Other victims of Unite and Griffith were severely marked by their experiences, and played no further role in Mancunian political life: Knight tells us that Dunn, after being prosecuted by Walker and serving time in the pillory, died in 1798, “at Manchester, in extreme wretchedness, unpitied and detested by mankind”; Booth died soon after.⁸³ Indeed, the particular organizations Walker was involved with – the MCS, MPS, and the MRS – appear to have died completely during the trial. Griffith, meanwhile, who likely had his own issues with alcoholism, receded from public life before long as well.⁸⁴

In reality, however, human conflict rarely resembles a debate at the Oxford Union, with two well-drawn sides supporting clear, opposing programs: in the *longue durée*, one might usefully reframe recurrent political conflicts as *collective* behaviours endemic to particular political cultures, flaring into action and organization when existing negative images or associations combine with generalized conditions of stress or anxiety.

The battle of grand ideas that Walker envisioned was not quite a fantasy; it was a motivating self-image, a weaving together of real ideals and emotive attachments into an enabling and inspiring narrative for Walker’s admirers and followers. Still, to the historian, it is partially informative at best. After a critical and realistic assessment of the Manchester evidence, one emerges with a picture of a clash which was deeply localized, a flaring-up of existing religious, cultural and social fractures within an urban elite. While one side was doubtless more

⁸³ Knight: 175-6.

⁸⁴ Booth suspected Griffith and his clerk, Mr. Paynter, were drunk when they ordered his arrest, and he frequently drank with them in prison: see Walker, *Review*: 97-104.

intellectually exploratory and socially progressive than the other, group allegiance and mutual suspicion divided local political life much more cleanly than any policy program. This raises the possibility that the force of the clash came not from the ardour or clarity of the participants' beliefs, but rather from the stakes of the struggle.

This, I would suggest, is the clearest lesson one can take forward from the sound and fury of the Walker episode. To an unmistakable degree, an unobstructed right to participate in local political life was *worth* something to Walker, his community, and their opponents. For the Establishment, a relatively coherent local state system, available and responsive to the longstanding local commercial community they knew and trusted, was rapidly being swamped by new arrivals – strangers who bore with them new ideas, political languages, and trumpeted a religious affiliation which had long been a source of sore division in the town. From the viewpoint of these new arrivals, meanwhile, a calcified political structure was barring them access from administrative machinery which they saw as vital for meeting the emerging challenges of early industrial urbanization.

The suggestion is an ironic one: rather than one side modernizing the state over the protests of the other, the intensity of the conflict itself had the effect of augmenting the significance and power of local state structures. Prior to the 1790s, the Manor had generally only caused controversy in cases of personal corruption or incompetence, and no Police Act had ever been sought or needed. In the heat of the reform/loyalist battles, on the other hand – when the legal machinery by which the local governing class had typically arranged its affairs was increasingly appropriated for partisan ends – control over these instruments inevitably became the object of more recognizably modern political campaigns. One could not simply abandon a

tool this useful to one's rivals. In the short term, the Establishment would retain hegemony, but the struggle was far from over.

In the next chapter, I will pursue this suggestion more fully, examining the broader contexts in which these elite priorities were evolving, and assess some more pragmatic deployments of state power to address more material strains. First, however, I must reserve one point from this chapter's discussion for later examination. If one can accept this vision of the Walker episode not as a purely theological or intellectual struggle but as a battle over representation and the right to participate, one must also note that it left the political positioning of the majority culture – that is, the rapidly expanding population of working poor – quite ambiguous. Passing through the door of organized reform, working people gained entrance to a legitimized, state-directed, secular political discourse at the local level really for the first time. The premise on which they gained this entrance, however, and the rights they had once inside, were far from a matter of consensus. Despite the depth of the fault lines which defined Manchester politics, then, one of the crucial questions in Mancunian political life – what role, if any, the exploding working population had as political agents – emerged from the upheavals of the early 1790s conspicuously unresolved.

Chapter Four: Capital's Turn Toward the State

On May 22, 1787 – before the Test and Corporation upheaval, before the formation of the CKC, the APCOL, the MCS, MRS, or MPS – Manchester's leading citizens gathered at the Collegiate Church. As described in the *Mercury*, those present included “the Magistrates, together with the High Constables of the Hundred, the Boroughreeves and Constables of Manchester and Salford, and many of the most respectable Gentlemen of the Towns and Neighbourhood”. The group – made up of Anglicans and dissenters alike – listened to a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Asheton on forgiveness and generosity, then proceeded to a newly-cleared patch of land in Salford overlooking the Irwell, where they intended to build one of the largest and most advanced prisons in Europe.

Before local magistrate Thomas Butterworth Bayley laid the foundation stone, the group buried beneath it a lead time capsule containing a copper plate inscribed with this text:

On the 22d of May, MDCCLXXVII...this gaol and penitentiary-house, (at the expence of the Hundred of Salford, in the County Palatine of Lancaster) was begun to be erected; and the first stone laid by Thomas Butterworth Bayley: And that there may remain to Posterity a monument of the Affection and Gratitude of this Country, To that most excellent Person, who hath so fully proved the Wisdom and Humanity of separate and solitary Confinement of Offenders, This Prison is inscribed with the name of John Howard.¹

Howard was Britain's leading proponent of the notion that incarceration should be reformatory rather than vengeful; he also believed that rather than supplementing more spectacular forms of punishment, incarceration should become the central technique of a new form of restrained state violence based upon rationality, predictability, and uniformity.² By inscribing Howard's name on

¹ *MM*, May 22, 1787.

² See John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations, and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons and Hospitals*, 3rd ed (Warrington: W. Eyres, 1784), in particular “Proposed Improvements in the Structure and Management of Prisons” (19-43). Interestingly, the major eighteenth-century source on Howard's life was written by John Aikin – *A View of the Life, Travels, and Philanthropic Labors of the Late John Howard, Esquire* (Philadelphia: John Ormrod and W.W. Woodward, 1794). See also Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain*: 47-57; Tessa West, *The Curious Mr. Howard: Legendary Prison Reformer* (Sherfield on

their prison, Manchester's governors thus declared the town to be at the vanguard of local governance practices.

The new building received its first prisoners in 1790. From the bench, Bayley made good the architectural promise of the new plan through judicial action. Since the early 1780s he had been laying the groundwork, accruing jurisdictional power to the Salford Hundred Sessions Court he led.³ According to legal historian George Fisher, "By absorbing into their court almost the entire business of trying minor theft crimes, the justices ensured that an activist magistrate with a progressive vision would have a free hand in working a reform of criminal punishment in Manchester."⁴ Bayley and his fellow magistrates were then free to stage a historic shift in how minor and mid-level crimes were punished in Manchester. By 1796-7, Fisher calculated, imprisonment was being sentenced in a majority of all sessions cases. Manchester thus became one of the earliest sites where the modern carceral regime entered operation, with the town's petty lawbreakers systematically subjected to the new Howardian regime:

The length of the average term grew sixfold from 1.5 months in 1774-75 to 9.2 months in 1791-92 before falling somewhat to 7.7 months in 1796-97. By the mid-1780s, the bench began to specify that many prison sentences be served at hard labor. In 1792 the bench began to add the condition of solitary confinement. And by 1796-97 virtually every sentence the bench handed down was to be served both at labor and in solitary confinement.⁵

In an odd pun on the name of London's Old Bailey, the new penitentiary was christened "The New Bayley" in honour of its champion. In short, at the very moment which Manchester's political life began its slide into prolonged partisan and sectarian conflict, the town took its place

Loddon: Waterside Press, 2011); Derek Lionel Howard, *John Howard; Prison Reformer* (London: C. Johnson, 1958); Martin Southwood, *John Howard: Prison Reformer; an Account of His Life and Travels* (London: Independent Press, 1958).

³ The Hundred of Salford was not limited to the town of Salford itself, but instead was a Saxon-derived jurisdiction including Manchester, Salford and a good number of inner suburbs.

⁴ George Fisher, "The Birth of the Prison Retold," *The Yale Law Journal* 104.6 (1995): 1253.

⁵ *Ibid.*: 1264-5.

at the bleeding edge of coercive state techniques, all centred around a massive new public structure named after a Unitarian.

The New Bayley, staring down on central Manchester from a bluff over the Irwell, was Manchester's most arresting monument to state innovation, but it was not an aberration. During the turn-of-the-century era in which Manchester's population regularly doubled or tripled each decade, the foundation stones of the modern state were laid in the industrial districts. A catalogue of firsts: in 1784, Manchester began to support an interfaith network of "Sunday Schools";⁶ in 1790, a public maternity hospital was founded; in 1790, a new Sessions Court was opened at the New Bayley; in 1791, the cornerstone of a large new workhouse was laid; in 1792, a public dispensary began operating out of the Infirmary; in late 1793, Salford was given its own new workhouse; in 1795, Percival, Bayley and others founded the first Board of Health; in 1801, the town authorities began managing smoke pollution; in 1806, a new Exchange was built; in 1810, publicly licensed hackney coaches began operating in Manchester.⁷ Seeds of all the great trajectories of later nineteenth-century reform – sanitation, coercion, the poor laws and social welfare provision, transportation, health, the education of the poor – can be discerned in Manchester in these years.

The most significant single adaptation came with the granting of the 1792 Manchester and Salford Police Act, an administrative advance which bore the seeds of many other

⁶ See Rev. John Bennett, *The Advantages of Sunday Schools: A Discourse. Preached for the Benefit of That Useful and Excellent Charity, at St. Mary's Church, in Manchester, on Sunday the 2d of October, 1785; to Which Is Prefixed, Some Account of the Origin, Design, and Progress of This Institution* (Manchester: C. Wheeler, 1785). Despite the name, which might well seem unassuming to the modern reader, these were large, well-staffed institutes with several hundred students, most of which operated throughout the week as night schools. The ecumenical management system did not last into the nineteenth century, though large Established and dissenting systems continued to function in parallel (see Axon: 127).

⁷ Ibid.: 110-142.

innovations.⁸ This act gave the citizens of Manchester the right to undertake various “improvements” and to implement various regulations without seeking *ad hoc* parliamentary approval. In asserting the right to participate in this activity of every resident who owned or occupied a dwelling of greater than £30 annual value, however, the Act essentially established a semi-permanent new governance body. This body – “the Police Commission” – was headed by the Court Leet and Vestry authorities (the boroughreeve, constables, and churchwardens), but otherwise it was open to interested participants and made its decisions by majority vote. By deliberately setting a ceiling to participation above the heads of the town’s working majority, it essentially institutionalized the existence of a local governing class.⁹

Like many Manchester governance records, the Police Commission’s archives contain large holes. The remaining pieces, however, show how an oligarchy of capitalists, clerics, and professionals energetically sought to regulate their town through an expanding system of infrastructural power.¹⁰ They chased down “nuisances” (open cellar dwellings, street stalls, protruding stairways, smoky chimneys) and put up new lamps. Bit by bit, they declared every road in Manchester other than courts and back alleys “King’s Highways”, meaning they were to be lighted, cleansed, and kept up to a rough standard by the public purse. They drastically expanded the watch: the number of watchmen rose from a few men to a few dozen by the turn of the century, before plateauing around 50 for the coming decades.¹¹

⁸ *Manchester and Salford Police Act*, 1792 (32 George III, c.69).

⁹ See Redford and Russell: 201-204.

¹⁰ MCL: M9/30/1/1-9.

¹¹ In the closing months of the century, the number stood at 43 (MCL: M9/30/1/1, October-November 1799); by 1809, it had crept up to 52 (see MCL: M9/30/1/2, July 5, 1809). The watch was still at 55 in the year of Peterloo (MCL: M9/30/1/3, March 10, 1819). This settling on a seeming “natural” size – despite continued explosive population growth – suggests that the early Police Commissioners maintained an early modern approach to state coercion: the watch was a passive force that was to be tied to the physical size of the town, not the number of its inhabitants. Even if this was not a beat constabulary in miniature, however, the rapid expansion did represent the dawning of an awareness of a need for greater coercive control of the streets, and the commissioners continually implemented small steps toward regularization and professionalization of the service. For example, a typical motion

These material adjustments in the administrative practices of local state bodies in Manchester signalled the first serious movements toward radical state expansion. One should not lose sight, of course, of the fact that the pioneers of the 1790s did not clearly conceptualize in their own minds a state construction project as such. Much of the rapid growth in public bodies in early industrial Manchester was decentralized, initiated through private voluntary and charitable initiatives (like the Board of Health) or liminal, state-adjacent public institutions (like the Royal Infirmary, maintained by voluntary contributions but licensed by Acts of Parliament). In the Introduction to this dissertation, however, I put forward a definition of the state emphasizing the state's legal comprehension of itself, and the state in history as enacted law. In the early governance experiments of the turn of the nineteenth century in the North, one can see the distinctive possibilities of a state history framework as opposed to conventional politically driven narratives. Though no vanguardist body appeared in these years with an articulated conception of the desirability of state expansion, one can witness a clear tendency to make permanent the infrastructural innovations by embedding them in existing legal frameworks – the crucial fuse-lighting of an expansionist state. Manchester's leaders exhausted themselves in patient lobbying to secure legal constitutions for their institutions: parliamentary blessings needed to be sought not only for the catch-all Police Commission, but also bridges, hospital charters, and new roads.¹² Neither were the town's leaders passive about how this state

from December 7, 1799, suggested "That it be recommended to the several district commissioners to order that the watchmen in their respective districts attend at the Police Office at half past nine every night and also immediately after going their rounds at 5:30 in the morning and to make reports of what they have done and observed during the night..."(MCL: M9/20/1/1).

¹² Axon identifies a number of such acts: for example, 30 George III. cap. 81, which allowed for the construction of the new workhouse; 48 George III. Cap. 127, which allowed Oswald Mosley to grant lands to the Infirmary; or 57 George III. cap. 58, which allowed for the reconstruction of Blackfriars Bridge in stone. Acts for cutting canals, buying up estate lands, and laying new roads were passed at a rate, at times, of several a year. The title alone of a typical canal act makes plain how imbricated these ostensibly private utilities were with state authority and license:

expansion should take place. Different juridical mechanisms had their different champions: the Police Commission always had its enthusiasts, Bayley fought for the Sessions Court, while William Roberts, Court Leet steward in 1793, made an impassioned plea from the bench for the expanded use of the Court Leet itself to meet the town's modern needs – a plea which went through several printings in pamphlet form.¹³ A twentieth-century welfare state this was not, but it would be unreasonable to deny a context-appropriate tendency toward state expansion and centralization.

Why this turn toward the state? This process ran against institutional entropy: the local state was becoming more complex, more costly, and more difficult to run. As noted in the last chapter, the classic liberal narratives characterized state growth in response to urbanization as inevitable and its manner and methods common-sense, erasing or obscuring the significance and – for lack of a better word – oddity of nineteenth-century state development as a historical process. The “common-sense” analysis does contain a grain of truth: Manchester *was* experiencing brute expansion of numbers, this *did* put a pragmatic strain on existing offices and practices, and part of the goal of many early innovations *was* to address the shortcomings. The 1792 Police Act, for instance, was not tailor-made for the industrial north: such Commissions were a generic legislative solution for areas experiencing rapid population growth in the period.¹⁴

Nonetheless, there is substantial evidence that the problem was not just that Manchester was growing, but the *kind* of society it was becoming; reformers sought not just larger

An Act to Enable the Company of Proprietors of the Canal Navigation from Manchester to or near Ashton-under-Lyne and Oldham, to finish and complete the same, and the several cuts and other works authorised to be made and done by them by the several Acts passed for that purpose, and for amending the said Acts and granting to the said company further and other powers, 1799 (38 George III. cap. 32).

¹³ Roberts, *A Charge to the Grand Jury*... On Roberts, see Chapter Three, note 77 above.

¹⁴ Cf. Redford and Russell, citing the Webbs: “Between 1748 and 1835, such bodies of statutory Commissioners for special purposes were established, at one time or another, in nearly every town of England, ‘from Truro to Berwick-on-Tweed’...” (Redford and Russell: 199). Manchester itself had in fact obtained two earlier such acts in 1765 and 1776, though neither had led to such structural changes in governance (*ibid.*: 200).

institutions, but innovative and novel practices of governance. Manchester may have needed more prison cells, but it was not inevitable that any jurisdiction would align itself so unanimously behind the Howardian vision.¹⁵ Manchester may have needed more and better lighting as the town grew, but it was not inevitable that it would become the first jurisdiction in the world to manufacture coal gas for public use. And the 1792 Act may have been generic, but the uses it was put to – from erecting these gasworks to becoming one of the first public legislative bodies in Britain to adopt the secret ballot – were anything but generic or preordained. An unusual openness to innovation was a clearly discernible element of the state-in-Manchester story from the early industrial era onward. It also seems clear that even if a master plan was never articulated, these new systems were instinctively being built to last. In every case, the desire for legal legitimation was closely related to a desire for permanence and entrenchment.

So Manchester in this period saw a notable tendency toward preliminary forms of state expansion and state innovation. This is an interesting assertion to follow the discussion of the last chapter, because while it describes a process which took place concurrently with the great sectarian crashes of the 1790s and involved all of the main participants,¹⁶ the steady trajectory of innovation bears no strong correlation to the political fortunes of either Manchester loyalism or the reform movement. In the catalogue above, the Opposition was responsible for few major innovations – Thomas Walker’s tenure as boroughreeve, for instance, was fairly conventional. On the other hand, it would also be inaccurate to describe the Establishment as the real driving

¹⁵ Cf. Fisher: “No one community could better exemplify the reform than Manchester... In Manchester the pressures these forces put on the old penal institutions were especially urgent, and the resulting changes in those institutions were especially sharp and clear” (Fisher: 241).

¹⁶ On this point, it is perhaps interesting to note that the initial cause of the conflict between Walker and Roberts was a pragmatic (though partisan) debate about Infirmary staffing levels (see *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of an Action Brought by Thomas Walker...*).

force for change, even beyond the counterintuitive nature of the claim: radicals took an active part in public meetings, spearheaded the “think-tank” style activities of the Lit and Phil, and as we shall soon see, would go on to play a much more influential, pragmatic reforming role around the turn of the century.¹⁷ Seen properly, the real story of early state development in Manchester is one for which neither the Establishment nor the Opposition can be given sole credit. The heightened political situation of the 1790s was a crucial context for early experimentation with the local state, and I have suggested that it almost certainly contributed to an increasing assessment of the value of the local state among Manchester’s political class as a whole. When it came to practical governing, however, the headier political principles of the reform clash can seem like something of a distraction from the practical challenges thrown up by early industrial urbanization – challenges which were felt by Manchester’s leaders first not as partisans, but as members of a local governing class.

In this regard, perhaps it is Thomas Butterworth Bayley, not Thomas Walker, who stands as the more illuminating embodiment of Manchester privilege in this period – illuminating in his contradictions. Bayley was a cornerstone of the Establishment, a vitriolic supporter of Church and King from an old Manchester family, yet he was also a Dissenter and a judicial innovator.

¹⁷ Redford and Russell tried to square this circle by arguing the *defeat* of the radicals led to the enactment of their real agenda. Explaining the passage of the Manchester and Salford Police Act in 1792, they wrote, “ironically enough, the practicability of local constitutional changes was strengthened by the fact that the Tories and Churchmen, backed by the mob, were now able to overwhelm the opposition of the Whigs, Radicals and Dissenters. Hitherto the Whigs and Dissenters had vainly pressed for reforms in the local administrative machinery; these attempts had been thwarted by the Tories and Churchmen, who feared that any change might give their opponents a dominant share in the control of local affairs. Now that this fear was removed, the Tory oligarchs were willing to admit that the local government of the town ought to be improved; they were even willing to acquiesce in a more democratic form of local government, provided that this change did not endanger their own power” (Redford and Russell: 168-9). This account skewed chronology. Walker may have been tied up in the trial, but he was far from neutralized opponent in 1792, the peak of his national fame. Beyond the demise of the MCS and its affiliates, Opposition organizing went on at as frenetic a pace as ever, as is discussed later in this chapter.

He was a country gentleman and an agriculturalist, but one with close personal and business ties to the cotton industry. He saw himself as a friend to the poor and gave much thought to their welfare, yet in his friend Thomas Percival's accounts of his actual dealings with poor people, Bayley could also be violent and cruel, renowned for his harshness to prisoners and prone to leading the charge against rioters in person.¹⁸ This mix has confounded historical categorization: Bohstedt, examining Bayley's role in repressing strikes and riots, put him down as a traditionalist Tory; George Fisher, studying only his prison activism, called him a reforming Whig, and assumed he must have suffered greatly under "Tory" rule.¹⁹

Let us, for a moment, hold up the fundamental incoherence and neurotic character of this persona as emblematic. Thomas Walker's hyper-literate, idealistic world view, in the end, turned itself toward no significant immediate questions of state management, and Walker's brief tenure in office was unremarkable. In contrast, Bayley's anxious, contradictory, self-deceiving mind devoted itself relentlessly to practical questions of rule, and was as responsible for initiating the process of state development in the world's first industrial urban society as any other. The

¹⁸ E.g., "And he has been known to ride into the midst of an enraged multitude armed with stones and bludgeons; and, when exhortations and threats availed not, has assisted personally in the seizure of their Ringleaders..." Several defensive comments by Percival imply Bayley was notorious for sadism on the bench, a common charge against eighteenth-century justices: "he pronounced the sentence of the court, on the unhappy convicts, with the most impressive solemnity"; "In the exercise of the Magisterial functions, the sentence of justice can seldom be expected to give satisfaction to each of the parties who are the subjects of it... Sometimes, also, the decision may be apparently rigorous and severe; and by exceeding the moral turpitude of the offence, may stand opposed to the feelings of pity, and even to the sense of equity, in the minds of uninformed spectators" (Thomas Percival, *Biographical Memoirs of the Late Thomas Butterworth Bayley, Esq. F.R.S. &c. &c. of Hope Hall, near Manchester* (Manchester: W. Shelmerdine, 1802): 4, 11).

¹⁹ The confusion apparently arises because of the archaic terms of Thomas Percival's comment that Bayley was "a Whig of the old school" (ibid.: 10). Party adherence in this era was a complex and non-institutional phenomenon, and one must be able to distinguish between personal identities or attachments and voting behaviours. As Jennifer Mori reminds us of the national scene, "Finding self-professed Tories at Westminster before the 1800s is difficult because the term was still synonymous with Jacobite treason and therefore not willingly adopted by contemporaries... the vast majority of politicians still defined themselves as Whigs." (Mori, 6) The two dominant figures of French-war era Toryism, William Pitt and Edmund Burke, both considered themselves Whigs at heart, and Percival's comment might even be a reference to Burke's characterization of "old Whigs" in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs...* (London: Dodsley, 1791). Bohstedt is therefore probably closer to the mark than Fisher: Percival was implying Bayley was the kind of Tory supporter who would once have been a Whig.

question is not how Manchester's idealists implemented their vision; the question is why Manchester's uneasy governors as a body began to gravitate toward the unconventional solutions they did.

The present chapter will address this question in two parts. In the first, I will ask what, beyond idealism, impacted middling or bourgeois views on the role of the state as the eighteenth century drew to a close. This was a time of frenetic wealth creation and capital accumulation in the North, but it does not follow, necessarily, that the culture of the cotton masters and their associates was one free of hardship or anxiety. Perhaps the most easily forgotten fact about the early "cotton lords" was that they moved in an uncertain economic terrain, ruled by a national government which rarely understood, let alone sympathized with their interests, and operated in an industrial environment characterized by high levels of experimentation, improvisation, and risk. One must make some effort to recreate the unique subjective world views generated by this historically unique juncture of material circumstances if one wishes to understand something of how industrial-elite attitudes toward the role of the state evolved.

Secondly, moving forward to the turn of the century, we will find the Establishment-
Opposition rivalry still active, though in a less violent and dramatic form. The most concerted Opposition activism in these years was led by an accountant named Thomas Batty (a self-publicist like Walker, but in every other respect a different kind of politician) and addressed questions of decidedly local, practical urgency: the integrity, efficiency, and capacity of local governance bodies and systems. The concerns which animated this activism were much more clearly tied to the general anxieties and dangers of middle-class life in the industrial north than they were to the grand, philosophical ideals of the 1700s, though a broad ethic of rational

liberalism was retained. In these combative exchanges, we will see how developments that were broader reaching and longer lasting than their architects or opponents realized could arise from the blinkered frenzy of partisan conflict.

The instability of early industrial capitalism

New forms of capital investment brought Manchester's world of wealth together. As I argued in the previous chapter, participation in this emerging economy was not limited to an innovative Unitarian ideological leadership, but crossed ideological, religious, and party lines. Cotton was so ubiquitous in the turn-of-the-century Manchester area that it even served as a kind of economic lingua franca or currency in kind; when George Heywood, the young grocer's clerk returned home to Huddersfield to raise capital to buy his own shop, he remarked "If I did not succeed...I could buy myself some cloth which would perhaps pay my expences."²⁰ So what was the subjective experience of participation in this new economy like?

Based on the available evidence, if one tries to reconstruct the business landscape of the cotton districts at the close of the eighteenth century as it would have appeared to one of its participants, one produces an image of a surprisingly hostile and unpredictable environment. Historians of this period have generally focused on successes – innovative production models and accounting practices that spread, upstart firms that flourished, obscure locals who began in an uncle's counting house and retired millionaires. The few who have made a study of failure in these years, however, have unanimously concluded that this optimistic characterization is a distortion of typical experience. As Sheila Marriner has written, "In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries...financial failure (temporary or permanent) became a common feature of

²⁰ *Journal of George Heywood*: F 36 v. See also Chapter Two, note 7.

trade, industry, and banking affecting tens of thousands of businesses, large and small, and the course of history is littered with the relics of those who tried and failed.”²¹ Even the strong felt this presence as they watched the weak fall around them, and cautionary tales abounded.

The figures generated by the studies of failure can be astonishing. In the final decades of the seventeenth century, the average annual number of British bankruptcies had been 44.9; for the final decade of the following century, the figure was 762.7.²² Most importantly, bankruptcies increased dramatically in the final decades of the eighteenth century, they were increasingly concentrated in south Lancashire and the cotton districts, and rather than simply rising evenly with the number of firms, bankruptcy became a greater risk to the individual firm as the industrial revolution took off. As Julian Hoppit has noted,

An increasing volume of bankruptcy bears witness to prospering areas of the textile industry, Lancashire cottons and West Riding woolens. Indeed, when the cotton industry's development got into full stride at the end of the century, Lancashire challenged London as the most important home of textile bankrupts. In 1798 numbers of textile bankrupts from Lancashire surpassed the capital's for the first time; and in absolute terms the number of textile bankrupts from Lancashire rose twenty times between the 1740s and 1790s.²³

As Lancashire's trading centre, Manchester was also its bankruptcy capital, going from 80 bankrupts over the course of the 1770s to 109 over the 1780s and 319 over the 1790s. Even in Manchester, however, the risk was highest for those who took part in the cotton boom: “Generally the business environment in Manchester was steady enough, with a bankruptcy rate of around one in 200 per annum. But within the cotton industry the rate of bankruptcy worsened over the three decades and in the 1790s may have been about one in 120 per annum.”²⁴ A

²¹ Sheila Marriner, “English Bankruptcy Records and Statistics before 1850,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series 33.3 (1980): 351.

²² Julian Hoppit, *Risk and Failure in English Business, 1700-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 46.

²³ *Ibid.*: 76.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 82.

generalized annual failure rate approaching 1% would be attention-grabbing enough. In reality, however, the real rate would have been even higher, as Hoppit's figures only account for firms undergoing formal bankruptcy – a specific legal procedure that was pursued in only a minority of the insolvency crises one might informally term “bankruptcy” today.

This arena of panic and failure was also the engine of the British economy, the home of a flourishing trade which continued to grow throughout this period. Of course, a sufficiently high average rate of profit and a large enough number of new-entry firms could still allow for growth with whatever number of individual failures. What is significant, however, is that higher rates of individual failures and an increase in general wealth and productivity were not just co-existent; failure was in fact a *symptom* of growth, as the new form of economy generated and incentivized risk in new ways. In an article tracing patterns of failures or “crises”, Hoppit found that the rapid expansion of the final three decades of the eighteenth century was itself the primary cause of an increase in failures:

What distinguishes financial crises after 1770 from those before is that they were in large part caused by economic growth. Growth encouraged speculative business expansion funded by trade credit, which occasionally interacted to very damaging effect. Because of the business community's heavy dependence on credit instruments, the stability of which was largely maintained by confidence, because those instruments were easy to create and, finally, because growth encouraged risk-taking and speculation, genuine expansion found itself periodically beset by a debility in private finance that bordered on complete paralysis. Real economic opportunities encouraged an over dependence on unstable financial mechanisms, and real economic fluctuations often generated the specific causes of crises.²⁵

Paradoxically, the success of the cotton districts had, by the 1770s, given rise to a world-historical phenomenon: the generalized national crisis in private, as opposed to public credit –

²⁵ Hoppit, “Financial Crises in Eighteenth-Century England,” *The Economic History Review* New Series 39.1 (1986): 51.

essentially an impossibility in earlier financial systems. This new phenomenon would be endemic to all future industrial capitalist economies.

The ominous frequency of insolvency crises illustrates the extent to which capital holders in the early industrial era were pioneers in an unfriendly land. The example is, however, an extreme one, capturing a risk which all knew and feared, but was faced relatively rarely. Yet the problems and contradictions of pursuing an industrial form of capitalism in a basically non-industrial state context extended well beyond this.

An excellent illustration of the more mundane discomforts of the pioneers can be found in another issue which was treated by English law as extraordinary and limited in relevance, but had become, by the close of the century, a matter of widespread concern in the north: currency integrity. In previous eras, exchange had been based on credit, debt, and exchanges in kind, with a very limited usage of high-value coinage. Paper instruments first appeared in the Tudor era and were, like bankruptcy, initially limited to the upper reaches of London finance.²⁶ London financiers were perennially anxious about the integrity of these instruments, and favoured a very restricted circulation of high-value, bespoke notes. The early modern state surrounded these delicate instruments with a curtain wall of spectacular violence: both counterfeiting and circulating false notes were made capital offences, and unlike most entries in the “bloody code”, executions were common. In fact, according to Randall McGowen, Britain’s most prolific

²⁶ See Eric Kerridge, *Trade and Banking in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Bruce G. Carruthers, *City of Capital*; Randall McGowen, “From Pillory to Gallows: The Punishment of Forgery in the Age of the Financial Revolution,” *Past & Present* 165 (1999): 107-40.

forgery historian, “Forgery...shared with murder the distinction of being most likely to see a convicted offender actually make the trip to the gallows.”²⁷

As the eighteenth century progressed, however, merchants began to deal on a scale which made the innate liquidity of paper currency irresistibly attractive: John Smail has written of a “chronic shortage of cash” in the century, and has characterized the typical eighteenth-century business as “typically short of capital”.²⁸ In the North especially, with its growing firms and increasing rate of transactions, there developed a powerful demand for standardized, relatively low-denomination notes to facilitate the dozens of transactions that flew in and out of the major counting houses and warehouses on a daily basis. Instruments like promissory notes and bills of exchange proliferated, adding another dimension to the existing crises of credit and liquidity: “As well as the risks inherent in the credit instrument itself, the shift toward the bill of exchange meant that more and more of a merchants’ remittances were coming from a larger number of less well-known correspondents whose only direct obligation lay in their expectation of being served well in the next order they placed...”²⁹ In a development which was to have even greater long-term impact, over the course of the century the Bank of England – which had only begun to issue notes at all in 1667 – increasingly issued smaller notes to meet the demand: the first standardized issue came in 1729, with £25 for the lowest note; this dropped to £10 in 1759, then £5 in 1793, and finally, as the fiscal-military state groaned under the weight of the French wars, £1 and £2 notes in 1797.

²⁷ Randall McGowen, “Managing the Gallows: The Bank of England and the Death Penalty, 1797–1821,” *Law and History Review* 25.2 (2007): 243.

²⁸ John Smail, “Credit, Risk, and Honor in Eighteenth-Century Commerce,” *Journal of British Studies* 44.3 (2005): 442–4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 452.

Within months these £1 and £2 notes – the very idea of which had once been viewed as a *reductio ad absurdum* by London finance – were in widespread circulation in Manchester and the surrounding areas.³⁰ The issue was that the legal infrastructure which surrounded the currency remained essentially the same. According to McGowen,

Within weeks of the issuing of low denomination notes, reports of forgery began to arrive at the Bank. The problem soon assumed proportions it had never achieved before. Dealers in counterfeit coin rapidly shifted their attention to the new opportunity. The temptation was overwhelming. Skilled engravers in Birmingham had little trouble imitating the crude notes issued by the Bank, and a public unfamiliar with these instruments proved an easy target.³¹

The easily replicated low-value notes thus created an explosion in counterfeiting, while even unknowing circulation remained punishable by death.

Traditionalist lawmakers at the time may have viewed the severity of the crime as well-suited to the severity of the problem. For active traders, however, the situation was made untenable by the complete inadequacy of the actual technologies or legal infrastructures on hand for securing and verifying notes. The new bills were preposterously simple to imitate, being one-sided, block printed, and lacking any watermark. As Virginia Hewitt has shown, throughout the 25-year lifespan of the first £1 note, merchants begged for a more sophisticated bill design, and engravers and cryptographers flooded the Bank of England with design pitches, but all to no avail.³² In reality, however, without any real verification technologies on hand, there was no final way to determine if any note was good or bad, generating what legal historians laconically call an “epistemological gap”: a basic inability to empirically determine guilt or innocence. Indeed, in the case of all but the most egregious forgeries, the reputation and actions of the note’s bearer

³⁰ “Particularly in places like Lancashire, always starved for circulating medium, both good and bad notes spread rapidly.” (McGowen, “Managing the Gallows”: 244)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Virginia Hewitt, “Beware of Imitations: The Campaign for a New Bank of England Note, 1797-1821,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 158 (1998): 197–222.

would form the primary “evidence”.³³ Available bill technologies thus created a situation that was innately hostile to the high volume of transactions upon which progressive trade and production techniques depended.

One final threat deserves particular consideration in this illustrative catalogue: the threat from below. The relationships between masters and workmen in the cotton trade did not conform to the patterns still dominant in other trades or elsewhere in England, and there is ample evidence that Manchester’s capital investors generally felt peculiarly exposed to threats from this expanding workforce. To assert that this anxiety was shared broadly among the world of wealth does not mean that views of workers conformed to a single capitalist-class pattern, or even that wealthy Mancunians from both sides of the political divides were not willing, in particular contexts, to engage with, even valorize working people and working people’s demands. All it means is that a recurrent sensation of the autonomous collective power and possible violence of the working poor reappeared in diverse middle-class or professional contexts as a looming and problematic fact. When the wealth-holding populations of the North turned their attention to questions of governance, though, this sociological circumstance took on a profound historical significance.

³³ McGowen, “Managing the Gallows”, 247. McGowen notes the note had to be “proved false”, but this should be understood strictly in the legal sense of satisfying the court that the fact had been proven. McGowen, in another article – “Knowing the Hand: Forgery and the Proof of Writing in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Historical Reflections* 24.3 (1998): 385–414 – outlines at length the methods by which this satisfaction was obtained: for private paper instruments, courts deferred to the testimony of a “respectable” party familiar with the issuer, while for Bank notes, they deferred to the testimony of a Bank clerk. McGowen argues that most forgery courts themselves took this type of evidence seriously and genuinely believed in its utility. Whether or not one accepts this somewhat unfalsifiable argument, the fact remains that both forms of testimony were innately subjective (conclusions were based on the qualitative “character” of the writing, not any technical analysis of it), and therefore did not in any empirical sense substantially close the “epistemological gap”. Certainly, historians should consider the status of historical notes declared either genuine or fake based on such evidence as unknown.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the ubiquity of these anxieties so well as the complex class dimensions of the political battles detailed in the last chapter. It has already been noted how much a recurrent fear of working-class violence permeated and structured northern reform thought and writing. Wealthier reformers did not have a clear or consistent assessment of the motivations of this violence or the targets at which it would be directed: instead, they conceived of violence as intrinsic to the operation of the collective proletarian mind, imminent whenever working people gathered together. There was an essential aporia, an unanswered question at the heart of the class relations which structured the reform movement in Manchester: elite reformers themselves were unclear whether the inclusion of working people within their movement was an affirmation of working-class politics, an effort to amplify working-class claims, or just the opposite – a containment strategy, an effort to capture, silence, and redirect otherwise dangerous and reprehensible working-class impulses and actions.³⁴

Within the Establishment, on the other hand, the fear of the violence of the Manchester poor could become an all-consuming obsession. No figure in 1790s Britain, perhaps, embodied this paranoia so fully as Bayley, the man whose greatest public passion was the construction of a prison to contain the more destructive impulses of the industrial poor. Bayley was not, however, an isolated case. Bayley had little trouble in finding enthusiastic supporters and collaborators for his plans – he was the only individual for whom a public building was named in Manchester in this era – and though he bombarded the Home Office with panicked, hyperbolic letters about the condition of his region, in comparison to the screeds sent in by the later magistrates of the 1810s,

³⁴ The tension is captured in the last sentence Walker published, the belief he seems to have held most fervently: “Ignorance – Public Ignorance is the sole cause of Political Evil, and the great Bane of Human Happiness.” By diagnosing the working masses as at root ignorant, Walker at once expressed his great optimism about them – the ignorant are, after all, educatable – and his profound alienation from them in the state he actually encountered them (see Walker, *Review*: 127).

Bayley's correspondence was positively restrained. Bayley was also far from the only public official to be caught up in direct confrontations with radicals and strikers.³⁵ Indeed, one of the most unusual and alien aspects of Establishment communal life to the modern reader is the readiness and enthusiasm of its male membership (acting in a time before such activities had been outsourced to a constabulary) to engage in direct, personal official violence against working-class people; the system of the Special Constabulary depended upon this readiness.

Most importantly, a developing sense that the working poor of Manchester were *different*, and that the task and trials of those who sought to govern them was also therefore different and more challenging, saturated this bi-partisan anxiety about the industrial working poor. Bayley noted in a letter to the Home Office that "The trade of this County is wonderfully prosperous. It produces its attendant evils; amongst those I include a very numerous and *foreign* population (especially from Ireland), estranged, unconnected, and in general composed of persons who are in a species of exile."³⁶ Bohstedt, quoting this passage, argued that "New, impersonal social relations [had begun] to emerge. The history of social crisis and conflict between 1790 and 1812 suggests that class polarization in Manchester in large part grew out of the structured alienation of urban politics and out of particular violent moments." As George Fisher has remarked of prison reform,

In Manchester the social forces that convulsed Britain in the late eighteenth century—rapidly accelerating industrialization, massive immigration into urban centers, deepening social dislocation—operated with special ferocity. In Manchester the pressures these forces

³⁵ In 1808, for example, Manchester's weavers peacefully occupied St. George's Fields in the northeast of the city for two days; see Chapter Five below for an extended discussion of the context. In the trial of Joseph Hanson, a wealthy fellow traveller of the weavers' unions, the strategies of the civil authorities were the subject of extended discussion (see Joseph Hanson, *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial...*). Cavalry troops were called out to clear the fields; seemingly as a matter of course, the boroughreeve and local magistrates also appeared on horseback, and were part of the clearing action.

³⁶ Aspinall: 1.

put on the old penal institutions were especially urgent, and the resulting changes in those institutions were especially sharp and clear.³⁷

This sense of difference had a tentative quality at this hybrid juncture, in which northern industrialists might still aspire to retire as country gentlemen. Nonetheless, this particularly localized class anxiety already sounded as a recurrent note, one which was to become a dominant one by the 1830s – and it is thus worth marking with particular emphasis.

Public questions and public responses

These examples are offered here as emblematic illustrations of the perils of early capitalism. In tracing the systemic dissatisfactions of the world of wealth, one could equally generate studies of the threat of fire and accident in an untested manufacturing network, the related frailty of available insurance instruments, the extreme vulnerability of country banks, or the headaches and absurdities inherent in shipping goods across an eighteenth-century, toll-infested system of canals and semi-private roadways.³⁸ One did not have to be a factory owner or

³⁷ Fisher, “The Birth of the Prison Retold”: 1241. Frustratingly, Fisher’s article then devolves into a Quixotic effort to locate a non-economic single-factor explanation of what exactly was different, settling on the suggestion that Bayley’s prison was intended as something like a juvenile reformatory formed in response to a spike in young offenders caused by an increase in child labour. Age was certainly (and unsurprisingly) correlated to reformability in Bayley’s and Howard’s minds, but it is hard to see this as anything other than special pleading to avoid a discussion of economics, particularly given Fisher’s acknowledgement that “the word ‘juvenile’ was nowhere a part of the rhetoric of the reform, and the reformers did not contemplate a class of juvenile offenders strictly separable according to age from their adult counterparts.” The latter point in particular would seem to foreclose the viability of Fisher’s own argument. Still, even a scholar so opposed to structural economic analyses as this was willing to vaguely acknowledge that “the realities of social upheaval” following industrial urbanization formed the broader context (Ibid.: 1281).

³⁸ On the modernization of roadways, for example, see Jo Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). Stuart Jones, meanwhile has written a series of articles on the restructuring of finance around the demands of Mancunian industrial capital: “First Joint Stock Banks in Manchester, 1828–1836,” *South African Journal of Economics* 43.1 (1975): 9–21; “The Cotton Industry and Joint-Stock Banking in Manchester 1825–1850,” *Business History* 20.2 (July 1978): 165–85; “The Manchester Cotton Magnates’ Move into Banking, 1826–1850,” *Textile History* 9.1 (October 1978): 90–111; “The Entrepreneur in Banking: The Private Bankers of Manchester 1770–1825,” *South African Journal of Economic History* 8.1 (1993): 242–55.

cotton master to feel such strains: one simply had to invest capital and seek to do business in the northern context.

The point, however, is not simply that early capitalists had problems – hardly a surprising conclusion. Rather, the innate risk and instability of early industrial capitalism is relevant to this dissertation because of an important truism about capitalist production and exchange: “the economy” as practiced in capitalist societies – even pre-industrial capitalist societies – can never be fully disentangled from the structures of law and state. It is not that early industrial capitalists felt certain random pressures and put forward a new state system as an *ad hoc* response to those stresses. Rather, early industrial capitalists in the north experienced the particular strains they faced as *already embedded* in a complex legal infrastructure. Put another way, the existing support for early capitalist forms on the part of the early modern English state – a subject which has a rich scholarship of its own – concentrated the attention of northern capitalists on questions of state as they began to outgrow this compromise.³⁹

Take the example of insolvency crises. The frequency of these crises has already been noted, but a more detailed exploration of the case illustrates well the inconveniences, anxieties, and practical dangers of doing business in an as yet partially capitalist or proto-capitalist state. In the late eighteenth century, Manchester’s debtors, as they faced a landscape of unprecedented risk and crisis, found themselves trapped in an anachronistic and often frankly hostile state structure. It was not that the existing regime of the eighteenth century was pre-modern or “aristocratic”, and thus unable to adapt to capitalist interests: rather, it was the product of a specific power brokerage appropriate to the unique conditions of sixteenth and seventeenth-

³⁹ See note 40 below.

century Britain. In this system, a dominant landed class had presided over a limited but stable legal regime, one that preserved their traditional power and property at a local scale, but provided specific and narrow legal instruments and solutions to a particular, identifiable merchant class.⁴⁰ In the late eighteenth century, distinctive developments of eighteenth-century Lancashire – a vastly increased rate of transactions, unprecedented levels of productivity, firm sizes and workforces many times the average elsewhere – increasingly tested this system’s premises.

A certain amount of arcane knowledge is necessary to appreciate the problem. In early modern Britain, “bankruptcy” proper was a preferential legal procedure, limited by statute and precedent to individuals who owed debts exceeding defined limits, and who fit a narrow legal definition of the term “trader”. Only a creditor could initiate proceedings – one could not file for bankruptcy, no matter the scale of one’s debts – and to do so, the creditor had to prove that the debtor had acted in specific ways that the early modern architects of the system had assumed bankrupts would act: they had refused to answer the door, fled their homes, opted to remain in debtor’s prison to stay out of the clutches of their creditors, and so on.⁴¹ By the early industrial

⁴⁰ Patrick O’Brien glossed the arrangement thus: “In early modern conditions and geopolitical contexts, there had to be a sovereign authority with sufficient political coercive and administrative capacities to appropriate levels of taxation and raise loans required to supply whatever geopolitical strategies and political policies became necessary to sustain an uplift in the rate of economic growth over the long run. In the wake of civil war and the restoration of monarchical and aristocratic government, the British state established, promoted, and sustained institutions that turned out to be more promotional for a precocious transition to an industrial market economy than for social welfare or for the maintenance of federal-style fiscal and political constitutions that led to a greater devolution of power and dissipation of rents on the mainland” (O’Brien, “The Nature and Historical Evolution of an Exceptional Fiscal State and Its Possible Significance for the Precocious Commercialization and Industrialization of the British Economy from Cromwell to Nelson,” *The Economic History Review* 64.2 (2011): 439). See also Broadberry et al.: 380-3; Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, “The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth,” *American Economic Review* 95.3 (2005): 546–79; Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Stephan R. Epstein, *Freedom and Growth: The Rise of States and Markets in Europe, 1300-1750* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴¹ These actions were, in fact, codified as “acts of bankruptcy”. According to Ian Duffy, there were 17 actions the law considered symptomatic of bankruptcy, the most important of which were “staying indoors for an unusually long time, leaving home for a similar time and lying in gaol for two months after being imprisoned for debt.” See Duffy, *Bankruptcy and Insolvency in London During the Industrial Revolution* (London: Garland, 1985): 24.

period, these stipulations, taken together, barred a majority of businessmen in crisis from the bankruptcy process.

If one could not access formal bankruptcy, two other formal processes existed: the “insolvency laws”, which allowed for more open litigation between a body of creditors and a debtor, and the small debt courts, which issued summary judgements on debts of a few pounds, and were thus most relevant to the shopkeeping class. One final option presented itself, and was theoretically accessible to all: when debtor and creditors sought a mutual solution to a problem, they could agree to a “composition”, a legally binding but voluntary process by which a debtor’s business was wound up and their possessions distributed between creditors without direct court involvement. This required a perfect and unlikely equanimity not just between debtor and creditors, but also among the creditors themselves. Unsurprisingly, most insolvency crises eventually ended up in one of the three court-managed streams.

As Ian Duffy, the most thorough historian of industrial-era insolvency has written, “the major structural defects which were prevalent in all three [formal] sectors of the debt laws were exacerbated by the strains imposed by economic expansion towards the end of the eighteenth century”.⁴² By the close of the eighteenth century in the industrial districts, all three formal solutions had come to be viewed as scandalously archaic, inept, and in many cases, destructive.

The problems started at the top, with bankruptcy. The first issue was gaining access. Substantial Manchester traders easily passed the threshold for indebtedness, but the exclusions from the legal definition of who was considered a “trader” and therefore entitled to bankruptcy could be arbitrary, even bizarre. Precedents for admission had been established over centuries through hundreds of individual cases, resulting in an incoherent naughty or nice list: innkeepers

⁴² Ibid.: 3

were out, brewers were in; attorneys were out, scriveners were in. This last distinction persisted even after scrivening as a separate profession died out by the late eighteenth century – meaning only attorneys *were* scriveners.⁴³ And of course, even full-time cotton traders could only become formally bankrupt with the collaboration of their creditors.

Should a trader have run this gauntlet and secured a bankruptcy commission, the commissioners would then, in theory, take an account of the debtor's assets and redistribute them to a list of creditors based on the proportional size of their debts. In practice, this was a drawn-out, costly system, which struggled to manage all but the largest and clearest cases – Hoppit notes that large amounts in uncollected dividends accrued every year to the Bank of England, abandoned there by creditors who had died or lost interest.⁴⁴ For one thing, the bankruptcy commissioners themselves were widely understood to be inept, underpaid and overworked. For another, the process had to be done in London, requiring, for Manchester businesspeople, a slow and expensive choreography of attorneys and runners. Proceedings could stretch on for months or years, well outside of a useful window for a typical cotton firm to secure its investments.

The two more accessible systems, on the other hand – the insolvency laws and small debts courts – both relied on a series of anachronistic assumptions which made them not just unwieldy, but objects of terror in the business world. While the legal system recognized failure as a regrettable risk of high finance, early modern common wisdom asserted that non-trading debtors only became indebted through depravity or malice – and thus almost by definition could and would pay their debts if subjected to sufficient suffering.⁴⁵ Both the insolvency laws and the small debts courts, then, depended upon a nearly immediate recourse to imprisonment to squeeze

⁴³ Ibid.: 20.

⁴⁴ Hoppit, *Risk and Failure*: 39.

⁴⁵ Marriner: 357

the debtor, and left things there – prosecutors and judges were not even entitled to claim the debtor’s assets. Of course, in a dynamic business environment like Manchester’s, nothing could harm a trader’s ability to acquire new capital more than the physical restraint and moral tarnish of debtor’s prison. Under insolvency procedures, a creditor could keep their debtor free in the preliminary stages through a legal machination called “serviceable process”, but even the best-intentioned creditor could not keep their opponent out of prison for long without dropping the case.⁴⁶

By the late eighteenth century in places like Manchester, the insolvency laws were being used to deal with innumerable cases of straightforward business failure due to all the barriers to the formal bankruptcy process outlined above. In such cases both sides were subjected to perverse and paradoxical incentives. The very process of these laws – burdening the debtor not just with the physical impediment, but the opprobrium of imprisonment – all but ensured that debtors would be unable to pay. On the other hand – and unlike bankruptcy – the insolvency laws gave creditors nearly unlimited power over the body of their debtors, but no specific power over their assets. In the majority of cases then, the system realistically offered the creditor nothing more than *schadenfreude* – but it did encourage them to indulge.⁴⁷

The personal catastrophes generated by this circumstance are evident in a number of qualitative records from the era. In 1826, for instance – after the period in question here, but before the laws were reformed – the cotton investor Absalom Watkin received a panicked visit

⁴⁶ Duffy: 63.

⁴⁷ Duffy frames the Insolvency Courts’ failures in stark terms: “It was stated in 1837 that, on average, the 50,000 debtors who had used the court since 1820 produced a farthing in the pound. Consequently, most merchants treated a notice from the court as tantamount to compulsion to abandon their claims” (Ibid.: 94).

from his brother-in-law, Joseph Makinson. Watkin's diary well captures the anxiety of insolvency:

He told me that he had one of his bills returned, that it was in the hands of an attorney, that he should be arrested if it were not taken up, that he could not raise the money, that Brooks the banker had refused to help him for some time, but had at length said, 'If Mr. Watkin will endorse the bill I will help you.' I did it for him, but God keep me from ever having to solicit a similar favour from anyone.⁴⁸

And yet Joseph Makinson was a perfectly typical, respectable middle-class capitalist. By 1829, he was on his feet again, making £350 a year, and by the 1830s he had amassed credit to the tune of thousands of pounds.

The insolvency laws, then, could come for anybody – or at least a sufficiently wide and unpredictable grouping to stoke the anxieties of anyone doing business in the volatile Northern economy. Opening any issue of any of the Manchester papers of the time, whether the Establishment organ the *Mercury* or the various reformer papers – the *Observer*, *Times*, and *Guardian* – reveals how present the reality of bankruptcy and insolvency was, with the advertisement pages typically clogged with notices of failures, firm dissolutions, bankruptcy filings, and debt auctions. Occasionally, explicit notes of despair were sounded in letters and editorials, as in this snippet from 1806: “According to Mr. Howard, in 1782 there were 2179 debtors in prison: it is supposed that there are near double that number at present. What a body of men torn from their families! among whom are many who have toiled and bled for their country.”⁴⁹

In this dire situation, Manchester traders found themselves cornered into untenable circumstances and absurd scenarios as a matter of course. Professions were fudged or forgotten

⁴⁸ Absalom Watkin and Magdalen Goffin, *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin: A Manchester Man, 1787-1861* (Stroud: Sutton, 1993): 68.

⁴⁹ *MM*, May 27, 1806.

to cram cotton's diverse investors into the legal definition of trader. To produce usable "Acts of Bankruptcy", creditors and debtors collaborated on absurd performances of dishonesty,⁵⁰ and it was not uncommon for respected, wealthy businessmen to chase one other around the country or abruptly disappear in the middle of the night. In 1815, for instance, young Absalom Watkin spent most of his spring criss-crossing the Pennines on foot, chasing down his debtors. He seems to have viewed this activity as entirely normal, taking time to write odd remarks about the landscape in his diary: "In ascending the hill from Otley, I was frequently obliged to stop by the steepness of the hill and the heat of the day. In doing so I had at every halt a more extensive and more beautiful view of Wharfedale."⁵¹ In 1813, we read in the law reports of the case of William and James Spencer, owners of a substantial spinning firm:

[William Spencer], having been travelling on Business in the North of *England*, went to *Manchester* in *September*, and for two days stayed at his Brother's Lodgings, and occasionally visited the Counting-house in which his Brother carried on Business. At the End of that Time, both Brothers, being afraid of being arrested, set off privately in a Post-chaise to *Halifax* in *Yorkshire*, and carried all the Books of *James Spencer* and Co. with them.⁵²

Since it qualified as an Act of Bankruptcy, this could well have been viewed as a respectable, upright action; the brother's creditors may even have suggested it to them. In Spigot's 1821 business directory, we find "Spencer Wm Jms & Co. quilting, dimity &c. manufacturers" back in business at 11 Spring-gardens.

In reviewing these processes, the temptation might be – following the law – to consider "the creditor" and "the debtor" as synchronic, fixed identities with unique incentives and interests. In reality, of course, in the dynamic cotton districts both debtor and creditor were

⁵⁰ See Duffy, 24-25: "Misunderstandings could be eliminated if the bankrupt arranged for one of his creditors to call at a certain time in order to receive the denial." The problem of faked Acts of Bankruptcy was apparently widely known, with Lord Chancellors commonly having to invalidate particularly egregious cases.

⁵¹ Watkin and Goffin: 16.

⁵² Rose, *Cases in Bankruptcy* Vol 1 (London: Reed and Hunter, 1813): 362.

contingent roles which every member of the world of wealth was used to playing. A creditor chasing his debtors into prison might well have paused to reflect on the integrity of his own debts – indeed, firm failures often had cascading effects. Commenting on the insolvency processes in 1823, the *Manchester Guardian* editorialized that:

The operation of the existing law for the relief of insolvent debtors, has been found so injurious to the fair trades, and so pernicious, from its demoralizing tendency, by the excitements held out to fraud and perjury, that amongst the respectable part of commercial men there exists a very strong conviction of the necessity of its total repeal, as necessarily preparatory to the adoption of a better principle of legislation on the subject.⁵³

The inadequacy of credit protections, then, was not simply a procedural problem, but a problem for capital owners as a class.

The continued troubles of the unhappy Joseph Makinson illustrate this well. In 1836, he appeared again at Watkin's door in a panic, but this time with the opposite problem – he had become not a desperate debtor, but a desperate creditor: “About half-past five in the afternoon Joseph Makinson sent for me. I went. He told me that Vogel had stopped payment and owed him between four and five thousand pounds!!! He asked me to go with him to London. I consented. At eight we got into the Knutsford Mail.”⁵⁴ And off they went, with no warning, on a journey which took them 23 hours to complete. Once again, a surreal air of quasi-normalcy permeates the proceedings. In London, they bumped into William Grime, another of Vogel's Manchester creditors whom they were friendly with who was in the capital on the same business, and found they were staying in the same inn. Watkin records a pleasant evening the trio spent together. The three then went about their extraordinary business as a matter of course: “Vogel was not to be seen. We called twice, left a letter for him and returned to the inn... Rose in good health,

⁵³ *The Manchester Guardian (MG)*, January 11, 1823.

⁵⁴ Watkin and Goffin: 167.

breakfasted, spent most of the day in looking after Vogel and getting a docket struck against him.” At the very least, this last note means Vogel qualified for bankruptcy, suggesting the trip may have been worthwhile. Watkin doesn’t say, instead noting: “Found time to look at my old habitation, school house and places of play.”⁵⁵

The corners that traders could be backed into by the existing legal infrastructures around currency issues were, if anything, more dire. The Crown Court records furnish us with a number of illustrations of this problem. In 1800, for example, the cotton merchant William Holdon began to pass notes that fellow traders found suspicious.⁵⁶ Around Christmas time, the innkeeper John Brooks refused low-denomination Bank of England notes Holdon tried to give him. By springtime, an impressive roster of Burnley merchants and innkeepers had turned down Holdon’s notes, in addition to Joseph Harrison of Gargrave, Elias Nutter of Broughton, Thomas Edmondson of Barnoldswick, and three men from Todmorden. Holdon seems to have stayed out of prison by always backing down when challenged, apologizing and immediately making up the debt in good currency. Edmondson, for example, said Holdon “took [a note] back again without any demur, and paid him twenty shillings in gold and silver in part of it.”

That Holdon could meet with such a high rate of failure in passing forgeries is not surprising: textile markets were high-information places, the crossroads of numerous financial and cultural networks. If a trader made one bad exchange, word would travel fast, and the rumour could quickly become self-reinforcing. Elizabeth Bond, for example, a Burnley ropemaker, did not suspect the note that she had been given was bad until she heard that Holdon had “paid several suspicious notes in Burnley”. What is striking is that the people who began to

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ TNA, PL 27/8, “The information of Miles Veevers...”

suspect and ultimately testified against Holdon were mostly people who knew Holdon well and had traded with him for a long time. John Brooks stated that Holdon “hath frequented his father’s house in Burnley on market days for some years.” More than one merchant continued to do business with Holdon after turning down bad bills.

One can thus discern a tension in the actions of these traders, all of whom had theoretically witnessed a capital crime. On the one hand, all displayed an enormous reticence to openly challenge or accuse their associate. Holdon was repeatedly exposed across a period of three months before being charged, in repeated performances of group scrutiny that seemingly went nowhere. Elias Nutter showed one of Holdon’s notes to William Dent, who thought it was bad; “For further certainty” he then showed it to Christopher Edmondson, who agreed with Dent. Joseph Harrison showed his bill to a number of people in Colne, and both Thomas Edmondson and William King consulted with John Brooks. King, who does not seem to have known Holdon as well, notably had difficulty getting Brooks to explicitly pronounce on the case: “This informant only put it from him with a smile, but King followed him to the parlour door, and said, ‘What say’st thou over this note’, and this informant answered ‘It’s a bad one’ and he saw King return it to Holdon.” None of these men sought to involve the law.

On the other hand, these traders were also deeply cautious, taking pains to insure themselves against charges of knowingly circulating bad notes should Holdon ultimately be accused. Needless to say, the group consultations were one way of having one’s own transparency witnessed; these performances were typically staged in market inns, and could involve up to a half-dozen people. Most merchants also took the step of marking bills they thought were bad, or having Holdon mark them, thereby preparing evidence for a prosecution they were unwilling to initiate themselves. Individuals who do not seem to have known or even

to have been aware of each other did this, suggesting the mechanism and merits of the technique were something like common knowledge. When John Harrison and Benjamin Townson finally arrested and searched Holdon, the notes they found on his person were marked with the initials and signatures of merchants and petty capitalists from a region spanning 25 miles of Lancashire countryside, whose testimony then became the central evidence against Holdon. Elizabeth Bond appeared with a marked bill from Holdon she had been keeping in a safe for the occasion. In all, 20 individuals were pulled into the inquest, almost all of whom had taken precautions but no action.

I would submit that these traders' actions speak to a particular, increasingly untenable legal-economic context. In the closely-knit, high-volume trading networks of the north, the reputation of one's bills could be highly contagious. Market-town innkeepers like Brooks, for example, often served as exchange managers as much as they did food and drink providers: they made introductions, witnessed transactions, covered short-term debts, and most importantly, changed bills. Holdon would have been a known source of Brooks' notes, making their reputations inextricable. And with counterfeiting and uttering capital offenses, Brooks – once becoming aware of Holdon's malfeasance – would have been left with little room to manoeuvre. While innkeepers were especially vulnerable, the same considerations would have applied to any merchant doing business in the area to one degree or another. In a sense, the integrity of the Burnley market itself was at stake.

Throughout the industrial era, then, traders like John Brooks or Elizabeth Bond were forced, with their own lives on the line, to collaborate, however hesitatingly or haltingly, on the capital prosecutions of friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and even family members. Cases like these could rip apart close-knit trading communities. In a 1798 Salford case, Benjamin Longmire

tried desperately to prevent pub manager Samuel Beswick from testifying against Joshua Hilnor, a mutual friend. According to Beswick, Longmire offered to take him on holiday while the inquest proceeded: “You and I can take a walk as far as Warrington or Liverpool for a few days to be out of the way and live very well.” Longmire and Hilnor’s son put together a £10 bribe for him. In the end, Beswick went through with the testimony, though Hilnor was still acquitted.⁵⁷

In essence, then, there were a variety of rising stressors relevant to the economic role of public bodies that affected the world of wealth in the 1790s. The contemporary state, in other words, and its particular interests and habits, rendered capitalist life nerve-racking in the best of times, and frequently inflicted great pain on the economic pioneers of south Lancashire. Due attention to the strains around Manchester capitalism does not explain everything about the town’s politics, and the suggestion here is not that the idealistic claims of the reform era were simply a code for more tangible concerns. What one could say, however, is that the particular issues which galvanized “party” enthusiasm in Manchester took place alongside the emergence of what one might call a sense of *northern exceptionalism*. This was a developing instinct, a common wisdom among property holders in the new economy that the pace of change in their world was rapidly erecting a barrier of experience and understanding between themselves and the rest of Britain – including between themselves and the government at Westminster, to whom many of them might still be loyal.

It is *this* dimension of local culture, I would argue, that one should hold foremost in mind when one asks why, as the industrial economy began to take off, issues of secular political concern and practical procedure increasingly preoccupied the minds of the world of wealth. A

⁵⁷ PL 27/7: “Informations ag^t Joshua Kilner [sic] for uttering counterfeit coin.” For the verdict, see PL 27/8: Lent assizes, 1798.

radical northern exceptionalism was, of course, the animating sentiment of the Opposition, but the complex careers of loyalist innovators like Bayley, or later figures like Charles Frederick Brandt, or the Tory reformer Thomas Fleming – the dominant figure in Manchester’s urban politics in the early 1810s – speak to an analogous discomfort on the part of the Establishment. These men did not have to fight their way into positions of local power, and were strongly attached to church and state by sentiment and family tradition. And yet as Manchester increasingly stretched to the horizon, they increasingly displayed a marked open-mindedness to innovation; as we shall see in Chapter Six, by the 1830s even the town’s Tories were publicly lamenting the lethargy with which the rest of Britain followed Manchester. Across the political divides fracturing Manchester, it became more and more reasonable for members of the world of wealth to feel a diminishing confidence in the efficacy of existing powers and procedures. If, in a context of deep sectarian and partisan conflict, neither side trusted the other to manage or implement the necessary solutions, this does not mean they did not share a broad diagnosis of the problem. Watching the storm clouds gather, they fought for control of the ship’s wheel.

Battye’s battles

In the later 1790s, as Thomas Walker stormed off the political scene and the immediate currency of French revolutionary enthusiasm subsided, a new form of political conflict took hold in Manchester. The pragmatism of this second movement of the 1790s brought the political and the structural together, in a way the noisier activism of the Revolution years had never quite achieved. Once again, the claims, counterclaims, and parties of this conflict could be shifting, contradictory, or incoherent. Nonetheless, through this clash an increasing acceptance of the immediately accessible machinery of state as both the acceptable venue for and primary object of

political struggle emerged as a shared value of Manchester's world of wealth. This belated, accidental recalibration was to be one of the most significant and longest-lasting legacies of the hectic politics of the early industrial town.

On April 9, 1794, just five days after the opening of Walker's trial, a group called the "Society of the Associated Ley-Payers in the Township of Manchester" (ALP) gathered at the Bridgewater Arms on High Street and resolved to publish their proceedings of the past year. The group had formed in 1793 after the Establishment had proposed a near-doubling of the town's poor rate. Wielding the auditing privileges afforded to those paying the rates under England's parochial poor relief system (church rates being known as "leys" in Lancashire), they set about reviewing the books of the town, looking into the behaviour of various officials, and evaluating the need, or lack thereof, for the hike.

The result of this investigation, published as a 31-page pamphlet entitled *A Report of the Associated Ley-Payers*, found thousands of pounds of back taxes unaccounted for.⁵⁸ This, coupled with the hike, was taken to suggest preferential treatment, with the burden on some citizens being augmented to enable others to live tax-free. Worse, the *Report* detailed a lengthy catalogue of abuses of office and misappropriation of public funds. The town's Court Leet oligarchy soon found itself with a new source of harassment and rivalry: a crusade against corruption which was to last for more than a decade.

Like the Constitutional Society, this movement had its own flamboyant leader named Thomas: the brewer turned auditor-for-hire Thomas Battye. Like the MCS, also, Manchester's anti-corruption movement left a significant archival trace by publicizing its efforts in lengthy

⁵⁸ *ALP Report*.

pamphlets packed with footnotes and appendices.⁵⁹ Unlike Thomas Walker and the MCS, however, neither Battye nor his movement have earned substantial scholarly attention. Historians have generally seen Battye as an eccentric lone wolf, pursuing a cause which seems less unavoidably political than earlier electoral concerns.⁶⁰ G.B. Hindle, who tried more than most, frankly admitted that “to come to a satisfactory conclusion about the type of man Battye was is not easy”.⁶¹ A partial exception is once again John Bohstedt’s *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales*, which contains the most lucid account of Manchester politics in these turn-of-the-century years – yet even Bohstedt understood Battye to be a “nonpartisan muckraker”, and the anti-corruption campaign to be peripheral to Reform proper. Otherwise, reviewing the evidence anti-corruption campaigners assembled, historians have generally accepted their case on the face of it: that is, Manchester corruption *was* egregious, and fair-minded citizens had no choice but to speak out. Liberal historians of the twentieth century tended to frankly assume the moralism of their subjects: evidence of closed practices and missing funds was “regrettable”, nineteenth-century reforms were an “improvement”, certain more conscientious Tories deserve “credit”, and so on.⁶²

Two major analytical opportunities are missed, however, if one does not look behind the claims to objectivity of the campaigners. The first is that one fails to appreciate fully how

⁵⁹ The remainder were all published under Thomas Battye’s name. The full collection must include (with necessarily truncated titles): *A Reply to Mr. Unite’s Address to the Ley-Payers of Manchester* (Manchester: G. Bancks, 1794); *A Disclosure of Parochial Abuse, Artifice, & Peculation, in the Town of Manchester*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: J. Thomson, 1796); *Reflections on the Subjects of Deputy Constable, Billeting, Beadles, Police Act, Collectors’ Accounts, Publicans’ Licences, Special Constables...* (Manchester: Boden and Graham, 1796); *The Red Basil Book, or, Parish Register of Arrears, for the Maintenance of the Unfortunate Offspring of Illicit Amours* (Manchester: J. Hopper, 1797); *Strictures upon the Churchwardens and Overseers of Manchester with Some Introductory Remarks on Public Abuse, Parochial Taxes, &c.* (Manchester: J. Pratt, 1801); and *An Address to the Ley-Payers in the Town of Manchester* (C. Barber: 1807).

⁶⁰ Bohstedt: 118.

⁶¹ Hindle, *Provision for the Relief of the Poor in Manchester*: 57.

⁶² This evaluative language is peppered throughout Redford and Russell’s and Knight’s texts. For instance, “It is clear, however, that Fleming and his friends did some notably good things, even if the general level of their achievement was low” (Redford and Russell: 144).

distinctive the belief in the “corruption” charge was to a certain kind of wealthy Manchester citizen, and how much continuity there was between Walker’s and Battye’s movements on this account. Despite the high rhetoric of the movement, pragmatic concerns always had an important place in reform activism. The second is the scope of “anti-corruption” – how grand, and indeed, how prescient the vision of the state contained within Battye’s polemics was. After the more detailed review of the case below, I will still not be able to designate state modernization as a unique project of the reform movement, and thus the state itself as an artifact of the action of liberal ideology in history. I will, however, assert that the practical and material strains of the world of wealth did have a significant place in the controversies of the early industrial era; no discourse about the state could avoid the pragmatic impetus to tame modernity entirely.

As for the first line of inquiry: behind a slim façade of objectivity, several details in the supposedly non-partisan *Report* and its sequels suggest that the political divisions of the previous few years were a factor in the ALP’s formation, marking a continuity between the more plainly ideological activism of the early 1790s and the pragmatic concerns of the turn of the century.⁶³ Comparing what membership data is available, Bohstedt identified a strong suggestion of a continuity of personnel between Reform and the ALP:

The impetus for [administrative] reform came in large part from the upper ranks of the political active opposition, not from ‘nonpartisan’ small rate payers... The political attachments of these sixteen men were quite clearly marked: three were on the Loyal Association’s ‘suspects’ list, two others were veteran Reformers, and twelve signed at least one of the opposition peace and protest petitions of 1795. Two members of the ALP and two members of the committee of inquiry were politically neutral.⁶⁴

⁶³ Like all anti-corruption efforts in Manchester, the *Report* made a conspicuous show of non-partisanship, boasting that “When it is considered that the society has no political relation, it is impossible to put any other construction upon these observations, than merely to notice the impropriety of applying money collected for the relief of the poor to other purposes” (*ALP Report*: 10).

⁶⁴ Bohstedt: 116.

While Battye's showmanship may have often blocked out the light, it is clear reading each of his publications that his successes were dependent on a large and active bloc of support, suggesting a strong continuity with previous activism. Resentment of the Establishment as a group colored all ALP concerns. Throwing an enormous party on the King's birthday, for example, had become a signature activity of loyalism in Manchester and elsewhere. Reviewing the hundreds of pounds spent on the 1792 festivities, the ALP bitterly noted,

[Y]our committee are not afraid to say...that whatever expence individuals may incur in rejoicing upon this occasion, ought to be defrayed by themselves. If the constables chuse [sic] to make use of it as an opportunity of treating their friends, they ought not to be permitted to refund themselves from the poor's rates.⁶⁵

Ostensibly, the practices the ALP chose to attack were sources of inefficiency that placed an undue burden on the ratepayer, but the targeted practices frequently possessed another dimension:

Your committee are informed, that it has lately become a point of etiquette in this township, to allow the second churchwarden to nominate officers for the ensuing year. By the mode of conducting this election, a person nominated churchwarden has continued in the office three years – The head churchwarden goes out every year, – the second churchwarden nominates himself in his place, – the junior becomes second, and some friend is appointed the junior.⁶⁶

Such critiques spoke less to inefficiency *per se* than to a provocative exclusivity, a governing clique that used the local organs of parish management to reproduce itself intact. The deep and organizing sense of exclusion which knit Manchester Reform together was maintained intact in the ALP perspective.

On the other hand, the sort of concerns raised by Battye had already been much more central to MCS organizing and ideology than has sometimes been appreciated. Bohstedt's account does an excellent job of detailing how reform momentum energized the ALP's

⁶⁵ *ALP Report*: 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: ix-x.

campaign, though he portrays this relationship as somewhat unidirectional and incidental – corruption was just an Establishment vulnerability that frustrated reformers happened to exploit. However, local and parochial concerns had always been present in Opposition ideology, even if idealists like Walker did not tend to linger on them. Items III and IV in the MCS’s founding declarations speak as much to local managerial concerns as they do to the influence of the French Revolution:

III. That public honours and emoluments can only be due for services conferred on the State.

IV. That every person, from the highest to the lowest, appointed to and accepting of any office or trust for the benefit of the Community, is ultimately responsible to the people for the complete discharge of the duties of it.⁶⁷

Walker himself had almost nothing to say in print about the authoritarian cabinet then ruling England; rather, it was the “arbitrary faction” who managed the day-to-day affairs of his town, the “civil power” or “High-Church party” which reappear again and again as the target of his vitriol. Perhaps most suggestively, Walker’s only foray into formal politics was not a campaign for MP – which he doubtless could have afforded – but the year he spent managing town accounts as boroughreeve. Rather than seeing anti-corruption as incidental to reform, then, it should be understood as one of the Manchester Opposition’s central and enduring fixations. While the 1790s saw a shift in emphasis from high ideals to pragmatic concerns about efficient management of the state, both strains were constant subjects of the reform conflict as a whole.

The second note that is omitted if one does not interrogate the ALP and Battye’s campaign more fully is a sense of how wide-ranging and ambitious a political program “anti-corruption” really was. In the ALP and Battye’s rhetorical structure, initial charges of

⁶⁷ Walker, *Review*: 17.

malfeasance and inefficiency were followed with a host of suggestions and solutions. Though these were typically presented as a return to the status quo, in reality they amounted to a wide-ranging program to streamline and reshape Mancunian governance, bringing forward for the first time some of the concerns that would shape the next century of state formation.

Perhaps the clearest example of this breadth is a brief Battye pamphlet from 1796. The scope of the project is palpable in the pamphlet's very title: "*Reflections on the subjects of Deputy Constable, Billeting, Beadles, Police Act, Collectors' Accounts, Publicans Licences, Special Constables...*" In it, Battye supplied a catalogue of suggestions for a reformed administration:

The duty of the constables in Manchester being chiefly discharged by a *deputy*, the person so appointed, ought to give a security of at least *one thousand pounds* for the faithful performance of the trust reposed in him...

If a new deputy be chosen who is desirous of emulation, there is an open and extensive field to shew his services to the town, a clear and demonstrative proof *may* be had by making a comparison between the *subsequent* and *preceding* years' accounts; and yet it would be well to withhold the *present books*, from the eye of the person chosen, fearful lest any extraordinary charges might not only be an inducement to follow the *old rule*, on account of the profit arising therefrom, but might with *some* be followed up, to shew the justness of the accounts of his predecessors...

The deputy ought to keep a *minute book*, wherein every transaction worthy of remark should be *daily* entered, with an account of what *felons* are taken up, and how disposed of; of *stolen goods recovered*; and *from whom, and under what circumstances*; *Informations* of all kinds should also be entered, with the various other occurrences in that office...

A *Cashier* should be appointed to pay all *travelling poor*, the number having increased by most palpable abuses, from about 50 to 500, and from 500 to 1000 in a year!...

BEADLES. IN this department there is an unbounded field for reform, which was never more loudly called for, than at the present period...⁶⁸

Similarly, Battye's *magnum opus*, *A Disclosure of Parochial Abuse, Artifice, & Peculation, in the Town of Manchester* lays out a vision for reform with more than a hint of innovation, even expansion:

⁶⁸ *Reflections*: 1-3.

As the POLICE OFFICE is entailed on the town *for ever*, at the enormous rent of *one hundred and fifty pounds per annum* – it ought to be made to answer some useful purpose; it might be converted into different apartments, for *collectors, overseers, &c. &c.* – there might be an office for paupers to receive their tickets – and another office for the cashier, without harassing the poor by long attendances for their tickets in one part of the town, and afterwards for payment in another; - which is generally the loss of a day before they receive their mite.⁶⁹

The police office was a new building, with no precedents for usage to refer to. The way Unite and his predecessors were using it – renting out its rooms as flats as a perquisite – does, of course, seem outrageously self-serving. But in condemning this usage, new possibilities arose: the “should” of a claim of moral imperative quickly became generative. Battye cited Elizabethan legal precedents for some of his suggestions; many ideas were borrowed from elsewhere; in other cases – for example, the deputy’s minute book – he was able to claim that something similar had previously been tried. Taken as a whole, however, Battye’s writings emphasize a shift from parochial governance as a friendly, fairly unambitious collaboration between peers, to an interventionist, managerial, and rigorously self-scrutinizing bureaucracy.

Most of all, the root impulse evident in Battye’s activism and popularity was not a restricted diagnosis of simple ills, but a much broader sense that society itself had broken beyond the bounds within which it had formerly been managed. More than any single Establishment provocation, it was the growing anxieties of northern exceptionalism which occasioned Battye’s interventions.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Battye’s anguished, contradictory, half-informed relationship to Manchester’s poor. Like Walker, Battye frequently situated himself as a “friend of the poor” to set himself on a moral high ground above a brutish town administration. Like

⁶⁹ *Disclosure*: 83.

Walker, also, this attitude was more than a rhetorical feint. In the *Disclosure*, in particular, Battye engaged in some truly pioneering proto-journalism, going into the town's slums to find victims of the extortionate poor law administration and relaying their concerns to his readership. These chapters provided fully realized human portraits, some of the best primary source material we have from the time (I will return to this material extensively in the following chapter). Battye's empathy for the poor was real, his outrage at their treatment was informed and specific, and he supported their causes even at times when it was more of a liability than a benefit to his case to do so.⁷⁰

Given this genuine progressivism, it is all the more notable that Battye and his anti-corruption colleagues demanded a full 50% reduction in benefits spending, just as the working poor groaned under the weight of the wartime economy. This public miserliness was enabled by a presiding assumption that as a group, Manchester's poor were intrinsically grasping and dishonest:

It may appear a *bold*, but perhaps will not be found a *groundless* assertion, that nearly one half of the money expended on the parochial poor is misapplied, in consequence of the want of this acquaintance with them, and experience of the artful stratagems they have recourse to, in order to extort undeserved relief. Whilst they can have their wants supplied without labour, they will most certainly remain idle; and to obtain this supply, they are naturally tempted to fabricate falsehoods, and impose themselves as objects of charity, upon the officer or the magistrate, indeed when their distresses *are* real, they are commonly produced by that idleness and dissipation, which their dependence upon this parochial relief encourages and promotes. Complaints of the cruelty and inhumanity of parish officers are, it is true, the hackneyed topic of declamation; but it is a certain fact, that vast sums are expended upon undeserving, artful cheats, who impose upon their credulity, nor is it to be wondered at if a discovery of these frauds should too often steel their hearts against that compassion, which ought always to be extended to every object in real distress.⁷¹

⁷⁰ For instance, Battye consistently defended the rights of sex workers: "I am at a loss to conceive what plea can justify such treatment of these unfortunate women. I do not mean to stand forth the champion of prostitution – yet, I think much may be said in extenuation of many young and unsuspecting females." (*Disclosure*: 90)

⁷¹ One could read these passages as evidence of a division within the movement: a split between those who empathized with the poor and those who viewed them as cheats. Battye himself, however, is one of the likeliest candidates for authorship of the passage above. The passage was offered in support of the "Shrewsbury" scheme of workhouses, one of Battye's recurrent themes – about which, see below.

The pamphlets issued under Battye's name likewise provide plenty of analogous examples of hostility toward the poor as a group. In the *Disclosure*, Battye advocated the public humiliation of relief recipients:

...to do away as much as possible this kind of imposition, I have recommended the methods made use of in many large towns, by advertising the names and residence of the poor, who received weekly relief; and I am happy to find the gentlemen of No. 3 division, have adopted this plan, which cannot fail of having its desired effect. Many names will, in all probability, appear in the present quarterly accounts published, to be imposters, and others will become industrious, rather than have their names published as receiving parish relief.⁷²

Following a similar logic, he advocated forcing some paupers – at the discretion of magistrates – to wear a large “P” upon their shoulder, suggesting this “badging” “undoubtedly would be the means of suppressing great numbers of those clamorous, idle, and drunken poor”. He considered Manchester's large homeless population “pests let loose upon society”, and demanded their removal by force.⁷³

Perhaps the most emblematic, complex, and indeed prescient moment in Battye's treatment of the poor came in the form of his recommendations for Manchester's workhouse. Manchester in fact had a grand new workhouse: a sprawling building on New Bridge Street with intended accommodations for several hundred paupers. It had opened its doors on February 14, 1793, months before the ALP campaign began. Unlike the New Bayley, however, the construction of this edifice was not immediately accompanied by a wholesale revision of its practices – a gradualist pace of development which reformers saw as a wasted opportunity.

The ALP adopted its own proposal wholesale from Shrewsbury technocrat William Wood, who had constructed a panopticon-like system to manage his town's large pauper

⁷² *Disclosure*: 32.

⁷³ *Strictures*: 61, 42.

population (Shrewsbury, not incidentally, lay in a partially industrialized region of Shropshire and boasted its own active textile trade).⁷⁴ Enthusiasm for this system appeared immediately when the ALP began publishing, in the *Report*:

Your committee would not think they had discharged their duty to the society, if they did not, after pointing out the existing abuses, propose a plan for reforming them. They are relieved from any difficulty on this subject, by recommending the plan of the Shrewsbury house of industry.

This was the cutting edge of institutional efforts at controlling the industrial poor, boasting the endorsement of technocrat hero John Howard, “who, after his laudable researches declared, it might vie with the best regulated institutions of the kind in the kingdom.” The structure of Wood’s plan were hallmarks of progressive approaches to late-eighteenth century state coercion: well-constructed, highly ventilated buildings, a large and professionalized managerial body, a totalizing focus on habituating the poor to productive labour, and a clear, consistent, and ruthless system of rewards and punishments: “To encourage *all* by treating them with humanity and good humour, and distributing among them suitable rewards, in proportion to their industry and good conduct: and to punish the refractory and disorderly, by withholding those rewards, by solitary confinement, or in extreme cases, by corporal punishment.” The goal was a forced reordering of the human mind: in Wood’s words, “to introduce and establish...a habit of labour, of cleanliness and decency.”⁷⁵

The fact that Battye displayed a real outrage when witnessing certain acts against the poor should not prevent us from observing clearly the class-structured violence inherent in this approach. Battye chastised the present authorities for chaotic scenes of violence that had been used to keep the workhouse population in check, but his plan was not to do away with violence

⁷⁴ See Barrie Stuart Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1973).

⁷⁵ *ALP Report*: 13-14.

per se, or even necessarily to reduce its frequency – rather, he hoped to make corporal punishment regulated, regularized, and purposeful. Attention was particularly focused on young children, who were to be isolated from the elders of their community – “*a total and complete separation of [children] from the abandoned and depraved*” – and subjected to a round-the-clock labour regimen. When wards were kept clean and physical punishment made predictable, Battye believed, labour could be extracted from children at a rate of up to 12 hours a day, six days a week: “by habit their employment soon ceases to be irksome, they see their little companions around them, all engaged like themselves, and by their lively countenances, and general vivacity, it is apparent they are contented and happy.”⁷⁶ Battye and his peers do seem to have been genuinely angry when presented with cases of arbitrary and sadistic violence, and offended by the inconsistency and rank self-enrichment of parish officials at the cost of the poor. Nonetheless, the intrinsic suspicion of the poor as a group was clearly a significant component of Opposition plans for the state, and this anxiety enabled surprisingly violent coercive impulses – so long as these were confined to institutions abiding by the aesthetic and managerial tendencies of Northern middle-class reformism.

Just as with the New Bayley, what is impressive about Wood’s own project and the unanimous enthusiasm for it on the part of the ALP is the timing: several decades before the attempted overhaul of the nation’s workhouses along Shrewsbury-esque lines in 1834, Manchester’s Opposition activists were already developing a bureaucratized, systematized, interventionist approach to managing the emerging working people’s culture of the urban industrial landscape. Just as with Bayley, however, the vision guiding this tendency seems less systematic and objective than it does self-deluding and neurotic, an involuntary twitch of class

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 87.

animus in response to an object of fear. It is this complex common-sense of northern exceptionalism, rather than a coherent intellectual case, which governed the generative spirit of innovation guiding Battye's vision of state power.

Interestingly, when compared to the rhetoric of the MCS, the pragmatic register of the ALP seems to have been the more effective political language. The major victory of the MCS – the acquittal of Walker and his associates – was apparently a pyrrhic one, coinciding with the implosion of the reform mobilization. In contrast, Battye's successes, despite the equal revulsion with which he was held by the Establishment, were enduring, forcing the governing clique to make concessions and reforms which it did not wish to make. Volume by volume, the accounts Battye demanded made their gradual appearance, and arrears were collected.⁷⁷ By the turn of the nineteenth century, new and more fastidious practices were being applied to Police Commission business by men from both sides of the town's major political divide. Most tellingly, some of the very same figures whom Walker had raged against in his pamphlets without effect were successfully hounded out of office by Battye. According to Frida Knight, both Reverend Griffiths, *père* and *fils*, were thrown out of the Police Commission in the 1790s; Richard Unite, after attempting a direct, public attack on Battye, was humiliated, fired by the town, and “went to the Isle of Man with an indifferent character” to act as an overseer – but soon lost this position too.⁷⁸ By seizing legal tools already available under existing parochial regulations, then, and by not seeking to go beyond the mutually acceptable arenas of political contest in the town – the

⁷⁷ See Hindle: 66-78.

⁷⁸ Knight: 175.

vestry, the Police Commission, the official public meeting⁷⁹ – the ALP was able to score successes that the MCS and its affiliates had never done.

Returning to the model of the state as law, I discern in these two strategies – reform and anti-corruption – two distinct approaches to the contest for control over the central mechanisms of the state. Walker and his associates, though they claimed a constitutionalist heritage, fundamentally sought to open a new space within the law, a new realm of rights and practices which did not yet exist as lived practice. In this sense theirs was a fully “radical” strategy – but it was unsupported by the kind of revolutionary mobilization which would have allowed it to blow open this new space by force. An otherwise uninspired Establishment, given wide latitude for violence and extra-legal action by the coincidence of a paranoid wartime government, was thus able to smash it completely. Battye and the ALP, in contrast, began their campaign with a studied appropriation of existing legal frameworks. The Tories tried to initially bat them away as they had the MCS, but when it came to matters of parochial propriety, support from above failed to materialize and the managers of the state began to slip into the gears of their own machine. As the *Report* acidly commented, “On the first application your committee were told that ‘the law did not know them.’ But this error having been corrected, they received promises from time to time that these accounts should be delivered to them.”⁸⁰ The law in fact *did* know them, because they presented themselves entirely in the extant terms of the law, as parishioners claiming extant and widely recognized auditing privileges. Much more than any abstract debates over the rights

⁷⁹ “Public meetings,” despite the vagaries of the name, were specific gatherings obeying a formal procedure. Only the boroughreeve had the ability to call them, and only when an issue of manifest public concern faced the town – this seems to have been one of the most coveted and contested powers of the office, as the resulting gathering had some claim to speak in the voice of Manchester as a corporate political entity. In 1794, Battye succeeded in having an official public meeting called to inquire into Richard Unite’s conduct; this was a major coup and proved to be Unite’s undoing (See *A Reply to Mr. Unite...*). Up until the founding of the council in 1838, quarrels over the propriety and status of meetings (or non-meetings) were an endemic feature of Manchester politics.

⁸⁰ *ALP Report*: i.

of man, it was this kind of restrained, pragmatic agitation which drove state development forward at the ground level. I mark this disparity as an early symptom of the disorganized, unplanned path which the British state was to take toward modernity – one which was not guided by political theory, but by broad-based class concerns.

Collaboration through conflict

So Battye and his style were effective. All the same, one runs into trouble again if one seeks to place the anti-corruption activists, without reservations, in the role of “modernizers”, and their opponents as defenders of a dying and decaying archaism. For one thing, corrupt though some of them may have been, we have already seen how the members of the Establishment fit uncomfortably into the role of defenders of *ancien régime* tradition. For another, it is fairly clear that even at the height of Battye’s campaigning, the Opposition was not the sole nursery of reform and innovation in local governance and public bodies. Nothing could better illustrate this than Battye and Bayley’s shared status as the two greatest champions of Howardian reform in Manchester, despite the fact that Bayley, as Manchester’s single most powerful individual citizen, was more than once a target of Battye’s ire.⁸¹ After the controversies of the early war years died down, a succession of more or less competent, energetic, Establishment boroughreeves stepped forward to lead the town, and they continued to implement steady improvements. At times these adjustments or expansions aligned with a problem Battye had identified – but just as often they did not.⁸²

⁸¹ See *A Report*: i-iii; *Strictures*: 97.

⁸² By far the most prescient and significant development in state institutions in Manchester of the late 1790s – the expansion of the watch – seems to have had little to do with Battye or the ALP. Instead, it was championed by the Tory Charles Fredrick Brandt, a wealthy manufacturer and APCOL veteran, yet in all other regards preserved in the archives as a conscientious, incorruptible team player. Brandt’s tenure is covered by MCL: M9/30/1/1; see also Redford and Russell: 214-40.

Even the evolutions the ALP managed to foster depended as much on a cadre of willing, adaptable Establishment figures to carry them out as they did on an Opposition brain trust. This is not just because the Establishment clung to power: there is suggestive evidence that when it came to the grind of daily official business, Opposition volunteers could be thin on the ground. After 1792, the Police Commission offered unparalleled opportunities for unfettered citizen engagement and, perhaps most significantly, the exercise of power in numbers. It is thus significant that even as the Opposition published tirades against Tory management practices, this seemingly ideal mechanism for implementing reform languished. Reading through the surviving PC minutes of the 1790s, one finds again and again uniformly Tory boroughreeves faithfully attending meetings which failed for lack of quorum. In May of 1798, the Commission's secretaries were moved to issue a rebuke to the town's inhabitants in the papers:

Several meetings have of late been called, but for want of sufficient number of commissioners attending no business could be done, and the collection of the rate as well as the matters of importance respecting the police of the town, have in consequence been much impeded, and we are directed to add that unless the treasurer (who has uniformly attended) is for the future better supported by the commissioners he will certainly resign his office.

The next meeting, on June 11, saw a healthy attendance, but by July the old refrain returned:

“there not being a sufficient number of Commissioners present no business could be done.”⁸³

Reading of failures like these, the perennial support and fidelity which “respectable” Tories like Thomas Butterworth Bayley extended to the dubious men willing to fill the town's offices seems less a mark of rabid partisan allegiance, and more a token of desperation.⁸⁴ One also begins to

⁸³ MCL: M9/30/1/1, May 11, June 20, July 18, 1798.

⁸⁴ Walker, for example, captured a striking moment in Benjamin Booth's trial when Bayley intervened from the bench to vouch for the character of John Parker, a special constable and Establishment heavy who had been involved in Dunn's and Booth's interrogations: “Mr. *Thomas Butterworth Bayley*, the chairman of the Manchester Sessions, gave strength to *Parker*'s evidence in his own favour, by declaring, after *Parker* had been examined, that he knew him very well, and that he (*Parker*) was as respectable a man as any in *Manchester*; which declaration I understand had great weight with the jury.” Walker notes that immediately after the trial, “[Parker] became insolvent; and under circumstances which were very far from justifying the character so publicly given him by Mr. Justice Bayley”

suspect that the Establishment's habit of ready voluntary public service was a necessary component of the expansionist trend, even if it was an essentially conservative inclination.

It is also unclear whether any program of reform *could* have quieted ALP demands. When Manchester's population suddenly grew in the 1770s with the mechanization of spinning, the amount required for the town's social services provisions likewise exploded. The total collection in 1731 had amounted to £777 9s 6d, while the 1792 account uncovered by the ALP showed £5610 6s 10d being collected, with thousands of pounds more languishing in arrears.⁸⁵ Both were tiny amounts relative to the town's GDP – some of the wealthiest citizens could have comfortably paid the entire earlier rate themselves – but the budget had still grown several hundred percent in a couple generations, a trend which worried ratepayers, to say the least. What's more, under Britain's archaic parish system, only a minority of better-off citizens contributed to the poor rate. Because the town's growth occurred overwhelmingly at the bottom end of the income scale, the ratio of relief claimants to ratepayers was abruptly upended. Nor was it just a matter of increased spending: an extremely limited cadre of town officers was forced to deal with a vastly increased workload of cases and inspections. They certainly used this as an opportunity to enrich themselves and milk the poor, but "efficiency" in the circumstances was essentially an impossibility.

These contextual remarks might not lead one to empathize with the Tory old guard, exactly, but they might encourage us not to overestimate the inherent rationality of the Opposition case. One should not assume, because they raised the banner of prudence and propriety, that Opposition demands were necessarily reasonable or satiable. Recall, for example,

(*Review*, 116). Redford and Russell characterize an inability to reliably fill minor offices as an endemic feature of Court Leet rule, dating to the 1500s at the latest. (See Redford and Russell: 47-63).

⁸⁵ *An Answer to the Case of the Petitioners against Bringing in a Bill for Erecting a New Work-House, in the Town of Manchester* (Manchester: 1731): 2; *Report of the ALP*, xxix.

that in the midst of the most rapid urban growth the northwest had ever experienced, the ALP called for a 50% reduction in expenditure on the poor – not proportional to the population, but in absolute sums – even as they called for the poor to be more expertly managed. Just as governments today inevitably pay a political cost for financial crises over which they exert no meaningful control, any group caught holding the reins of parochial spending and poor relief management at the epicenter of the cotton boom was bound to come in for a beating. When, as was the case in Manchester, the group in power really was a closed and confrontational in-group with plenty of irregularities on its books, the situation was something of a tinder box.

The truth, as it would seem to have been, was that the ALP and Battye provided one source of innovation and reform energy in turn of the century Manchester, but not the only one. Much of the ALP's activism seems to have been intended to serve less as a policy platform than as a goad. Battye, like Walker before him, was happy to cast his opponents in the role of defenders of tradition and *saboteurs* of progress, but in reality they were a diverse group, none of whom comfortably fit this characterization. Some, like Richard Unite or Reverend Griffiths, certainly were troubled, violent individuals who ruthlessly took advantage of local office. Others, like Bayley, were intellectually and temperamentally predisposed to innovation, but had drunk deeply from the paranoia of the war years, and saw the employment of corrupt bruisers like Unite or, after him, Nadin, as necessary evils. Still others, like the 1799 boroughreeve Charles Frederick Brandt, were genuine Tory reformers – emotively attached to the Established Church and perhaps skeptical of the brashness of radical rhetoric, but otherwise prone to seeing Manchester's public offices and the challenges facing them in essentially the same light as the ALP.

The image that arises from this long discussion, then, is one of a gradualist shift toward a certain broad rationality about the state on the part of an entire class of people: the cotton-dominated world of wealth in nineteenth-century Manchester. This group was socially and culturally distinct, in the ways outlined in Chapter One, but they were not unified: they were stratified in terms of wealth and deeply internally divided by political, personal, and religious polarities. Nonetheless, certain shared experiences of stress led this group to 1) place far greater value on the mechanisms of local governance than their predecessors had done, 2) to accept that the distinct challenges of early industrialization had made a perfect continuity of the old forms unfeasible, 3) to begin casting about for new models and governance solutions. The stakes of the task and a history of partisan and especially sectarian conflict in the town meant that this groping toward an answer frequently took the form of vitriolic internal conflict. Nonetheless, it was from this shift as an entire process, rather than the heroic efforts of any one group or individual, that important foundations of the modern state began to take shape. As yet, the form these innovations took was generally improvisational and instinctual as much as it was theoretical, though the world of wealth doubtless showed an early patronage for iconoclasts like Howard and Wood. The contribution of the world of wealth was essentially to demand that the management of the state take cues from the institutions with which they were familiar: the board of governors, the public meeting, and most importantly, the counting house. Instinctively, the world of wealth pushed state management toward more rigorous bookkeeping and standardized, regularized, and repeatable systems, toward the professionalization of the workforce, and the depersonalization of as much decision-making as possible below the executive level.

What is most interesting about this picture is that it suggests that *it was the process as much as the material of political contest which led to long-term, systemic change*. Commenting

on the recurrent ability of the northern middle classes to diffuse class friction in their towns in a slightly later period, Brian Lewis has suggested that a politically and religiously fractured bourgeoisie, given its inherent adaptability and flexibility, was made paradoxically stronger by its divisions:

A powerful hegemony, relationships of authority within the broader framework of the dominance of capitalism, and a pulsating civic and market culture do not need united class action, and the hunt for the class-conscious middle class might best be dispensed with. The variety of semi-contradictory organizational endeavours and conflicting ideological measures was a sign of strength, not of weakness.⁸⁶

Lewis' insight – which is chiefly concerned with mid-century questions of class conflict which will become more relevant in later chapters – is still applicable here in modified form: just because a class group was disunited politically does not mean they did not make a distinctive and substantial contribution to state development *as a class*.

If this seems like a counter-intuitive proposal, one could note that an analogous explanation of the early modern growth of European states has achieved the status of scholarly consensus in the literature of historical sociology. In this view, championed by Charles Tilly, Michael Mann, and John Brewer, the meteoric rise of the early modern state came about not through the vanguard leadership of any one state or state thinker, but rather through the exigencies of warfare between and among states: as states fought ever-larger conflicts, they required ever-larger armies, requiring in turn ever-larger funds. To secure the provision of these funds, through a trial-and-error groping towards best practices, these states settled on the forms of expanded banking and taxation which would provide the basis for the bureaucratic state. In this model, the careful development of political-philosophical complexities traced by intellectual

⁸⁶ Brian Lewis, “‘A Republic of Quakers’: The Radical Bourgeoisie, the State and Stability in Lancashire, 1789-1851,” in *The Making of the British Middle Class?: Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity Since the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (Stroud: Sutton, 1998): 87.

historians like Quentin Skinner does not disappear from relevance, but it must find itself marked down several pegs of significance.⁸⁷ It was the development of ideologies, common wisdoms, and blunt instincts particular to governing groups which is of more importance in understanding state development.

Plainly, the mechanism for the process of growth and innovation outlined in this chapter and the previous one was not warfare, though Britain was, in fact, at war throughout this period. Instead, I would point to two features of the sectarian conflicts of early industrial Manchester which allowed for an innovative approach to the state to take hold. The first is that the dominant participants, detest or malign each other though they might have done, shared a fairly narrow range of experience – meaning they also shared a particular set of stressors, and a rough model of what “efficient” and effective governance looked like, arising from the institutions they knew and valued. The second significant precondition for the early modernization of local governance in Manchester is demonstrated for us by the fact that Battye’s reform was so much more efficacious than Walker’s; progress required that the constituent parties agree that the local machinery of state was the acceptable arena for political contest.

With these preconditions laid, everything else was, in terms of state history, a contingency: did the Establishment fire Unite because of Battye’s charges, or because of their own discomfort with his behavior? Were the advanced social-control techniques of Mancunian institutions better attributable to Battye and his championing of Wood, or Bayley and his championing of Howard? These are illuminating discussion questions to pose, but they are not finally answerable. So long as the participants in Manchester’s political machinery essentially agreed upon an acceptable terrain of political contest and an acceptable range of institutional and

⁸⁷ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

political solutions, state development could advance, largely independent of the year-to-year fortunes of involved parties.

Of course, the participants in this rough compact remained only a very small element of their society. I have traced the origins and initial trajectory of the distinctive contributions of the world of wealth to state development, but that does not mean this narrative of state development stands as a total account. Throughout the previous two chapters, I have noted a recurrent and persistent ambiguity: the role of Manchester's majority population and culture in these developments. For the most part, the working poor appeared early in the state records as a problem, one for which the expansion of social control favoured by bourgeois Manchester was meant to be a solution. In this conception, the mass of working people in Manchester were relevant to state history essentially as an object – an obstruction, to be contained and rerouted like the increasing streams of waste that the Police Commission had begun to direct into the town's fledgling sewer system.

Clearly, however, this was a fiction: the working poor were disenfranchised, but they were not inanimate. Like any other human population, the working masses of Manchester did exercise agency throughout the 1790s and 18-naughts – not just as individual participants in encounters with the state, but in a myriad of collective forms with political implications. Perhaps the greatest weakness of western state history and the sociology of the state has been a persistent methodological failing to reckon with or make sense of what I would call the problem of disenfranchised agency, even when making use of archives where it is a clear issue. The pertinent questions are what attitudes and instincts the disenfranchised adopted about the states which sought to exclude them, what strategies they undertook to influence state behaviour, and

whether, in the long run, the enfranchised were totally successful in stopping up their influence.

The following chapter turns to these questions.

Chapter Five: The Beginnings of Governance from Below

Who knew what about the state at the start of the nineteenth century? Wealthier individuals in Britain tended to have a quite clear concept of centralized authority in their minds: they made frequent use of the legal system, most had voting rights, many served as JPs or church wardens, and all were called upon to pay poor rates and other taxes. The distribution of power was evidently not even, and a small group of families in the aristocracy retained a particular sense that the British state belonged to them. Still, even alienated figures like the MCS members turned instinctively and naturally to the state as the appropriate terrain for matters of public and collective concern and felt deeply its innate legitimacy.

The historiography of the turn-of-the-century “lower orders”, on the other hand, typified by the “moral economy” celebrated by E.P. Thompson, often suggests isolated societies free and able to govern themselves, save for occasional spectacular interventions from above.¹ Under the fiscal-military state of the 1700s, English systems of law and order grew more rigorous, and the strains of the agricultural revolution restructured power in the agrarian districts, sweeping away a number of local traditions. Many areas which fed population to Manchester, however, particularly the wilds of the Pennines, remained relatively under-governed. As Andy Wood writes, “In many (not all) pastoral-industrial areas... commons often remained substantial, common rights held more widely, customary knowledge more broadly shared. An easier, rougher, looser life may well have been the lot of the poor in such places.”² In 1788, we read in the diary of William Rowbottom, the Oldham weaver, “Stang-riding – Peter Blaze, of North Moor, rode stang for Amos Ogden of same place, April 22nd, 1788. What is remarkable, Amos

¹ See E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: Norton, 1993), especially “Custom, Law, and Common Right”: 97-184, and “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”: 185-258.

² Wood: 41.

rode stang for Peter in the year 1776.” What was remarkable was the coincidence – the practice of stang-riding itself (what Thompson would have called “rough music”) was apparently banal.³

By the late eighteenth century, the historian should append a third item to this catalogue of views of the state: the distinctive experience of the urban working poor, particularly in the expanding, industrializing new towns of which Manchester was the paradigmatic example. For these people, any bucolic libertarian experience was fast disappearing. No central government departments or bureaucracies yet existed to deal with the poor and constabularies did not yet patrol their neighbourhoods, but this does not mean that working people never encountered authority. On the contrary, for the majority culture the move to Manchester brought with it a much more recurrent, invasive experience of state-legitimated authority, so that by the turn of the nineteenth century the Manchester poor had as potent an experience of state governance as anywhere in the Western world.

In the previous chapter, I put forward the suggestion that the particular stresses of wealth-holding in an industrial economy provoked a gradual, cross-partisan turn toward the state among Manchester’s middle classes. I also suggested that both the nature of those stresses and the form that “turn” was to take were heavily conditioned by prior experiences of the early modern state. In this chapter, I will, to some extent, pursue a similar equation and analysis. So soon as an identifiable industrial-urban popular culture developed in Manchester, working people similarly began to turn their attention ever more toward the expansionist state – to make it a subject of their political discourses, their ideological ambitions, and their visions of an industrial future.

³ William Rowbottom, *William Rowbottom’s Diary as published in the Weekly Standard*, edited by Samuel Andrew, transcribed by Mary Pendlbury & Elaine Sykes: 6. Andrew’s late Victorian notes to the diary tell us that the victimization of a substitute when the intended target could not be found was a distinctive Lancashire tradition, hence the “riding for”.

And once again, that turn was rooted in existing conditions, an existing relationship to a historically specific state.

Clearly, for Manchester's workers to make this turn, they had to negotiate a far greater degree of alienation than their middle-class counterparts; the agents of the state they interacted with did not understand their lives, their experiences – many did not even speak their dialects. Nonetheless, I do insist that this world of work developed discourses and rationales about the state almost immediately after industrial urbanization had begun, and in this chapter, I intend to illustrate the point. It is all too easy, when a large portion of a populace is disenfranchised, to assume that state activity and ideology was only the concern of those with legitimated mechanisms for influencing state power. The majority is taken to have either simply fled state power, fought it off, or endured it as they could: as one historian breezily put it, “the responses of the governed may not always be as important as some accounts imagine.”⁴ This, it seems to me, is exactly wrong; not only the casual dismissal of mass experience, but the figuration of majority discourses as purely responsive, reactive. In actual fact, working people's discourses and ideas about the state were hugely generative, innovative. In this dissertation, I want to attempt to historicize the trajectory of the modern state as a whole, including recurrent patterns and impulses – labour market regulation, welfarism, democratization – whose intellectual and ideological ancestry, as we shall see, must be traced for the most part to working people's movements and discourses. This is a significant analytical point, as to some extent it must implicate working people – for better or worse – in the modern state's construction. In this chapter, we will see both why and in what circumstances working people turned their attention to the state, and how this impacted the shape the expansionist state was to take.

⁴ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*: 184.

Rough Government

The particular set of governmental circumstances the early industrial poor encountered in Manchester did not exactly align with other places in Britain. On the one hand, Manchester was no York or London, draped in old and illustrious local institutions: Mancunian governance was still notoriously provisional and disorganized, and while reform was underway, the early attempts at systematization and reform were still substantially impeded and diverted by wartime authoritarianism and partisan bickering. At the same time, a sense of manic urgency inflected upper-class discourses about the working majority. While in pastoral areas, the local gentry might show some tolerance for stag-riding or even the occasional well-mannered food riot, in Manchester, even the most old-fashioned Tory magistrate was not willing to leave the working poor to their own devices. The fact that much of the local system was a problematic anachronism, creaking under the weight of a form of urbanization which it had never been intended to manage, does not mean that its impact on individual lives was not significant. State actions in Manchester's working districts were unpredictable and inconsistent, but they were no the less "official" or ubiquitous for all that.

As a shorthand, I will call this unusual experience one of "rough government". Importantly, in reaching for such a signifier, I am not positing a particularly coherent governmental tendency or state ideology; rather, I am grouping together a common set of *experiences* of government that were distinctive to working people in the industrializing town. Rough government, then, was a composite whole. It was a function of both national and local systems and circumstances. The early modern "spectacular" forms of punishment which so interested Michel Foucault and his followers were still present, with executions and the ritual

desecration of criminalized bodies leaving their mark on various public spaces. The regular assertion of the law's authority over public spaces was accomplished at night by the fairly passive presence of a couple dozen patrolling watchmen, but military or quasi-military forces and special constabularies made frequent appearances to put down disturbances of all kinds. Finally, during the economic downturns which were endemic to the early cotton economy, wide cross sections of the working population were thrown upon the patchwork of extremely limited social welfare provisions that were on offer in the town. Accessing these meant submitting to a sprawling, moralizing, poorly staffed, and often violently exploitative infrastructure with no central management and no coherent policy goal.

If rough government was not unitary or intentional, however, it is significant to our narrative, as it formed the original context in which the urban industrial poor began to develop distinctive ideas about state power. This is a clarificatory point on which one must insist. Working people's politics can sometimes be figured as organic and innate, with no contextual origins other than bare economic facts. In reality, any political discourse must shape itself in reference to and in dialogue with an existing system of law and arrangement of social power. Rough government was the first kind of state the industrial world of work encountered, and the first it decisively rejected.

One could approach "rough government" from many angles, but two primary sources we have already encountered provide a valuable impressionistic account. Two of Thomas Battye's investigations – *Disclosures of Parochial Abuse* and *Strictures upon the Churchwardens and Overseers of Manchester* – paid special attention to the experiences of actual working people who had submitted to the parochial system for relief of various kinds. They provide a uniquely

rich body of evidence for the period, as Battye went to the trouble of tracking down individuals and taking statements directly from them, often while they were still incarcerated in Manchester's workhouse.⁵ They typically focus on intensely gendered experiences faced by women, perhaps in part because women made sympathetic subjects for Battye's readers, but also simply because women generally found themselves reliant on the parish and public charities more often than men.⁶ Still, these were class experiences too, being decisively shaped by the facts of poverty, labour, and economic oppression. And while labour history has conventionally depicted the male labourer's experience as normative, demand for female labour in the spinning mills and other low-wage jobs meant that the typical early industrial worker was a woman.⁷ These accounts thus serve as an excellent introduction to the system of rough government as it operated in turn-of-the-century Manchester.

In 1789, James Westley joined an independent regiment, leaving his wife Martha at home alone on Portland Street, Manchester with their child. Martha soon discovered she was pregnant.⁸ "Being anxious to regain the comfort and society of her husband," in Battye's words, Martha pawned a large portion of her wardrobe to secure James' discharge three weeks before Christmas: "she was induced to pledge *one silk gown, one printed gown, one black gown, one*

⁵ The term "incarcerated" is deliberately chosen here, as it better captures the nature of the workhouse regime than seemingly neutral terms like "living in" or simply "in". Workhouse inmates differed from prison inmates in having a theoretical right to leave, but the treatment they were subjected to clearly belongs to the same genre. Importantly, the right to leave of the typical inmate, who would have nowhere else to go – whether for reasons of age, disability, or simple poverty – was essentially a legal fiction, as upon leaving, they immediately became liable to being involuntarily returned. The workhouse is therefore best understood as an element in a broader, if heterogenous carceral network. This is roughly how it was viewed at the time – recall Dickens' Scrooge: "Are there no prisons?... And the Union workhouses, are they still in operation?" (Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas," in *Christmas Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 11).

⁶ A note on terminology: "Public charity" is today something of a contradiction in terms, but in the early modern period, there existed in Manchester several "town charities" whose endowment was managed by public or semi-public officials (e.g., the Churchwardens of the Collegiate Church) and whose provisions were integrated into the local system of poor relief; see Chapter One, note 47 above.

⁷ Cf. Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*: 89-94; Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (London: Cass, 1969): 138-48.

⁸ Battye, *Disclosure*: 61-63.

green quilted petticoat, one pair of stays, two white aprons, three silk handkerchiefs, two fine shifts, twelve pairs of cotton stockings, and other wearing-apparel, and, also one pair of sheets, for seven guineas." She then somehow succeeded in sending the pawn money across England to Chatham, Kent, where it was sufficient to purchase James' discharge. As Westley returned through London, though, "he went on board the Crescent frigate," as likely as not impressed against his will.⁹ Martha Westley was now destitute, unable to work, separated from her husband, and expecting to give birth any day. She therefore applied to enter the Manchester workhouse on January 6, 1790, and within a week had given birth to a second child.

Conditions in the Manchester workhouse were dire at this early date, and as long as Westley remained there she would be separated from her elder child. Though Westley was a legal resident of Manchester parish through her husband, she therefore volunteered to be sent back to the parish of her birth in Shropshire, on the condition that Manchester would forward money for her relief. After she left, however, Deputy Constable Richard Unite appears to have simply pocketed the allowance that was meant to be sent to her. Powerless and starving in Shropshire, Westley made her way back north to Manchester and re-entered the workhouse while Unite continued to ignore her pleas for the outdoor relief she was legally entitled to. Incarcerated and separated from her children and husband, Westley then contracted a serious illness: "Says, she lost the use of her limbs in the workhouse, and was taken in a carrying-chair to the infirmary." She would not regain mobility for 10 months. When Westley's paralysis finally receded, a new parish official, James Hallows, agreed to give her an extremely limited outdoor allowance. Unite, however, found out about this, showed up at the Westley home and staged a screaming match with Martha, after which all payments were terminated.

⁹ Battye gives no indication one way or the other; I base my assumption on the thought that it seems unlikely Westley would buy out one commission only to willingly accept another.

Like Martha Westley, Betty Pike lost a husband, though in her case this was a more straightforward masculine betrayal; her miller husband ran off, leaving her pregnant and with three other young children to care for.¹⁰ She applied to Hallows for relief, but Battye states that, “not knowing the place of her settlement, her application was fruitless.” This is an unclear characterization – as wives adopted their husband’s parish, it seems to suggest Pike did not know where her husband was born, though it is perhaps more likely that she was unable to prove it. In either case, as her three children began to suffer from malnutrition, Pike began to make frequent appearances at the Hallows’ family home, begging for relief or a ticket to the warehouse. Mrs. Hallows, who handled much of the family business, eventually wrote her out a fake pauper resettlement pass and told Pike that it would get her back to Baslow, the place of Pike’s own birth, where she would be entitled to receive relief. Neither of these assertions was true.

Pike was suffering from a severe fever by this point, but she set off on foot with her three children, seemingly out of sheer desperation. She got as far as Stockport – a couple hours into her 12-hour journey – when she was arrested for vagrancy. When she showed the magistrates there her pass, she was informed that it was a fake – Mrs. Hallows was, in fact, notorious in Manchester’s hinterland for issuing fraudulent passes. Nonetheless, Pike was still legally responsible for her own support, and was therefore denied assistance and forcibly returned to Manchester in a chaise.

Battye here informs us, “At this juncture, she was so far advanced in pregnancy, that she was frequently seized with the pains peculiar to that situation, and much enfeebled.” Pike was dropped off outside the Hallows’ home, but she was once again turned away. Pike now found

¹⁰ Ibid.: 63-68.

herself alone on the night streets of Manchester, out of money and with three children in her care, undergoing painful contractions and running a fever as a November rain began to fall:

...she wandered about with her three children, in search of a lodging, whilst she was able to stand, till at last, she, and her little ones, sat down upon some wet steps in Jackson's-row, when the cries of her children brought to her assistance a poor woman, who compassionately gave up her bed to her and her children, otherwise she thinks she must have died.

Under pressure from her neighbours, Hallows was finally persuaded to give Pike a total of 3s to secure a single room for herself and her children at a lodging house on Queen Street. She was carried there and almost immediately went into labour. At nearly the same moment, however, a remonstrance came back to the Hallows from the Stockport magistrates for having issued a fraudulent pass to a sick, pregnant woman. Blaming Pike for this professional embarrassment, Hallows reappeared at the lodging house in a rage, intending to drive Pike through the streets to the workhouse. The other female lodgers defended her and eventually got Hallows to back down from forcing Pike to make the journey on foot; he nonetheless forced her into a sedan chair and sent her off.

After all this, unsurprisingly, "*she continued in labour until the Sunday morning following, when she was delivered of a DEAD CHILD*, which, as well as her present indisposition, she attributes solely to the ill treatment she had received." After the miscarriage, Pike remained in the workhouse, separated from her surviving children: "I ought to observe, that this poor woman was confined to her bed-room near three months after delivery; that at the time she gave me the fore-going relation, she had lain-in many weeks, yet she was so enfeebled, as to render assistance necessary to support her while she made the above declaration." As Battye noted, Pike's version of events was confirmed by the Stockport magistrates who had refused her.

Battye provided two more detailed accounts of cases following similar patterns. Mary Clayton was fired from an inn after being impregnated by a soldier named Schneider. When she applied to Unite, however, to “father” her child – that is, to seek legal enforcement of bastardy claims against Schneider – he stated that she would not be entitled to money from Schneider until one month after the delivery. After the month had passed Hallows had taken over from Unite, and the new officer flatly refused Clayton when she applied again. She thereafter “became so *enfeebled* and *sickly for want of food*, that she was taken to the Infirmary, where she continued *seventeen weeks*.” Unlike Pike and Westley, however, Clayton was a long-time resident of Manchester, and therefore had a community which was able to provide her and her children with a small amount of support; “had she not been relieved by different people in Cock-gates, with broken meat, &c. both herself and child must have perished for want.”

Finally, Betty Allen’s estranged husband, Robert Allen, actually did provide regular payments to the parish for her support, but they were embezzled by Unite.¹¹ Allen then ran up 40s in debts to her grocer while awaiting the money; this grocer then agreed to confront Unite with her, and the pair succeeded in obtaining 2 guineas from the parish – enough to cover her debts, but less than 25% of what Robert Allen had actually paid. Betty does not seem to have been able to secure anything more: Battye tells us that when he met her, she was “in a very wretched and helpless situation” and struggling to feed her children.

Thomas Battye transcribed these accounts in order to mount charges of corruption and cruelty against the particular men involved. If one grants Battye some strategy, they are likely to represent more egregious instances of abuse as opposed to a norm. Both Richard Unite and

¹¹ Ibid.: and 20-23 and 49-51.

James Hallows were driven out of office following Battye's investigations, bringing their distinctive influence to an end.

Even if one assumes, however, that the specific abuses Battye highlighted as features of these men's tenure were rare – the arbitrary refusal of relief to qualifying applicants, the forging of documents, the destruction of records – the stories nonetheless imply something about the status quo of rough government, beyond the clear vulnerability of the system to abuse. Indeed, the contemporary reader must be careful not to assume even Battye viewed as extraordinary or objectionable things which may seem strange or cruel today. Prescott and Stopford – the two Stockport officials who arrested a pregnant woman and sent her back to Manchester against her will – were seen to be acting entirely properly, and in fact collaborated with Battye's campaign by supplying him with an independent copy of their report.¹² While the cases might be extreme in certain regards, then, they nonetheless allow us to make certain suggestions about the normal.

First, Battye's research implies that interactions with local governmental power were frequent and often unavoidable among the Manchester poor. Working people may not have interacted with the state on a weekly basis – some might have gone years without direct interaction with an official – but the people who Battye depicted coming into the clutches of the local state were drawn in by causes that fell well within a normal range of life experiences: single motherhood, widowhood, orphanhood, temporary or long-term disability, illness, layoffs, and so on. Neither can this frequency of resort be taken as a simple indication of "choice", agency typically being clearly compromised in these cases. In the Crown Court cases, down through the decades, one finds women behaving as Westley, Pike and Clayton did – applying to the warehouse in times of desperation, and almost immediately making frustrated attempts to get

¹² Ibid.: 67.

out.¹³ Fevers and cholera waves could carry off all the productive members of a family in a matter of days, leaving survivors state-dependent against their will.

This suggestion aligns with the quantitative findings of researchers of the “economy of makeshifts”. The poor nowhere were exclusively dependent on parochial relief – it was simply too meagre – but in resource-starved circumstances, few could avoid it entirely.¹⁴ This was especially true in the northern cotton economy, where crisis and volatility were the norm; according to Julian Hoppit, “During the last thirty years of the eighteenth century financial crises became almost commonplace, occurring on average every six years.”¹⁵ In a comprehensive study of existing early industrial vestry records, Margaret Hanly summarized the situation thus:

...a relatively harsh and non-interventionist poor law, when viewed against the backdrop of substantial life cycle and cyclical poverty, probably diluted the value of some of the strands of the economy of makeshifts by forcing larger numbers to pursue limited resources. Luck, chance and some forward planning were vital elements in successfully making do and a sensitive reading of pauper censuses of the sort available for early nineteenth-century Lancashire begins to show this very clearly indeed.¹⁶

For all but a fortunate few in high-wage trades, adaptability was a must, and this necessitated an engagement with state power at times. Applications to the parish were therefore not a rare, last resort preserve of the desperate few, but a common thread in a complex tapestry of survival strategies of the precarious many.

¹³ In 1855, for example, a woman named Ann Pearson was forced to give birth in the workhouse after losing her place in service due to her pregnancy and falling out with her family. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to make a life for herself outside the workhouse after the birth, she appears to have murdered the child which so bound her to the institution (PL 27/13, “The examination of several witnesses...in the presence and hearing of Ann Pearson”). Similarly, in 1856, Bridget Kelly entered the workhouse under a false name, gave birth, and almost immediately murdered the infant as well (PL 27/14, “In the presence and hearing of Bridget Kelly...”). Few cases can be as wrenching as that of Bridget Kenyon, a Blackburn woman who in her old age in the 1920s quite literally starved herself rather than receive “indoor” relief; once her strength was almost gone, she dressed herself in her finest clothes and stumbled to the workhouse, entering under a fake name to save her family burial expenses, and died within hours. Her story was immortalized by her grandson, William Woodruff, who wrote the well-known memoir *The Road to Nab End: A Lancashire Childhood* (Chicago: New Amsterdam, 2000).

¹⁴ See King and Tomkins.

¹⁵ Hoppit, “Financial Crises in Eighteenth-Century England”: 50.

¹⁶ Margaret Hanly, “The Economy of Makeshifts and the Role of the Poor Law: a Game of Chance?”, in King and Tomkins: 97.

Secondly, and conversely, the stories illustrate the extent to which rough government was personal and improvisational, even when these improvisations did not veer into illegality. The actions of state agents come across as characteristically impulsive and *ad hoc*: deputy constables wasted whole days chasing down particular transgressors while hundreds of cases languished on the books; bookkeeping and process were innovated by each officeholder in turn, sometimes with the friendly advice of a predecessor, sometimes not.¹⁷ Critics like Battye could quibble with the priorities or decisions of given officials, but little in the system tended toward any state of completion, as everything depended on individual initiative. An early modern system predicated on officials' intimate and personal familiarity with their parish had been burst at the seams by the force of the industrial migration.

More than anything else, this is what rendered the experience of rough government intrinsically unpredictable and chaotic. The resident of a "dangerous" cellar might live in peace for years before an active member of the Police Commission happened to stroll down his lane; the cellar-dweller might then find themselves subject to weeks of hounding by the Commission, ending in eviction – or the case might be dropped when a more pressing matter arose.¹⁸ For women especially, the outcomes they could expect from their economy and their state had as

¹⁷ Battye spent dozens of pages in the *Disclosure* and elsewhere detailing his efforts to track down various records which Richard Unite had allegedly received from his predecessor but declined to pass on to his successor. He struggled to express his full contempt: "If the days of superstition and miracle were not now in their wane, we might be almost led to attribute the wonderful and sudden disappearance of these books to the effect of magic art, and to suppose they had been conjured away by the potent wand of a Prospero." (*Disclosure*: 16). The eventual publication of one of these accounts – a bastardy arrears journal Battye dubbed "*The Red Basil Book*" – vindicated his suspicion that enforcement was either arbitrary or preferential, and accounts had been deliberately disappeared to cover up financial misdeeds. Still, while this kind of concealment was dishonorable, even criminal, each officeholder was left to innovate their paper practices themselves, subject to no formulas or regulations other than general demands for honesty – leaving it little wonder that the chain of information transmission was frequently broken.

¹⁸ For instance, in one of dozens of such cases, on July 18, 1806, a body of 10 Commissioners noted that "It [appears] to this meeting that Joseph Emmerson at the instances of Mr. Cooke opened the cellar hole in Blue Boar Court after it was made up and paved over under the order of the Commissioners". The Clerks to the Commissioners were tasked with looking into the matter, but the minutes for subsequent meetings contain no mention of Blue Boar Court.

much to do with matters of freak chance – the health of their partner or husband, the impact of bad weather or blights on the harvest – as it did with either their own actions, or the designs of any state program. The series of unfortunate events that threw Martha Westley into dire straits provide an excellent example of this chaos. In some sense, Westley’s misfortunes were the result of state actions – in particular, the likely impressment her husband, and the resulting waste of the entirety of the family’s savings. The severity of these actions, however, was not exactly intended by any state program or bureaucratic mind, and the fact that they all happened to her at the same time was simply bad luck.

Thirdly, rough government involved frequent and normalized deployments of physical violence. It is true Battye focused on instances of extraordinary violence, but if we take from this that violence itself was rare, we fail in a basic way to consider context. As Battye affirmed time and again, the expected norm that even a reformer sought was still a violent one: for decades after Battye wrapped up his campaigns, the right of parish authorities to use force to manage the poor was uncontested, and the use of traumatic techniques of corporal punishment and family separation on workhouse inmates was uncontroversial.¹⁹ Indeed, Manchester’s relatively limited townscape was still punctuated by the didactic exposition of state violence: the massive pillory in the marketplace, the looming walls of the New Bayley, and sometimes even the pageantry of an execution (though rarely, Manchester not yet being an assize town).²⁰ Battye may well have focused on the more baroque cases, but violence was an intrinsic part of rough government’s operation.

¹⁹ As noted in the last chapter, reformers called for children to be driven to work 12-hour days in the workhouse through corporal punishment, and the practice of the forcible separation of parents and children was seen by the ALP as generally beneficial.

²⁰ See W. E. A. Axon, “Public Executions in Manchester: An Historical Sketch,” *The Reliquary: Quarterly Archaeological Journal and Review* 9 (1869): 209-217.

Beyond a wide range of official forms of predictable violence, there are suggestions of broad patterns of abuse which must be inferred, but which are eminently believable, as rough government placed control over working people's lives and bodies in the hands of wealthier and more powerful individuals. Perhaps the most obvious such pattern is the inferred use of sexual violence against women in the exercise of institutional power. There was a strong correlation between entering the workhouse and failures to conform to gendered behaviour – indeed, the archetypal workhouse entrant was the young single mother. A prurient, sexualized discourse orbited around such deviant women: after he had embezzled the proceeds from the sale of a widow named Peggy Whitely's goods, for example, Richard Unite defended his actions not with a denial, but with an assertion "*that she was a bad woman – and that he knew many who had been connected with her.*"²¹ Battye strongly implied that "searches" were used as a pretext for sexual assaults.²²

The final lesson of the Battye evidence is slightly more ineffable, but perhaps the most significant in evaluating working people's orientation to the state: the eighteenth-century configuration of the British legal regime systematically threatened working people's autonomy, both as individuals and as communities or collectives. It is true that the Common Law, more than most contemporary legal regimes, maintained an idealistic construct of the rights of "freeborn Englishmen", and it is also true that this construct was given life through legal mechanisms such as habeas corpus (though even this was suspended during much of the French war years). Nonetheless, in practice this theoretical freedom was compromised for working people as a

²¹ Battye, *Disclosure*: 74-5.

²² "...the very shameful and indelicate manner in which she was examined at the workhouse by the overseers, could only be done with a view to insult her feelings, and to gratify the depraved and vitiated passion of two monsters!" (Battye, *Strictures*: 74-5)

group, as the state saddled individuals with coercive policies and practices according to specific markers of income and wealth.

The most obvious legal impediment to working people's autonomy in the Battye cases is the Elizabethan policy of pauper resettlement, which had the effect of making the right of working people to choose where to live a contingent one.²³ To its proponents, pauper resettlement was a limited action which occurred only when a person no longer became able to support themselves. In actual fact, it was to become a basic technique of local governance in the early industrial economy and a significant budgetary item: for a three-year period between 1813-1815 for which there are detailed figures, Manchester spent an average of £4,105 each year – 10% of total expenditure on the poor – on removals and lawsuits.²⁴ Parishes were enabled to act not just when people applied for relief, but when parish officials believed people were *likely* to apply for relief. In practice, therefore, resettlement was a diffuse risk, a danger which was attached to public markers of class and poverty: single motherhood, crowded homes, tattered clothes. Battye tells us that the mere accusation of pregnancy was enough to secure Peggy Whitely's committal to the workhouse, though she never in fact had a child. There was no meaningful legal recourse in such cases, and legal consensus understood that this non-freedom associated with poverty did not conflict with constitutional rights.

²³ For general accounts of pauper removal, see Audrey Eccles, *Vagrancy in Law and Practice under the Old Poor Law* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Robert Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode: A History of Responses to the Roofless and the Rootless in Britain* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999); Samantha A. Shave, *Pauper Policies*.

²⁴ See *Abridgement of the Abstract of the Answers and Returns relative to Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England and Wales*, HC 1818 (82) XIX: 216-17. In *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), David R. Green noted the average budgetary share for England and Wales as a whole was 7.7%, while the capital spent only 4.5% of its poor relief budget on removals (see p. 46); we might therefore conclude the northern worker was particularly vulnerable. The inclusion of lawsuits in this budget item might seem mysterious, but Battye's narratives indicate parish officials commonly became involved in legal fights with other parishes over who was responsible for a particular pauper.

Pauper resettlement targeted women much more than men, particularly able-bodied men who, even if unemployed, would be understood to be part of a valuable labour pool. Battye's evidence thus has comparatively little to reveal about the lives of men. While rough government was doubtless gendered in its iterations, however, this does not mean that one should think of rough government as itself confined by gender; as noted, middle-class reformers found working women more attractive objects of empathy than their male counterparts, lending a certain slant to the evidence. Young able-bodied men may have faced less of a risk of involuntary workhouse confinement and resettlement, but inversely gendered systems of class-specific, intrusive, arbitrary state coercion did exist which echo the impressionistic findings detailed above.

The most dramatic and notorious of these was doubtless impressment. The press gang was, of course, a creature of wartime circumstances, but in the early industrial period, when Britain was continuously at war for the better part of 25 years, this hardly diminishes its social significance. Indeed, it is worth underlining the degree to which the early industrial experience of the state was shaped by the exigencies of state practices during the largest wars Britain had ever experienced. This context heightened rough government's unpredictable authoritarianism, giving it an unusual capacity for violence and intervention.

Dozens of broadside ballads from the era capture the plight of young lovers torn apart by the "cruel press gang". These songs, which were reworked and rewritten over the decades, assert that impressment was a widespread risk; the Bodleian Library's collection of ballads includes examples of Aberdeen men and "plough-boys" carried off by the navy: another tells how "Now Covent Garden's lost its glory / The lads are press'd and gone".²⁵ A relevant example from Preston tells of a "Pretty Factory Boy":

²⁵ "Mary Ann of Aberdeen", Roud V541, Bod8134; "Mary and William," Roud 5649, Bod411; "Covent Garden's Lamentation," Roud V29290, Bod19907.

It chanced her aged parents they came for to know
 That the factory lad did court their daughter Jane,
 A press-gang they did send, and press'd the factory lad away,
 For to send him to the wars to be slain.²⁶

While the navy heavily favoured men who had already worked on ships, in an economy based on coastal trade and canal shipping such skills were not as rare as one might imagine today. The Middleton weaver Samuel Bamford's autobiography, for example, contains a detailed first-hand account of the terror of the press system, as Bamford briefly served on a coastal cargo ship in southern England, bailing out on his contract in 1810. Even though he was a northern weaver with only a handful of months' experience in the coastal trade, Bamford was repeatedly harassed by recruiting agents on his return home. When Bamford entered St. Alban's, for instance, he was spotted by a crew of marines:

'Where's your pass, to pass you through the country?' asked the first man.
 'I have no pass,' I said; 'I'm a free-born subject of this kingdom, and can travel this or any other high-road without carrying a pass at all.'
 The men looked at each other, and then at me. They could not comprehend the reason of my cool manner and unusual language. They had no idea of free-born subjects, nor of sailors travelling without passes.²⁷

Bamford got himself out of this particular scrape by persuading the illiterate marines that an expired leave pass from his former merchant-marine employers was an active one from a navy ship, but the risk remained present: a few nights later, Bamford once again had to dodge marines in Northampton: "I waited outside until the quiet hour when people had all gone home from church, and had got seated at their dinners, before I essayed the perilous experiment of walking through."²⁸ Once again, he was questioned and had a narrow escape. There is, of course, no way to independently verify these incidents, and the dialogue and detail, narrated several decades

²⁶ "The Pretty Factory Boy," Roud V4698, Bod6023.

²⁷ Bamford: *Early Days*: 251.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 258.

later, is presumably a semi-fictive literary device. Nonetheless, the experience evoked was meant to be relatable to an informed readership – an experience in which impressment heavily impacted working men’s relationship to travel, making the English landscape one fraught with risk and danger.

In the war years, naval impressment was joined by another form of forced enlistment with a more ubiquitous impact in the cotton districts: the militia ballot. Militia service necessitated abandoning one’s trade and submitting to the banal terrorization of Napoleonic-era military discipline. In theory, every man of fighting age had to enlist, but exemptions were granted upon the assignment of a substitute or the payment of a fee. Employing a substitute, however, meant paying another man’s wages; meanwhile, the fee to avoid service altogether was £10, several month’s earnings for most men in the north. Katrina Navickas has described the resulting situation:

Fear of the militia ballot was probably the most common experience for all the inhabitants of [Lancashire] and the country during the wars. This does not denigrate the genuine patriotism and loyalism of the population but re-emphasizes its pragmatic preference for local over nationally organized institutions. The exemption from the ballot granted to volunteers in 1799 also played a great part in the latter's popularity. Dread of the ballot was a running theme of many contemporary diaries and autobiographies, which often also dramatically recounted their authors' close shaves with press gangs as they journeyed or tramped across the country.²⁹

The aggressive enforcement of the ballot – largely irrelevant to the members of the world of wealth, but a source of deep economic anxiety for wage earners – was in fact one of the more class-constitutive programs the state undertook.

With this in mind, perhaps the most interesting aspect of Bamford’s account is that it is saturated with mentions of an unequivocal anti-impressment solidarity. Early in his journey, Bamford stopped a man on the road to ask for directions, and the man asked if he was a sailor

²⁹ Navickas: *Loyalism and Radicalism*: 61.

without a pass. Bamford frankly admitted he was. Rather than turning him in, the man gave him rather detailed advice:

At St. Albans...a party of marines are stationed, who press every sailor that appears in the town. They even press them off the coaches, or other vehicles, if they get a sight of them. Through St. Albans, however, you must go, and you will be pressed if you appear in the streets; you must, therefore, get through the town without being seen, if possible. Fortunately it may be done. In a short time you will overtake a waggon which carries goods on this main road. You must get to ride inside of it, get stowed amongst the packages, and never show your face until you are clearly on the other side of the town.³⁰

In the event, Bamford got in the wrong wagon, hence his narrow escape in St. Albans. After his escape, however, he once again encountered friendly strangers:

Several decent-looking farmers, who had left their produce in the market, stood in the cart-road watching the whole proceeding, and when the marines had left, they said, 'Well, young fellow, you are the first blue-jacket that has slipt through the fingers of yonder scoundrels this long time.' I entered into friendly conversation with these men, and as they were going my way I had their company on the road as far as Redburn, where, after partaking with them a glass or two of ale, we parted.³¹

Finally, Bamford knew to be cautious in Northampton because a man he met had seen marines there, "though whether or not they had orders to press he could not tell".³² The picture is clear: working people dealt frankly and communally with the pervasive risk of impressment when travelling. Whether this solidarity should be designated a form of "resistance" is entirely up to the categories of the historian. What it does show, however, is that rough government was understood as a shared risk, and dealt with pragmatically as an unavoidable, collective problem for the working poor.

We thus begin to develop some picture of how state-legitimated authority appeared to working people in the early industrial north. Far from existing on the outside of state parameters,

³⁰ Bamford: *Early Days*: 248.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 252.

³² *Ibid.*: 258.

living in an “unpoliced” state of antediluvian individual liberty, the Manchester-area working poor lived in intimate proximity to a violent, chaotic, aimless system of governance – indeed, in many cases likely understanding it much better than its ostensible governors. Many of the conclusions glossed above would apply equally well to the working poor elsewhere in Britain, particularly the threat of the press gang. Still, the intensity of Manchester’s rough government was distinctive, not representative, even though systems like the poor law were national in scope. As scholars like Bohstedt and Wood have shown, the very laxness and flexibility of early modern social provisioning and law enforcement practices was intended to harness the power of custom. The tranquility and health of provincial districts was understood to be the prerogative and duty of local elites, and while national legislation provided some minimal frameworks, it was expected that local iterations would develop appropriate to particular contexts. In Manchester, all such paternalist covenants had been undone by mass migration and capital concentration.³³ If the poor of Manchester were not yet governed with a coherent system or program, they were already the objects of an urgency and aggression of governance which made their case unusual. One must also note that the picture that emerges of rough government is overwhelmingly a negative one. One could almost say that we emerge from these initial impressions with a sense of the early industrial state as a *problem* for working people.

Reviewing this picture, the historian is called upon to exercise imaginative empathy and ask what kind of attitudes toward, discourses about, and ambitions for state power working

³³ “If Manchester was poorly administered by modern standards, it was governed better than most contemporary towns. Yet these reforms gave Manchester’s social politics an artificial cast. Because the reforms were a class response to the threat of sudden urban disintegration rather than the products of slower, organic, evolution, they tended to substitute the one-sided interest and direction of the propertied classes for the rough political reciprocity that characterized patronage – and riot – in older towns.” See Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*: 75.

people might have developed in this historically specific context. In such a situation, one might reasonably expect endemic rebellion, rejection, and upheaval – or, alternately, withdrawal, evasion, secrecy. These dynamics were far from unknown in early industrial Manchester. Still, in the unfriendly economic environment of the early industrial north, evasion was only so possible. As we saw in Chapter Two, the industrial poor were paradigmatically mobile and unrooted, but their motions took place on a sharply limited plane, one curtailed by low wages, a lack of access to most forms of property, and a labour market with abundant openings but only in very specific areas and upon unappetizing terms. By the early nineteenth century, this crushing environment would begin spewing surplus workers across the New World by the hundreds of thousands. For those who remained, dealing with the intimate and intensive experience of governance endemic in the industrial north required adaptive, intelligent strategies of engagement. In the sources glossed above, one unearths working-class discourses about the state only in scraps and fragments: neighbours banding together to assist vulnerable women in their struggles with the parish; travellers on the road sharing anecdotes about press gang activity. It is unlikely that many working people would have understood these discourses in the frame in which I place them now. Still, seen properly, they are signs of a distinctive and self-generating discourse about the state.

This discourse was to have a profound social and political impact when mobilized through collective action. During these same decades surrounding the turn of the century, working people's movements began to put forward strikingly innovative and ambitious plans for the expansion of the state in their favour. Rather than turning away from the state, working people's intimate experiences of official power seemed to provoke a realization of the urgency of establishing some influence over the state. The flip side of rough government, then, was an

increasing engagement with state power, what one might paradoxically call an effort to “govern from below”.

To keep this effort visible, we must keep the defining ambivalence of working people’s encounter with the state in focus. If in surveying the Northern world of wealth, we examined a political community which approached the state from the side, as it were – confident in certain modes of legitimate participation, though far from hegemonic in the British state system as a whole – in the world of work’s experience of rough government, we see a community which experienced state power decidedly from below. Most importantly – and this fact should strongly influence one’s approach to the evidence – the working poor did not interact with the state on a basis of good faith, but rather in a chaotic, exclusionary context of disenfranchisement and frequent repression. Keeping this in mind, it will then confuse us less that working people did not speak in a single voice or maintain an internally consistent political ethic, but adopted situationally appropriate stances, splitting their attention between multiple strategies and approaches. Just as there was not a single bourgeois party or political voice, there was not a single working people’s politics, either. Nonetheless, distinctive tendencies and contributions to state development would emerge over time among Manchester’s working poor. These would exert a powerful influence on the trajectory of the modern state in Britain.

Early Working-Class Reform

One manner in which working people in Manchester initiated an early engagement with the state was through the formal, organized reform movement of the 1790s, in particular the Manchester Political and Reformation Societies mentioned in the previous chapter. Characterizing working people’s reform, however, is a challenging task, as there are real and

significant gaps in the archives – no original document from either society survives, nor any independent publications by any of their members. Thomas Walker, throughout his various publications, depicted the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of Manchester reform as specifically bourgeois in origin. As far as the Manchester Constitutional Society went, this was likely a reliable enough intellectual history: one can trace a fairly coherent through-line from early Dissenter discourses around political rights and freedoms, through Warrington, to the high-intellectual reform debates of the Lit and Phil, to the elevated language of MCS publications and polemics. On the other hand, Walker did not note any distinctive contribution of the MPS or MRS to the politics of Manchester reform whatsoever.

This does not mean, of course, that there was no independent or distinctive working-people's reform discourse in the 1790s; only that it is difficult to access it archivally, making any hard statements about it necessarily somewhat conjectural. The founding documents of the MRS and MPS printed in the *Review* – the only surviving pronouncements from these groups as corporate bodies – present an ambiguous picture. They target economic inequality with a greater degree of clarity than the elite societies, perhaps: "The people of this country, especially the middle and lower classes, have been kept in the dark with respect to the abuses of government, and have been constantly told that they ought not to meddle with the affairs of administration, because those in office would ever have their interest at heart."³⁴ MPS and MRS members had already demonstrated their belief that the lower orders had a right to "meddle with the affairs of administration" by organizing themselves into political societies in the first place. Still, it is difficult to make much more of these generic reform pronouncements: there are no clues suggesting the process by which they were written or how far they represent any consensus view.

³⁴ Walker, *Review*: 35.

All three of the final “resolutions” of the MRS declaration were lifted, word for word, from the earlier resolutions of Walker’s bourgeois group.³⁵

Some MRS and MPS members actually testified at the various trials and interrogations which Walker reprinted. The evidence these texts provide for a distinctive working-class reform culture is similarly ambiguous. William Dunn and Benjamin Booth – both MPS and MRS members – testified to a raucous, drunken, and radical plebeian reform environment, in which toasts were drunk to the success of the French and jokes made about killing the king.³⁶ Booth and Dunn’s confessions, however, were both retracted by their authors, and were agreed by all sides to be distinguished by their inaccuracy. James Lomax, George Clark, and James Roberts, also MRS members, offered point-by-point refutations of Dunn’s testimony, declaring the Society followed a constitutionalist, pacifist approach borrowed from the bourgeois leadership, and that had any insurrectionary discussions occurred, they would immediately have resigned. Lomax opined that even Thomas Paine was *verboten* at MRS meetings, though he acknowledged being familiar with Paine’s work.³⁷

Still, there is reason to doubt that this prim, upright, and religiously non-violent and constitutionalist image was representative of working-class reform as a whole. Lomax, Clark, and Roberts, though not subject to the same terrors as Booth and Dunn, were still interested witnesses, and some points of their evidence – such as the total disavowal of Paine, the main intellectual lodestar of English radicalism – seem exaggerated. Historians have snorted at the “confessions” of Booth and Dunn, but both men clearly showed a genuine fondness for alcohol-based conviviality when not under duress. Indeed, unless they were total outcasts from the gin-

³⁵ Compare *ibid.*: 36-7 to *ibid.*: 17. It is, perhaps, of interest that four MCS resolutions were *not* adopted by the MRS, though I see no clear pattern in what was kept and what was jettisoned.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 110-4; 101-8.

³⁷ *Proceedings against Thomas Walker*: 66-7.

palace, bareknuckle boxing and Saturday night market-loving culture of their neighbourhoods, working-class reformers were almost certainly a rowdier group than they represented themselves to be in court. More to the point, advocacy of righteous political violence in the Manchester area can be found indirectly in other sources: Bayley recorded “No King” graffiti scrawled across the walls of Manchester, while the Crown Court files record the strange case of James Tonge, a weaver, who allegedly went down upon his knees in Little Lever and screamed, “God damn the King, and all the subjects belonging to him!”³⁸ At the turn of the century, the failed insurrectionary Colonel Despard even claimed to be in touch with a republican organization in Manchester that was prepared for a violent uprising.³⁹

Taken as a whole, the evidence indicates that the formally organized plebian reform groups were neither rabid insurrectionary organizations, nor carbon copies of their middle-class counterparts, but rather represented a tactical decision on the part of some working people to seize a narrow opportunity for broadening the political sphere by working within the confines of the elite-dominated movement as they found it. The discipline of these groups in maintaining the MCS line through the ordeal of several sedition trials suggests they understood and accepted that this meant adopting the movement’s existing ethic and language. That harder-edged, more populist discourses circulated on the margins seems believable – Booth and Dunn must at least have been aware of these ideas to confess to them. Dunn’s long-time presence in the movement on its own demonstrates that not all members were teetotaling, upright English weavers. Still, it is intrinsically unlikely that groups which met on Thomas Walker’s property would toast the Jacobins and cheer for the death of the king. As participants in 1790s reform, working-class

³⁸ Bohstedt, 92; TNA PL 27/7, “The King vs James Tonge.”

³⁹ See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*: 525.

activists seized the advantage offered by the genuine desire of elite activists to establish a cross-class alliance, but remained a quiet presence once admitted.

Labour and the State

In July of 1791, the Home Secretary Henry Dundas received a letter from two Manchester magistrates, Henry Norris and the famous Thomas Butterworth Bayley. The two old Mancunians complained of the strangeness of the culture of the world of work then arising in their town, in a passage quoted in passing in the previous chapter: “The trade of this County is wonderfully prosperous. It produces its attendant evils...” If the JPs were annoyed by the chaotic atmosphere of a boom town, however, what truly bothered them – their reason for writing – was not chaos, but organization.

We have also now a very general spirit of combination amongst all sorts of labourers and artisans, who are in a state of disaffection to all legal control. The introduction of machinery to abridge labour in weaving, is also a subject, at this time, of peculiar disgust and jealousy. And, I fear, the example of [loyalist riots in] Birmingham, and an unhappy party spirit about the Revolution in France, heightened by the meetings on the 14th instant (which I believe none of the magistrates in this County *approved, countenanced, or attended*) has added to the general ill-humour and may be a pretext for mischief and outrage...⁴⁰

The concern was proven justified – the letter was penned at the cusp of a period of sustained labour unrest. What is most significant is the early date: Manchester’s real growth beyond the scale of a market town had only begun a little over a decade earlier. Labour organizing among Manchester’s cotton workers, then, was for all intents and purposes an immediate, intrinsic aspect of the industrial urban landscape from its inception.

Both labour and political historians are prone to undervaluing the “political” valence of labour activism, assuming union concerns to be narrow and sectional until proven otherwise.

⁴⁰ Printed in Aspinall, *The Early English Trade Unions*: 1.

This siloing of labour history, however, is unwise for a couple reasons, and would certainly have seemed strange to Norris and Bayley, with their invocation of Jacobin-inspired radicalism and “all sorts of labourers and artisans”. Firstly, labour actions in this era were the very opposite of contained: every serious Manchester strike quickly spilled over beyond the labour-force immediately involved, dragging in more or less organized well-wishers and solidarity activists who recognized common cause with those stopping work. This is entirely unsurprising, considering that the core economic unit of working-class society was a household made up of several workers, typically split by gender and age into different trades. In short, labour actions in the 1790s were more than a self-interested tactic employed by the workers of a single firm: they were the primary site of Mancunian class conflict in general. Secondly, the very effort to bring taxonomic clarity to a political situation like the turn of the nineteenth century in the cotton districts – one in which most “political” strategies were foreclosed by widespread disenfranchisement, and any substantial labour unrest quickly resulted in state intervention anyhow – is an anachronism. Any worker’s organization of the early industrial era was intrinsically political, insofar as it immediately found itself enmeshed in controversies of law and state.

In sketching the developing corpus of working-class thought about the state, then, one must insist on giving the labour movement a substantial role. Many labour historians, it is true, have traced organizational or membership connections between labour unions and more explicitly political reform movements; in the 1810s this note would grow louder, and by the Chartist period, labour support for democratization was often explicit and organized. In claiming labour history as state history, however, we are referring to something more than cross-pollination or fellow-travelling. Working people’s encounters with and ideas about the state

saturated their lives in the many ways discussed in the first pages of this chapter, and dissatisfaction with the existing state-legal matrix extended well beyond a narrow dissatisfaction with the franchise. Seen properly, organized labour was not simply a significant source of organized support for reform: it was a breeding ground in itself for discourses about state power and its deployment.

Early strikes could be violent, combative affairs, and often embroiled working people well beyond the workforce concerned. This meant that labour unions were often tasked with organizing some of the most direct confrontations between working people and a repressive state. The particular early agitation which made Norris and Bayley nervous, for example, occurred among Manchester's mule spinners. As John Bohstedt explained,

The mule spinners were a new breed of workers, the spinning mule having been invented only in 1779... For more than a decade mules were employed in small shops and factories, but in the 1790s, first waterpower, then steam was used to drive the mules, and mule spinning factories began to multiply in Manchester. The mule operator required skill to tune the machine, a fine touch, and physical strength...⁴¹

For a handful of decades, the supremacy of the mule concentrated the most skilled and experienced workers together in close quarters. The precise tuning of the mules also meant they operated best in the wettest climates of Europe, like the lowlands of the Manchester area – elsewhere, the spun threads would snap and fray, erasing the gains of automation. This technological juncture gifted significant bargaining power to the mule-spinning labor sector in Manchester and surrounding areas, making them leaders in labour actions during the cotton boom.

⁴¹ Bohstedt: 128.

The Crown Court depositions preserve the earliest detailed account of a Manchester spinning strike, and the force and confidence already on display were impressive.⁴² In March of 1790, the cotton firm of James Lees, James Shaw and Lawrence Buchan decided to lay off hands and reduce wages at their mills in Lever Street and Pudding Lane. Early in the morning of March 22, “a vast number of persons assembled” outside the Pudding Lane mill, led by a young spinner named William Mitchell. James Kay, a firm manager, gave his version of events:

...he saw William Mitchell, who appeared to be a principal in the riot, he was in his shirt sleeves, he heard him call out to the mob now lads up with stones and break them all, meaning the windows of the said factory in Pudding Lane, and damn them tell them I ordered you, then a great number of stones were thrown through the windows and he saw the said William Mitchell take off his hat and call to the people now lads, shout, the crowd then consisting of men women and children did shout as Mitchell ordered.

After smashing the windows on Pudding Lane, the spinners and their supporters then moved to the Lever Street factory and smashed the windows there. When James Shaw and Deputy Constable William Waters arrived, they were quickly spotted. Mitchell “stepped forward as a leader, clapped his hands together and said damn their eyes let them touch me, I will go first, come along.” He and some others then kicked open the doors of the Lever Street factory, locked themselves inside, and carried on the destruction. Waters and Shaw were left with nothing to do but hammer on the door and beg to be let in. By noon, the crowd had grown to thousands strong – many times the number that ever involved themselves in loyalist-radical clashes in Manchester. Around noon Bayley himself appeared at the head of a cavalry contingent, and the mob finally dispersed.

The collective strength on display here is notable. Despite the fact they worked in an industry which was little over a decade old, the mule spinners were able to assemble a force of thousands and control a vital portion of the town for a roughly six-hour period. The strategies

⁴² PL 27/7, “Evidence against William Mitchell for rioting at Manchester.”

employed shocked wealthier observers, but they also showed a certain tactical sophistication and restraint – rather than targeting machinery, the crowd engaged in superficial destruction which would cost their employers without delaying production upon resolution of the conflict. Furthermore, the case reveals an organization already at a stage of fair maturity. It is not just the level of solidarity that implies prior coordination: witnesses affirmed that the mule spinners had for some time been meeting illegally at the Three Horse Shoes pub in the Old Shambles, the heart of Old Manchester. This organization showed an awareness of and a sensitivity to the state repression arrayed against it, deploying its strength when strategic, but withdrawing when necessary.

Head-on confrontations such as this, however, were appropriate to specific circumstances and satisfied particular needs – contesting wage-reductions in the short term, forcing particular owners to comply with industry standards and the like. The organizations which supported such actions were necessarily underground and semi-permanent due to their illegality; other systems were still needed to provide more systemic support for working households.⁴³

Another bulwark of the labour movement, then, was the “friendly society”. The distinction between the fighting union and the friendly society could be unstable; according to Malcolm Chase, “The blurring of friendly and trade societies had been endemic to these popular associations since their inception and a matter of concern since the late eighteenth century in the minds of officialdom.”⁴⁴ As a rule, however, unions existed to negotiate working conditions and wages, while friendly societies were tasked with providing prototypical forms of health and

⁴³ The exact statutory legitimacy of labour organizing changed throughout this period, with notable legislation including the Combinations of Workmen Acts of 1799, 1800, 1824 and 1825; fundamentally, however, labour was substantially hampered by criminalization until the 1874 Trades Unions Act.

⁴⁴ Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill, and the Politics of Labour* (London: Routledge, 2017): 1-2.

unemployment insurance, sometimes even quasi-retirement policies to their members. As the Pitt government increasingly empowered magistrates to crack down on unions, a number of societies responded by splitting functions more clearly, in the hopes of keeping one arm operating which could provide needed sustenance to members in the volatile early industrial context. Despite frequent official hostility, throughout the decades of industrialization in Manchester friendly societies persisted which were able to fulfill this function. Figures prepared for Parliament found 12,838 Society members in Manchester proper in 1813, 13,638 in 1814, and 14,639 in 1815, and nearly 63,736, 66,574, and 74,300 members for the same years in Salford Hundred as a whole.⁴⁵ These were huge numbers on their own, almost a majority of the working-class population, and given that Society membership could entail some benefits to the member's household, it is plain that friendly support was not just a significant, but a structural and normative component of working-class economic life. Migrating workers had successfully transposed into the industrial city a sense of collective welfare and obligation, and built stable institutions to support this moral economics. Crucially, friendly society or burial club provisions were figured as *rights*, able to be claimed by members without the shame or self-abnegation ritualized into all forms of charitable and Poor Law provisioning. In this respect, one can discern the kernel of a crucial divergence between liberal and populist views of welfare provisions.

Unions, then, in both friendly and fighting form were decidedly public institutions, the primary organizational structures through which working people's collective aspirations were mediated. Even more than this, however, they served as a crucial breeding ground for proletarian imaginings about the state. Already, there existed a precedent for the mingling of labour

⁴⁵ See *Abridgement of the Abstract...*: 215-217.

concerns and state infrastructures in the early modern guild tradition. As Chase has noted, “each guild was closely involved in the civic life and governance of the community of which it was part and, until the upheavals of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, played an integral part in local religious life.” Memories of this role did not die out: “Labour’s sense of the guild tradition contributed towards the validation of collective action and helped legitimize its aims.” In Lancashire, the guild tradition was well and truly moribund by the late-eighteenth century, but strong cultural memories of it persisted, evident in the names of unions and the continued nostalgia for the guild-regulated apprenticeship tradition. This made for something more than a moral confidence: it meant that from its inception, organized industrial labour’s attention was closely attuned and attentive to the legal corpus of the state, its influence over labour markets and negotiations, and labour’s power within it:

So central was apprenticeship to the concerns of the early trade unions that their emergence corresponded closely to the decline in effectiveness of the Statute in enforcing it. The emergence of trade unionism was necessitated as the erosion of communal and guild-based norms was paralleled by the diminishing authority of statute law regarding apprenticeship.⁴⁶

It is easy to deride industrial-era guild nostalgia as evidence of a naivete or conservatism on the part of workers. In fact, it provided the foundation for an entirely modern idea: that the forms of mutual assistance workers had nurtured on their own could be absorbed into and burnished by state power.

In the immediate context of the early industrial moment, the nascent labour movement thus began to forge its own connections between the question of control over the state and the possibilities and perils of expanding state power, separate and distinct from the proto-liberal discourses of the wealthy. In one sense, it could not have been otherwise: rough government

⁴⁶ Chase: 9, 28.

intruded upon workers' affairs nearly as soon as industrial towns began to form in the north, giving workers little choice other than to consider strategies for mitigating hostile state attitudes and actions. One might think that it was possible for unions to fly under the radar by avoiding more caustic rhetoric or violent actions, but legal aggression was as often intrusive and proactive as it was reactive. For instance, Mancunian employers developed a specific legal strategy of securing the confiscation or destruction of friendly society treasuries or "boxes" as a method of securing worker dependence, claiming the funds were used for illegal activities. Thomas Percival tried to mediate in one particularly brutal instance of this strategy during a dispute between Manchester-area checkmakers and their masters in the 1750s, but the affair terminated in the court-ordered destruction of an entire workforce's savings.⁴⁷ A year later, the smallware masters won a similar victory. These attacks made for small economic catastrophes within particular trade communities, and represented an existential threat to organized labour's viability as an institution; generating some kind of response was therefore mandatory.

On the other hand, certain openings in the practices of state recurrently revealed themselves to the early unions, incentivizing workers to develop autonomous visions of the state's future. While some employer and magistrate thinking about labour movements could be crass and totalizing in its rejection of worker collective action, a certain subset of Britain's governing class would come to view the development of forms of mutual aid as a potentially beneficial development – a benevolent stream into which union enthusiasm could be channelled, which would simultaneously relieve pressure on public provisioning. Percival typified this

⁴⁷ See Thomas Percival, *Letter to a Friend: Occasioned by the Late Disputes Betwixt the Check-Makers of Manchester, and Their Weavers; and the Check-Makers Ill-Usage of the Author* (Halifax: J. Buckland and others, 1758). In their description of this case, Wadsworth and Mann describe the masters' case as "pure laissez-faire doctrine", but this rather undersells both the brutality and the archaism of rough-government economic policy. In actual fact, the declared intent of both the masters' strategy and the Assize ruling on the case was to use state controls to bar check weavers from accumulating long-term savings so as to secure long-term worker dependency – an almost feudal approach to worker management (see Wadsworth and Mann: 361-368).

school of thought in Manchester, and his influence was hardly insignificant: he became involved in the checkmakers' dispute not because he had any fondness for collective negotiation, but because he found the workers' efforts to generate their own systems of support commendable and forward-thinking. In 1793, British law for the first time extended certain legal protections to Friendly Society funds by allowing Societies to register with magistrates, so long as they satisfied the justices that they had no negotiating agenda. Far from rejecting this embrace, Friendly Societies rushed to register for the protections. Humphrey Southall has summarized the situation:

Societies had two incentives to register: their members were exempt from removal under the settlement laws unless actually falling on relief, and registered societies could sue or be sued; of importance in internal disputes over funds. The obvious disincentive for trade societies was that registration drew attention to their activities, and there are examples of both individual rules and whole societies being objected to; in one case, for having 'the appearance of an improper combination.'⁴⁸

By the time of the New Poor Law in 1834, Benthamite commentators were actively defending the Friendly Society as a crucial supplement to the Poor Law.⁴⁹ This accommodationist strategy was certainly partly intended to defang the labour movement, but it failed decisively in this regard, and workers were able to maintain the porous border between Friendly Society and fighting union behind the scenes. Indeed, Southall notes that two of the most effective unions of the later nineteenth-century – the Friendly Society of Ironfounders and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers – both passed their early decades as fully registered and apparently legitimate Friendly Societies.

⁴⁸ Humphrey Southall, "Towards a Geography of Unionization: The Spatial Organization and Distribution of Early British Trade Unions," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 13.4 (1988): 468.

⁴⁹ See Penelope Ismay, "Friendly Societies and the Meaning of the New Poor Law," in *Trust Among Strangers: Friendly Societies in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 47-84.

This complex legal context must inform one's understanding of how even hardline union activists viewed state power. While the general tendency of state authority arrayed itself against organized labour, almost from the outset the legal body of the state revealed itself to be somewhat malleable to pressure and engagement from below. Workers thus faced, on the one hand, a present reality of interference and disenfranchisement, and on the other, intermittent openings for a certain degree of increased security and bargaining power. It is therefore significant but unsurprising that even at this early stage there were signs of serious and intentional thinking about the potential manipulation of state power from below. For the most part, these early schemes came to naught, but they show that governing from below was already being considered a viable strategic possibility. It is not going too far to say that to imagine a future for the labour movement necessarily meant imagining a society governed by a different kind of state.

One of the most interesting and creative strategies in this regard was adopted by the handloom weavers of southern Lancashire at the turn of the nineteenth century. Weavers had strong friendly societies and participated in their fair share of combative collective disputes. Unlike mule spinning, though, handloom weaving was relatively easily adopted by newcomers, and with the warehouse/putting-out system dominant in this sector into the 1820s, weavers were physically dispersed and disorganized, meaning the closed-shop, picket-line tactics of the already-mechanized sectors were less practicable for them. While the spinners enjoyed several victories in the 1790s, more combative weavers' actions generally ended in defeat, even as more and more workers poured into the industry.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See Wadsworth and Mann: 368-375, Bythell: 176-181; Bohstedt: 126-156.

In this case, however, necessity was the mother of invention. Bohstedt has summarized the emerging strategy:

...in the spring of 1799 the weavers began to organize regionally. They formed an association to petition Parliament for the regulation of the cotton industry. Their campaign initially sought a more efficient means of settling disputes than the cumbersome appeal to the magistrates. It did not seem to be spurred on by immediate hardship, for the cotton industry in the first half of 1799 was generally prosperous. Their strategy of acting 'not from any power of their own but by appealing to Government' recognized their weaknesses in trying to bargain collectively.⁵¹

A few things are worth emphasizing here. First, even though some strategies were less likely to obtain for weavers, the turn toward parliament was not a desperation move, but a calculated strategy born from a position of moderate strength. Lancashire handloom weaving in later decades was to serve as the exemplary case of tragic industrial obsolescence, with thousands of households facing starvation when power weaving took over. Few historians, however, consider power weaving to have been a viable large-scale technology in the late 1790s. As a group, handloom weavers were therefore still structurally vital to the cotton economy and, by extension, the economic health of the north. While the "appeal to government" was thus in part determined by constrained circumstances, it should still be seen as a deliberate and pre-meditated manoeuvre.

Secondly, the pressure point in the industry which weavers focused on – the arbitration of wage disputes – was strategically well-chosen, allowing weavers to at once provide immediate solutions to existing hardships while forcing open the door to more structural changes in the industry. In the ordinary pattern of work, cotton weavers would visit their employers' warehouse on a given day, turn over the pieces they had completed, collect wages and receive new thread to be woven. Contracts were uniformly verbal – weavers would simply be told the day's prices for

⁵¹ Bohstedt: 138.

the material they were working on, and could in theory choose to take or leave them – and opportunities for abuse were plentiful.⁵² Should a master break his end of the contract, a weaver had, in theory, the right to litigate the case before a local Justice of the Peace. In practice, the intersections of class and state power severely undermined the utility of this mechanism. As weavers tried to explain during the parliamentary inquiry into their petition, an expensive, time-consuming legal process was not a viable method to resist routine nickel-and-diming:

What remedy have you, in those cases, been accustomed to resort to?

A. The Remedy People apply to in such cases is to a Magistrate; but they are often in such a Situation, that they dare not have Recourse to this Method, for Fear of being turned out of Employ, which may perhaps be of great Disadvantage to them and their Families.

What creates the Necessity of submitting to the Decision of your Masters, when Disputes happen between you and them?

A. A person may be employed in working a kind of Work, when to change to another, neither his Time nor his Circumstances would perhaps permit; and in some cases, the Manufacturers are in the Habits of lending to their Men a certain Sum of Money to purchase Utensils. In such a case, not having the Money to repay, and the Utensils perhaps thrown on their Hands useless, they chuse rather to submit to their decision, than to run the risk of their Displeasure.⁵³

If they did take a case to the bench, weavers were unlikely to be pleased with who they would find sat upon it. In the cotton districts, the relevant JPs – figures like Norris or Bayley – were certain to have strong personal ties to masters in the cotton trade, if they were not cotton investors themselves. JPs who did not have direct knowledge of cotton weaving would often call in an expert witness, who without fail would be, in the words of one of the parliamentary commissioners, “some experienced and intelligent manufacturer”.⁵⁴ While prosecutions may have held marginal utility in specific circumstances, few weavers would have expected much from these hearings.

⁵²See Rule, *The Experience of Labour*: 124-129.

⁵³ *Report upon Petitions of Masters and Journeymen Weavers*, HC 1799-1800 CXXX: 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* : 25.

At the turn of the century, then, the weavers therefore sought the erection of a new arbitration system to govern wage disputes, a quasi-judicial procedure which would be speedy, accessible, and most importantly would mandate equal representation of weavers and masters as witnesses – thereby rebalancing the power dynamics of the warehouse interaction. In cases of conflict, there would be an initial negotiation between delegates, with recourse to a magistrate only taken if the delegates could not agree.

The organization which formulated this plan was only tenuously legal, and the government which faced them inimical to their economic worldview. Nonetheless, the weavers approached Parliament with a clear-headed and sophisticated understanding of how state power operated in turn-of-the-century Britain, and with a realistic, if ambitious plan to redirect its course. They engaged in the same strategic personality-splitting the labour movement was habituated to in these years: despite an immediate proximity to the combative union tradition, the public face of the arbitration agitation remained unwaveringly law-abiding and loyalist in its rhetoric. Even more interestingly, the weavers did not rely purely on pressure, but made a deliberate effort to arm themselves with the appropriate tools to tackle the legal machinery of state. Joanna Innes provides a fascinating account of this decision:

Whether or not they had prior judicial expertise, the Weaver's Association – now regional in scope – made recourse in 1800 to a man of the law, and through him, to a young lawyer named Thomas Gurney. Gurney had a solid prior experience in labour law, having pled before the courts of London and Middlesex in different conflicts, sometimes for employers, sometimes for workers. In 1799, he represented workers before the House of Lords, arguing against the law on unions during the third and final reading of the bill. When the northern weavers hired Gurney, it appears they had recruited in him not only an expert, but also a sympathizer with their cause.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Original text: “Qu’elle ait eu ou non une expérience antérieure d’expertise juridique, l’association des tisserands, désormais régionale, eut recours en 1800 à un homme de loi, et à travers lui, à un jeune avocat, en la personne de Thomas Gurney... Gurney avait en outre une solide expérience du droit du travail, ayant plaidé devant les cours de Londres et du Middlesex dans différents conflits, tantôt pour des employeurs, tantôt pour des ouvriers. En 1799, il plaida au nom des ouvriers, devant la Chambre des Lords, contre la loi sur les syndicats, lors de la troisième et dernière lecture du texte. Quand les tisserands du nord mobilisèrent Gurney, ils semblent donc avoir recruté non seulement un expert, mais aussi un sympathisant de leur cause.” Translation my own. Joanna Innes, “Des tisserands

This was a forceful, thoughtful, and targeted campaign. It provides a clear instance in which organized labour both recognized the infrastructural power of the British state, and believed in the possibility of exerting meaningful influence on this power from below. It also demonstrates a compelling awareness that effecting lasting change meant not just persuading employers or the government to adopt different principles, but actually changing the legal fabric that structured workers' lives and labour experiences.

So did they succeed? In the long run, certainly, the Association did not reverse the long-term decline of handloom weaving. Duncan Bythell, the trade's authoritative historian of the 1970s, wrote dismissively that the eventual failure of the arbitration strategy was an "inevitable conclusion" due to the dominant *laissez-faire* attitude of Britain's governors at the time.⁵⁶ If we do not assume, however, that there *was* a counterfactual possible positive outcome for handloom weaving, then the short and medium-term successes of the weavers, and the efforts they undertook to reshape one facet of state power in their own interests, seem impressive enough. The complete and total opposition the weavers faced – drawing from a wide spectrum of the world of wealth in Manchester and supported by the government of the day – make any victories worthy of note.

The petition itself stands as one of the major organizational feats of the labour movement in these years. As Bohstedt notes, "Their original declaration was signed by thirty delegates from thirteen towns, at least some of whom represented large and active branches of a federation of weavers with headquarters at Bolton."⁵⁷ This initial foray provoked a flurry of panicked letters

au Parlement: la légitimité de la politique du peuple (Angleterre, 1799-1800)," *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, 42 (2011): 94.

⁵⁶ Duncan Bythell, *The Handloom Weavers: A Study in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution* (London: Cambridge U.P.: 1969): 155.

⁵⁷ Bohstedt, 138.

back and forth between the Home Office and south Lancashire magistrates. One of the most infamous pieces of anti-labour legislation of the French War years, the 1799 Combination Act was in some measure a response to the petition. Nonetheless, the weavers continued to organize: “By the spring of 1800 the weavers’ petition had collected twenty-three thousand signatures.”⁵⁸ Organization on this scale threatened to bring the nation’s most vital trade to a standstill. In May, the same government which had just ostensibly banned labour associations altogether invited a number of Lancashire weavers to testify before an inquiry into the petition. Men like James Holcroft – a young Lancashire weaver and militant trade unionist – found themselves sitting across from a committee led by Colonel Thomas Stanley, MP for Lancashire since 1780, holding their undivided attention.⁵⁹ Against a chorus of opposition from Lancashire cotton masters and prophecies of doom from Justice Bayley and others, parliament passed the Cotton Arbitration Act modelled on the weavers’ demands in 1800.

This victory was more than superficial: for a time, the weavers *did* substantially reshape local legal machinery from below. James Jaffe’s summary provides some idea of the scope of the legislation:

The 1800 Cotton Arbitration Act applied solely to the cotton weaving trade and provided for the appointment of a pair of arbitrators, one each by the worker and master, to resolve disputes concerning wages, deductions, standards of production, and the like. In the event that these arbitrators could not agree on an award, the dispute was to be referred to the nearest justice of the peace for a hearing and summary decision. Justices of the peace were further authorized to imprison or fine those who refused to attend, participate, or abide by the arbitration process. As in the 1800 Combination Act, the arbitrators were accorded the power to summon witnesses and examine them under oath, and manufacturers (and their workers) were expressly forbidden from acting as magistrates in these cases.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid.: 139-140.

⁵⁹ See *Report upon Petitions...*

⁶⁰ James Jaffe, “Industrial Arbitration, Equity, and Authority in England, 1800-1850,” *Law and History Review* 18.3 (2000): 535-6.

Historians have tended to emphasize that the Act did not satisfy all of the workers' demands, but this is a high bar to set for regulatory legislation during the years of the Pitt terror. What the Weavers' Act did do was immediately and drastically change the terms of the crucial moment of exchange between weaver and warehouse across Lancashire. As Jaffe has noted, "This act proved to be popular among cotton workers, especially for resolving disputes concerning the standards and quality of both raw materials and finished work."⁶¹ Wayward masters found themselves facing a flurry of arbitration demands. What's more, weavers did not just bring cases, but regularly won them, with a majority being decided in favour of workers during the years of the Act's operation.⁶²

Finally, and most importantly for this study, the weavers' agitation opened a conceptual space in which, within the confines of an avowedly anti-democratic state structure, developments of state power could take their initiative decidedly from below. Perhaps the most striking detail in the entire agitation from today's perspective was the weavers' demand for a minimum wage. Simply because of the audacity of this demand, historians like Bythell have encouraged their readers to pay little attention to it,⁶³ but contemporaries seem to have taken it fairly seriously, up to and including William Pitt himself. Joanna Innes has rendered the negotiations in a more neutral tone:

William Pitt had studied with care the question of the regulation of wages in the 1790s, when an Opposition MP had proposed encouraging magistrates to fix agricultural workers' salaries. He had concluded that state intervention in the market was counter-productive. In the case of the weavers, he acted with consistency, declaring to the petitioners that he would not support this element of their demands.

As a negotiating point, though, the demand had been effective:

⁶¹ Ibid.: 536.

⁶² Bohstedt: 141.

⁶³ Bythell : 168-74.

...he added that he was, all the same, quite willing to help them obtain a fairer arbitration system... Pitt asked the weavers' representatives to inform their constituents of his intention to only support this aspect of their proposal for the law, and to see what they thought. Apparently, they were satisfied with this compromise.⁶⁴

Surely what is most striking about this picture is not any delusions of grandeur on the weavers' part, but the apparently earnest back-and-forth between Britain's autocratic prime minister and the representatives of an ostensibly illegal trade combination.

The creativity generated by the weavers' approach likewise comes through in the way the Act was used *after* it was passed. The original Act was intended to set up a limited judicial mechanism to solve personal conflicts between particular weavers and particular masters. In 1803, Parliament assigned a second commission to study the law in practice and propose amendments to the system. What they uncovered was a fast-moving field of arbitration innovation.

First of all, a subset of weavers had emerged as experts in arbitration, some of them becoming surprisingly well-versed in the law. A Scottish weaving delegate, Archibald Hamilton, was pressed by the 1803 committee on points of jurisdiction. He averred with due humility – “I know there is such a court [Scottish Small Debt Court], but I am very little acquainted with its Proceedings”; “I am not conversant on the Subject of Appeal” – but was actually able to speak cogently and discerningly about where weavers were bringing cases: “In [Small Debt Court] you can only sue for a Debt, but not upon a Dispute with a Manufacturer”; “I cannot say precisely on the point of Appeals... I have known Four or Five to the Sessions, and those principally Eight or

⁶⁴ Original text: “William Pitt avait étudié avec soin la question de la réglementation des salaires dès le milieu des années 1790, quand un député de l’opposition avait proposé d’encourager les magistrats à fixer les salaires des ouvriers agricoles. Il en avait conclu que l’intervention de l’État dans les lois du marché était contre-productive. Dans le cas des tisserands, il agit dans la continuité et déclara aux pétitionnaires qu’il ne soutiendrait pas ce volet de leurs revendications...il ajouta qu’il était en revanche tout disposé à les aider à obtenir un système d’arbitrage plus juste...Pitt demanda aux représentants des tisserands d’informer leur base de son intention de soutenir seulement cet aspect de leur proposition de loi, et de voir ce qu’ils en pensaient. Apparemment, ils furent satisfaits de ce compromis.” Translation my own. Innes: 98.

Nine Years back, but not lately, because they are intimidated.” When asked a leading question by a professional attorney named McKerrel hired by Scottish weaving masters, Hamilton firmly stopped the line of questioning and then implied McKerrel’s own understanding of the relevant point was lacking:

that Question arises from a mistaken principle of the Bill in the House; I know the manufacturing Interest misunderstand the Bill, they think that we intend by Arbitration to settle the Price to be paid per Ell⁶⁵ for new Patterns when they come in; there is no such thing intended.⁶⁶

McKerrel did not press the point. The numbers of cases some of these delegates had arbitrated in just two years was staggering: James Holcroft, the Bolton weaver who had made such an impression on the 1800 committee, claimed to have participated in no less than 300 cases – clearly implying semi-professional activity, a kind of proletarian legal practice.⁶⁷

What’s more, weavers were using the limited provisions of the bill to force their own interests forward. Jaffe provides a useful summary of the most interesting creative usage:

The weavers of Whitefield made a particularly clever attempt to adapt the act to these broader goals. Nine hundred of them simultaneously submitted their demands for arbitration in response to a general reduction of piece rates. Significantly, the question of whether the terms of the act could be construed to operate in this way was entertained first by a pair of arbitrators who then agreed to refer the matter to an attorney for an opinion. When the attorney, whose costs were paid jointly by the weavers and manufacturers, returned a judgment favorable to the weavers, the manufacturers sought a further opinion from the irascible Edward Law (soon to be Lord Ellenborough) who wrote a brief more to their liking.⁶⁸

This second decision was then upheld at the Quarter Sessions, but the masters were clearly not in exclusive control of the law. The fact that 900 weavers were willing to collaborate on what

⁶⁵ This was a unit of measurement used in the textiles trades, equivalent in England to 45 inches.

⁶⁶ *Select Committee on Petitions Relating to the Act for Settling Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Manufacture: Minutes of Evidence*, HC 1802-03 (114) VIII: 28-29.

⁶⁷ Jaffe: 536; Bythell: 151.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

amounted to something like a proto-class action suit suggests an investment in and sense of ownership of the process which should not be discounted.

Unsurprisingly, the weavers made a second effort to push forward explicit wage regulation during the 1803 amendment process. Once again, they were unsuccessful, and the amendments that actually passed – re-allocating significant powers from the arbitrators to the presiding magistrates – made the law a less potent force for weavers. If the Weavers' Association ultimately lost this battle, however, this does not diminish the scale of their effort and the extent to which, for a brief period in the development of the south Lancashire cotton industry, the initiative in the developing field of industrial law belonged to them.

The weavers' successes, then, are notable enough. The relevant conclusion that arises from this material, however, is not only about the effectiveness of workers' engagement with the state – whether it was *wise* for them to pursue these tactics – but rather, about the historical fact of workers' investment in such tactics almost from the first moments of industrial urbanization proper. This was not a workforce that was content to abandon any attempt to influence state power, or which merely instinctively responded to state aggressions. Rather, the course of the weavers' effort traces a clear and sophisticated discourse about how to influence a burgeoning state power from below.

By the height of the Napoleonic wars, one can identify in the northern labour movement a coherent, adaptive discourse about the state and the future of state power, a vision that imagined a state that would aggressively regulate the labour market, ensure workers' rights in the workplace, and legitimate and protect the mutual aid infrastructures workers were autonomously developing. One can also discern an emerging set of strategies and pressure tactics to influence the state from below in order to bring this desired outcome about – and all of this *before* the

emergence of a concerted state-directed, worker-led mass political movement. This need only be a contradictory finding if one imagines state-directed discourses as existing exclusively in the formally political realm. The primary evidence shows was not the case: from its first appearance in the late 1700s, a distinctively industrial labouring community in Manchester and its surroundings thought about, strategized about, and went to work on the state, even absent a defined working people's movement.

In part, as we saw in the first pages of this chapter, this was because the expansionist, chaotic, intrusive, and as-yet unplanned state system working people encountered gave them little choice other than to do so. But it was surely also and at the same time because in certain limited yet significant contexts, working people were able to exert pressure on the state and watch it budge, however slightly. The performance of a restrained, suitably deferential respectability within the early reform movement allowed working-class radicals to hitch their wagons to upwardly mobile, ambitious elite figures like Walker and his liberal successors, opening a limited discursive space for working people to begin to participate in political activity as responsible citizens (though, of course, that status would continue to be contingent and contested). Within the labour movement, more aggressive, strategic, and coordinated efforts to influence and impact specific policies developed, from the remarkable ambitions of the weavers' movement, to the more limited strategy of Friendly Societies adapting appearances and practices in order to gain the security of state supervision.

I have thus far brought the narrative as far as the 18-noughts. After the arbitration system was weakened by the 1804 amendments, the Weavers' Association became more forceful and active in mounting their claims, just as the economics of the trade began to shift under their feet.

1808 saw a mass petitioning campaign remounted, once again demanding a minimum wage and certain controls on the trade, including a restriction on the number of apprentices. Parliament commissioned a report in response, allowing one to form a picture of the years between the first successful weavers' campaign and the end of the Napoleonic era.

That picture is unmistakably dire, showing a battered industry heavily downloading uncertainty and costs onto its workers. According to Jeremiah Bury, a Stockport manufacturer, "There was a great depression in 1803, in consequence of which wages dropped fifty per cent." Wages recovered half the distance to 1803 levels in 1805, but Napoleon's closure of continental markets in 1806 once again wrought havoc: "out of fifteen or sixteen Manufactories in Stockport eleven have failed within the last twelve months [March 1807 – March 1808]. I now speak of the Muslin Manufacturers only."⁶⁹ A Bolton manufacturer, Thomas Ainsworth, agreed:

Has the Trade, since you knew it, been subject to fluctuation in the price of goods and the wages of the Workmen? – Yes, it has.
Since what period has it been subject to the greatest fluctuation? – Within a few years, three or four; that is, it was the highest and the lowest.⁷⁰

The most detailed information came from James Atherton, a weaver, who was able to provide pricing data as far back as 1793.⁷¹ He told a story of a secular decline in wages, stretched working hours, shoddier materials, and the beginnings of an attempted exodus from the trade, causing an oversaturation of adjacent labour markets: "As many Weavers as can get off in general do, if they have been used to spade work, and those are the men that gentlemen will employ."⁷²

⁶⁹ *Report from the Committee on Petitions of several Cotton Manufacturers and Journeymen Cotton Weavers &c., Together with the Minutes of Evidence taken before The Committee*, HC 1808 (177) II: 4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 7.

⁷¹ It should be noted that "pricing" in the putting-out context is synonymous with wages.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 21-25.

In a sign of things to come, Parliament's rejection of the weavers' new demands was total and swift:

Your Committee are unanimously of Opinion, That the Proposition stated in the said Petitions, relative to the fixing a Minimum for the Price of Labour in the Cotton Manufacture, is wholly inadmissible in principle, incapable of being reduced to practice by any means which can possibly be devised, and, if practicable, would be productive of the most fatal consequences... Your Committee have thought it their duty to come to this early decision, that they might not encourage any false hopes in those whose situation demands the utmost respect, and whose acknowledged sufferings, arising from natural and political causes, can only be remedied by such changes as Your Committee anxiously hope may take place.⁷³

This time, there was to be no middle ground or judicial innovation, no polite correspondence between Bolton weavers and prime ministers: handloom weaving as a sector was losing its hold over capital and state.

If one places oneself in early 1808 and looks backward, then, one seems to be witnessing the end of a dynamic, creative, but ultimately futile attempt by working-class people to influence the state from below. Standing thus like *Angelus Novus*, however, one fails to see the storm approaching at one's back. Rather than marking the end, 1808 was to prove to be the beginning of a dramatic period of working-class investment in secular politics. On May 24, weavers gathered on St. George's Fields, a suburban open area bordering heavily working-class residential areas in the northeast of town to receive the delegates who had carried their petition to parliament. When the news arrived that their pleas had been rejected, the weavers announced they would not leave the field until they had been heard. Locally stationed cavalry were called out to drive them off, but the weavers were back in force by early the next morning. In a sign of growing political momentum, observers noted a variety of well-wishers and fellow tradespeople

⁷³ *Select Committee on Petitions from Journeymen Cotton Weavers in England and Cotton Manufacturers and Weavers in Scotland: Report*, HC 1809 (111) III: 1.

gathering on the field, causing this labour-directed action to take on the atmosphere of a mass rally.⁷⁴

Following the St. George's Field meeting, Manchester's weavers turned out *en masse* in the largest and most disciplined strike the trade had ever seen, and by the end of the year, they had secured unprecedented concessions from employers. Soon, however, dissatisfaction had spilled beyond trade-specific organizing. From this point through to Peterloo in 1819, constant working-people's agitation, both capital- and state-directed, involving mass meetings, petitions, and occasional outbreaks of insurrectionary violence were to recur regularly not just in Manchester, but across industrializing Britain. Some of the events of these years are fairly well-known: the Luddite uprisings beginning in 1812, Cartwright's 1813 tour and the first round of mass reform petitioning, the Spa Fields riots in 1816, the Blanketeers' march in 1817, the militant conspiracies which surrounded the Pentrich uprising in the same year, Peterloo in 1819, and finally the Cato Street Conspiracy, the "Radical War" in Scotland, and the Queen Caroline Affair in 1820. To this list, one could add innumerable smaller clashes, mass demonstrations, and quashed uprisings, which collectively heralded the beginning of mass working people's politics in the industrial era, as well as the first major push for British democracy.

From roughly 1810 onward, then, one no longer needs to read between the lines to discern working-people's discourses about the state. From the hectic experience of rough

⁷⁴ It is possible to construct a detailed account of this meeting, as a local cotton heir and reformer, Joseph Hanson, was prosecuted for abetting the weaver's illegal strike. He later publicized his trial in a pamphlet, preserving a number of eye-witness accounts of the gathering. In actual fact, Hanson had imposed himself on the meeting uninvited and begged the weavers to go home, even offering to pay them to leave the field; though he insulted local authorities by his actions, his primary concern had clearly been the old reformer anxiety about the working-class propensity for violence. The case bears a passing similarity to Walker's earlier prosecution, although the less politically astute Hanson seems to have exercised no influence over the workers he sought to control, and unlike Walker, Hanson lost his case and served a prison sentence. See Joseph Hanson, *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of an Indictment against Joseph Hanson, Esq: For a Conspiracy to Aid the Weavers of Manchester in Raising Their Wages, Before Mr. Justice Le Blanc* (London: T. Gillet, 1809).

government and the trials and successes of the labour movement, a strident, state-directed politics of the disenfranchised was to emerge.

Chapter Six: Democratization and the Emergence of the Politics of Makeshifts

In 1815, the Napoleonic wars ended – then restarted, then finally, four days after Waterloo, ended for good. These era-defining convolutions brought a kind of frantic hope to Manchester. On the one hand, the “continental system” which had shut British exports out of French-controlled areas in Europe was over, allowing for the reconstruction of international trade networks around the newly expanded British productive capacity. On the other hand, with only one year’s interruption (1802-3), England had been continuously at war since 1793. In the short term, the end of the war thus meant the dismantling of a wartime economy, the evaporation of troop supply contracts, and the sudden appearance in Britain of hundreds of thousands of deeply traumatized and largely unskilled young men.

It was in this volatile context that the young Scot Archibald Prentice arrived in Manchester from Glasgow. The cotton clerk had previously been employed in the traditional mode of outwork-era textile companies, travelling to market nodes to make contacts for his firm. Prentice’s particular insight, however, was to perceive that this old, diffuse mode of doing business was quickly becoming anachronistic:

In Manchester I found that I met in the street, in one day, more country drapers than I could, with the utmost industry, meet in their own shops in two, and it struck me that if we kept our manufactured stock in Manchester we could considerably increase our business, and at a great saving in travelling expenses. One evening in September, 1815, while sitting with my master at his house, I mentioned the concourse of drapers to Manchester, and expressed my conviction that, if there were to be a continuance of peace, that town would become so much the market for all kinds of goods, in cotton, woollens, linen, and silk, as to attract every respectable country draper in England several times in the year. The subject was long and earnestly discussed between us.

Prentice won the debate, and within 24 hours was on the road south to Manchester. Soon the firm transferred its entire stock to a warehouse Prentice had leased at 1 Peel Street. Managing the new strategy meant taking on an unusual amount of responsibility at 23 years old, but as Prentice later

recorded quite frankly in his memoirs, there was not an unmanageable amount of actual work to be done in firms such as his: “I made a point of pushing on work in the early part of the day, so that I had the evenings to myself”.¹ Furnished with a substantial income and time to spare, Prentice dove into the world of liberal reform politics in Manchester, the project which was to become his true calling.

What makes Prentice’s *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections* an interesting source for evaluating working-class approaches to state power is that soon after Prentice became involved in Manchester politics, he began to record a marked divergence of paths between elite and popular reform. After the passage of the Corn Laws in 1815, educated activists like Prentice quickly made free trade their central issue. In Prentice’s own account, the major organizational triumph for free traders in these early years, a meeting at the Prince Regent’s Arms in Ancoats, brought out a grand total of 37 people. Within a couple years of the peace, however, agitations over poverty and representation were garnering widespread support, and giving rise to tactics which well exceeded the bounds of moderate, middle-class reformers’ comfort. In Prentice’s telling, “Towards the close of 1816, the people, disappointed in their expectations that prosperity and plenty would follow in the train of peace, and having no faith in a legislature which, the moment the war was terminated, had inflicted the corn law, demanded a better representation in parliament.” Gone were the days in which educated Cross Street Unitarians defined the representation issue. Though a liberal who placed himself explicitly in the lineage of Walker and Battye, Prentice found the popular agitation at best sad but understandable, at worst disturbing. Riots began in the countryside and soon spread to the towns – as Prentice lamented, “A bad example is catching.” Meanwhile, workers began to organize themselves into radical groups

¹ Prentice: 66-7.

espousing democratic principles. Prentice tentatively welcomed this discipline, but primarily as a containment strategy: “anarchy was averted by the direction of the mind of the oppressed to the remediable measure”.² By the late 1810s, middle-class moderates like Prentice clearly found themselves adjacent to, rather than placed above an active, energized working-class rank and file.

After the more diffuse state discourse that was the focus of the previous chapter, this radical decade – particularly the tumult of its latter years – must mark something of a watershed in this account: the origin of an autonomous, explicitly political strategy on the part of the disenfranchised. This is not to say that “rough government” evaporated in these years – far from it – nor that the labour movement abandoned its sectional concerns. Still, this period saw the beginnings of a working-class political ethic which specifically contested – albeit to a limited extent – the legitimacy of existing state infrastructures, and put forward a working-class vision in their stead. While Paineite in origin, a radical willingness to flout the law, or even deny its status *as* law, was now given regular, practical application in the Manchester area, seemingly with widespread endorsement from movement partisans. Since this was a movement of the disenfranchised, this comfort with illegality was presumably a necessary step – in a very real sense, the movement contravened the law just by being. At the same time, the movement’s radicalism floated discordantly alongside a more traditionalist constitutional language, one clearly adopted from the Enlightened radicalism of the late eighteenth century. While one surviving Peterloo banner proclaims “LIBERTY OR DEATH”, another anxiously warns, “HOLD TO THE LAW.”

² Ibid.: 86-87.

This strategic ambiguity leaves historians with something of a challenge when seeking to capture the working-class democratic movement's essence. Liberal commentators, following the moderate tradition of early recorders like Prentice, have typically siloed the two strategies – constitutionalist and insurrectionary – into different compartments and denigrated the significance of the latter. When assessing the radical 1810s, one must insist upon the futility of this taxonomizing: there were not two movements, one violent and one pacifist, but a single, heterogenous movement capable of embodying both characters.

At times, to be sure, the authorities wildly overestimated the level of insurrectionary organizing, thus perhaps fostering the notion that radicalism was nothing more than an authoritarian's fantasy. Such was certainly the case in the spring of 1817 when a panic spread about an intended rising in Manchester. From the Salford Sessions bench, chairman W.R. Hay warned that "purposes of the blackest enormity must be disclosed to the public".³ A dozen men, including Samuel Bamford, were arrested on a spy's information, then carted off to London to – unbelievably – be interrogated repeatedly and in person by Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, the Secretary of State, and Sir Samuel Shepherd, the Attorney General.⁴ By the end of the summer, the authorities had released Bamford and his companions and dropped all charges against them.

The absurdity of such moments, however, can be a distraction – indeed, in the case of Bamford's memoirs, it was arguably deliberately used as such, fostering the impression that any hints of radical violence stemmed from the paranoid delusions of gullible conservatives. In fact,

³ Prentice.: 96.

⁴ Bamford claimed to have begun his first interview by saying to Sidmouth, "My Lord, having been brought from home without a change of linen, I wish to be informed how I shall be provided for in that respect until I can be supplied from home." The three ministers therefore conferred amongst themselves on the subject of a country weaver's underwear, and responded that Bamford "should be supplied with whatever was necessary." See Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*: 107.

Bamford himself was by his own account no lily-white pacifist. In January of 1819, for example, the celebrity speaker Henry Hunt was beaten by some cavalry officers at the Royal Theatre during a visit to Manchester, and a number of locals decided to retaliate at a subsequent performance. Even in his later years, Bamford clearly relished the moment:

About five o'clock on the afternoon of the day appointed,- it was, I think, on the Monday following,- a gang of ten rough-looking country fellows attracted some notice as they passed through several of the streets of Manchester. Their appearance was somewhat remarkable, even for countrymen. Their dress was of the readiest, fit for "donning and doffing," their hats were mostly beyond damage by warfare,- their shirt collars, clean and white, were thrown open,- some wore their breeches unbuttoned at the knees, as the Irish do,- some tramped in heavy clogs, rimmed with iron,- others wore strong shoes, with clinker nails grinning like a rasp of shark's teeth; all bore stout cudgels of greater length or weight... This party consisted of myself, and nine picked men of my acquaintance, from Middleton.⁵

In the event, Hunt decided against forcing his way into the theatre, and the Middleton men went home disappointed. Still, this was clearly a movement willing to countenance extra-judicial action and justified violence. The seamless passage of Bamford as a leadership figure from the head of one strategic arm of the movement – its violent and combative side – to the other – its peaceful, constitutionalist side – is instructive. It suggests that historians have been remiss in seeking to portray either constitutionalism or insurrection as the essence of working-class political strategy; rather, the movement was at its core Janus-faced, capable of deploying seemingly contradictory strategies in an adaptable carrot-and-stick effort to influence power from below.⁶

⁵ Ibid.: 170-1.

⁶ Bamford's own autobiography – and its prevalence as a Peterloo source – has muddied the waters here, as the older, more conservative Bamford narrated his own actions as perfectly consistent, repeatedly arguing that street fighting and nighttime drilling were no more illegal than mass public meetings. This claim was repeated, though perhaps in a quieter tone, by figures like Prentice who depended on Bamford's text and found Bamford a convenient ally. Nonetheless, it was, to put it mildly, an audacious claim: legal opinions from the time were unanimous about the illegality of these activities, and the mere fact of nighttime drilling was cited as a sufficient cause for declaring radical meetings illegal. At a simpler level, one is entitled to question what, if the vote was to be won entirely through peaceful means, the military drilling using sticks as dummy rifles was *for*.

A number of the popular actions of the late 1810s – the Blanketeers march, the strike waves of 1818, the February 1819 clashes in Stockport – would afford solid examples of the twinned constitutionalism and latent threat of violence employed by the era’s radicalized reformers. The most significant iteration of the movement’s duality, however, was the capstone event of this period, the St. Peter’s Field mass meeting of August 16, 1819. The constitutional, moderate side of Peterloo is well-known, and what happened on St. Peter’s Field itself was fairly simple: after the marchers had gathered, the authorities made an inaudible announcement that the meeting had been deemed illegal, and either from incompetence or a desire to provoke, sent a contingent of yeomanry to arrest the platform party just as the speeches began. Some kind of ruckus began as they pushed toward the platform and the yeomanry began to attack the crowd with sabres, causing panic; the belated arrival of other cavalry contingents blocked most of the points of egress, and dozens of fleeing marchers were trampled while the yeomanry ran amok among them in a kind of proto-police riot. Even if the marchers did seek to defend themselves or provoked the cavalry with sticks and stones, the authorities outgunned the marchers by any reasonable metric, and the prolonged attack on a panicked retreat certainly merits the one-sided term “massacre”.⁷

⁷ The primary material relating to Peterloo is too extensive to gloss in a footnote (various fragments are cited below), but the two most significant eyewitness accounts are Bamford: 196-217, and John Edward Taylor, *Notes and Observations, Critical and Explanatory, on the Papers Relative to the Internal State of the Country, Recently Presented to Parliament* (London: E. Wilson, 1820). The gamut of the modern historiography of Peterloo generally aligns with the picture presented here, despite disagreements over the moral point of who was to blame for the massacre, which need not detain us here – see Reginald James White, *Waterloo to Peterloo* (London: Heinemann, 1957); Donald Read, *Peterloo: The “Massacre” and Its Background* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958); Robert Walmsley, *Peterloo: The Case Reopened* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969); Joyce Marlow, *The Peterloo Massacre* (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969); Robert William Reid, *The Peterloo Massacre* (London: Heinemann, 1989); Jacqueline Riding, *Peterloo: The Story of the Manchester Massacre* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018); Robert Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising*. Poole’s magnum opus, timed to be published with the bicentenary of the massacre, essentially summarizes what there is to know about the event itself and will likely remain the standard reference for some time to come.

Still, the mythology of martyrdom which moderates sought to foster after the fact can obscure the actual tactics employed by radicals in August 1819. What's more, the hysterical tone of the authorities' accounts of the meeting – generally the most detailed sources on reformer violence – have led many historians to discount these sources entirely, including details which seem quite likely to be true. For example, in a statement written in the hours after the bloodshed, the leader of the Manchester Yeomanry protested,

It may perhaps not be thought befitting the Yeomanry Corps to enter into any political discussion on this occasion nor have they any wish to do so, but it must be recollected as they were Inhabitants of the Town and Neighbourhood of Manchester it was impossible for them not to know something of the pains which had been taken to exasperate the minds of a great majority of those who were then assembled, against the existing government of the country and the persons acting under its authority. It was impossible for them not to know that clandestine military training to a great extent had taken place in the surrounding country and that the chief part of the mob consisted of persons who had come to the place of meeting from distant places in large bodies marching in regular Order and Military steps and obeying words of command, bearing Caps of Liberty and Banners with threatening inscriptions and many of them armed with sticks and bludgeons.⁸

Whether or not the historian can empathize with the sentiment, the accuracy of this statement is hard to impeach. Military-style drilling *had* been going on for months, led by the very same figures who had organized the St. Peter's Field meeting. Given prior shows of force like Bamford's parade outside the Royal Theatre in January of the same year, the assumption the Peterloo marchers would be armed was in fact a reasonable one, based on concrete experience. Indeed, Bamford himself had advocated arming the August 16 marchers with clubs, though he later claimed to have been overruled.⁹ It does not seem at all unlikely that many attendees quietly ignored their leaders' commands to disarm.

⁸ "Narrative of those parts of the transaction which took place at the Public Meeting in Manchester on the 16th of August last in which the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry were personally concerned," UMA: MS 1197/26: 3.

⁹ Bamford: 197.

The real insurrectionary heat of the late 1810s, however, became most palpable in the hours and days *after* the massacre. Even as the violence on the field was subsiding, dozens of marchers succeeded in breaking into the walled grounds of the Friends Meeting House and fought back as best they could using stones and bricks they found there. An eyewitness account survives from the Hussar William Joliffe, who witnessed this small act of resistance:

The mob had taken possession of various buildings on that side, particularly of a Quakers' chapel and burial ground enclosed with a wall. This they occupied for some little time, and in attempting to displace them, some of the men and horses were struck with stones and brickbats. I was on the left, and as soon as I had passed completely over the ground and found myself in the street on the other side, I turned back, and then, seeing a sort of fight still going on on the right, I went in that direction. At the very moment I reached the Quakers' meeting-house, I saw a farrier of the 15th ride at a small door in the outer wall, and to my surprise his horse struck it with such force that it flew open. Two or three Hussars then rode in, and the place was immediately in their possession.¹⁰

Street fights between marchers and yeomen continued for an hour or two in the narrow, commercial streets around the field before the marchers fell back, receding from the city centre into the working-class residential areas and outlying weaving villages they had come from.

As night fell, acts of retributory violence broke out all across southern Lancashire. The "New Cross" – a stone marker and open area at the intersection of Oldham and Swan Streets – marked the centre of working-class life in Manchester at the time, and by evening, hundreds of radicals and troops had gravitated there expecting a fight. Robert Mutrie, a special constable who remained on duty throughout the massacre and for hours afterward, gave an eyewitness account of what transpired in a letter to his brother:

... if you look at your map you will find that the most notorious part of the Town New Cross is in your neighbourhood – well on this delightful station I took my place – we charged and cleared the streets 50 times without using either swords or guns, but all to no purpose for the people came out again as soon as we retreated to the Cross.

The officer, Capt. Booth who commanded the troop of the 15th after we had been exposed to the pelting of stones for an hour or two got into the most furious passion and

¹⁰ *Three Accounts of Peterloo*, edited by F.A. Bruton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1921): 54.

swore to Mr. Norris if he did not immediately read the riot act he would order his men to their quarters.

Mr. Norris was very averse that we should commence hostilities and with great reluctance gave his consent that it should be read. The moment it was read Capt. B. ordered the Infantry officer to form a hollow square in the centre of the Cross, we all took shelter in the square when the word was given to fire in all directions – the square then opened and the horse charged every way upon the crowd – my mare grew quite mad and carried me over the back of many a poor Devil. – two people were shot in the first charge just opposite my room window. You may be sure I was (as well as my Mare) very thankful to get relieved at 3 o'clock in the morning.¹¹

Similar clashes continued throughout the night, adding to the dead and the wounded. In most accounts these fights are placed in a principally moral frame, the understandable lashing-out of an outraged populace. Though it might have been understandable, however, this violence was not quite spontaneous in the usual sense: radicals used a familiar urban geography to their advantage, and maintained sufficient organization to mount a successful resistance to armed and trained troops on horsebacks several times over.

In the villages around Manchester, acts of violence or intimidation took place which showed militant enthusiasm and preparations more clearly. John Tyas, who reported on the day's events for the *Times*, was briefly arrested with the platform party, then released on the seventeenth to make his way down to London. His account of his journey south describes a pattern of widespread, organized militancy:

On arriving [in Macclesfield], our horses were seized by some special constables and we were advised not to proceed further up the town, if we had any regard whatsoever for our lives. Of course we took their advice, and turned our horses into a yard, as they desired us. On enquiring into the cause of the anxiety which was depicted in all their faces, they informed us that the Reformers in their neighbourhood, irritated at the defeat which they had sustained at Manchester the day before, had assembled in a body of two or three thousand men, and had been committing the most abominable acts of violence in different quarters of the town. In the market-place they had broken every window which looked into it, and in various other places had done similar acts of atrocity. They were emboldened in their villainy by the knowledge that there were only a few military men in the town, and that in the custody of these men, were 300 stand of arms, and several thousand rounds of ball cartridge...

¹¹ Printed in Philip Lawson, "Reassessing Peterloo," *History Today* 38.3: 26.

Whilst this scene was transacting in Macclesfield, it was said that bonfires had been lighted on the hills which surrounded it, and it was surmised that these served as signals to the disaffected. The first lighted was on Blakeney-hill; this was answered by similar fires on all the hills, from thence up to Northern Laney, there it stopped; but at another signal, fire-rockets were thrown up from it.—Whether there was any meaning in these fires or not we are unable to say; but shortly after they appeared, the people resumed their attacks, having first taken the precaution to extinguish all the gas-lights in the town.

For a small community like Macclesfield, the numbers and discipline involved were no less impressive than those displayed at the march down to the meeting a couple days earlier. Tyas also suspected that he had witnessed pub meetings being called earlier in the evening at Stockport to organize similar attacks: “A new hat, a tea-kettle, and some other articles of little value, were displayed at the window, as is customary to display the prizes given at wakes or feasts in this part of the country. This was to serve as a pretext for their meeting together...”¹² Whatever he had seen, clashes continued for days afterward, instigated by both sides.

A Politics of Makeshifts

Making sense of working people’s politics in these combative, radical years, then, provides something of an analytical challenge: was this essentially a law-abiding, constitutionalist agitation troubled by a few bad apples, or was it a fundamentally radical movement that on strategic occasions chose to hide its fangs? The question is not a trivial one: it forces one to characterize the nature of autonomous working-class political activism at the moment of its origin.

The root conundrum, I would suggest, is not actually the opacity of the primary material, but the frameworks that have been applied to it: commentators have assumed that some essential

¹² *Peterloo Massacre* (Manchester: James Wroe, 1819): 8-9. This book-length pamphlet is attributed to “An Observer”, a play on the name of James Wroe’s short-lived radical paper; the original text within is generally attributed to Wroe himself.

core of the workers must have been either intrinsically loyal or latently revolutionary. This tendency to argue over the “real” character of working-class radicalism began almost immediately after the massacre. The *Observer*’s James Wroe bitterly mocked John Tyas’ account, quoted above, for overestimating the danger Tyas had actually been in:

...as [Tyas] has not favoured us with an account of the ‘hair breadth’ ‘scapes’ which he encountered in the remainder of his travels to the city of refuge, we must presume that the *new hats*, and *tea-kettles* (dreadful emblems of civil commotion) were more terrible to his affrighted imagination than the *newly-sharpened* swords of the Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry.¹³

Importantly, the suggestion here was not that the hats and kettles were *not* signs of a meeting – at the very least, the gathering defied the magistrate’s order that all pubs close. Rather, the jibe was intended as a moral point: it was perverse for Tyas to express dismay at the restrained tactics radicals used mere days after the authorities had unleashed a massacre. In this comment, one can see how the moral narrative placed upon the massacre by sympathetic outsiders – that it was an unprovoked and inexcusable act of aggression – occluded the more complex nature of working-class political organizing at the time.

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that political organizing must necessarily reflect in some degree the state structures which are its object. Along those lines, in his work *No Other Way Out*, the sociologist Jeffrey Goodwin offered the following comment:

[I] want to challenge the tendency among some scholars to view revolutionary movements as the products of rapid social change, intense grievances or poverty, certain class structures or land-tenure systems, economic dependence, imperialist domination, the actions of vanguard parties, etc., or some combination of these factors, abstracted from the political context in which all of these factors are embedded... I want to suggest, instead, that a close examination of states as a reality *sui generis*, to use Emile Durkheim’s expression, is crucial for understanding the formation and fate of revolutionary movements. Political context is not simply one more variable to be examined by the conscientious scholar of revolutions (on the order, for example, of educational attainment or median income), but a ‘force field’ that mediates and powerfully refracts the effects of a wide range of factors that typically impinge upon the

¹³ Ibid: 9.

development and trajectory of revolutionary movements. Political context, in short, is not the only factor that explains the formation and fate of revolutionary movements, but it is generally the most important factor.¹⁴

Goodwin was interested in a fundamentally binary and categorical question – whether or not particular political contexts generate truly “revolutionary” movements. While intermittently insurrectionary, the British industrial workforce of the 1810s clearly never generated a coherent revolutionary vision. Still, if we retain the core of this observation while setting this binary inquiry to one side, we might begin to formulate a sensitive approach to complex quasi-insurrectionary situations like that which Manchester experienced in the late 1810s.

The political context faced by Manchester’s working poor was uncertain and paradoxical. At the local level, the oppression working people faced via “rough government” was at once constant, untenable, and incoherent. Meanwhile, the national political scene remained essentially a world apart from the strange little ecosystem that had developed in Manchester. When Sidmouth sat across from Bamford in 1817, it is difficult to imagine two more different personal experiences that could have been found in the British Isles to confront one another. Even William Joliffe – later Lord Hylton – who participated in the cavalry charge at Peterloo could not claim to really understand the people he was tasked with containing:

This was my first acquaintance with a large manufacturing population. I had little knowledge of the condition of that population, whether or no a great degree of distress was then prevalent, or whether or no the distrust and bad feeling which appeared to exist between employers and employed, was wholly or in part caused by the agitation of political questions. I will not, therefore, enter into any speculation on these points...¹⁵

This still-dominant world of landed power remained a world apart from the comparatively small industrial population in the north. It had its own inequalities and its own insurrectionaries, to be

¹⁴ Jeffrey Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 30-31.

¹⁵ *Three Accounts*: 48-49.

sure – agrarian uprisings remained endemic to the British rural economy for years after Peterloo.¹⁶ These struggles, however, remained distinct from those of the handloom weavers on Manchester’s outskirts, the spinners in Manchester’s factories, or the great swarms of casual labourers and navvies who clogged Manchester’s streets each morning, eking out the last crumbs of the industrial wage economy.

All of which is to reaffirm that if one properly considers the context for working people’s politics in early nineteenth century Manchester and its surroundings, one is not led to expect a unified, coherent, political program, as any such program would have failed to live up to the complexity of the moment. What’s more – and here, I think, is where other accounts have run aground – one is certainly not led to expect the confident, earnest, good-faith political discourses of enfranchised populations whose rights are assured. One must be cautious not to apply to early industrial Britain a sociopolitical analysis appropriate to a liberal, democratic society. This was emphatically not such a society: rather, it was a fantastically unequal culture governed by an authoritarian, anti-democratic state structure which systematically disenfranchised a majority of the population it governed. For both rulers and ruled, this set of circumstances curtailed the viability of certain strategies and viewpoints, while increasing a dependency on others. In short, one cannot expect Britain’s early industrial workers to behave like twentieth or twenty-first-century liberal-democratic subjects.

For this reason, in characterizing the early politics of working people in the early industrial era, I would repurpose the “economy of makeshifts” framework mentioned earlier, and

¹⁶ See, for instance, the scholarship on the “Captain Swing” uprising of 1830: Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (New York: Norton, 1975); Carl J. Griffin, *The Rural War: Captain Swing and the Politics of Protest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Mike Matthews, *Captain Swing in Sussex & Kent: Rural Rebellion in 1830* (Hastings: Hastings Press, 2006).

argue that working people made use of a “politics of makeshifts” to further their collective goals.¹⁷ Just as flexibility and creativity were essential strategies for navigating a condition of economic disempowerment, the brute facts of disenfranchisement, rough government’s chaotic interventionism, and the structural difficulty of building political alliances in a precocious economic microclimate prompted a strategic adaptability as a characteristic feature of working-class ideology. Workers responded to a situation of exclusion and strain with a diversity of opportunistic tactics, all nonetheless united in an effort to change working people’s experience of governance for the better. It is not the case, of course, that there was a perfect, integrated unity to working-class political action in these years, or even that different organizations and strategies did not at times compete with or confront one another. Still, it is important to appreciate that there was a certain cynicism and premeditation in the differing poses workers adopted toward legitimate authority, allowing for cross-pollination between seemingly mutually exclusive strategies, and the doffing of one political hat to don another when expedient. Working people’s politics are often caricatured as raw, emotive and primeval: to understand the politics of makeshifts, one must be willing to accord working people *strategy*.

This strategic politics of makeshifts doubtless had its origin in the adaptive personality-splitting of the labour movement portrayed in the previous chapter. Witness the apparent earnestness, for example, of the 1795 “Articles, rules, orders, and regulations, made, and to be observed, by and between the members of the Friendly Associated Mule Cotton Spinners, within the township of Stockport, in the County of Chester,” one of the earliest formal Friendly Society

¹⁷ Nicholas Terpstra has repurposed the same phrase in the same manner in *Cultures of Charity: Women, Politics, and the Reform of Poor Relief in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013). Other than making the same pun on Hufton’s phrase, however, Terpstra’s usage of the term is unrelated to my own.

registrations. On the surface, the articles were not just respectable and law-abiding, but stridently anti-union:

XXV. That if any person or persons belonging to the said society, shall assault or abuse any master, or other person employed as foreman, or manager in the business of Cotton Spinning, or shall do any willful or voluntary damage to their houses, buildings, or property, on any pretence whatsoever, *or shall combine together to raise the price of their wages, contrary to law...* each person or persons shall be immediately expelled this society, and not partake of the advantages hereby intended, for the encouragement of sobriety, industry, and peaceable behaviour.¹⁸ [emphasis added]

In actual fact, of course, the friendly societies of the northern towns were the bankers and patrons of the fighting wing of the labour movement; of the spinners' societies specifically, Bohstedt believed that "there is no doubt that the spinners' [friendly] societies were at the core of their successful militancy."¹⁹ Disavowals like Stockport's article 25 – of which only a fragment is quoted above – are thus not evidence of popular conservatism, but rather an impressive critical distance from and ability to wield disingenuously "official" discourses around labour.

More direct evidence of the breadth of the politics of makeshifts can be found in the tactics of the 1808 weaving strike itself. From 1799 through 1808, save the odd anonymous threat, the Weavers' Association had shown immense discipline and collective commitment to diplomacy: outbreaks of violence were rare enough that magistrates and even national politicians like Pitt were willing to treat with weavers' representatives at length and even grant them concessions. Once this tactic had failed, however, and the more brute realities of imposing strike discipline on a dispersed, home-based workforce presented themselves, the same organizational structure flew into form as an aggressive fighting union:

¹⁸ *Articles, Rules, Orders, and Regulations, made, and to be observed, by and between the members of the Friendly Associated Mule Cotton Spinners, within the township of Stockport, in the County of Chester* (Stockport: 1795): 15. These are some of the earliest labour movement documents we have in the original, appearing only two years after the state extended legal protections to Friendly Societies. These bylaws were "confirmed and allowed at the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, held for the said County, at the Castle of Chester, this 12th day of January, 1796," thereby securing their preservation.

¹⁹ Bohstedt: 134.

...the strike was enforced covertly – by threats and handbills posted on walls, and by small flying squads of strikers who rushed into shops to take the shuttles from those they found at work before the patrols could catch them. In many cases, the work of non-striking weavers was destroyed by ‘utter strangers.’²⁰

It is, perhaps, reasonable to suppose that the personnel of the “flying squads” was different from the respectable delegations who had corresponded with the magistrates, and may even have represented an opposite pole of the movement. The point is that the same movement nurtured and kept alive both poles, reproducing them over decades, and, indeed, at various points made successful use of each. A politics of makeshifts could not afford to jettison either strategy entirely.

Given this history, it is unsurprising to find a politics of makeshifts saturating the radical agitations of the 1810s. The ambiguity around the pacific nature of the movement is most memorably emblemized by the midnight-marching that activists engaged in in the hills around the weaving towns. Years later, Samuel Bamford, having organized such military-style training in Middleton, felt a clear need to defend it in his autobiography:

There was not any arms, - no use for any, - no pretence for any; - nor would they have been permitted. Some of the elderly men, the old soldiers, or those who came to watch, might bring a walking staff; or a young fellow might pull a stake from a hedge, in going to drill, or in returning home; but assuredly, we had nothing like arms about us. There were no armed meetings. – there were no midnight drillings. Why should we seek to conceal what we had no hesitation in performing in broad day? There was not anything of the sort.²¹

Historians have been rather credulous about this insistence that organizers believed this drilling would be construed as totally loyal and pacific. Poole, in an article entitled “The March to Peterloo”, has noted the importance of pageantry and display to working people’s collective life in the north; his suggestion that northern working people naturally expressed their politics

²⁰ Ibid.: 153.

²¹ Bamford: 179.

through this festive language is well taken.²² Still, one must not forget the obvious. First of all, Lancashire's weavers had by this point listened to decades of tirades by magistrates and reverends about the dangers of publicly assembling; similarly, in each encounter with well-meaning elite radicals like Walker, they were anxiously informed that any autonomous working-class collective action was sure to be misconstrued. The notion that they were shocked that nighttime drilling was construed as militarist – even when they were aware spies were being sent to observe them – seems intrinsically unlikely. Secondly, whatever the festive accents, drilling *was* military in origin and nature. Bamford acknowledges as much when he notes that “Our drill masters were generally old soldiers of the line, or of militia, or local militia regiments”, and that these men taught the workers “to march with a steadiness and regularity which would not have disgraced a regiment on parade.” Drilling in Napoleonic-era armies was not pageantry, but a core strategic component of contemporary military practices.²³ The associations were not subtle or ambiguous to anyone who witnessed them: drilling on the moors was an unmistakable (and unmistakable) act of intimidation, whatever its constitutionalist overtones.

Rather, however, than seeing this toying with militarism the way it was caricatured at the time – as evidence of an innate wildness or bloodlust in popular politics – one should grant radicals like Bamford an element of strategy, of cynicism. Much of the gentility and docility which is now ascribed to the radical movement is an artifact of post-Peterloo discourses, a sanitized picture of the honest northern radical which served a contingent propagandistic interest.

²² Poole, “The March to Peterloo”: 123.

²³ In a time when formal infantry drilling is associated primarily with pageantry and ceremony, it is easy to underestimate this importance. The basic Napoleonic-era military tactic was to march a large group of men several kilometres in plain view to within 200 yards of the opponents' army, then to have them all fire together – a maddeningly terrifying procedure that required the men performing it to be so rehearsed as to be able to overcome powerful instincts. See Brent Nosworthy's evocative description in *Battle Tactics of Napoleon and His Enemies* (London: Constable, 1995): 39-44; also Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

In the 1810s, however, proletarian radicals were much more willing to call up the spectre of violence. Middle-class anxieties about working-class violence, after all, while they foreclosed dialogue between workers and the world of wealth, offered radical strategists a pressure point to lean on. A performance of respectability could be used to calm nerves, to win a seat at the table. Yet the merest hints of anger, of intimidation could go a long way toward awakening the middle class's worst fears about what the working poor could do when they were frustrated.

Goals and effects

This politics of makeshifts was determined by circumstance, and was thus necessarily fractious, opportunistic, and seemingly inconsistent. It certainly did not resemble the emerging middle-class pattern of the disciplined, bureaucratic party movement with a defined platform and a designated hierarchy of leadership – an appropriate strategy for a partially enfranchised population making a bid for inclusion in existing power structures. By the politics of makeshifts, I also mean to suggest something more diffuse than E.P. Thompson's model, in *The Making of the English Working Class*, of a radical, vanguardist underground acting within a less politicized mass population. While there were doubtless more and less committed working-class politicians, I am referring here to patterns of working-people's collective politics as a whole, patterns which expressed themselves not just in the deliberate strategies of leadership groups, but also in the quasi-spontaneous involvement of hundreds of thousands of marchers, rioters, and strikers across the years.

Still, if the politics of makeshifts was not unitary, it did demonstrate some clear cohesion to justify treating it as a discrete phenomenon. I am suggesting that it reflected the existence of a broad discourse, an ongoing conversation within working communities about how to effect

social change. For one thing, throughout the early industrial period, across both labour organizing and political radicalism, one can discern a distinctive set of working people's strategies for influencing the state. Broadly speaking, I notice a few generic forms these strategies took: first, blunt resistance or violence (the spinners' strikes, Luddism, etc.); secondly, the construction of systems of social solidarity outside of the legal realm, but nonetheless governed by regulation and bureaucratization (friendly societies, arbitration); third, a technique of flattering and seducing state managers into moving in desirable directions (constitutional radicalism, peaceful union lobbying). These happened synchronically, with different tendencies being adopted across different occasions and places. But the patterns recur, and at times one can even witness particular movements or individuals shifting between them, indicating the existence of a strategic discourse, the specific language of which one can now only infer.

Secondly, while short-term or immediate goals were diverse, working people's political actions tended to push state development in two clear directions: a rights-based, un-means tested approach to the mitigation of poverty – what one might call a practice of social generosity – and a universal right to participation, or, more simply put, democracy. The former of these principles I have already explored in some detail. Calls for relief for industrial workers and a restructuring of Poor Law provisions were dominant notes in every working-class movement of the industrial period. It is, of course, true that nothing like a twentieth-century welfare state was yet imaginable; nonetheless, from an early date working people sought a legal, official existence for the systems which they had innovated on their own. By the time of Peterloo, registered Friendly Societies had rendered access to limited health insurance, unemployment insurance, and funeral coverage a fairly normalized, class-constitutive experience in the working-class north. Importantly, this ethic of social generosity rarely celebrated or called for the expansion of

existing poor law and workhouse provisions – it is in this period, of course, that the workhouse gained the moniker of “Bastille”. Social generosity was a communalist ethic with indigenously popular roots, which existed uncomfortably or antagonistically alongside existing state provisioning.

The origins of the essential working-class value of democratization, on the other hand, deserves more comment; most of all, it is necessary to be precise about what is meant by “democracy”. The complex and not always mutually complementary discourses around the origins of democracy were already broached in Chapter Three. In a number of intellectual traditions, democracy has been taken to be the product of liberalism, a strong civil society, and the rise of the middle classes. These narratives, however – which generally mean by “democracy” the Western parliamentary, constitutional system – generally avoid the question of the origin of the democratic ethos: the notion that the right to political participation is universal and inalienable for each member of the collective, rather than being a privilege either earned or inherited.

In 1992, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber, and John D. Stephens collaborated on *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, the most thorough study of class dynamics and democratization to date. They took a more pragmatic view of democratic inclusion. As the three authors wrote: “Our most basic premise is that democracy is above all a matter of power.”²⁴ Generally speaking, they argued, social classes in all societies have striven for the betterment of their own social position, and have, when feasible, sought to use state power to their own advantage. Those seeking the widest franchise, then, have been those with the largest numbers but the least legitimate power. Using the largest survey of democratization processes ever

²⁴ Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 5.

undertaken up to that point, and supplementing it with qualitative case studies, they came to a striking conclusion:

The centrality of class power to the process of democratization was repeatedly confirmed in the comparative studies... The organized working class appeared as a key actor in the development of full democracy almost everywhere, the only exception being the few cases of agrarian democracy in some of the small-holding countries. In most cases, organized workers played an important role in the development of restricted democracy as well.²⁵

Democratization, it is suggested, is at root a pragmatic bid for power and autonomy by disenfranchised social classes. The definition here does not hinge on the fulfillment of a particular constitutional arrangement, referring instead to a maximalist approach to the question of the right to political participation.

This more pragmatic, less value-laden approach has a clear utility in disentangling the fraught discourses about representation in the early industrial sphere. The sense of justice which mobilized bourgeois reformers was, in broad terms, a meritocratic one – they argued most firmly and consistently that the disenfranchised northern burghers, and a variable portion of the respectable working classes, *deserved* the vote. On the other hand, in the chaotic, spontaneous politics of the mass meeting or the fighting union, the right of all to participate was a foundational belief, the political point of departure. This is not to say that certain working-class leaders did not embrace a meritocratic ideal, but rather that the notion of universal participation clearly circulated in proletarian circles to a degree which simply was not the case elsewhere, an inheritance from the generalized egalitarian principles of the underclasses.

The contribution of the 1810s popular radical movement was to concretize this tendency into a formal, organized demand for a democratized British state. In this regard, the movement arguably reached its full maturity on a quite specific date: January 22, 1817. On this day,

²⁵ Ibid.: 270.

delegates of radical “Hampden Clubs”²⁶ from around the country met in London at the Crown and Anchor Inn to determine the contents of a reform petition that they planned to have MPs Francis Burdett or Thomas Cochrane present to parliament. Robert Poole, in *Peterloo*, has pieced together a fairly detailed account of the gathering from attendees’ memoirs and contemporary media coverage. As Poole makes clear, the meeting was more than administrative in nature; in carefully following an established set of guidelines for selecting delegates and observing strict procedure, “The implication was that the meeting was more representative of the people than the House of Commons.”²⁷

Prior to the gathering, word spread that the meeting would petition parliament for universal suffrage for the first time. Reform’s elite moderates were embarrassed by this proposal, many of them having spent decades assuring themselves and their peers that full democracy was not the logical conclusion of the Reform ideal. As Poole writes, “Having learnt that the demand was now for universal suffrage, Burdett had informed [speaker] Cartwright that he would not support anything beyond direct taxpayer suffrage and left for Leicestershire to go hunting.”²⁸ A nervous Cartwright was forced to deliver the news of this abandonment to a shocked meeting; he followed this up with the awkward notice that the London Hampden Club had refused to endorse the petition as a body. The initiative at this point shifted to lower-class organizers who had come in from the provinces, who promptly struck all mention of Hampden Clubs from the meeting’s

²⁶ The Hampden Club saga provides an interesting illustration of metropolitan/provincial dynamics within French-war era radicalism. The original Hampden Club was formed in London in 1811, and was marked from the beginning by a moderate tendency and quest for respectability; see Naomi C. Miller, “Major John Cartwright and the Founding of the Hampden Club,” *The Historical Journal* 17.3 (1974): 615–19. The model soon proliferated elsewhere in Britain, though the provincial clubs exhibited a strong tendency toward proletarian radicalism; see Bamford: 6–13; A. Temple Patterson, “Luddism, Hampden Clubs, and Trade Unions in Leicestershire, 1816–17,” *The English Historical Review* 63.247 (1948): 170–88. Ironically, by 1817 the namesake club had become an unrepresentative iteration of the movement as a whole.

²⁷ See Poole, *Peterloo*: 105–111.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 105.

proceedings. Henry Hunt mounted a vociferous defence of universal suffrage, which William Cobbett tried unsuccessfully to diffuse with pragmatic arguments about the difficulty of registering voters. It was, apparently, Samuel Bamford – there as a delegate for Middleton – who pushed the meeting over the edge, by making his first public intervention on a national stage to point out the existing militia rolls could serve as an electoral register. Cobbett threw in the towel. According to Hunt, “Cobbett plainly saw that his motion would be lost by a large majority, and he had the policy not to press it to a division. I, however, insisted upon having the question put, and it was carried in favour of Universal Suffrage by a majority of twenty to one.”²⁹ There was, in a real sense, no going back from this moment. The meeting swiftly passed a host of other populist demands, anticipating the People’s Charter of 1838 on every point except the payment of MPs.

Of course, as beguiling as this image of a Manchester cotton worker forcing democracy onto the national stage is, this 1817 meeting was one moment in a larger context, and its individual participants were clearly not bound by any fixed laws of class behaviour. Hunt was from as comfortable a background as Cartwright, and had a far more privileged upbringing than William Cobbett, whom he portrayed in his memoir as his main rhetorical antagonist. Neither Cartwright nor Cobbett abandoned the cause, and even Burdett was brought round to put forward, wincingly, a petition for universal suffrage in 1818.

More importantly, however, the radical movement itself was not the sum total of working people’s democratic vision; put another way, the specific, constitutional demand for universal male suffrage made up only one aspect of what the growing democratic ethos entailed. The particular legal provisions which govern the franchise right in any democratic state are

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*: 107.

contingent historical artifacts, shaped by contemporary legal frameworks, and usually “universal” only in the sense that they are generally felt to fulfill a broader democratic right to participate in political decision-making – all “democracies” today, after all, place age and citizenship restrictions on suffrage. In our case, the specific “universal suffrage” demand as it was imagined in the 1810s – a demand which excluded women from the vote – was a confused and ultimately compromised project for masculine freedom which would not outlive the gender politics of the nineteenth century.³⁰ January 22, 1817 stands as a paradigmatic moment of a decade in which the democratic demand finally became impossible to ignore. Still, the major contribution of British working people to the political philosophy of the early 1800s was not a policy platform, but a general attitudinal shift: away from a discourse around the franchise which focused exclusively on who had earned the vote and who was most competent to wield it, and toward the blunter, far more radical idea that a right to participate in political decision-making was innate and inalienable.

Between the outset of the industrial urbanization process and the bloodshed of Peterloo, then, a subtle but significant transition had occurred: a diffuse discourse about how to influence

³⁰ Historians of gender in the radical movement have often diverged in their analysis without disagreeing on facts. Two dialectical truths emerge from the literature: radicalism served as a crucial moment for women to claim ground and renegotiate their political exclusion – indeed, it was the only meaningful arena for this renegotiation in the early decades of the century – while at the same time, radical movements in practice remained essentially masculinist and heteronormative until the coming of the suffragettes. See Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*: 141-174; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*: 1-19; Catherine Hall, “The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century England,” in Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland, eds., *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990): 78-102; Paul A. Custer, “Refiguring Jemima: Gender, Work and Politics in Lancashire 1770-1820,” *Past & Present* 195 (2007): 127-58. Still, just as the contingency and narrowness of the 1810s universal suffrage demand is demonstrated by its exclusion of women, the broader import of the rising democratic ethic is illustrated by the fact that the movement nonetheless increasingly understood that women’s suffrage was an unavoidable question. As Clark wrote, in the 1810s, “for the first time, radicals began to define the People as including women” (Clark: 159). Women were well-organized and active members of the 1810s proletarian movement – something that had never been the case in the 1790s – and by 1832, Henry Hunt would be arguing for women’s suffrage in parliament, a full three decades before John Stuart Mill’s much better-known defense of the idea; see HC Deb vol 14 c1086 (03 August 1832).

or mitigate the harms of an intrusive, chaotic habit of governance had coalesced into an actionable political program. For the time being, however, this was as far as events would proceed. No national movement emerged from Peterloo, and its organizers – all of them imprisoned after the massacre – generally saw their fame and influence peak on the platform itself. The middle-class liberals who made their careers in the aftermath – most especially J.E. Taylor and Prentice himself – had opposed the goals of the marchers, and in Prentice’s case, had not even been present when the massacre began. Peterloo remains a fundamentally ambivalent memory in British radical history: unparalleled in its spectacle, its tragedy, and its drama, but lacking a clear legacy in any later political movement or institution.

In the central passage of *No Other Way Out*, Goodwin laid out his schemata for predicting popular insurrection globally. Using three polarities of state structure – repressive/exclusive vs liberal/inclusive, bureaucratic/rational vs patrimonial/clientelist, and finally weak vs strong – he sketched a basic scenario of revolt:

...few people join or support revolutionaries – even when they are more or less in agreement with their demands or ideology – if they feel that doing so will make them more vulnerable to state violence or if they believe that they can obtain much or even some modicum of what they want, in political terms, through some routine, institutionalized, and therefore low-risk channel for political claim making (e.g., voting, demonstrating, or petitioning). Other things being equal, people, like electric currents, take the path of least resistance. As Trotsky once put it, ‘People do not make revolution eagerly any more than they do war... A revolution takes place only when there is no other way out.’³¹

Once again, this model resonates in a complex fashion with the situation of Britain in 1819. It is not quite true that working people felt they had “no other way out” – as already noted, the constitutionalist strategy enjoyed unmistakably wide support. Nonetheless, it is equally apparent that few working people were willing to place all their eggs in the constitutionalist basket. In

³¹ Goodwin: 410.

times like the hours after Peterloo, or the similarly violent dispersal of the weavers' meetings in 1808 – when the constitutionalist strategy had led to catastrophe and the leaders who had advocated it lay in jail, humiliated and beaten – the viable path forward must have seemed to swing sharply toward more confrontational tactics.

All the same, if the genuine and widespread contempt for the existing systems of order has not been given adequate scholarly attention, it remains decidedly the case that the political situation described in Bamford's or Prentice's memoirs was not a revolutionary situation, but a historically distinctive impasse. Despite the anxieties of the authorities, no meaningful bid to contest the sovereignty of existing state powers ever emerged in nineteenth-century Britain, and certainly not in the furtive nighttime raiding and terrorism of 1810s Lancashire. Rebellious working-class reformers may have scrawled "No King" on the walls and sent threatening letters to the magistrates who ruled them, but this impulse was far from gaining a monopoly within a politics of makeshifts which still clearly favoured an adaptable, multi-partite strategy.

The French war period in Manchester, then, was remarkable for a widespread turn toward the state, both from "the side", as assessed in Chapter Three, and from below, as outlined in this chapter and the previous one. Despite their rabid internal divisions, and despite a pervasive sense of grievance and partial exclusion from national affairs, the capital holders of the industrial North turned toward the state with a fundamental sense of futurity, even optimism, and entitlement. The shift among working people was more complex, more adversarial, and at times, more reactive. Still, definite ideas about the role and responsibilities of the putative modern state were visible in working people's public politics from the earliest years of industrial urbanization

– ideas and ethics which were to have no less profound an influence on the following two centuries of state development.

As the 1820s progressed, the specific constellation of forces which had so dominated Britain during the quarter century of war would fade from view. In Manchester in particular, the 1820s would see an economic dam breaking via the long-awaited mechanization of cotton weaving: the handloom economy, an entire economic universe which men like Samuel Bamford had inhabited, suffered the most spectacular collapse of any trade up until that point. The first phase of industrial urbanization – that which had been predicated on a hybridity between a handloom weaving sector fed by a precociously mechanized spinning sector – had seen the coalescence of a novel class landscape in the industrial north, and the advent of distinctive attitudes toward and concerns about state power which were to have long-lasting effects. In the short term, however, the radicalism of the 1810s was to remain a gun which failed to go off; once again, the revolutionary social, cultural and political changes fast descending on the industrial north were not to be the result of heroic and concerted political action, but a more diffuse process of socioeconomic development.

Part Three: The Emergence of the Modern State in High Industrial Manchester

Setting

One Thursday in late August, 1819, a wealthy young woman made her way up to Manchester from the suburbs to the south.¹ She did not write her name in the three small diary volumes of hers which have survived, but it is possible to glean certain things about her. She lived with her uncle, a locally eminent and active Tory, and received her own income from rents.² She was not merely well-off, but was part of the industrial north's wealthiest circles, being a frequent guest at Platt Hall in Rusholme and a personal friend of the Oldknows, an industrialist family which dominated the village of Marple. She was intelligent and observative, her primary passion being frequent attendance at chapels as a sort of intellectual entertainment; her theological tastes tended toward the evangelical.

Today, her starting point at her uncle's home would be somewhere near the University of Manchester campus along the Curry Mile, one of the denser residential areas in Northern England.³ At the close of the 1810s, this was a string of self-consciously fashionable, half-developed suburbs; while the diarist seems to have been able to do much of her social visiting on foot, there were green fields around, and in one entry she noted the hay being cut in her neighbourhood. Then as today, one entered the town from the south along one of a handful of parallel major arteries: Oxford Road, Brook Street (now Princess Street), London Road. In the twisting meanders of the Medlock, the landscape began to decisively change; this area was taken up with warehouses and workers' housing – an unornamented, practical red brick landscape.

¹ "Diary of a young Manchester woman living with her aunt & uncle," MCL GB127.MISC/339.

² Entries mention her uncle attending Pitt club dinners and being elected constable, though he may have held this position in Manchester, Chorlton-on-Medlock, or some other suburban township.

³ This location can be determined circumstantially, from descriptions of trips back and forth to Ardwick taking less than an hour and one mention of walking home along Plymouth Grove.

Soon, however, one passed into the stately centrepiece streets of the new Manchester – Portland Street, George Street, Mosley Street – all lined by Cottonopolis mansions with their Grecian columns. Beyond lay the packed slums of lower Deansgate, the Georgian trading district around King Street and St. Ann’s Square, and the old town to the northeast. On all horizons, the towering smokestacks of the mills were beginning to crowd the skyline and choke the air.⁴

By the standards of the day, the town this young woman entered was no longer a fledgling market town, but an emerging major European city. Its few hundred thousand residents do not seem impressive in the twenty-first century, but at the time they made Manchester comparable in size, if not in pedigree, to major centres like Moscow or Berlin.⁵ For several decades now its name had been carried round the world, attached to its cotton goods. Manchester was still a novelty, but it was becoming a known place, from New York to Delhi.⁶

What makes this young woman’s journey interesting is, however, less its geography than its date: August 26, 1819. This was less than a week after the bloodletting at Peterloo, as the national liberal press was exploding into a Manchester-focused frenzy of outrage; in Italy, Percy Shelley was having visions of the horsemen of the apocalypse riding up Portland Street. The massacre itself had made a certain impression on this young woman’s sphere, yet her entry for August 16 itself mixed news of the clash with the mundane details of daily life: “M[onday]. Up at 7 – Washed muslins – Riotous day – Did shirt &cs – Hunt taken – S[pecial] constable killed – Some women, & many wounded – Lower’d body [on shirt].” The next day, she noted (perhaps with some frustration), “No business done in town Warehouses & shops & Banks &c closed –

⁴ See *A Plan of Manchester and Salford* [map], (Manchester: Pigot, 1819).

⁵ See “A4 Population of Major Cities (in Thousands)” in *International Historical Statistics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 3518–24.

⁶ For Lancashire cotton’s expanding global influence, see Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market*; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

The soldiers & artillery all up & down the town.” The tension does not seem to have diminished her mood, though, as she also praised the “glorious hot weather.” She was soon back to her busy rounds of social visiting, and come Sunday, indulged herself by visiting her favourite chapel in Ardwick twice. When finally on the 26th she risked a trip to town, our young diarist did not pick her way through rubble or proceed under armed guard; she merely went shopping. Her entire entry for the day read “We went to town – Bt books at [*illegible*] – 6d print, seryt’s gloves, &c. Read ‘Vampyre’ Made child’s frock Mr. Beevers called.” The document makes no mention of either the massacre or democratic politics again.

This ambivalent document provides a healthy check to the occasionally overwrought mythology of Peterloo. This is not to say that Peterloo was insignificant, per se: it formed one of the first truly national events to transpire in the cotton north, and marked the decisive opening of a century-long period of mass campaigning for democracy. Still, in the short term and at the local level no major political or social changes were to emerge from the bloodshed, and one could hardly say that the development of the cotton Mecca was knocked off its course. In fact, after the quagmire of Peterloo, Manchester entered into the most dynamic period of development in its – or any other town’s – history. During the years of the French wars, Manchester had hosted what seemed to be the maximal growth of a hybrid factory-spinning/handloom-weaving cotton industry. In the 1820s, 30s, and 40s, the top would be blown off this tentative experiment: in the words of Sigfried Giedion, mechanization took command.⁷ The cotton industry at once grew rapidly as an international market and experienced an unparalleled level of concentration of production in south Lancashire, focusing the world’s attention and capital on this strange experiment in urbanization. Manchester before the 1820s was a historical curiosity, an outlier;

⁷ Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Norton, 1969).

after the 1820s, it was to be a world city, a driver of economic and social change not just on a national, but on a global scale. It was, in the phrase current at the time – at once evocative of Manchester’s unprecedented global profile and the power dynamics which governed this status – the second city of the empire.

In August of 1819, then, merely a week or so after the worst massacre of the British nineteenth century, young wealthy people were making their way back into town in their carriages, omnibuses, and sedan chairs to go shopping. Despite the rage and inequality the brutal early decades of industrialization had engendered, the fruits of the early industrial experiment were to ripen in this generation’s hands. Let us follow our diarist, then, into a new Manchester, one which was fast leaving the eighteenth-century world of cottage industry well and truly behind, looking forward instead to a century of unprecedented growth in which much of the world would model itself on Cottonopolis. It was in this strange new world that the modern state was to be born.

Chapter Seven: The Appearance of the Governing Mode

As was noted in the Introduction, one part of Manchester's role in this work has been to serve as a test case. I began with a proposition: that industrial capitalism was the primary causative factor in the rise of the modern state. If this were true, one would expect to see some evidence of this connection in the most unfettered site of industrial capitalism in its first stages – some early enthusiasm for the modern state project, some intrinsic connection between state bureaucratization and expansion and the needs of industrial capital. The previous three chapters sought to illuminate some of these connections with clarity and precision, the specific stressors that caused the heterogeneous industrial population to make a state-centric turn in their politics and collective ambitions; this theme will continue to be noted and commented upon in the remaining pages.

Manchester is, however, more than simply a test case or case study in this dissertation; the argument goes further than this. The town itself was the primary site of the particular energies and forces which lent the trajectory of state development in the nineteenth century those qualities – rationalization, bureaucratization, professionalization, and above all, dramatic, unprecedented civil expansion – which gave it its “modernity”. For this reason, industrial Lancashire formed a political and social-scientific brain trust from which reforming energies emanated outward from the early nineteenth century onward. This is not to say that Manchester was always “first” in governance experiments, or that no great reforms or pressures originated elsewhere. It *is* to say that Manchester was always early in adopting significant state reforms, and that other places – Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds, even London itself – tended to embrace reform to the degree to which they resembled Manchester. It would be folly to claim that Manchester was “representative” of the nineteenth-century practice of the state, but finding the

most average case is rarely the historian's goal: Manchester was the original for the direction in which the state was heading, the exemplar.

Importantly, this is not a localist argument about the importance of Manchester as a unique cultural site. This is an observation about industrial capitalism, and the particular forms of urbanization and social relations it generates. Manchester's significance to state history derives only from its status as the original site of industrial urbanization: the argument is simply that industrialization caused state modernization.

And so we arrive at the current chapter. Tangibly, the reason one can make such forceful claims about the *longue durée* significance of Manchester is because of what occurred in the city in the 1820s, 30s and 40s – developments which make up the subject matter of the remaining pages in this dissertation. Up until this point, Manchester had shown an early and marked openness to innovation and reform, it had served as the site of some early experiments, and it had seen an increasing value placed upon secular legal structures by both the wealthy and the propertyless – but no radical departures had yet occurred from past models. During the high industrial period, in contrast, Manchester entered a period of radical, unrelenting pressure on local mechanisms of government, a period which would see substantive and lasting change. If the previous chapters illustrated how industrialization caused a turn toward the state, the remaining chapters focus on the appearance of recognizably modern governance practices on Manchester's streets.

To establish some chronological order: the first stage in this process – lasting from the mid-1810s to the mid-1830s – would be a concerted attempt to transform the Police Commission into a representative, meritocratic form of government attuned to the new capitalist urbanism.

While this project used an early modern legal framework (the Police Commission) as its vehicle, this project itself, as we shall see, unquestionably tended toward “modernization”, or at least as much as any that followed it. This strategy went surprisingly far, considering the glacial pace of change previously – by 1830, most of the innovations and many of the leading characters of the modern state project in Manchester were in place, albeit in limited form. This phase reached its apotheosis with the passing of a new Police Act in 1828. By the 1830s, however, the effort to make the eighteenth-century, off-the-rack option of the Police Commission fulfill the demands of the industrial city had run its course; the limitations on the possible powers of such Police Acts, and the essential fact of split sovereignty between the Police Commission and the Manor represented immovable barriers to further progress.

And so the strategy shifted. At the close of the decade, Manchester’s leading reformers were able, with full national government backing, to essentially lay waste to what had come before them, erecting a new system of local governance from scratch in their own image in the form of a newly incorporated borough. Borough charters had been granted for centuries in England, but what happened in the 1830s and 1840s was different. Not only were Manchester’s new governors handed a new charter; a new Act governing *all* new borough charters was written, largely tailor-made to suit Manchester’s needs, and reflecting the developing governing ethos of the industrial north. This second stage lasted from the passing of this legislation – the Municipal Corporations Act – in 1835, through the incorporation of Manchester as a borough in 1838, through an ensuing period of legal challenges and revanchist obstructionism, to the final settling of the borough system in the mid-1840s.¹ In just two short decades, Manchester had passed from

¹ I have refrained from giving an exact date here, as the consolidation of the advantages gained by incorporation did take a number of years. Much of this delay was due to obstructionist lawsuits and jurisdictional wrangling, which will be narrated more fully in the next chapter; the new Borough itself, however, took some time to set its house in order and determine what needed to be done. Redford and Russell, for instance, make a compelling case that the

being an under-governed, chaotic boom town, governed by an awkward multiplicity of early modern legal frameworks, to a unified borough, managed directly and unequivocally by a mayor, aldermen, and councillors, presiding over a public gas works, large and efficient sanitation and street-cleaning operations, and most importantly, the second-largest, most professionalized and aggressive beat constabulary in the world.

Of course, history had left its stains on this gleaming new edifice. Unification was neither as smooth nor as thorough as its proponents had wished, with isolationist Salford even today retaining its separate status as a kind of museum piece of early modern improvisatory governance. English government in general was not and has never been as fully systematized as some continental cases, and Manchester would retain for many decades a Board of Guardians, parish vestries, JPs, and so on. Still, these are qualifications of a fairly clear point. By the mid-1840s, as cotton capitalism reached its full maturity, the modern state had decisively arrived in Manchester.

These final two chapters chart this rapid administrative transition. Undoubtedly, this makes them the most important chapters in this work. Still, the patterns which I shall be tracing in these final pages will be familiar, as their origins lay in the early industrial era, and the underlying message of this dissertation remains the same. First, there is the strong insistence that the industrial revolution – specifically, by setting off the process of industrial urbanization – had been and remained the driving force of state modernization; had there been no industrial revolution, there would be no modern state. Secondly, however, while industrialization had a dramatic effect on the internal socioeconomic structure of the industrial north, the resulting state

1844 Police Act – which gave the Borough of Manchester an aggressive, modern sanitation regime several years before the rest of England and Wales benefitted from the 1848 Public Health Act – was nearly as much of an administrative watershed as the 1838 Act of Incorporation itself (Redford and Russell Vol. II: 83-87).

form was not the product of a single political or ideological enterprise, and no single group or class gained complete control of the trajectory of state development. Rather, the modern state as a historically practiced social institution was to be the result of a novel and complex interplay of class-based social relations. This crucial conceptual distinction between ideology and effect must be made in order to understand the modern state not just as a technocratic ambition or ideological complex, but as a historical phenomenon: not what it was thought or hoped to be, but what it was.

A changed Commission

To the modern sensibility, one of the oddest aspects of the pre-incorporation public offices by which Manchester was run in the French wars era is their seeming hybridity, a combination of a seeming voluntary informality on the one hand, and a striking degree of governmental power and authority on the other. Being a Police Commissioner was a volunteer position, theoretically open to any man who could meet a requisite property qualification, resided in the town, and could be bothered to attend a meeting. At one and the same time, Commissioners played an important and consequential managerial role; individual commissioners might be involved in the hiring and firing of personnel or the auditing of books and accounts, or represent the town in trips to other jurisdictions. In their level of authority and the roles they played on committees and at public meetings, they were the clear predecessors of the later councilmembers and aldermen. The major manorial offices, meanwhile – the boroughreeve and the constables – enjoyed a near-dictatorial power, dominating the Police Commission committees, calling public meetings at whim, and frequently managing them with a strong hand when convened. And yet these were positions to which seemingly random men –

qualified essentially by being well-liked and wealthy – were nominated by an ad hoc jury each year, with almost no continuity in between tenures, and with no political “platform” or mandate to speak of.

In modern, representative contexts, in which even low-level elected positions are often filled through hard-fought, competitive election campaigns, this might seem an inexplicable or untenable scenario – liable, if not to abuse, then at least to clumsy inconsistency and the whims of eccentrics. In theory, a large measure of power was available to any qualifying man who might happen to walk through the door of a meeting. To understand how such a system could not just be tenable, but be *seen* to be tenable, one must set aside modern representative, meritocratic conceptions of government. Instead, one must call to mind an eighteenth-century provincial tradition in which local public office was understood as a duty or burden – a usually uncompensated, quasi-charitable undertaking which prominent citizens might from time to time engage in from a sense of local pride, duty and honor.

Such a system seems to have worked best when dominated by particularly vocal and dedicated figures. So long as their self-dealing was not too flagrant, these men were generally viewed with a grudging gratitude by their peers. Throughout the 1810s, a wealthy cotton magnate named Thomas Fleming established a miniature one-man empire in the Police Commission. While the post of Police Commission chairman had traditionally been filled by the Boroughreeve, Fleming took on the role without simultaneously holding a manorial office and transformed it into a unique leadership position. Using the chairmanship as a base, he initiated and drove forward all of the Commission’s most significant projects, led its important

committees, and filled its meetings with friends and associates.² He was vividly memorialized as an icon of Commission rule by the Victorian writer Josiah Slugg:

I have a vivid recollection of the figure of an elderly gentleman whom I used to notice fifty years ago, as he tracked his way through the streets. It was impossible to see him without being struck by his appearance. He was a large-boned man, though not corpulent, was beginning to stoop a little, walked with rather a quick step, the expression of his face indicating that he was very much in earnest about something, and was most respectably dressed in black, wearing the usual knee-breeches of the period, with silver knee-buckles and black stockings, and having on a pair of gold spectacles. To those who knew him I think I need not say that this was Mr. Thomas Fleming, who for many years took such a lively interest in the improvement of the town. To him, in connection with Mr. George William Wood, formerly M.P. for the southern division of the county, is principally ascribed the merit of originating the gas works of Manchester, and placing them on their original basis, which has been so beneficial to the town... Mr. Fleming was the means of forming a company and raising the capital in shares for the erection of the present [Blackfriars Bridge], for passing over which a toll was paid for many years. The speculation did not pay, and ultimately Mr. Fleming bought up all the shares.³

Fleming's achievements as an administrator were not insignificant – the Manchester Gas Company, in particular, was the first public infrastructure undertaking of its kind in the world – but they were remembered by Slugg almost as the expression of a kind of personal enthusiasm or voluntary spirit, not a technocratic or ideological schema. It is notable how little political ideology was ascribed to Fleming's actions, despite his lifelong allegiance to the Tory party. What was important about figures like Fleming was that they got a frequently unpleasant and time-consuming job done with efficiency and impact.

Of course, Battye's investigations show how liable this system was to abuse. For a number of decades, it still seems to have functioned just well enough to forestall radical reform. In the 1810s and 1820s, however, a novel conception of public affairs began to take hold of

² See Redford and Russell: 240-275. Unfortunately, this is a case in which it is not possible to replicate the bulk of Redford and Russell's research, as the third volume of the Commission's minutes (MCL: GB127.M9/30), running through Fleming's tenure from 1812-1819, has gone missing in the decades since their work was published. Court Leet and newspaper records do survive.

³ Josiah Thomas Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago* (Manchester: J.E. Cornish, 1881): 105-106.

Commission meetings that was to lead to a thorough renovation of how Manchester's institutions of government functioned. This transition had two major components. First, there was the unmistakable ascendancy of the Police Commission over the traditional manorial posts – while the legal arrangement between the Manor authorities and the Commission would not change on paper, it was increasingly clear which institution dominated the public sphere. At the same time, the Commission itself underwent a dramatic transformation. Interest and participation in Commission affairs rose sharply, so that the raucous, crowded Commission meetings of the 1820s barely resembled the quiet, closed-door affairs of the Napoleonic period. Commission affairs were in turn placed under greater scrutiny, and a push was soon underway to regularize, systematize, and professionalize the Commission as an institution. Fleming himself likely played a transitional role in these developments: by wresting the chairmanship from the boroughreeve, he diminished the practical importance of manor offices, and his energetic campaigns significantly expanded the governmental scope of the Commission. Still, his was a fundamentally ad hoc, voluntary rule, and events would soon outpace him.

A series of controversies of the late 1810s and 20s provided specific occasions for the changeover in Manchester's governance style – the transition from the ad-hoc, voluntary tradition dominated by charismatic or committed figures, to a more corporate, communal form of rule. The first of these was an actuarially motivated opposition to Fleming's gasworks construction. By 1818, the tight control which Fleming exerted over this major enterprise had become a subject for scandal. Liberal reformers, led by an irascible set of brothers named Whitworth, used their status as police commissioners to shower Fleming with demands for

transparency.⁴ In a sign of the growing relative significance of the Commission, they succeeded in implementing a policy that any police commissioner had to be granted personal access to inspect the works upon producing a certificate attesting to his status. The demand was fairly hollow as a practical matter, it being unlikely that these cotton investors could have made much of the most sophisticated industrial technology of its time. It was, however, symptomatic of a push to institutionalize commissioners as public, legitimate figures of authority, and in this regard it was radical.⁵

Snowed under by accounting inquiries and second-guessing, Fleming eventually resigned in protest in 1819. As Redford and Russell wrote,

It would be easy to represent Fleming's resignation as the downfall of a corrupt and decadent oligarchy, smashed by the insistent attacks of a nascent democracy, and there would be some germ of truth in this view; but there was also another side to the picture. To begin with, the Tory oligarchy was not yet smashed, though it was never afterwards so rigidly exclusive as it had been during Fleming's administration. Furthermore, it may seriously be doubted whether Fleming and his friends were corrupt, according to their lights and according to the ordinary standards of their generation...⁶

Fleming's major projects were all taken up by his successors, and his local political instincts do not seem to have strongly differed from his rivals'. It was Fleming's *style* that had grown

⁴ See Redford and Russell: 266-272. The Whitworths remained a thorn in the side of the Tory establishment for several years, though their role in the reform tradition was ambiguous; they are mentioned approvingly but impersonally in Prentice's *Sketches*, and though they certainly took the Reform side, they seem to have been isolated, iconoclastic figures. It might be accurate to think of them as some of the last adherents of the obstructionist muckraking tradition of Thomas Batty and his ilk. In a characteristic moment at a routine 1821 parish meeting to review Constables' accounts, Nicholas Whitworth rose and declared, "before the accounts were gone into, he had one or two questions to ask; and if satisfactory answers were not given, he should resist the passing of the accounts by every means in his power," threatening to "object to every item in the accounts." (*MG*, May 12, 1821: 3). The controversy was over the wisest use of a £1000 grant the government had offered Manchester for housing troops, and seems to have had little to do with the constables, and to have interested no one other than the Whitworths. The brothers' activism and importance seems to have faded by the late 1820s, and incidental notes suggest why. Nicholas Whitworth actually left Manchester; a note in an 1827 *Manchester Guardian* finds him charged with inciting a riot in Drogheda, Ireland, for encouraging farmers there to resist corporation tolls (*MG*, September 22, 1827: 4). The Whitworths together, however, filed for bankruptcy in 1831 (*The London Gazette*, June 3, 1834: 1033).

⁵ Redford and Russell: 266.

⁶ *Ibid.*: 272.

anachronistic – his approach to local governance as a voluntary, gentlemanly undertaking. Rather than marking a simple partisan victory, the dislodging of Fleming led to a shift in the way of doing business. After his departure, the chairmanship returned to a more ceremonial status, being handed down to each year's sitting boroughreeve, but the Commission at large increasingly functioned as a corporate, oligarchic body, doing its business in public meetings and committees. Fleming, in fact, remained active in Commission affairs, participating in seemingly uncontroversial but important infrastructure projects. The fundamental objection had not been to the man, but to the system.

The second major controversy that was to drive change was, of course, Peterloo. The tangible influence of the massacre on civic affairs was somewhat subtle and indirect, however, as Manchester's local leadership on both sides had stayed out of the actual affray on August 16. The liberals – including both J.E. Taylor and Archibald Prentice, who were to take leadership roles in the post-massacre controversy – had kept their distance from the meeting, finding Hunt's populism distasteful and alienating. Manchester's manorial officials, meanwhile (while certainly supportive of the suppression of Hunt's movement) had been pushed aside by an ad hoc group of paranoid county magistrates, led by the arch-reactionary William Hulton, a gentry landowner who lived on a family estate well outside of Manchester. Certain that the north was on the brink of armed revolution, this group consolidated themselves at a meeting of July 23, and, in conjunction with the Home Office and military powers already stationed in the area, essentially governed all of south Lancashire as a quasi-military jurisdiction throughout August.⁷ The

⁷ A roster of the July 23 meeting written in Hulton's hand is held by the University of Manchester ("List of Cheshire and Lancashire Magistrates," UM: English MS 1197/11). The most detailed rendition of the magistrates' activities remains Robert Walmsley, *Peterloo: The Case Reopened*. More recent research on the stationing of troops in Manchester, and the triangulated power arrangements between magistracy, military, and national government can be found in Poole, *Peterloo*: 165-182, 213-4.

Manchester watch were not called upon to participate in the suppression of the meeting, and save for Deputy Constable Joseph Nadin – who made the initial move against the crowd with the Special Constables – no serious blood was left on the hands of either the Police Commission or the Manor Court.⁸ At the first Commission meeting following the massacre on September 8, a new comptroller was hired and accounts were reviewed as usual, and the major controversy pushed by Reformers that autumn was over suspicious billing by a Mr. Atkinson for a cement-pouring and pipe-laying contract.⁹ Indeed, reading through the local official records – the Police Commission minutes, the Court Leet records – one would have no idea a massacre had taken place at all.

Still, the aftermath of Peterloo did provide an occasion for a marked ideological re-balancing of Manchester's governing culture, particularly in the realm of print media. With the gauntlet thrown down on August 16, the Tory officials had little choice but to rally to the defence of the authorities, and on August 19, in a hastily assembled public meeting from which reformers were excluded, issued a statement stating that the forces of order had done nothing wrong:

the Inhabitants of Manchester and Salford cannot delay the expression of their grateful acknowledgments to the magistrates of the Counties Palatine of Lancaster and Chester, who have so ably and so vigilantly exerted themselves to ensure the safety of these towns and neighbourhood; and especially for their conduct with respect to the tumultuous assemblage on Monday last, which was chiefly composed of persons from a distance.¹⁰

It went on to dole out special gratitude to the Yeomanry and individual military units who had carried out the massacre, thanking each of the commanders by name – even Major General Sir John Byng, who had notoriously skipped the meeting to watch the races at York. The right to

⁸ This was almost certainly because local officials had been outranked, not because of a lack of enthusiasm on their part. The Lancashire and Cheshire magistrates watched the massacre from a Manchester constable's house, with boroughreeve Edward Clayton and constables John Moore and Jonathan Andrew present. (Poole: 280-2) Still, blame (and credit) for the suppression of the meeting and the resulting massacre was overwhelmingly directed at the magistrates, who themselves took full responsibility for the events of the day.

⁹ MCL: M9/30/1/4: August – December 1819.

¹⁰ *MM*, August 24, 1819: 1.

speak in the name of “the inhabitants” was part and parcel of the recognized authority of the boroughreeve and the official public meeting, but this ill-judged declaration well illustrates the peril of abusing this right. The outrage generated by the massacre and the authorities’ response to it sparked off a period of liberal propagandizing which was to last the better part of two years. Reformers Archibald Prentice and Absalom Watkin – neither of whom had attended the meeting, nor supported its call for a universal franchise – circulated a popular petition denouncing the authorities, and denying the legitimate authority of the Star Inn declaration:

the meeting convened at the Police Office, on Thursday the 19th of August, for the purpose of thanking the magistrates, municipal officers, soldiery, etc., was strictly and exclusively *private*; and in order that its privacy might be more completely ensured, was adjourned to the Star Inn.¹¹

Notably, the lesson drawn here was not that the town authorities were to *blame* for the massacre (though they had been in the room when it had been ordered), but that the inadequacy of their management had undermined their claim to a monopoly on executive power within the local state. J.E. Taylor, meanwhile – who found populism even less congenial than Prentice, but who had actually witnessed the bloodshed, if from a safe distance – published a book-length pamphlet on the massacre which was to become the authoritative account of the affair.¹² It reprinted the Star Inn declaration in full with little comment, presumably under the belief that the Tory officials had undone their own position.

This national stage given to Manchester’s liberals in the stock-taking after the massacre was to effect a permanent change in Manchester’s media landscape. Both Taylor and Prentice launched liberal papers off the backs of the affair – the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Manchester Gazette*, respectively – which fast displaced the older Tory papers, with the

¹¹ Prentice, *Historical Sketches*: 165-6.

¹² John Edward Taylor, *Notes and Observations*.

Guardian in particular soon established as the industrial north's paper of record. Significantly, from the beginning Taylor established a practice of reporting on Police Commission affairs regularly, presenting it unselfconsciously as *the* local governance body.

These major events, however, are merely symptomatic of a generalized trend of a heightening value and focus accruing to local governmental affairs. Momentary controversies continued to periodically buoy up the increasing interest in Commission business, and the scale of Commission finances continued to grow. In the early 1820s, another major construction project – a fantastically expensive and poorly-planned Town Hall – once again ballooned Commission expenditure, and provided an occasion for partisan finger-pointing.¹³ Desperate for more funds, the Commissioners tried to make sense of the archaic rate-collection system, but assessments and actual collection rates bounced around wildly year to year, making budgeting difficult.¹⁴ Ironically, the only positive financial development was the booming success of Fleming's gas works, particularly after Parliament recognized and legitimated the right of the town to establish a monopoly on gas supply in 1824. With large sums of money beginning to flow through Commission activities in the midst of this fraught context, the stakes of Police Commission affairs were dramatically heightened. According to Archibald Prentice, by the mid-1820s,

¹³ Early signs of trouble can be found in MCL: M9/30/1/4-5, but the Town Hall would not be finally completed until the 1840s, well into the tenure of the Corporation (see Redford and Russell: 183-6). The Commissioners paid for a spectacular new design before surveying the site; when a survey was done, it showed that the site was unsuitable for this form of construction. Once the building was built, the Commissioners paid a fortune for a fresco so ugly it had to be immediately painted over. Statues commissioned for the roof had to be taken down and placed in the botanic gardens. As Redford and Russell note, Prentice used the astronomical cumulative costs – around £50,000 by the late 1830s – as an argument for the innate incompetence of the Commission system. This was a somewhat disingenuous argument, as Prentice and his associates had led the Commission throughout the construction period, and indeed, the initial push to construct on the site was a reform idea, stemming from a feeling that Fleming's decision to turn over the property to the military was wasteful.

¹⁴MCL: M9/30/1/4; 1820-1822; Redford and Russell: 279-83.

the meetings of commissioners were constantly becoming more numerous and more stormy, till it was not an uncommon thing to see eight hundred commissioners present at a meeting, and to witness proceedings as little deliberative and decorous as we sometimes see in front of the hustings on the nomination day at a contested election.¹⁵

By the end of the decade, it was clear to all that a greater regularity and permanence was needed to render the Commission functional again. Fistfights were becoming a regular occurrence at Commission meetings, leading to serious injuries. After a deeply contentious meeting, the secret ballot was introduced in 1827; while this was a decidedly radical measure, long hated by the Tories as a kind of public cowardice, it seems to have been embraced as a way of lowering the temperature, freeing Commissioners from mutual intimidation.¹⁶

Finally, in 1828, in the second great step toward the regularization of Mancunian governance (after the founding of the Commission itself), a revised Police Act was sought from Parliament. Predictably, the lobbying effort for the bill aroused partisan controversy, but the actual disagreements were not major, and like the secret ballot, a radical restructuring of the Commission as a governmental system was eventually able to pass with general support.¹⁷ By far the most significant change brought in by the new Act was the transformation of the role of “Commissioner” itself from a voluntary, property-limited status to a representative position, with the number of Police Commissioners capped at 240, and qualifying householders in the township now given a vote in their selection. Redford and Russell outlined the technicalities of the new system:

The qualification for voting at the election of these Commissioners was to be the occupation of an entire tenement rated at the yearly value of £16 (or £32 in the case of publicans), provided that the occupier had paid his rates. The qualification for acting as a

¹⁵ Prentice: 313.

¹⁶ A detailed account of the raucous meeting at which the ballot was introduced was published by William Whitworth; see “W.W.”, *Report of the Proceedings of a Meeting of Police Commissioners held in the Town Hall, Manchester, 21st November, 1827* (Manchester: 1827).

¹⁷ *An Act to amend several Acts for cleansing, lighting, watching, improving, and regulating the Towns of Manchester and Salford in the County Palatine of Lancaster* HC 1828 III.

Commissioner was the occupation of an entire tenement rated at the yearly value of not less than £28 (or £56 in the case of publicans): or the ownership of tenements of the clear yearly value of £150: provided in each case that all rates had been paid. The commissioners were to be elected for three years at a time, eighty of them retiring annually but being eligible for immediate re-election. The assignment of the Commissioners to each of the fourteen police districts was made proportionate to both the number of the population and the amount of the assessment, with provision for the redistribution of the numbers of Commissioners at the end of every fourteen years.¹⁸

Vestiges of the old system remained, including most significantly the split sovereignty between the Court Leet Officers and the Commission. Still, what had been a decidedly eighteenth-century, voluntary body was increasingly resembling a regular, meritocratic, if class-exclusive representative system.

Immediately, the Commission's operation took on a more managerial, bureaucratic form. Previously, general meetings had taken up any and all subjects, while dedicated volunteers like Fleming on ad hoc committees ensured particular projects were actually completed. After the passage of the Act, a series of standing committees was struck, each with a particular mandate for overseeing a portion of Commission affairs: the Finance Committee, the Lamp Committee, the Watch, Nuisance and Hackney Coach Committee. General meetings of the Commissioners were now to function as quasi-parliamentary oversight bodies, receiving reports from and assigning tasks to working committees. Local governance, in short, was functioning more and more like a modern, systematized government.

Notably, while the Boroughreeve and Constables retained their legal powers and were integrated into Commission and Committee work, the governing prerogative of the Court Leet had been made all but redundant. On paper, the system was still the same old eighteenth-century model, a dense thicket of split sovereignties and jurisdictions. In practice, Manchester's political

¹⁸ Redford and Russell: 308-9.

class had jury-rigged a modern, bureaucratic, multi-party system of governance for themselves within an eighteenth-century legal framework – not necessarily ideal in its form, but sufficient until Parliament should provide them with a more workable vehicle.

Classical industrialization and the reasons for reform

Institutionally and administratively, how the Police Commission got here is not a mystery. Since its inception, the Commission had been structurally vulnerable to strategic numerical swamping. Decisions were made by vote, but the relevant voting body at any given meeting was simply whatever number of qualifying Commissioners happened to be present; a sufficiently organized and motivated party, then, could ram through decisions simply by persuading their followers to show up.¹⁹ For a surprisingly long period – including, notably, the party squabbles of the 1790s and 1800s – this option was not exercised. In the increasing intensity of the 1820s Commission, however, radicals began to pursue this strategy with increasing frequency, and what had been a secluded, voluntary activity pursued by a group of dedicated volunteers became a raucous, extremely public institution, in which hundreds of men from opposing parties would attend to fight for their cause.

The pressing question, then, is not how this transformation was effected, but why it occurred when it did – why the Commission should have persisted in one format for three decades of its existence, before being abruptly overwhelmed by public interest and forced into reform. Other models of state development at the municipal level in the nineteenth century have emphasized the sudden emergence of a visionary, technocratic liberal program, though they have

¹⁹ The fact that this strategy was generally not employed for the first several decades of the Police Commission's existence seems like strong evidence once again of how indirect the connection between the "party feeling" in Manchester and actual questions of government was, and how uninterested early reformers often were in day-to-day managerial concerns.

generally situated this program in later decades.²⁰ Once again, however, the technocratic emphasis forces a narrative coherence on the record which it does not self-evidently possess. No single figure led the Reform push throughout this period – indeed, the great policy leader of Mancunian liberalism, Richard Cobden, did not move to Manchester until the 1830s. More revealingly, partisan opinions on administrative, technological and infrastructural questions were inconsistent and strongly influenced – if not determined – by context. By far the most significant infrastructural undertaking of the Police Commissioners, for instance, was the gasworks, the first public infrastructure project of its kind in the world. This was a project begun with not just bipartisan, but unanimous commissioner approval in 1817,²¹ and spearheaded by Sir Thomas Fleming, a Tory. Under Fleming’s tenure, gas prices became one of the major targets of the radical-reformer Whitworth brothers’ relentless campaigning – but the price complaints outlasted Fleming, and when, in 1822, price obstructionism went so far that the entire gas committee resigned in protest, liberal hero Thomas Potter signed the complaint.²² The records we have of state growth in the postwar era, in short, tend to yield a very uncertain partisan narrative. It seems more precise to say that rather than being transformed by a single revolutionary ideological program, Manchester was developing a functional, if rudimentary two-party system, and this system as a whole became a mechanism of change. In power, a dominant party pushed for expansion and development; out of power, they demanded financial transparency and accountability – but both agendas were contextual expressions of similar ideological agendas.²³

²⁰ Note the dating of John Seed, “Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830-50”; Joyce’s *The Rule of Freedom* generally begins with incorporation, and does not seem to have used the Commission records as a source.

²¹ Redford and Russell: 264.

²² MCL: M9/30/1/4: March 20, 1822.

²³ Redford and Russell note that the Webbs tried to credit Potter with the gasworks; the Webbs in turn note that Edward Baines credited G.W. Wood (Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *English Local Government: Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes* (London: Longmans Green: 262)). Prentice, for his part, offered the following narrative: “The commissioners had, very wisely, established gas works, instead of leaving the supply to any joint stock company...

If no dramatic ideological shift or political program appeared to account for the pace and scale of state development in the 1820s, answers must once again be sought in the broader socioeconomic context. Major economic transformations occurred in the 1810s, 20s and 30s in Manchester on a scale which is difficult to ignore; indeed, after the 1780s, this was to be the most dynamic economic period in Manchester's history. I will suggest that a due curiosity about and granular attention to these developments is fruitful in explaining Manchester's rapid institutional development in these decades. My question is simply enough: I would like to know why Manchester's wealthy governing class suddenly changed their minds about what the state was and what it was *for*.

Economic historians have generally been ambivalent about the direct impact of the wartime economy on the cotton trade, or the impact of Napoleon's shuttering of continental markets under the "Continental System" from 1806 onward. Certainly, the cotton trade continued, on average, to grow, even in the depths of the war years. Still, it seems plain enough that the lifting of the wartime economy brought about a new economic landscape for cotton investors. In 1835, Edward Baine published the following figures:²⁴

Year	Raw cotton imports in lbs	Year	Raw cotton imports in lbs.
1810	132,488,935	1820	151,672,655
1811	91,576,535	1821	132,536,620

But, in the early stages of the manufacture, there was reason for complaint that improvements, as well as the lighting of the town, to which the whole community ought to have contributed, were effected out of the pockets of the gas consumers" (Prentice: 312). None of these accounts mention Fleming, whose gasworks labour predated Wood and Potter by years, nor the clashes between the Whitworths and the bipartisan gas committee.

²⁴ Edward Baines, *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain* (London: Fisher, Fisher & Jackson, 1835): 347.

1812	63,025,936	1822	142,837,628
1813	50,966,000	1823	191,402,503
1814	60,060,239	1824	149,380,122
1815	99,306,343	1825	228,005,291
1816	93,920,055	1826	177,607,401
1817	124,912,968	1827	272,448,909
1818	177,282,158	1828	227,760,642
1819	149,739,820	1829	222,767,411

The precise question of why cotton grew following the war is a question of sophisticated economic subtlety which is not of strict relevance here. The more salient fact is that the industry which dominated Manchester – and which was highly concentrated *in* Manchester – was being conducted in the mid-1820s on a scale which was multiples of what it had been just 10 years previously. A simple calculation by Baines underlines the point. While the rate of increase in imports from 1791 to 1801 was 67.5%, and that from 1801 to 1811 39.5%, from 1811 to 1821 the equivalent figure was 93%, and from 1821 to 1831 85%.²⁵ Unthinkable as it seemed to contemporaries, the growth of the “shock” industry of the prewar and wartime years was dramatically accelerating.

Aside from the simple fact of growth, there was a major structural shift underway in the postwar period which was to have rippling seismic effects from the top of Mancunian society to the bottom: the mechanization of weaving. The beginnings of this development had not been auspicious. As has already been discussed, automation of the spinning process had led, in the

²⁵ Ibid.: 348.

final quarter of the eighteenth century, to unprecedented growth in cotton production, and the initial development of Manchester as an industrial centre.²⁶ A number of preparatory processes relating to the cleaning and preparation of the cotton wool (washing, combing and carding, etc.) had likewise yielded to substantial mechanization. The mechanization of weaving, on the other hand, while technically simple, remained perennially untenable as a business proposition. The great early innovator was Edmund Cartwright, an Oxford-educated cleric from the Midlands – a perhaps endearingly inept gentry hobbyist who attempted a power loom in 1784 despite the fact, in his own words, “I had never before turned my thoughts to any thing mechanical, either in theory or practice, nor had ever seen a loom at work, or knew any thing of its construction”.²⁷ Despite decades of efforts and a £10,000 grant from parliament, Cartwright died in 1823 without ever producing a loom capable of turning a profit.

Today, museum guides and history textbooks credit Cartwright with discovering the technology of tomorrow. What Cartwright had actually discovered was a major gap between the intrinsic engineering complexity of the spinning and weaving processes; the two technologies, while standing at two ends of the same industry, in fact make for a fascinating contrast in capitalist technological development. The gains from automating spinning in the 1780s had been astronomical, leading to increases in productivity of thousands of per cent scale; even in 1835, Edward Baines looked back on the decade after the expiration of Arkwright’s patent, during which cotton production “prodigiously accelerated”, as the most remarkable phase in the history of any trade.²⁸ The labour force generally welcomed the technological development, as it

²⁶ In the same series just quoted, Baines calculates the import increase in the decade after the expiry of Arkwright’s patent – 1781-1791 – as 319.5%.

²⁷ Ibid.: 230.

²⁸ Baines: 348.

allowed for immediate exponential growth of the industry.²⁹ For decades, however, Cartwright and a handful of rivals struggled to manufacture a reliable mechanized loom capable of matching, let alone outperforming the typical output of an experienced handloom weaver. What's more, since the purpose of mechanizing weaving in the short term was so clearly to undermine labour power – the foreseeable output benefits being marginal – power loom pioneers faced unrelenting pressure from strikes, machine breaking, and incendiarism. More than one experimental mill burned, and Ned Ludd's target for machine breaking was not the spinning mule but the knitting frame, and then the power loom.³⁰

By the 1810s and 20s, however, the output of the best power looms had drawn even with the weavers, changing the power dynamics of this industry-wide conflict substantially: traditionalist handloom weavers were now facing an uphill battle. As the parliamentary reports quoted in Chapter Five mentioned, many men began to flee the industry, to the extent that anecdotal evidence suggests parallel labour markets became saturated as well. Duncan Bythell noted major demographic changes in the handloom weaving workforce in the postwar period, with a trend toward casual labour performed by marginalized, disempowered groups such as women, children and the elderly – in other words, those who were less able to contest falling wages.³¹ Slowly, the great hybrid power spinning/handloom weaving industry began to be replaced by a fully automated production cycle. According to Robert Allen, in 1806, there were a

²⁹ Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*: 149-50.

³⁰ "General Ned Ludd" himself (that is, a handloom weaving leader dressed as his persona) first appears in Manchester-area court testimonies in April of 1812, processing across Dean Moor in Stockport by night (PL 27/9, "The Information and Complaint of James Fletcher of Little Lever"); Navickas provides a cultural context for this kind of pageantry in "The Search for 'General Ludd': The Mythology of Luddism," *Social History* 30.3 (2005): 281–95. Though the years of organized and concentrated Luddism were specific – 1811 to 1816 – machine breaking seems to have been endemic at lower intensity from this point onwards, with cases occurring sporadically right up until the end of the period surveyed for this study. Joseph Fielden's powerloom factory, for example, was subject to sabotage as late as 1855, as was an 1859 carding mill (PL 27/13, "The Queen against George Pollard for destroying machinery"; PL 27/15, "The Queen in the Personation of Robert McCallum v Thomas Beaty").

³¹ Bythell, *The Handloom Weavers*: 60-65.

few hundred power looms active in Britain, producing less than 1% of the woven cloth. By 1812, this had crept up to 2,400 looms, producing 1%; by 1820, 14,150 looms produced 10%. Then the end came, however, and it came fast, with a sudden implosion in handloom weaving between 1830 and 1835. In 1832, a majority of cloth – 55% – was being woven by power looms; just three years later, 108,894 looms were fulfilling 71% of the industry’s needs. An entire economic ecosystem – that which had led the world’s first growth economy, and had called greater Manchester into being as a substantial urban area – had been wiped out.³² It was the world’s first industrial tragedy, the first time that a labour niche created by economic development had in turn been destroyed by it.

Manchester’s status as Cottonopolis, however, was far from erased; indeed, the town was now entering into the apex of the industrial era. The developments just mentioned – the increased rate of growth, and the final automation of the cotton production process (at least, those parts which took place on British soil) – coincided with a new scale of capital concentration, population growth, and development. In general, many of Manchester’s cotton firms were already vertically integrated, employing both handloom weavers and mill spinners.³³ As Lloyd-Jones and Lewis showed, however, the transition to an automated process led to an acceleration of firm consolidation, with massive, factory-building firms displacing the kinds of small masters who had once employed relatively small numbers in rented warehouse floors.³⁴ In the short term, manufacturing gained an even *greater* proportional influence in an already industry-dominated town, but all sectors of Manchester’s economy saw substantial growth in this period, with the

³² Robert C. Allen, “The Hand-Loom Weaver and the Power Loom: A Schumpeterian Perspective,” *European Review of Economic History* 22.4 (2018): 382.

³³ John S. Lyons, “Vertical Integration in the British Cotton Industry, 1825-1850: A Revision,” *The Journal of Economic History* 45.2 (1985): 419–25.

³⁴ Lloyd-Jones and Lewis, *Manchester and the Age of the Factory*: 103-130.

exceptions of wholesaling, agriculture, and mining.³⁵ This new scale of industry resulted in widespread and rapid development across the economic landscape. As Stuart Jones has shown, the capital demands of the new firms resulted in a pioneering expansion of joint-stock banking.³⁶ In 1830, the world's first commercial passenger railway began running between Manchester and Liverpool, Manchester's seaport, financed in large part by John Kennedy, owner of the largest mills in Manchester. There was no longer anything "proto" about Manchester's industrialization, nothing tentative about its economic adventurism. So far, we have referred to the early decades of Manchester's growth as the "early industrial" phase; from 1820 onwards, we enter into what one might call the "classical" phase of industrial urbanization: a world of mechanization, steam, coal and wage labour.

One must be emphatic here: the figures above are not ordinary numbers, ordinary shifts in growth rates. They were unprecedented, deeply shocking to contemporaries, and world-historical in their long-term impacts – symptoms not just of a transforming industry, but a radically changing social structure in which such production was taking place. The maturation of the cotton economy, in short, is not a context social historians have the freedom to ignore: it was the dominant social-historical fact of the postwar era. The advent of the "classical" industrial phase therefore serves as an important context for our examination of the development of local state practices, in ways both direct and indirect.

In the first place, a greater concentration of capital led immediately to an accompanying growth in Police Commission budgets, and resultingly an increase in the scale of the projects

³⁵ Ibid.: 105, table 7.1. The relative decline of wholesaling and agriculture in the industrial districts might be surprising, but reflected the development of a more complex supply chain developing to support the industrial areas.

³⁶ Cf. Jones, "First Joint Stock Banks in Manchester"; "The Cotton Industry and Joint-Stock Banking in Manchester."

public authorities considered and undertook. In the 1790s, when Thomas Battye had pursued local officials for extorting single mothers and skimming from bastardy payments, the sums involved had been fairly small. Under Fleming and his successors, however, the Police Commission was increasingly placed in charge of major infrastructural projects on the scale of those undertaken by municipal governments today. The gas company and the new Town Hall, for example, regularly required investments comparable to the Commission's total operating costs in earlier decades.³⁷ The history of partisanship over spending and corruption in local affairs created an environment of high suspicion and uncertainty around these projects, even as their basic necessity was largely agreed upon, and rumours of financial misdeeds reliably brought anxious townsmen out in droves to Commission meetings.

This point is a blunt but important one: a larger town and wealthier town, one filled with massive, "rateable" capital investments, meant a corresponding increase in revenue and a leap in the scale of ambition civic managers could entertain. Manchester was becoming rich, and as it became richer, the scale and stakes of its civic government increased also.

It is in the 1820s and 30s also that one begins to see the rise of a subculture of young men – self-consciously forward-thinking, innovative, and programmatic in their approach – who applied themselves to the processes and institutions of Manchester governance as their life's work. If capitalist Manchester possessed a governing or political *class* in the high industrial period (those enfranchised to participate in civic affairs), this group might be considered the active component of this governing class, what I will call the governing set. Their rise, it seems to me, is symptomatic of a heightened sense of the unique burden and the unique capabilities of the industrial capitalist culture as a whole. If the first decades of industrialization spurred a

³⁷ For the Town Hall, see note 13 above; meanwhile, an 1824 expansion of the gasworks required a mortgage of £10,000, topped up by a further £5000 the year following (Redford and Russell: 292).

general turn toward the state, the ratcheting up of capital concentration and wealth in the 1820s and 30s crystallized the notion that Manchester's capitalists were an exceptional group, with both an ability and a duty to make the new industrial society function.

The emergence of a governing set

By the 1820s, Manchester was a burgeoning metropolis, several times the size of the fledgling boom town we saw in Part One of this dissertation. Still, the world of wealth holders in classical-industrial Manchester – the middle and upper class world of the 1820s and 30s, the world of the “respectable”, of capitalism and capitalists – was even at its greatest extent a community of some few tens of thousands. If no community is a monolith, one should still think of this world as relatively closely connected and self-aware. Over the course of a lifetime, its members would come to know each other by face, and to a great extent by name; they intermarried, did business together, dined and partied together, with the rituals of various class-exclusive institutions providing regular opportunities to reestablish bonds of familiarity. It was, in short, a village, or perhaps a very small town – smaller than the timber-framed Manchester of the 1700s with which we began this dissertation.

Geographically, however, this village had a peculiar distribution, being strung in a roughly circular band through about a dozen miles of lowlands around the city. Thousands of acres of flat farmland in south Manchester and, to a smaller extent, Salford and Cheetham were repurposed in the first decades of the 1800s as middle-class suburbs. Friedrich Engels, who lived in this world, gave an evocative description of this social segregation in one of the *Condition of the Working Class in England*'s most frequently quoted passages:

Outside, beyond [the working-class quarters], lives the upper and middle bourgeoisie, the middle bourgeoisie in regularly laid out streets in the vicinity of the working quarters,

especially in Chorlton and the lower lying portions of Cheetham Hill; the upper bourgeoisie in remoter villas with gardens in Chorlton and Ardwick, or on the breezy heights of Cheetham Hill, Broughton, and Pendleton, in free, wholesome country air, in fine, comfortable homes, passed once every half or quarter hour by omnibuses going into the city. And the finest part of the arrangement is this, that the members of this money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of all the labouring districts to their places of business without ever seeing that they are in the midst of the grimy misery that lurks to the right and the left. For the thoroughfares leading from the Exchange in all directions out of the city are lined, on both sides, with an almost unbroken series of shops, and are so kept in the hands of the middle and lower bourgeoisie, which, out of self-interest, cares for a decent and cleanly external appearance and can care for it.³⁸

As the cotton economy consolidated, even the architecture of this second Manchester began to change, so that the industrial revolution's characteristic square, unornamented red-brick palette became the exclusive preserve of the mills and the working people's areas, while a more elaborated Victorian aesthetic, often enough built in stone, began to proliferate in the suburbs.

There were exceptions to this segregation, to be sure – Richard Cobden, notably, lived in an old brick building on Quay Street at the doubtful end of Deansgate, only a few minutes' walk from notoriously blue-collar Jackson's Row.³⁹ In general, however, the division was astonishingly complete. The extent of middle-class flight was laid bare when the town of Manchester began to run out of resident wealthy to fill the traditional town offices. William Neild, one of the last capitalist holdouts in the city centre, expressed outrage when he was cornered into serving as boroughreeve only a year after having served as constable. His exchange with the Court Leet Jury is memorable:

Mr. Newbery (laughing): Well, Mr. Neild, you are excellently qualified for the office, and we cannot find another who is.

Mr. Neild: What! Do you mean to tell me that, in a town like this, there is not another person fit to be chosen to such an office?

Mr. Newbery: Not one.

Mr. Neild. What! Is there not one gentleman upon the jury or in the town who will volunteer his services for the good of the town?

³⁸ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*: 46.

³⁹ The property has been known as "Cobden House" since the nineteenth century, and today hosts barristers' chambers under that name.

Mr. Newbery: Not one.

Mr. Neild: Then, after having so recently held a public office, I do not think it fair that I should be made the scapegoat.

Mr. Samuel Kay (deputy steward): Then we must pronounce him in contempt of court.⁴⁰

And so they did, laying on Neild the blistering fine of £200, which was only lifted after aggressive lobbying from the town's elite radicals.

More than just a demographic concentration, however, the town's capital holders were drawing together in a northern capitalist culture with a new level of self-confidence and cohesiveness. One could still, of course, speak of multiple communities and subcultures within this world – patterns of social adhesion and intermarriage were still strongly influenced by denomination, and there remained also a world of shopkeepers and small businessmen, strung uncertainly between the worlds of respectability and the street. In general, however, capitalist Manchester committed to and endorsed, with striking uniformity, an increasingly explicit, elaborated, and aggressively policed cult of class-specific attitudes and behaviours. This coding transpired under a few vocabularies, which some historians have tried to pin down as fixed cultural institutions in themselves – “respectable” was one of the most frequent adjectives of approval, as was “liberal”, in a broad, largely non-partisan sense.⁴¹ In Manchester, however, it

⁴⁰ Quoted in William E. A. Axon, *Cobden as a Citizen; a Chapter in Manchester History* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1907): 15-16.

⁴¹ For “respectability” as a cultural ideology, see F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (London: Fontana, 1988). This closely analogous usage of “liberal” is bound to cause confusion, as the word “liberal” increasingly attached itself to a particular political platform in this same era, and by the 1840s, the Whig-Radical coalition in Parliament had adopted the term “Liberal Party” as an endonym. This very adoption, however, was itself a sign of the term's wider positive connotations; generally it referred to an admirably open, rational, and free-thinking disposition in a propertied man. Its opposite, “illiberal”, was unambiguously a criticism. A comment at an 1828 Manchester public meeting about plans to revise the Police Act captures the valence of the term: “Mr. E. Dixon said that he was sorry to have to differ in opinion with the most liberal person who had that day addressed the meeting, he meant Mr. Holt. Mr. Holt had said that the projectors of the new bill had their interest at heart: why the whole tenor of the bill went to deprive a great number of them of their interest in police affairs entirely. It went to disenfranchise all of them from having a vote in police affairs, who were assessed under £25 per annum. He would not call the proposition unjust or illiberal, nor would he call it iniquitous, but he would say in the language of a man of old, ‘he who taketh from the poor and giveth to the rich, is an abomination in the eyes of the lord.’” (*TMG*, March 1, 1828: 3) Dixon and Holt were speaking from opposite

was not that a diverse and heterogenous population drew together over a cult of respectability; it was that an increasingly cohesive and self-aware northern capitalist culture increasingly sought vocabularies and signifiers with which to describe itself – such words were so frequently used precisely *because* they were in such constant need of reassertion and redefinition. By the 1820s, 30s and 40s, wealthy Manchester was increasingly asserting itself as a *place*, a site of intrinsic international interest and cultural specificity.

One of the most intimately revealing documents of capitalist Manchester during this classical period is lawyer Edward Herford's three-volume diary, kept intermittently from when he was a teenager in 1832, through to his life as a bastion of Mancunian wealthy society in 1858.⁴² Herford made some effort to preserve his privacy by writing sensitive portions of the first couple volumes in a lightly personalized version of Samuel Taylor's shorthand system, and his commentary was often strikingly unvarnished. He thus emerges from the pages of this text as a strong and distinctive personality: hot-headed, moody, highly sensitive. After an outburst at the meeting of the directors of the Athenaeum, Herford mournfully wrote, "Alas for my temper! It has sullied all my efforts of public usefulness." He was also fond of humour and low comedy, and one is often amused at his frankness: "I was indeed very much troubled with wind all day which is very disagreeable because I might offend the ladies." As a young man he was constantly in love, and able to take his frequent failures with a certain amount of humour; offended that a Miss Stevenson no longer spoke to him, he joked with himself, "'Augh! Bother!' as the corporal

sides – that is, for members of both "parties" in Manchester – but Dixon characteristically assumed that "liberal" was an aspirational term for both of them and for their audience.

⁴² "Diaries of Edward Herford of Manchester, Public Prosecutor for Borough of Manchester," MCL GB127.MS 923.4H32. A translation of the shorthand passages was made with the aid of Taylor's original manual, *An Essay Intended to Establish a Standard for an Universal System of Stenography, Or Short Hand Writing* (London: Printed for the author, 1786). As Taylor's system (like many historic shorthand systems) eschews vowels and groups a number of consonants together, individual words and, rarely, clauses can be problematic, but overall the meaning is generally clear.

says ‘Them are she-creturs’”.⁴³ In short, this passionate, romantic man, who had a successful career at the center of Manchester’s public life, was no Thomas Gradgrind.

If the view Edward Herford affords us into the world of capital in industrial Manchester defies the leaner stereotypes of Victorian middle-class propriety, it is still illuminating of a highly insular, self-conscious society, one living on the edges of a teeming mass of workers living out an essentially untested social model, and benefitting from world-historical rates of profit. Reading the diary, it begins to seem that Herford was everywhere at the right time, knew everyone – a kind of Forrest Gump of industrial capitalist society. He lived with John Robberds, architect of Cross Street Chapel’s nineteenth-century reputation, for two years as a teenager. He was crushed when his adolescent crush Miss Stevenson married his friend Peter – becoming, of course, Elizabeth Gaskell. While Herford’s diary is, to some degree, a lucky find – not *every* local lawyer was this hyperactive and well-connected – the uncanny fly-on-the-wall aspect of the diary is also an index of how small and inward-turned this world was. Very few degrees of separation existed in wealth-holding Manchester, and one can chase oneself in loops through the archives, across denominations or generations. While we do not know whether Herford knew the young diarist of 1819 with which I began this section, for example, we do know that they had the same dentist.

This culture was policed by stringent habits of mutual surveillance and performance of manners: a constant drawing and redrawing of social lines, and a never-ending interrogation of proper action and behaviour. Much – perhaps one could say most – of Herford’s diary is a running commentary on manners. After winning the contest to become public prosecutor by a slim margin, Herford noted that, “My opponent Webb who was quite confident previously of his

⁴³ Ibid., Vol II: Thursday, May 27, 1841; Vol I: Sunday, March 18, 1832; Vol I: Monday, March 19, 1832.

own success, came afterwards handsomely enough to congratulate me on mine, an exhibition of Christian feeling in which I fear in opposite circumstances I should not have equalled him.”

When some wealthier men he knew on the street walked past him, he went home and sulked:

“That voluntary blindness which affects people at the sight of humble friends is I fear a growing species of opthalma. Thrice today have I been cut by men who know me as well as their doctor.

However it is my own fault if I mind it (even supposing it to be intentional)...” No one came in for such severe examination and critique as Herford himself; he clearly understood his public deportment as crucial to his personal and professional success, and as he put it, “I record my faults as the likeliest means of speaking the disposition to them.”⁴⁴ At times, he was able to feel optimistic:

Have read well today, at least 6 hours, besides the two with Fletcher & I feel somewhat fatigued with it. However I feel now that I can undergo any amount of work. I am determined to work my way & will have no flinching. I have only now to control my laziness in bed – my temper and sudden action from mere impulse. I have turned the corner and am on the right path.⁴⁵

At others, he could sense himself slipping, and lapsed into despair:

I must conquer – command, and altogether possess myself – and so help me God I will. One resolution in particular I begin to find I must positively form and adhere to. I must not argue. My irritability of temper, & my inaccountable cluster of crotchety opinions really put me out of the pale of amicable discussion.⁴⁶

Herford was not an anguished teenager when he wrote this, but a young man of 28, already one of Manchester’s leading lawyers and public officials. Of course, every community has its gossips, and Herford’s particular struggles with his anger are as much evidence of his

⁴⁴ Ibid., Vol II: July 1, 1839; February 4, 1843 (note that Herford seems to have got his dates wrong in the following entry from which the monthly date is derived; the date given here assumes he was correct about the day of the week, not month); January 23, 1842.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: September 27, 1843.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: January 28, 1844.

personality as they are of any broad cultural trends.⁴⁷ Still, this habit of unrelenting interpersonal evaluation and judgement is representative of a cultural style. At the dinners and parties Herford attended, gossip, judgement, and the arbitration of manners were the dominant subjects. Indeed, both Herford's notes and those of our unnamed 1819 diarist would imply that many of the sermons which middle-class people flocked to hear every Sunday were above all commentaries on proper middle-class manners. This culture's signature artistic medium, the novel, was likewise concerned first and foremost with correct behaviour and deportment.⁴⁸

Within this culture, active forms of civic participation were strong sociocultural imperatives for both men and women, albeit in highly gendered forms. One of the strongest indications of cultural coalescence in this period is the founding of numerous civic society institutions for the capitalist class. Mosley Street was increasingly lined with well-endowed, aspirational institutions: the Portico Library (1806); the Royal Manchester Institution (1823); the Manchester Statistical Society (1833); the Athenaeum (1837). Societies and charitable bodies proliferated, ranging from a Hospital for the Blind (1837) to a "Sunday School" infrastructure offering classes all nights of the week and instructing thousands of pupils.⁴⁹ There were a variety of arts and cultural institutions to patronize, with capitalist Manchester feeling a certain anxiety about its elite cultural bonafides.⁵⁰ Perhaps the most common activity was a form of voluntaristic

⁴⁷ It is, however, perhaps unsurprising that this young, tortured Victorian agnostic became a born-again evangelical. See *ibid.*: November 12, 1844.

⁴⁸ Despite the complexity and indeterminacy we recognize in these texts today, we should not forget how straightforwardly didactic their original readers could take them to be. Herford assumed a novel first and foremost made a rational, argumentative case, albeit in narrative form: "Read 'The Oxonians' in the 1st vol (page 70 I think) some very good and true observation on education. He takes exactly the view of the case that I have done" (Herford I: February 2, 1832).

⁴⁹ Fairly detailed administrative records for some of these institutions survive, cf. MCL, Bennett Street Sunday School, 1801-1966 (GB127.M103) and German Street Sunday School (GB127.M12).

⁵⁰ See John Seed, "'Commerce and the liberal arts': the political economy of art in Manchester, 1775-1860" in *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Classes*, edited by Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988): 45-82; Kidd, *Manchester*: 70-72.

do-gooding, activity which involved not just sitting on hospital boards, donating to charities, and the like, but which often involved an interventionist, boots-on-the-ground approach to philanthropy which Martin Hewitt has summarized as the “visiting mode”.⁵¹ The term is wonderfully apt, as it draws together a host of seemingly disparate activities – education reform, evangelist proselytizing, charity provisioning, and so on – which were nonetheless all pursued by essentially the same demographic according to similar patterns. Herford was absolutely clear in his mind that if he was to succeed in Manchester, he needed to dive into this world of clubbing, associating, and philanthropy. In addition to his participation in the MSS and the Borough, Herford helped to found two working men’s lyceums, rescued the Manchester Athenaeum from improper money management, founded a Law Students’ Society, and chaired the Young Men’s Anti-Monopoly Association – all while still in his 20s.

Under this class-specific rubric, I would add a broad sphere of activity which, borrowing from Hewitt, I will call the “governing mode”: a form of civic participation whose adherents adopted the management and investigation of the habits, activities, and lifestyles of the majority population through the mechanisms of state as their distinctive *métier*. As was argued in previous chapters, the question of how the state might properly manage the urban poor had interested Manchester’s industrial leadership since its conception, beginning with the social-scientific bent of the early Lit and Phil, epitomized in Percival and John Ferriar’s pioneering public health investigations. As capitalist Manchester matured and grew wealthy, however, the duties and ambitions of this governing set grew accordingly. Generally, this set found the Police Commission system a woeful anachronism, but its archaic openness provided an important precondition for the ease with which they flooded into public life in the 1820s.

⁵¹ Martin Hewitt, *Making Social Knowledge in the Victorian City*.

For political historians, following the accounts composed by participants in Manchester's civic life in this era, the classical-industrial years have been considered the apotheosis of the "reform" project as an organized political tradition. In identifying instead the rise of a governing *set* in these decades, I am trying to emphasize a slightly broader and deeper transformation than this. I am not only interested in the dominant party in the high industrial period, but the culture of governance as a whole – a broader and less rigidly defined phenomenon. In an influential article, for example, John Seed described the coalescence of Manchester's liberal governing culture as the final victory of the Unitarian community over its Establishment rivals. In reality, however, there were a number of prominent Anglicans and Quakers involved in Manchester's governance in this era: Unitarianism was a potent gravitational core, but it was not *the* organizing principle. Even more narrowly, Michael Turner has emphasized the role of a group of 11 men in the Reform culture of this period, advanced liberals who self-consciously inherited the tradition of Thomas Walker and the early radicals.⁵² All were strong advocates for reform and tireless local politicians, active both as Police Commissioners and later as councillors, mayors or aldermen. The list, however, is far too short for my purposes. Even as a roster of the leadership, it excludes figures who led for significant periods, then dropped into the background (for instance, the Whitworth brothers), and it arbitrarily omits giants like Richard Cobden and James Philips Kay-Shuttleworth, who arrived in Manchester slightly later and do not seem to have socialized as frequently with the others.

⁵² Curiously, when introducing the "small but determined band" of advanced liberals Turner provides biographies for 12 men, though he himself numbers the band at 11 (see *Reform and Respectability*: 7-38; 1). The 12 are John Edward Taylor (founder of *The Manchester Guardian*), Archibald Prentice (founder of the *Manchester Gazette*, the ACLL, and this period's first historian), Thomas Potter (Manchester's first mayor) and his brother Richard (a future M.P.), John Shuttleworth, Fenton Robinson Atkinson, James Crossley, Edward Baxter, Joseph Brotherton, William Harvey, John Benjamin Smith, and Absalom Watkin. It is possible only Richard of the Potters is meant to be included, as he was seen as more of an activist.

Most importantly, however, these narrower models shift attention away from the greyer, more workmanlike figures, those who did not necessarily gain the publicity of an Archibald Prentice or a J.E. Taylor, but whose names one finds constantly volunteering for committees, filling public offices, signing public declarations, and the like. I insist that, in aggregate, these figures were as crucial to the functioning of the modernizing local administration as the better-known names. It was, after all, not necessarily new that Manchester had a vocal and dedicated liberal leadership; what was new was that these men now had hundreds of supporters who swamped Police Commission meetings on their behalf, who became Commissioners, sat through committee meetings, conducted audits, and filed reports.

Edward Herford is an ideal type of the hangers-on and committee men who filled the ranks of the new governing mode. After throwing himself into clubbing and public life from an early age, he increasingly gravitated toward questions and issues which dealt with the management of the poor. In 1839, when the prospect of incorporation raised the likelihood that Manchester would hire a public prosecutor, Herford nursed his connections within the industrial elite – particularly with Cobden – to obtain the post. As he enthused to his diary, “this appointment has been the making of me. What I should have done but for some such godsend goodness knows.”⁵³ He would spend the remainder of his career in public positions, first as prosecutor, then as coroner, performing the day-to-day work of governing the modern city and its teeming, unpredictable population – a small signature at the opening of dozens of the Crown Court depositions informs us that it was Edward Herford guiding the questioning process. He had become part of an ecosystem, a culture of governance.

⁵³ Herford II: July 1, 1839.

In short, the maturation of the cotton economy in the classical-industrial period caused a simultaneous maturation of a definable community formed essentially by economic experience, but with a complex and moderately heterogeneous cultural iteration – that demographic which has been extensively theorized as the Victorian “middle class”, and whose local iteration in Manchester may be safely and accurately termed a “capitalist class”. This class in general exercised a monopoly on political power in Manchester through the simple but effective technique of the property qualification, and increasingly they viewed a participation in local governance as an important and distinctive part of a generalized performance of civic respectability. A significant portion of them, in turn, took up the practice of government as their distinctive passion project, applying to the enterprise all the instincts, beliefs, and common wisdoms which had arisen in capitalist culture in the industrializing North. When, in 1827, the liberal bulldog (and mill owner) William Whitworth argued that when it came to the Police Commission, “There was nothing resembling an argument why ballot should not be used on all occasions of importance,” he cited an illuminating catalogue of precedents of admirable institutions that “all vote by ballot”: the Literary and Philosophical Society, the boards of management of Concert and Billiard rooms, the trustees of the Royal Infirmary, the East India Company Directors, and the Bank of England proprietors.⁵⁴ The argument was, in essence, the bodies governing Manchester should more closely resemble the other institutions the governing set either participated in or held in esteem.

This is not to underplay the partisan or ideological dimension altogether. The balance of partisan power within this emerging subculture is obvious in their leadership, and was likewise reflected in the fact that they adopted the Commission as their sphere, generally leaving the

⁵⁴ Whitworth: 13.

Manor offices to an increasingly small and ideologically passive Tory-Anglican rump. It was during this period that the term “liberal” began to predominate in Mancunian civic life as a generalized term of approbation: even a Tory boroughreeve might refer to his ideas and attitudes by the term, and would bristle at being called “illiberal” as an unambiguous insult.

What is clear, however, is that the coalescence of the governing set was not merely a matter of partisan victory, but rather reflected a shifting socioeconomic context and balance of power more broadly. Though Turner makes little note of it, every one of his 11 “band” members was born in the 1790s, became involved in the cotton business in the 1810s, became fabulously wealthy with the ending of the French Wars and the rise of full mechanization, and in turn leveraged this wealth into a greater civic role over the course of the 1820s. This is, to put it mildly, a narrow life history for a political leadership to share – and yet with some adjustment for dates, it would suit Cobden and William Neild perfectly as well. The governing set’s establishment of a monopoly over civic affairs mirrored – or rather, was a product of – the enrichment and rising self-confidence of “new Manchester” in the 1820s. As the world changed beneath their feet, this set came together as a self-aware group, developing a strong habit of service, and offering one another social and interpersonal rewards for dedication and achievement in local governance. Their interventions were not merely philosophical or actuarial, as Walker’s and Battye’s had been in a previous era; rather, they stepped in to take the reins of local state institutions into their own hands, confident that it was their historic duty to *govern*.

The Reform Interlude

The radical changes effected to local government in the 1820s, then, can be attributed immediately to two factors, each of which was strongly influenced by broader socioeconomic

context: both the scale and wealth of local governance, and the care and deliberation by which it was managed. By the close of the 1820s, with the new Commission system firmly in place and hundreds of middle-class Mancunians now devoting themselves to local affairs, the regulation and reordering of Mancunian governance was well underway. Being an elected Commissioner under the new system meant standing for committees, regularly attending meetings, and so on – local state activity worked its way deep into the governing set's weekly schedules and habits. At the close of this decade of frenetic development, however, local politics in the north were suddenly overtaken by affairs of a national scale, as the controversy and activism surrounding the prospective Reform Act ignited civil society across the nation.

The irony for this work is that, though Manchester had served as one of the original seedbeds of the reform controversy and agitation, Manchester itself had essentially settled the question by the time the Reform Bill controversy arrived. Local liberals remained as ardently attached to the Reform ideology as ever, while local Tories had by and large come to accept the necessity of some substantial reform procedures by the classical-industrial phase, their one-time anxieties dulled by the fountains of wealth the industrial system had produced, the coalescence of an essentially moderate, loyal capitalist class, and the ongoing frustrations of acquiring necessary legislative accommodations for the industrial north when its great metropolis was unrepresented.

This does not mean, however, that the Reform Act agitation was not a major event in the development of the state in Manchester: only that its significance was not the same as in the rest of the country. While England generally marked an old order yielding place to new, in Manchester, this old order itself had all but retreated from the stage. Rather than reigniting the kind of partisan rancour that had dominated Manchester public life in the 1790s, then, the Great

Reform Act instead stands as an indicator of how far Mancunian political development had progressed beyond the norm in the rest of the country. Instead of serving as a moment of departure, the Reform agitation saw an acceleration of the ongoing realignment of local structures of power, establishing or concretizing some significant patterns of politicized class relations which were to bear heavily on public life in the economically volatile 1830s.

Firstly, the national reform moment gifted an increased significance, legitimacy, and clout to Manchester's organized liberals in town affairs, from the first intimations of Whig interest in the plan in the early 1820s, through to the more than a year-long battle over the Reform bill between 1830 and 1832. In a mirror image of the 1790s, when a paranoid Tory government had artificially inflated the power of Manchester's most revanchist Tories, this period saw England's leading Whig magnates turning to Manchester liberals for grassroots endorsements of their schemes. Lord John Russell, in particular, seems to have viewed the lack of franchise suffered by the engine of the imperial economy as one of the more egregious and easily attacked flaws of the old system. In one of his first serious tests of the parliamentary waters, Russell announced in April of 1827 that he would advocate for the disenfranchisement of the corrupt borough of Penryn and the reallocation of its seats to Manchester. As Turner put it,

Lord John Russell's statement...was apparently made without any prompting. Mancunians had no prior expectation of it and, as with the test and corporation acts, the local reformers had to respond quickly to a stimulus given them from elsewhere. The county M.P. Lord Stanley wrote at once to the boroughreeve and constables informing them of Russell's undertaking, and the local papers quickly took the matter up.⁵⁵

Superficially, the Tory officials' authority was flattered in this sequence of events; it was they who Stanley reached out to, it was they who called the town meetings on the subject. Still, it did

⁵⁵ Turner: 280.

not require a very long political memory to mark how radically the winds had shifted; the town's Tory leadership was being pressed by the national government to participate in what was clearly a trial run at reform. Manchester Tories did, it is true, have their own vision for parliamentary improvement by this period – it generally consisted of enfranchisement of the major industrial boroughs, some rationalization of the electoral system, and a high property qualification. This was, however, a newly minted, untested, and unenthusiastically held position, clearly adopted from moderate liberal proposals of decades past; it certainly marked a spectacular climb-down from the stance that all reformers were traitors and all reforms fatal to the English constitution. On the other hand, electoral reform had remained the central northern liberal issue. The most prominent proponents of this issue – the liberal wing of the governing set – were clearly to be the beneficiaries of the massive national investment in the reform cause that Russell was signalling.

Tangibly, what this meant is that leading liberals were able to put themselves forward in the Penryn seats discussion as legitimate, recognized voices of northern industrial power, despite not technically holding manorial positions. The *Gazette* and the *Guardian* immediately began editorial campaigns in favour of the liberal goals, and after a town meeting on May 23, a document was sent to parliament bearing the signatures of the town officials alongside reform champions J.E. Taylor, Thomas and Richard Potter, and Archibald Prentice. This petition was written in the voice of Manchester as a corporate entity; it seemed to recognize and crystallize the liberal wing as a constituent, valid, and legitimate component of the governing set. The contrast with the 1790s, when Tory magistrates sent letters to Tory cabinet members through back channels accusing their political rivals of treason is obvious; even the contrast with the more recent Peterloo controversy, however, is rather stark. In 1819 and 1820, the liberals had positioned themselves as the conscience of the town, external commentators on the actions and

misdeeds of Manchester authorities: from 1827 on, they were to speak in the voice – if not the whole voice – of authority itself.

This was, presumably, a humiliating and painful position for Tory officials to endure, and they do not seem to have borne it with particular grace. The town meetings around reform were raucous, insulting, confrontational affairs, and in the particular case of the Penryn seats, the liberal/Tory alliance collapsed before long. The way things fell apart is in itself, however, instructive. A committee was struck to draft a bill for Russell, christened the Manchester Representation Committee; as Turner described, “the balance of power within the M.R.C. would still be with the moderates and conservatives, and no less than 15 of the 31 men on the M.R.C. belonged to the Pitt Club.” All respectable Manchester apparently recognized the legitimacy of the Committee, which had been nominated at a legally called public meeting, and the only real point of debate was the seemingly minor question of whether the property qualification for the new franchise would be £15 or £20. After the moderate and Tory representatives of the committee travelled to London and presented a bill to Russell with a £20 qualification, however, Prentice and the leading radicals pulled the rug out from them, declaring that no franchise at all would be better than this, and that the MRC delegates had misrepresented their town’s interests. Russell threw his hands up at the bickering, and the entire effort collapsed. Though Prentice had arguably undermined Manchester’s first real chance at representation in its history, he and other leading liberals were not just unrepentant, but vindictive. In 1828, with the Penryn effort dead, Russell’s attentions elsewhere, and plenty of local business to attend to, Prentice stood up at a public meeting to argue that Manchester should revoke its promise to pay the expenses of the MRC delegation to London, as they had not acted properly in the town’s interests.⁵⁶ For the Tory

⁵⁶ *MG*, April 26, 1828: 2.

magnates who had made the trip, travelling to London to represent Mancunian interests to parliament would have been a rare, career-defining privilege; it is difficult to imagine a more humiliating punishment that Prentice could have inflicted from his position. Nonetheless, the motion was successful, and was even confirmed at a second meeting before the town authorities managed to re-establish control over the matter.⁵⁷ The message was clear: the town's traditional leaders did not possess the shreds of remaining authority they had thought they had.

When the series of events which was to lead to the Great Reform Act began in 1830, the manor authorities were given even less of a chance to do honour to their traditional roles. At the opening of Parliament, the Duke of Wellington sparked controversy nationally with a defiant speech denouncing all reforms and reformers, opining that "He was fully convinced that the country possessed, at the present moment, a legislature which answered all the good purposes of legislation,—and this to a greater degree than any legislature ever had answered, in any country whatever."⁵⁸ The speech was widely viewed as tone deaf and politically imprudent; in Manchester, however, it was an incomprehensible embarrassment even to the bulk of the town's conservatives. The *Manchester Mercury*, one-time mouthpiece of the Church and King Club and media backbone of the Establishment since 1759, could only shake its head at the spectacle of an old, confused man embarrassing himself in public:

His grace can see no defects in the present system of representation, and will hear of no alterations in it! The effect which this declaration has produced amongst *men of all classes, and of all parties in this town*, is far greater than could have been anticipated by the most ardent friend of reform; and it shews that a conviction of the necessity of some

⁵⁷ J.E. Taylor was instrumental in the effort to ultimately secure the compensation, one of the many instances of clashes between him and Prentice over tactics which Prentice would interpret as marking a widening ideological gulf (Turner: 87-88).

⁵⁸ HL Deb (November 2, 1830) Series 3 Vol. 1: 52-3. It should be noted that the speech was not generally popular by any means – indeed, it is generally viewed as an act of particularly inept political self-immolation. Still, it represented what was a core Tory principle, one that garnered an emotional, if not a strategic report among many members of the country gentry; it was also not the ravings of a controversialist back-bencher, but a set-piece speech by the sitting prime minister. For a full detailing of the parliamentary trajectory of reform, see Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

amendment of the representation of the country, has made a most rapid progress within the last few years.⁵⁹ [Emphasis added]

The editorial closed by wishing dolefully for a moderate reform vision to appear in Westminster, one that forward-looking Tories could claim as their own. As it happened, this was to be one of the last editorials the *Mercury* was to publish – seven issues later, the once hegemonic paper went out of business.

Meanwhile, the town's liberals gathered at the York Hotel in December of 1830 without bothering with the Manor Tories or their official blessing. Absalom Watkin recorded the roster in his diary: "Attended a meeting of gentlemen, at the York Hotel in King Street, to consider the propriety of a public meeting to promote reform in Parliament. This meeting I had been specially invited to attend. Mr. Greg was in the chair, and Mr. Mark Philips, Mr. Harbottle, Mr. Potter, Mr. Baxter, Mr. Connell, Mr. Hunter, Mr. Hadfield, etc., were present." All of these men were wealthy textile magnates, and none of them held Manor offices. They hammered out their own vision of Reform, then took it to the town authorities for official sanction:

March 5. Went, as one of the deputation of the requisitionists for a public meeting on the subject of Reform, in company with Messrs. Potter, Baxter, Mark Philips, Greg, Shuttleworth and Hunter, to the Town Hall to present requisition to the Borough-reeve and Constables, and receive their answer. After some conversation, they agreed to call a meeting.

It was clear enough where the initiative and momentum lay.

The slow passage of the Reform Act and its attendant controversy, as every student of nineteenth-century political history knows, was to be a drawn-out, year-and-a-half long saga. Once again, public meetings on the issue became bad-tempered and partisan, efforts at consensus collapsed, and no unified Manchester reform vision ultimately emerged, despite the fact that the spectrum of respectable opinion on the subject was narrower in the town than the vast majority

⁵⁹ *MM*, November 9, 1830: 4.

of political communities in Britain. Still, the liberals, even as they indulged in their own infighting and recriminations, retained the clear upper hand throughout. In a sign of things to come, when a public meeting in 1831 was swamped by workers and shopkeepers, the boroughreeve and constables revoked their legally mandated blessing of the gathering and stormed off. The meeting was moved to Camp Field and held in open air, with Sir Thomas Potter in the chair – the same man who was to become Manchester’s first mayor upon incorporation in 1838. Turner noted the death of the Pitt Club, around this time, successor to the Church and King Club and the final bastion of traditional loyalist ideology in Manchester:

...the Pitt Club was rapidly heading towards its demise. The number of its active members had been falling for a while, meetings were adjourned because of poor attendances, and May 1828 had seen the last annual dinner. In 1830 the constitution of the club was changed so that new members could be admitted on the vote of 12 rather than 24 existing members. There was no election of officers in 1831, and indeed no more Pitt Club meetings after May 1831.⁶⁰

A small Tory rump would continue to manage Court Leet affairs until the manor was put out of its misery with incorporation, but as an activist, reactionary force, organized, traditionalist conservatism in Manchester was a thing of the past.

Rather than provoking a major philosophical confrontation in Manchester, then, Reform’s national moment provided the town’s liberals with an opportunity to flex their might at the local level, to insinuate themselves into communications between national government and cotton capital, and in general terms to begin to assert themselves as the *real* voice of the industrial interest.

As with the emergence of the new Police Commission, this realignment has every appearance of having been the result of large-scale structural shifts, rather than short-term

⁶⁰ Turner: 295.

personal factors such as political genius or tactical maneuvering. As national-level politicians, Manchester's high industrial liberals were an untried and untested group, and even in Turner's generally laudatory telling their actions throughout this period bear a rather unmistakable mark of inexperience and disorganization. Despite being gifted a national platform, they frequently fell into infighting and thereby sabotaged their ability to speak in a united voice, despite the relatively trivial policy differences that separated them. Their two most prominent spokespeople, J.E. Taylor and Archibald Prentice, nursed an ongoing mutual personal rivalry, and while their papers dominated the town's media landscape, they frequently trained these powerful guns on one another. The inability of the town to get its act together to even accept what was essentially the gift of the Penryn seats is particularly illuminating. Prentice, whose antics were most conspicuously to blame for the deal's collapse, claimed in his memoirs that the collapse had in fact been a strategic victory, as piecemeal reform would have sapped momentum from the more radical Reform Bill two years later: "fortunately the spirit of obstruction to all reform was rampant, and the penny was clutchingly withheld to the loss of the pound."⁶¹ Whether or not this was a reasonable assessment, it is certainly not what guided Prentice's actions at the time, as he backed an essentially identical scheme for Wigan only months after kneecapping the Manchester arrangement.

When gifted with a political possibility, then, the liberals recurrently fumbled it – and yet by 1832 a broadly liberal ethos had established itself as the hegemonic governing modality of the cotton districts. This non-linear relationship between short-term partisan controversy and longer-term political and state development resonates with patterns we have been tracing throughout this work. It was an emerging bipartisan consensus for what direction state development should

⁶¹ Prentice: 308.

move in, a decision across Manchester's political class to tolerate a massive expansion of infrastructural state power that formed the basic occasion for the modernization of the local state infrastructure. On the other hand, as much as anything, it was the *experience* of integration with legitimate authority which seems to have eventually granted the industrial north a competent, ideologically cohesive liberal governing set, as opposed to the reverse. Rather than a liberal vanguard establishing the modern state, state modernization was to shape the liberal vanguard.

Chapter Eight: The Consequences of Inequality

By the close of the previous chapter – with the new Police Act of 1828, the diminishing clout of the traditional manor authorities, and the rumblings of broader changes with the Reform controversy of the early 1830s – a new governing mode had begun to crystallize with definite purpose in the industrial north. It is here that my own account begins to intersect with the existing historiography of state modernization in the nineteenth century. Patrick Joyce has pushed the use of the term “liberal state” for the broad rationale or set of instincts which were to guide state policy in Victorian Britain. If the greater despotic power of earlier regimes was predicated on the right to rule by fiat, the liberal state exercised immense infrastructural power while simultaneously strategically restraining its role in other areas: it was, in short, “the sort of state that systematically deploys political freedom as a means of governance.”¹ This liberal state operated at the top to an extent, but it took hold most strongly, and with most consequence, in the middle; it was a phenomenon of the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the technocracy, and, of course, of local government in forward-thinking towns like Manchester. Joyce has characterized this novel rationale as a distinctively bourgeois form of rule, a mode of managing modern capitalism so as to be attentive to its particular demands for free flows and rapid management – a value for freedom of information, freedom of capital flows, freedom of human movement and adaptation. It was, in short, state governance yielding to the logic of the factory, the counting house, the warehouse – all those new, hectic, engines of capital, in which profits, though potentially great, were precarious, and system and efficiency were therefore vital life-supports.

Joyce’s characterization of this ideological development is often bracing, and has garnered its fair share of critics. As a description of the way the new governing mode was

¹ Joyce, *The State of Freedom*: 3.

practiced, however, it must be credited as one of the few meaningful attempts to put into words the scale and pace of the project. Beyond Joyce, assessments of the development of the modern state as such have been fairly rare in recent years. Eric J. Evans' *The Forging of the Modern State* stands out as a quieter and more workmanlike treatment of the subject, taking the style of a high-political survey rather than a theoretical manifesto. Still, the broad strokes are broadly similar – society began to transform in Britain in a generally liberal-capitalist direction in the post-industrial era, leading to a rationalization and professionalization of governance.

While there is a definite logic to this common wisdom (it does not quite have the solidity to be termed a “consensus”), the conclusions and observations of the previous chapters lead me to offer two amendments. Firstly, I insist on mounting the specific claim that it was industrialization – by mobilizing a new form of capital management as the principal form of wealth generation and investment in the Manchester area – that effected a change in who was in power, and what their shared or aligned interests were to be. Throughout this dissertation, I have sought to draw firmer connections between broad economic, demographic and social processes and the manner in which the state transformed, a basic material grounding which is often lacking in the existing scholarship.

The second amendment I would offer would be to strongly reject the Foucauldian contention that there was something transcendently novel about these techniques and strategies, some ethereal, qualitative aspect of the nineteenth century state that made its actions and institutions fundamentally incomparable to those of its predecessors. Many important state actions in the industrial era were not necessarily intrinsically radical in themselves – it is not obvious to me, for example, that when the Court Leet jury of October, 1552, concerned

themselves with the fact that “laurence langley hathe in crowxede [encroached] apone the kyngs heghe weye [king’s highway] w^t buyldynge of a housse”, they were facing a qualitatively different issue of passage than when the Police Commissioners of the 1830s objected to construction blocking industrial throughfares.² The kinds of institutions which made up the nineteenth-century state, after all, were not infinitely complex systems. What *had* changed was the apparent urgency of the problem of governance, and thus the resources and energy which could justifiably be attached to it: the sixteenth-century Court Leet met a handful of times a year to deal with such issues, while the nineteenth-century governing set mobilized regular professional bodies to tackle them on a quotidian basis. The development of a new state form was therefore fractal in nature: small modifications, adaptations, and instinctive decisions added up, over the course of a handful of decades, to radical changes, without a radical vision or program ever fully materializing. Change was radical because the direction of flow had changed – different people were placed in decision-making positions, and applied a different cost-benefit analysis to old problems.

Thus far, however, these qualifications remain friendly amendments to such scholarly visions of the development of the modern state in Britain as one currently finds evidence for it in the literature. They are attempts to be more concrete and less mystical about how the liberal state ethos and *mentalité* came about, but they take the broad cast of existing descriptions of this ethos and *mentalité* essentially as one finds them.

Throughout this work, however, I have made some effort to insist that the narrative cannot stop here, with the assembly of a new hegemonic governing strategy and personnel within

² *The Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester*, Vol. I, October 4, 1552: 4.

the halls of state power. No matter how elaborate our characterization of the new mentalité, if we do not make some material attempt to characterize the broader social conditions in which this ideological framework arose and operated, we have not really ventured beyond the realm of intellectual history. We have failed to see the modern state with a greater critical distance than its own architects were able to do. The most important of these external conditions, I have proposed, was a distinctive form of structural inequality – that generated by capitalist industrialization. This brings us to the present, and final chapter.

In one of the oldest myths about British statehood, the post-Roman monarch Vortigern sought to construct an ideal city, free from the conflict and treachery he saw around him. He assembled the kingdom's leading artisans, architects, and a host of labourers to a place now identified as Dinas Emrys in Wales, and there he directed them to build an enormous citadel on the hilltop. They began their work, and gathered together all the necessary materials at the site; however, as the author of the *Historia Brittonum* put it, "the whole of these disappeared in one night, so that nothing remained of what had been provided for the constructing of the citadel. Materials were, therefore, from all parts, procured a second and third time, and again vanished as before, leaving and rendering every effort ineffectual."³ No matter how many resources Vortigern poured into the construction of his edifice, the whole collapsed into itself overnight, leaving the king and all his advisors at a loss. Eventually, the king encountered a miraculous boy who, like Jesus, had no father, and who was able to solve the mystery. Beneath the castle, he explained to the king, lay two dragons, each embodying a political vision – one, that of the Saxon overlords, the other, that of the Brittonic native peoples. Each night, these dragons rose

³ "Nennius," *History of the Britons*, translated by J.A. Giles (British American Books: Willits, 1900): 23-4.

from their slumber and did battle in the caves beneath the citadel, causing Vortigern's technocratic ideal to come crashing down above them.

We have concerned ourselves with a different city, and different dragons, but the lesson to be drawn is clear enough. Because nineteenth-century Britain was a famously stable state, and because it displaced an *ancien régime* which was significantly *more* unequal and repressive, it is easy for liberal British historians to become entranced by the technocratic visions of the Victorian period, and hence associate “modernity” in the state with liberalism, democratization and stability – but this is to be rather severely short-sighted. Not all – indeed, very few – of the “modern states” that have arisen in the two centuries since the British pioneered the form have been stable, representative, liberal-capitalist entities. Violence, insecurity, revolution, state collapse, atrocity, total war: these, too, have been distinctive features of modern statehood in the industrialized era. Britain itself has seen its fair share of instability and dramatic reversals of policies once seen as “progress”. Its two mobilizations for total war, and indeed, mechanized warfare itself would be unthinkable without the synthesis of industrial production and state control that was pioneered in the period of this study. Due to a commitment to this broader historicist and international perspective, this work has been attentive not just to the humming, technocratic centre of the modern-state machine in the industrial world's first urban centre, but the more complex and conflictual contexts in which the modern state first operated, and indeed, which frequently occasioned its operation. It is only by conceptualizing the modern state as a permanently unfinished creation, as a contested and unsettled site of political conflict, that one can begin to make sense of its long-term trajectory and its heterogenous historical iterations.

In the previous chapter I traced the development of the plans for the citadel; in this final chapter, I am compelled to return to this citadel's tumultuous foundations. The particular

question I return to is this: what role did inequality have in shaping the emergence of this particular state modality, and how did inequality structure the conditions in which this state operated and the influences this state was vulnerable to? The first half of this chapter will attempt to sketch a response to this question, firstly based upon an examination of the continuing role of inequality in shaping the discourses of local governance's architects in Manchester – even in the discourses which, in the previous chapter, may have seemed banal, administrative, or even progressive and “democratic” – and secondly by examining the role of class disparities in motivating and shaping the single most important state institution of nineteenth-century Britain, the reform which, more than any other, drove state modernization as a whole: modern policing. In the pages of this dissertation, I will then turn to some of the complex consequences of these enduring class frictions.

Reform and its continuing contradictions

The tense social conditions Manchester experienced during the advent of the classical-industrial period left an evident legacy even in the most advanced representative politics of the liberal leadership. If the reform moment provided an opportunity for local liberals to begin to assert themselves as the natural governing party of modern capitalism, it also provided an occasion for a particularly acute episode of the kind of painful class relations which had afflicted Mancunian liberalism since its beginnings in the 1790s. Manchester liberals tried, aggressively, to use the Reform moment to establish a decisive influence over the collective political energies of the northern working population, and just as decisively, they failed. In Chapters Three and Four, I attempted to show the class anxieties and contradictions which permeated the early green shoots of liberal reform in the 1790s. In tracing this continuity through to the high industrial

period, it becomes difficult not to see the social consequences of inequality as a profound and structuring subcurrent in the politics and class relations of industrial society, one with a significant influence on the state-directed campaigns of both workers and owners.

In the 1830s, beginning with Reform and ending with incorporation, a paradoxical pattern was established: astonishing success for the liberal vision on the administrative and technocratic level, and a slow implosion of its populist ambitions in society at large. Today, this paradox is familiar enough as a recurring agony of first-world liberalism, but in high industrial Manchester, it was a live drama being experienced for the first time. The pressures and anxieties of this drama focused attention on the essential rift which inequality entrenched in capitalist society, a gap between the two worlds of industrialization. Increasingly, Manchester's governing set would come to believe that this gap would never be naturally filled, it could only be scaffolded and propped open. In no small part, the aggressive, interventionist techniques innovated in the 1830s represented the construction of this scaffolding.

When it became clear a legislative possibility was opening for reform in March of 1830, Manchester's leading liberals gathered quickly at the York Hotel. I have already quoted Absalom Watkin's diary entry in which he noted those who attended. In the previous chapter I omitted to mention, however, the reason those present decided against an immediate public display of strength: "It was quite evident from what was said that there were serious apprehensions entertained as to the disposition of the working classes, and a fear of their interference produced an evident disinclination to a meeting *at present*." The subject of the discussion at this gathering had not been the appropriate level for the franchise, or the mechanism by which a reformed electorate should vote. Instead, the conversation had revolved around the most contentious issue

of reform as a whole in Manchester: how to at once use reform to capture the loyalties of the majority culture, while containing that culture's enthusiasm for a democratic agenda more broadly.

As the publicity around the reform bill mounted, deferring a public meeting became impossible: this led to the notorious October 12 public meeting, at which the town officials fled and Sir Thomas Potter took the chair. In its complex triangulated tensions and ironies, this moment perfectly captured the class dynamics of reform. Ostensibly, in moving to Camp Field, the working-class and middle-class reformers together rejected the old order, reconstituting themselves in a body that seemed to anticipate the borough franchise of 1838, down to the town's future mayor acting as the meeting's chair. In actual fact, a much more fraught negotiation – implicit and explicit – had taken place. Watkin was also present at this meeting, and recorded its events in detail:

October 12th. Attended the public meeting on the Rejection of the Reform bill. It began at 11 o'clock in the Riding School, but was immediately adjourned to Camp Field by the will of the rabble. The Borough-reeve left the chair and the meeting altogether, in consequence of this adjournment. Most of the requisitionists and the mob went to Camp Field. Some carts and a wagon and lorry from the New quay were converted into hustings, and at 12 o'clock, in the midst of an assemblage of 80 or 100,000 persons, Mr. Thomas Potter was called to the chair, and the business commenced. It was only commenced, for no sooner was our first resolution moved and seconded than an amendment was proposed by an operative, and it was immediately evident that there was an organization of the Political Union to upset our arrangements. Our leaders battled it with them until 4 in the afternoon, and all that time did we stand on our wagon, squeezed, elbowed, threatened, and in danger, in the midst of a furious mob. At last, after protesting against it, Mr. Potter was compelled to put a mangled version of our address praying for annual Parliaments, universal suffrage, and vote by ballot, and we left the ground, tired, baffled and exhausted, but congratulating ourselves upon having escaped personal violence and avoided endangering the peace of the town...⁴

⁴ Absalom Watkin, *Absalom Watkin: Extracts from His Journal 1814-1856*, edited by A.E. Watkin (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1920): 153-4.

Two things are clear in this narrative, both of which are indicative of larger trends. Firstly, the parallel liberal and working class wings of reform did not represent a spectrum of opinions held across an essentially continuous single movement, but rather represented two quite distinct movements, orbiting around the same cause but for different reasons and with very different emphases. Secondly, the liberal openness to the more radical plans for the franchise represented a contingent strategy of containment, not a philosophical adherence to a principle of democratic rights. Within a week of the meeting, the liberals abandoned the proto-Chartist petition that the workers had foisted upon them and sent to London their original petition unchanged – provoking howls of outrage, but not necessarily surprise on the part of the working-class movement. As cynical as this decision may have been, after all, it was a more honest reflection of the respectable Reform movement’s beliefs and intentions than the Camp Field petition.

Michael J. Turner, who devoted a certain amount of attention and research to these fraught class antagonisms in *Reform and Respectability*, has insisted on the significance of the fact that there was a diversity of attitudes toward the working-class movement and its claims within the body of liberal reformers. On Sir Thomas Potter, for example, Turner commented that, “He was painfully aware of the ease with which political agitation could get out of hand, and as a man of property, wealth and business he disliked excessive radical plebeian involvement in politics.”⁵ Of the populist Prentice, on the other hand, he wrote,

Prentice was...interested in working-class issues and sympathetic towards workers’ problems and desires. He was certainly more favourable than some of his allies towards a wide franchise encompassing the majority of working people. Many impulses operated in Prentice’s heart and mind: Benthamite radicalism, Christian egalitarianism, sensible and respectable liberalism and a charitable, humanitarian commitment to the little man who needed a helping hand to take his place in society.⁶

⁵ Turner, *Reform and Respectability*: 15.

⁶ Ibid.: 296.

Turner was scrupulous in his research, and on the face of it, there is little to quibble with here. Still, the overtones that the modern reader is likely to hear in this contrast are misleading. Figures like Potter, it is true, saw the working class as hopelessly brutalized in the short term, disdained to have personal contacts with individual working-class people, and generally viewed the reform debate as a conversation among property holders. Prentice saw hope for change among working-class people, and sought out contacts with their leaders. Nonetheless, in a meaningful sense Prentice was *more* aggressive and absolute in his antipathy to autonomous working-class demands and ideologies than his moderate peers – at the very least, his refusal of these demands was more informed. Indeed, it is in examining the more radical and “democratic” wing of the middle-class movement that the class anxieties of classical-industrial liberalism as a whole become most apparent.

In Prentice’s *Historical Sketches*, the major leaders and actions of the working-class movement in Manchester are dismissed in turn. Handloom weavers who had organized protests in 1812 against mechanization and the deferral of political reform were “the uninstructed multitude” and “misguided people”; he sniffed that “the [1817] Blanket meeting and the blanket march were, of all possible devices, the least likely to convince the middle and the aristocratic classes that the multitudes were fitted for the enjoyment of the electoral franchise; and yet there were circumstances which, though not amounting to a justification of those movements, offer, when duly considered, some palliation of the folly.” Prentice was not allergic to the deployment of state violence to suppress the democratic agenda, and though he viewed Peterloo as an unnecessary, brutish, and poorly planned operation, he spoke of the post-massacre chill on democratic activism with a clear sense of relief:

We...now arrived at a period when the forced silence of the radicals gave men in the middle classes an interval of calm, in which they could quietly consider the defects of our

representative system, undisturbed by the agitation which had raged around them. There can be no doubt that the harsh sentences which had been pronounced in 1820 had struck terror into the hearts of the noisy demagogues, who, out of their very cowardice, had thundered out their recommendation by physical force.⁷

This is a discordant note for a “friend of the people” to sound; certainly, Prentice detested those responsible for the massacre, but it seems clear that he understood the *effects* of the terror, at least in part, to be ameliorative.

Far from involving himself in working-class politics to empower working-class agency, then, Prentice made it his life’s work to dismantle the working-class movement as he found it (if for its own good), and was willing to get up to his elbows in the effort. In 1826, for instance, when the Manchester area was experiencing a wave of machine breaking in response to power loom adoption, Prentice pushed his way into a large meeting of weavers on St. George’s Fields, and used his contacts in the working-class movement to gain the platform. He told them that the Police Commission had that day decided to raise an extraordinary subscription for the relief of the poor:

...and I went on to say that I had, for the last ten years, been an attentive observer of the conduct of the working men in Manchester; that I had never, during that period, seen any attempt of theirs to destroy private property, and I begged and prayed, as they respected the reputation they had acquired for exemplary patience, that they would continue to manifest the same disposition; that they would not listen to the strangers who had come there to urge them to acts of violence and destruction, but would all follow me out of the field, and peaceably depart to their own homes.

He then left the field with his supporters, leaving a few thousand still present. The fact that Prentice *had* established meaningful contacts with workers is undeniable – a figure like Potter would never have gone to this trouble; a figure like Potter would not even have had the necessary contacts to obtain an invitation onto the platform. It does not follow, however, that Prentice was somehow more open to the working-class movement’s philosophical foundations. Having left St.

⁷ Prentice, *Historical Sketches*: 52; 53; 94; 199-200.

George's Field, Prentice walked directly to the Police Office and demanded that cavalry be sent out to charge the remaining protesters, comforting himself that "the very sound of their hoofs would disperse the crowds."⁸ As one of the magistrates present noted, this was a rather sanguine prediction, coming as it did only a handful of years after Peterloo. In the event, the ensuing military actions led to widespread street violence in New Cross and other working-class residential areas for the next several days.⁹

In short, Prentice was no democrat in the broad sense of the term. To say this is not to mount a moral critique, but rather, to describe with accuracy the nature of high-industrial liberalism in Manchester. Like Walker before him, Prentice was perfectly frank before posterity in identifying containment and diffusion as his primary goals in engaging working-class activists. His most ambitious project in this regard was the 1831 Manchester Political Union, a cross-class association along the lines of the relationship between the MCS and the MPS and MRS. The aim was, in Prentice's own words, "more to direct and restrain than to urge – urging not required when the association was formed."¹⁰ The conditions upon which working-class people were permitted to join and participate in the Union were humiliatingly strict. When first advertised in the *Times*, the plan was that working-class people would have to obtain "a recommendation from some respectable neighbour", then show a card proving their membership at the door.¹¹ At the first M.P.U. meeting in 1830, Prentice arrived with a pre-written list of men

⁸ Ibid.: 279-80.

⁹ Prentice rather tried to rewrite history here: "On the following day [April 29] the magistrates ordered the Queen's Bays to parade the streets, and this had the effect of repressing the disturbances, which were confined to the plunder of some bread shops" (ibid.: 280). According to the *Guardian* at the time, the rioting in fact continued until Tuesday, May 2, solidarity strikes continued for days afterward, and troop reinforcements were still being sent in on May 6 (*MG*, May 6, 1826: 2-3). It was not until May 13 that the paper pronounced the "disturbances" well and truly over (ibid., May 13, 1826: 3). In firsthand accounts of the April 29 clashes in the Crown Court depositions, special constables describe hours of hand-to-hand fighting and being pelted by stones (TNA, PL 27/10, "Rex V Peter McNamara and Michael Gavin").

¹⁰ Prentice.: 401.

¹¹ Turner: 299.

who would form the organization's leadership council, then demanded the workers present vote for his candidates. Turner has recounted the speech:

In nominating men for appointment to the political council, Prentice emphasised that they should be known to each other and prepared to act collectively. He hoped that no names would be proposed in addition to those on his list, for influential men might prefer not to act with individuals with whom they were not acquainted.¹²

Prentice boasted that there were "persons of every rank" on his list, but this was a revealing distortion of the case; while perhaps four or five of the members were better-off tradesmen, the remainder of the 31 members were all capital holders of one sort or another, with a preponderance from the shopkeeping class and a leadership of several manufacturers and "gentlemen".¹³ There were certainly no female mill workers nominated to represent the single largest workforce demographic in the town, let alone any navvies, street sellers, canal boat men, or any of the other dozens of typical Mancunian workers' occupations. There was, it would seem, a single weaver. Nathan Broadhurst, an Irish weaver in the audience, stood up to suggest that working men should be given more leadership positions in the organization; in response, Prentice threatened that he and the other wealthy leaders would immediately withdraw from the organization unless their list was passed without changes. It was duly voted through.

A due consideration of the complex reform bill controversy in Manchester, then, once again pushes one to develop a more sophisticated understanding of classical-industrial politics than the simplistic partisan model first established by Prentice in the *Historical Sketches*, and not infrequently resorted to by historians of the twentieth century. In this crude diagram, there was, essentially, one political issue in the classical-industrial city – "reform" – with two sides:

¹² Ibid.: 300-1.

¹³ Ibid.: 301.

reformers and anti-reformers. Politics existed on a single continuum, and development progressed in a single direction: away from the “early modern” (or at the time, “medieval”) and toward reform.

At the institutional level, to be sure, this unilinear narrative has a clear referent: informal rule, voluntarism in government, and, indeed, corruption (in the sense of the extra-legal appropriation of public funds for private purposes) were being steadily eroded away, while civil governance in Manchester became more regularized, professionalized, and, most of all, much bigger. When the governing set congratulated themselves on their achievements, they had tangible evidence of these successes before them: massive public infrastructure projects, one of the world’s largest and most legally powerful police systems, a network of enormous workhouses, prisons, hospitals. But as a site for the contestation of political power between different demographics, the trajectory of the local state in these years followed a less clear path.

A closer look at Archibald Prentice – credited in his own writings and in the historiography as the strongest “friend of the poor” among capitalist Manchester’s liberal leaders – reveals the depth of anxieties about working-class political power among middle-class reformers. Democratization was simply not a goal of early industrial liberalism; rather, a meritocratic rationalization of the franchise was. Liberals generally sought a lower franchise barrier, but for this very reason, the Reform moment served as a time of high anxiety for liberal leaders about their level of control over the working masses, and saw the deployment of various strategies of containment and diversion. Organizations like the M.P.U. were the closest contact the mainstream of middle-class reformers and workers were to have in this era. While it is clear that inter-class dialogues took place, and the reform movement as a whole made a wider space for working-class participation in its ranks than any other elite political movement of the era, the

gulf between class experiences and, indeed, class-based politics within the movement is no less apparent.

All this may be somewhat familiar to the reader by now. Clearly, these contradictions and discomforts resonate with those traced in the French War era in earlier chapters. While there is a great deal of continuity in this narrative, however, one profound change had occurred by the end of the 1820s: Manchester's liberal reformers were no longer a set of charismatic outsiders, but the intellectual core and leadership of Manchester's governing class as a whole. Unlike Thomas Walker or even Thomas Battye, the high-industrial governing set could no longer hide behind the moral certainties and practical vagaries of an "Opposition". The more power it accrued to itself, the more the governing set found itself governing decisively downward. More and more, the local state structures these men constructed reflected this.

The New Police

In 1830, the Police Commission's Watch Committee issued a revealing report, tracing the development of the Watch over the previous decades.¹⁴ In 1798, Manchester's Watch had stood at 30 men; over the ensuing decade, it climbed to a plateau of around 50, where it remained throughout the Napoleonic era; following Peterloo and the demise of the handloom industry, it began to climb once again, reaching 83 at the point at which the Watch Committee made their report. Meanwhile, the amount spent on these men had grown disproportionately to their number; while the town had paid a grand total of £813 in watch wages in 1798, in 1830 this number was £3889, comparable to an entire year's civic budget at the turn of the century. Dissatisfied with these numbers, the committee demanded an immediate 50% increase, bringing

¹⁴ "Watch, Nuisance and Hackney Coach Committee Minutes," MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/1: July 5, 1830.

the size of the force to 120 men. Such numbers may not seem vast when compared to London's Metropolitan Police Force, let alone a typical modern constabulary, but the comparison is a problematic one. Due to the limits of the Police Act's powers, the Commissioners' watch only patrolled the old city of Manchester, which even in 1798 did not contain the full extent of the town's urbanization.¹⁵ Given that the geographic area these watchmen patrolled did not grow between 1798 and 1830, the Committee's figures capture a full four-fold increase in density of street law enforcement over a three-decade period.

The numbers, however, are only the beginning of the story. As Manchester's government entered the phase of its most intensive development in the classical-industrial period, a wholesale shift in how the Watch was understood can be traced in the archives: first through the somewhat patchy Police Commission minute books, then the minute books of the Watch, Nuisance and Hackney Coach committee which was founded as part of the municipal overhaul in 1828. Reform was gradual in the early decades, and occasionally, individual commissioners would propose cost-saving measures, but there was a secular trend toward more watchmen, longer shifts, and higher pay. As the watch grew in size and importance, small modifications were made to make this increasingly prominent and costly body "efficient". In 1800, it was mandated that watchmen should report to the police office each morning to deliver up their rattles before

¹⁵ In *The English Police*, Clive Emsley states that "by the end of 1830 there were 2,000 men patrolling the entire Metropolitan Police district at night" (27, note 8). Doubtless metropolitan London experienced a much more cohesive and aggressive approach to policing an urban area as a whole. Nonetheless, as these 2,000 constables were distributed over an area roughly the size of the Parish of Manchester, while Manchester itself was very roughly 10% the size of London throughout this period (*International Historical Statistics*: 3518-3524), one must credit the Police Commission with maintaining a comparable, if not higher density of nighttime constables to population in Manchester proper. According to Information Services Branch Greater Manchester Police, *Freedom of Information Response GSA 819-19* (Manchester: 2019), <https://www.gmp.police.uk/foi-ai/greater-manchester-police/disclosure-2019/april/gsa-81919/>, a total of 1,119 Greater Manchester Police officers are assigned to the modern City of Manchester division today, once again an area and population several times that of the historic city proper.

heading home – a seemingly innocuous measure, but one which laid the foundations for a far more active management system.¹⁶ In 1803, the beginnings of on-the-job supervision could be detected with the suggestion that nuisance inspectors be “required to superintend the watchmen occasionally”, an ad hoc innovation that in later decades would be elaborated into a full management hierarchy.¹⁷ Tucked into the pages of this first Police Commission minute book one finds, seemingly by sheer luck, a slim “Friday Nights Book”, the beginnings of a written management system in which the activities of the busiest night of the week were recorded: a man who assaulted a watchman was proceeded against, seized items were sold off, watchmen were reprimanded for not keeping accounts, and so on.¹⁸ In 1820, an investigation into wages spurred some soul searching over what *kind* of men it was desirable to have in the post: “The committee think that the [present] wages are inadequate for their purpose of procuring respectable, able bodied men, of a proper age, competent to act as watchmen and as much as possible free from the temptation either of committing crimes or of neglecting their duty”. They recommended an almost 50 percent increase in wages.¹⁹

With the new Police Act and the appointment of a dedicated committee in 1828, what had been a trickle of expansions, extensions, and improvements widened to a flow. Over the next few years, this committee was to be responsible for the bulk of police reform which was to occur in the industrial city, and its minutes are a testament to the challenges of this exercise. One month after they began meeting, members of the committee began an aggressive, intrusive investigation into the existing habits of the Watch:

¹⁶ MCL: M9/30/1/1: March 28, 1800.

¹⁷ Ibid.: July 8, 1803.

¹⁸ Ibid., “Friday Nights Book.” While this is the only surviving edition of this book I know of, its importance as a record-keeping device can be gleaned from references to it in Committee meetings.

¹⁹ MCL: M9/30/1/4: July 6, 1820.

We met at the Constables' Office on the night of the 10th instant at ¼ before 11, Heslop came to the time say 11 Shaw was about ten minutes past immediately on his arrival we proceeded with him through Districts 6, 3, 2, 5, 1 and 4 in these districts we visited the station of every watchman with the exception of three or four and found every man on his round excepting a few who had been with prisoners, this occurred in no 6 where 2 or 3 prisoners were taken one of whom we saw, a cheese had been found in his possession and supposed to be stolen.

In almost every street we noticed the gas lamps were dirty and some very much so, it also appeared to us there was not sufficient gas turned on.

Signed George Hall

William Neild

Manchester

Nov^r 17, 1828²⁰

By the end of the year, committee members had visited and reported on each of the individual watch rounds in the entire city, had inspected each watch box, had questioned each watchman or taken note of his absence. Never had managerial scrutiny been applied with this intensity before, and the rounds themselves must have made for odd scenes – wealthy mill owners traipsing through the small hours of the morning to interrogate some of the town's lowliest, worst paid public servants, inspecting their clothing for holes, smelling their breath for alcohol. The committee began reprimanding and firing watchmen at a rate of several per week for absenteeism, sleeping on the job, and drunkenness – sometimes based off of information from the watch hierarchy, but often enough following accusations mounted by individual committee members themselves.

The commitment of the committee men to their task is evident throughout the records they left behind. One recurring battle was an effort to stop other Commissioners from nurturing special relationships with particular watch members for mutual benefit. The committee of 1828 issued official proclamations against such quid pro quos – a fairly rare act of generalized self-censure for Manchester politicians in these years.²¹ At some point during that year, temperatures

²⁰ MCL GB127.M9/30/5/1: November 17, 1828.

²¹ Ibid.: December 29, 1828.

rose to the point that the committee members seem to have seized the minute book from their clerk and signed a kind of pact with one another, its text slanted across the volume's inside cover:

We the undersigned members of the Watch Nuisance and Hackney Coach Committee do hereby agree ~~engage~~ not to listen to any private or individual application from any watchman or other person in our employ who may be apprehensive of an accusation being brought against him before this committee, or from any other person who may have complaints to bring before this committee...²²

Reform clearly meant stepping on the occasional toe. In October 1829, the exhausted committee submitted an initial account of their activities to the entire body of the Police Commission:

The watch, nuisance, and hackney coach committee, in taking a review of their proceedings since their appointment, have to observe, that owing chiefly to the magnitude and importance of the undertaking, they have not yet been able to make that progress in re-modelling the first branch of their department as they intended and hoped to have done; nor as, in their opinion, the interest of the Town imperatively requires.

The watch department, however, by being placed under the control of one committee, has been rendered much more efficient than was previously the case; but your committee are strongly impressed with the conviction that it is still very defective, and, as a ground-work for further improvement, they have procured through the medium of the personal inspection of the comptroller, the particulars of the systems pursued in such towns as have the repute of possessing the best regulations on these subjects detailed in several written reports and accompanied by various useful and interesting documents.

This information, your committee are of opinion will be found exceedingly useful to such future committee as you may appoint, should they think proper to go into the subject. To render this department effective, some increase of expenditure will be absolutely necessary; and altho' your committee are strongly impressed with the importance of the strictest economy in every department of your establishment, yet they conceive an increase of expenditure may be fully justified without any departure from this principle when required for so essential an object as the better protection of the persons and property of the ley-payers.²³

In 1829, the expansion and reform continued, a new mid-management position of "serjeant" was created and appointments to the post were handed out to the most highly thought-of watchmen.²⁴

²² Ibid.: front inside cover.

²³ Ibid.: October 12, 1829.

²⁴ Ibid.: March 15, 1830.

It was at this point, in 1830, that the committee issued its report on the history of the watch and demanded its increase to 120 men. While the increase on its own was substantial, it was apparent that the project they had embarked upon had resulted in a qualitative shift in what watching *was*, not just how many men would be tasked with performing it of a night. In one of the more striking symbolic decisions of this era, the Watch Committee abruptly announced to the commissioners as a whole that “Your Committee recommend that the whole of the Watch Boxes be at once discontinued, being of opinion that they hinder rather than promote the service.”²⁵ This meant breaking with several centuries of European watch tradition and the dismantling of a widely recognized icon of the early modern townscape.²⁶ The new rationale was becoming clear: the old conception of the watch, in which a watchman was essentially paid to stay awake throughout the night, was at root a *passive* technique of governance. The watchman of the classical-industrial era, by contrast, was to be an active, interventionist presence, constantly on the march, rooting out problematic and undesirable behaviours and putting a stop to them.

This renovation of street-level law enforcement, while radical in its cumulative effect, was plainly not the work of an instant, representing rather the culmination of decades of institutional development. One date from the end of this process, however, stands out above all others in Manchester police history: October 26, 1830, when the Watch Committee published the

²⁵ Ibid.: July 5, 1830.

²⁶ Watch boxes ranged from simple wooden cubicles to brick and stone installations, and frequently appeared along lanterns and broad-brimmed hats as identifiers of the watch in prints – e.g. Cruikshank's "Tom gets the best of a Charley." James Shaw photographed a run-down brick survivor in Chapel Street, Salford, in 1900. Boxes had made the old, primarily stationary style of watching bearable, and in *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998): 62-3, Elaine Reynolds suggests authorities in London had some difficulty in persuading watchmen to leave them. For Manchester's watch, then, the abandonment of this age-old system would have been a visceral, unmistakable sign of radical systemic change.

“Regulations for the government of the Watch department of the Manchester Police, 1830.”²⁷

The document is dozens of pages long, the first section consisting of a list of 29 new regulations which finally laid out the comprehensive revision in watching strategy the Committee had been working on for over a year. Each new regulation in its way contributed to a far more transformative program than had ever been applied to Mancunian law enforcement. The truly radical step, however, came in rule 25, albeit in a rather backhanded construction:

In order that a Watchman may not be at a loss as to the duties with which he is empowered by Law, he is directed to read part II with great care and attention. These relate to the duties of a Constable but they apply equally to a Watchman, as the Watchmen of this town *are now made constables by law*. [emphasis added]

Part II of the Report in turn laid out a pages-long explanation of the new legal powers, a copy of which was handed out to every watchman-turned-constable:

...the powers of a Constable, as will appear hereafter, are, when properly understood and duly executed, amply sufficient for their purpose. He is regarded as the legitimate peace officer of his district; and, both by the common law and many Acts of Parliament, he is invested with considerable powers, and has imposed on him the discharge of many important duties.

He is, in many cases, authorised and required, in the execution of his office, to arrest a party charged with or suspected to be guilty of some offence; to enter a house in pursuit of an offender; to quiet an affray; to search for stolen goods; to take possession of goods suspected of having been stolen.

If one was to identify an origin point for modern policing in Manchester, there could be few competitors with this 1830 granting of constabulary powers. From the early modern norm of a haphazard, minimalist and passive watch had arisen an active, well-trained and well-paid force, authorized in their dozens to exercise violent and interventionist powers which had previously been reserved to a handful of the town’s most important officials.²⁸

²⁷ MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/1: October 26, 1830.

²⁸ There remained just two “Constables” in the Manor-office sense of the term until the Court Leet’s demise; deputy constables, however, seem to have exercised broad powers of arrest as well, along with the authority to forcefully enter property, as one finds deputy constables frequently breaking down doors and elbowing their way into pubs in the depositions and newspapers of the turn of the century. I have been unable to determine if these powers were

A few notes are worthy of emphasis in this narrative. The first is Manchester's autonomy in this effort. Top-down histories of policing or of state development in the past have tended to emphasize the personal role played by Sir Robert Peel in the modernization of policing, and in particular, his leadership in establishing the pioneering Metropolitan Police Force of 1829. This was doubtless the most ambitious police project of this period, and the first to receive parliamentary direction and national attention. According to Eric J. Evans,

The capital was widely felt to be a special case, more prone to regular disturbance and less amenable to traditional means of control. Most of the backbenchers who acquiesced in the appearance on London's streets of blue-uniformed and truncheoned 'Peelers' would have been mortified had they known that these strange novelties formed the advance guard of a national, professional police force which would appear within thirty years.²⁹

Generally, the "New Police" are not supposed to have arrived in Manchester until 1838, when the borough was granted the right to form a new constabulary as part of the process of incorporation.

As a strictly parliamentary matter, the conventional narrative is accurate enough – but this was, of course, a period in which Parliament as a body could hardly be considered the bleeding edge of political opinion. Once again, one is led to remark on how rapidly political consensus in Manchester had outpaced much of the rest of the country. The 1838 Incorporation Act would certainly be significant to Manchester's police history: it would merge the night patrols with the day police – the smaller, more elite body which had been preserved under the

formally granted as an aspect of the posting, or were assumed in a more *ad hoc* fashion. The legal status of the "special constables" is similarly ambiguous; typically, the 1831 Special Constables Act is described as having granted constabulary powers to the specials for the first time, though what legal authority special constables had prior to this act is unclear; e.g., R.E. Swift, "Policing Chartism, 1839-1848: The Role of the 'Specials' Reconsidered," *The English Historical Review* 122.497 (2007): 672. What is clear is that all these positions – constables, deputy constables, specials – were systematically class-limited; the 1830 granting of powers to dozens of working-class watchmen was thus unprecedented in Manchester.

²⁹ Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State*: 195.

authority of the town officers – and it would consolidate Manchester’s reformed forces with those of outer neighbourhoods, bringing uniformity to policing across the majority of Manchester’s urbanized area. Every other major change associated with the New Police mode, however – the professionalized hierarchy, the uniforms, the use of handcuffs, lockups, and report books, the destruction of the watch box and the shift to regular beat patrolling – had actually been effected by the Police Commission’s watch committee before the New Year of 1831.

Even the limitations placed on Manchester’s constabulary tell us little about the town’s capacity for innovation, being a function of the constrictive legal frameworks imposed upon the town by Parliament, not local enthusiasm for reform. One of the most revelatory documents in the Police Commission archives in this regard must surely be an epistolary exchange between the members of the Watch Committee and Peel himself as the Metropolitan Police Act was making its way through Parliament in late 1829. In the House of Commons, Peel had mentioned that should the London police prove successful, the experiment might succeed elsewhere. Hearing of this, Manchester’s Watch Committee passed the following resolution:

That the Boroughreeve and Constables be respectfully requested to address a letter to the Right Honorable Robert Peel stating that the Watch Committee have it in contemplation to introduce several material alterations in their department, and as the Right Honble Gentleman is reported to have said in the House of Commons in the debate on the London New Police Bill that should the experiment answer which he was then about to try he would introduce it in Manchester and other large towns, this committee would feel particularly obliged if the Right Honble Gentleman would so far condescend as to favor them with his present views on this point prior to their entering upon the investigation of the subject with a view to a change of system.³⁰

On November 23, they entered Peel’s discouraging reply in their minutes:

I beg leave to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 18th instant. I did not state in the House of Commons that I had an intention of proposing to Parliament the Application to any other town of the system of police recently established in the Metropolis.

³⁰ MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/1: November 16, 1829.

I said that in my Opinion, if the measure should prove successful, the Inhabitants of large cities and towns would of themselves apply to the legislature for Acts of Parliament founded on the general principle of the Metropolitan Police Act. You are therefore entirely at liberty to act upon your judgement in respect to the Police Of Manchester.³¹

Here we have the ostensible genius of modern policing, telling the police authorities of England's most advanced urban economy that they were on their own. It seems possible that Peel misunderstood the Mancunians' tone, thinking that they were simply bristling at decisions being made for them in the Metropolis. Indeed, there may well have been something of this resentment in the Boroughreeve's letter. What Peel did not seem to know, however, was that these same figures were in the midst of implementing a local law-enforcement agenda every bit as ambitious and comprehensive as his own, using identical technologies and techniques, and indeed with a close eye on what the Metropolitan force was doing.³² While they may have reacted against being left out of the decision-making process, they were very much asking to be let onto the reform train, not left off it. In any event, the plan suggested by Peel – applying to the legislature for new policing powers – is exactly that which Manchester's authorities pursued in their advocacy for the Municipal Corporations Act. In short, while the modernization of policing in Manchester was doubtless part of a broader national trend, those who guided this process in Manchester very much did so in response to local conditions and local exigencies. Once again, Manchester was not characteristic of provincial England, it was precocious – the peculiarities of its socioeconomic profile being seen as peculiarly in need of innovative and intrusive state practices.

³¹ Ibid.: November 23, 1829.

³² For instance, on September 20, 1830, Jonathan Thorpe Jr. submitted to the Watch Committee a copy of the Metropolitan Police's application form, suggesting it might be useful to adapt to Manchester's needs (ibid.). Watch committee members frequently went on fact-finding missions to other towns with significant watch establishments and reported back on best practices.

This leads us to the second point of emphasis: Manchester's precocity in policing was not the result of a visionary technocratic effort, the product of individual genius and activism, but was rather the result of an accumulation of a new common wisdom on the part of wealthy Mancunian society as a whole. The Police Commissioners and boroughreeves who approved higher and higher numbers of watchmen year to year from the 1790s onward never discussed or intended a fundamental reconfiguration of law enforcement in Britain, and their augmentations – uniquely among Commission expenditures – rarely excited comment or controversy. Rather, law enforcement reform proceeded at the pace it did because each incremental reform seemed self-evidently necessary to each succeeding generation of governors once industrial urbanization had taken hold of Manchester. Indeed, any attempt to discern a transcendently “modern” ideological essence to policing rather collapses upon the antiquity of the New Police's actual techniques and technologies: the patrol was adopted and expanded from the night watch, handcuffs have apparently been in use since Roman times;³³ even such scribal techniques as nightly report books or the maintenance of a list of problematic figures “known to the police” seem likely adoptions from military intelligence practices, and were deployed in Manchester by the Court Leet officers before their general adoption by the constabulary.³⁴

In this regard, the figure who best embodies the logic of police reform in the industrial city is not Robert Peel, nor any other visionary activist. Tracing the period of the Manchester police force's most rapid and transformative growth, from the late 1820s with the restructuring

³³ Hugh Thompson, “Iron Age and Roman Slave-Shackles,” *Archaeological Journal* 150.1 (1993): 57–168.

³⁴ Casual reference to the collection of this sort of information by deputy constables is common in newspapers, e.g., *MM*, March 5, 1822: 4: “Timothy Houghton, known to the Police in this town...”; *ibid.*, October 5, 1824: “these fellows are well known to the Police as bad characters...” Joseph Nadin and Stephen Lavender after him seem to have led quite sophisticated intelligence-gathering operations, involving multiple sources and confidantes, particularly in the lucrative realm of currency policing. See, for instance, TNA, PL 27/7: “King vs William Carrol & Mary Baker for passage of base coin.”

of the Police Commission, through to the aftermath of incorporation in the early 1840s, one name appears in the record books more than any other, woven through all the various committees and public debates which took place over policing: that of William Neild. In most ways, Neild was entirely typical of the governing set that rose to public prominence through the Police Commission in the 1820s: he was a cotton-industry man from a dissenting (though in his case, Quaker) background; he inherited a calico printing firm at the peak of the high industrial expansion from his wife's father, granting him wealth, influence, and the leisure to immerse himself in civic affairs; and throughout his life, he espoused generally liberal, reformist beliefs.³⁵ At times, Neild found himself thrust to the forefront of local politics. It was he whom the Court Leet tried to coerce into serving as boroughreeve in 1837, touching off the controversy which ultimately led to incorporation; he also served a brief term as mayor from 1840 to 1842, making him only the second man to hold this post. In general, however, Neild clearly preferred to stay out of the public eye, and felt none of the controversialist joy of battle so relished by his better-known peers.³⁶ Neild himself left only a minimal, businesslike correspondence and no personal papers, but his son Alfred memorialized him in an autobiography he wrote for his children:

My father owed the warm esteem in which he was held to his transparent honesty and benevolence... He was a deeply religious man, and if there was a wrong to be righted, or some good to be done, he was always ready with his labour and money. He had not had many advantages of education, but he was a man of great natural powers. I have seen him make his way through intricate calculations with no knowledge of mathematics, but only

³⁵ See "Recollections of Alfred Neild," UMA, GB 133 ENG MS 872.

³⁶ After the fiasco of Neild's appointment as boroughreeve, Axon presents Cobden coaxing a reluctant Neild into battle. In a passage which is rendered in quotation marks but is likely a paraphrase, Neild responded, "I have tried my way, and it does not answer; I will go with you; all I stipulate is, that you will not take any course but what is consistent with morality and honour, and I will join you in any way you choose in order to put an end to this state of things" (Axon, *Cobden as Citizen*: 24). In the event, Neild felt such distress during the subsequent incorporation fight that he suffered some sort of personal crisis, forcing him to withdraw from business and political life for a time. He references this withdrawal in an 1839 letter to the Police Commission's Watch Committee (MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/4: June 3, 1839), and his son mentions it as well: "...my father worked hard in the matter and impaired his health by his exertions. I have a copy of 'Sam Slick', which was given him at this time by Mr. Cobden, in which the latter had written 'Read, laugh, and forget the Corporation'" ("Recollections of Alfred Neild": 14-15).

of common arithmetic. He was a great lover of poetry and could repeat a great deal by heart. Milton was his favourite. In politics he was a liberal of the old school.³⁷

Neild was, in other words, the very sort of grey, reliable figure who did the bulk of the actual governing activity during Manchester's high industrial period, though controversialists like Cobden or Prentice may have been given the spotlight. Elected in the first cohort of new-style Commissioners in the autumn of 1828, he quickly made his name for himself as a devoted committee member and public servant.³⁸ Throughout his long career, he spurned controversy, espoused what he thought to be respectable, liberal opinions and sought respectable, liberal civic outcomes. Generally, in a manner entirely characteristic of nineteenth-century moderates, he tried to de-politicize politics by naturalizing moderate liberal belief as the only legitimate political programme:

No one can deplore more than I do that the improvement of the municipal Police should be made a Political Question and I am prepared with ample proof that no pains have been wanting on my part to have the subject taken up on its merits. Nothing indeed is more harassing or distasteful to my feelings than anything like party differences or strife, an assertion strictly borne out by the whole tenour of my conduct during a residence of 35 years in the town...³⁹

Nothing in Neild's long career suggested he held any grand vision for the institution, other than this sense that it needed to grow and "improve". Alfred Neild's description of his eventual death is almost too perfect to be believed: "On the 4th of April 1864 my father died suddenly in the Town Hall. He was standing with his watch in his hand, awaiting the moment for the commencement of business, when he suddenly sank to the floor and immediately expired."⁴⁰ In short, while there were advanced Benthamites and technocrats aplenty in Manchester's governing set, it was possible to devote a lifetime to the astonishing progress of Mancunian

³⁷ Ibid.: 32-33.

³⁸ MCL, GB127.M9/30/1/6: September 11, 1828.

³⁹ MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/4: June 3, 1839.

⁴⁰ UMSC, "Recollections of Alfred Neild", GB 133 Eng MS 872: 21.

policing purely due to the kind of instinctive, bland sense of respectable liberalism common among the governing set.

For this very reason, it is highly significant how much *value* this entirely backroom, unremarkable reform character placed on law enforcement throughout his public life. Indeed, it is difficult to find Neild expressing concern for much else. He was nominated to the Police Commission Watch Committee at its first meeting on October 31, 1828, and immediately began devoting a remarkable portion of his life to its work. Three nights after chairing a long, complicated meeting on November 7, Neild and fellow committee member George Hall went out to inspect the rounds of Districts 1-6, an exercise which took the entire night; the two men then distilled their impressions in a formal report, and the following Monday, Neild chaired a long and contentious Watch meeting once again. When the watchmen needed coats, Neild was in charge of ordering them; when a committee member needed to pay a visit to the Accounts Committee to confer on rates defaulters, it was Neild who went. The carefully written minute book entry of June 21, 1830, speaks volumes:

Watch, Nuisance & Hackney Coach Committee

Town Hall June 21st 1830

Present Mr. William Neild.

Adjourned at ½ past 5 o'clock for want of attendance to tomorrow evening at ½ past 5 for six precisely.

William Neild Chairman⁴¹

Save for a health break, Neild was to faithfully maintain the same energetic level of activity and leadership until the committee was dissolved with incorporation, holding its formal chairmanship for 10 of the 11 years of its existence. When the corporation's new Watch Committee met for the

⁴¹ MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/1: 1828-1830.

first time on February 4, 1839, Neild was, of course, in attendance.⁴² Even during a two-year term as mayor, Neild made regular appearances at Watch Committee meetings.⁴³

Neild may have been extraordinary in his level of devotion to policing, but his general sense that policing was the most significant and inimitable aspect of the emerging new mode of governance was not a rare one among his peers. Every significant local political figure's name can be found in the Watch Committee attendance lists at some point – Richard Cobden attended a number of early Borough committee meetings, but seems to have soon left the exhausting work to his quieter friend. Neild is significant for our narrative not because he was extraordinary, but because he was an unimaginative conformist. His fairly anonymous career revealingly situates the radical expansion and restructuring of policing as an outgrowth of the characteristic energies and anxieties which were common to Neild's community.

Fear, violence and policing

In one sense, the character of this renovation of the watch plainly followed the pattern of “liberal state” reform in general: the close supervision and managerialism applied to a defined workforce; the regularization and de-personalization of actual watch practices; the bureaucratization and expansion of middle management and the flourishing of a new world of police paper, made up of policemen's notebooks, nightly reports, “Friday nights books”, regular reports to the Watch Committee, and the actuarial documentation of costs, payments, and receipts that these committees increasingly demanded. Seen against the background of the

⁴² MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Watch Committee/1: February 4, 1839.

⁴³ This comment does need to be qualified, as for most of Neild's two mayoral terms, Shaw was in office, and the Watch Committee rarely met; however, in these two months of Committee activity that did occur under his mayoralty, Neild chaired nearly every meeting and spearheaded the process of hiring Shaw's replacement. See MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Council Proceedings/2: October-November 1842.

expanding activity of the new liberal, middle-class, capitalist governing set, the prominence of the “New Police” mode can rather fade into the background.

But of course, policing was not simply another liberal state practice, because it involved the deliberate, systematic deployment of violence on a scale few local state structures had ever attempted. Furthermore, this violence was not undifferentiated, but was systematically concentrated in areas not seen as “respectable” – in other words, the same areas where the mass of the population went about their lives, and in no small measure, the areas where working-class people lived.⁴⁴ It has been suggested in this dissertation that the expansionism of the modern state was at root a function of the tendency toward crisis of a growth-predicated capitalist economy, and the rapidity and force with which crises proliferated. It has also been suggested that one great source of this instability and fragility was class conflict. When class tension is weighed against other sources of instability, however, a marked conceptual distinction must be made. When governing-set luminaries sought greater currency controls, more adaptable and accessible forms of corporate liability, better banking, freer trade, or the infrastructural enablement of free flows of information, goods, and people highlighted by the “liberal state” model, they sought essentially passive and defensive or ameliorative measures. Measures like the dramatic expansion of policing were not neutral and managerial: they were intrusive; they were antagonistic. The most significant context for the rise of modern policing was not some grand intellectual development, but was rather a governing class’s loss of faith in its own local society.

Year by year, as industrialization progressed and Manchester’s working population grew, generations of Boroughreeves, Police Commissioners, and Watch Committee members felt that

⁴⁴ In 1829, for example, the Watch Committee provided a breakdown of watch numbers per district; the only district to receive 10 watchmen was New Cross’s district 1, while nine each went to district 2, also in New Cross, and district 9, home of Jackson’s Row. Meanwhile, wealthy business areas such as those around the Exchange or north of Deansgate received three (district 12) or four (districts 13 and 14). See MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/1: June 29, 1829.

the existing capacity for state coercion in Manchester needed to be extended, strengthened, that its workforce needed greater discipline, numbers, youth, literacy. Into the gap generated by the dynamism of the industrial economy and the intractable problem of a specifically capitalist mode of inequality, worried governors thus sought to inject ever greater quantities of controlled and directed violence. In a misguided effort to fit the modern constabulary into the Foucauldian account of the state, some historians have suggested the new police were a passive, panopticon-like social presence;⁴⁵ the archival record makes clear the case was something like the opposite. The early modern watch *had* been, to a great degree, a passive surveillance technique. By expanding the watch's numbers, demolishing their boxes, placing them on permanent patrol, and granting them authority to make arrests and forcefully enter private property, the modernization program moved policing in one direction only: toward a greater, more intrusive, and more quotidian deployment of state violence in Manchester. In short, it was the distinctive class anxiety that permeated the industrial revolution's capital-holding political culture that made generations of Manchester's watch supervisors feel more intrusive law enforcement was necessary.

This root antagonism permeates all archival legacies of policing. In industrial Manchester, an essential clarity about who was being policed persists throughout the Watch Committee minutes and all other records of the emerging Mancunian new police strategy. When new "Inspectors of Police" were appointed in 1830, the targets of their interventions read like a guidebook to "disorderly" working-class past-times:

That any person or persons found assembling the steps, or outside any house or other building playing at pitch & toss, cards, or other unlawful games, will be taken recognizance of, and their names and places of abode taken down...

⁴⁵ E.g., Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*: 111.

That no person or persons be permitted to bathe in any of the canals or rivers, or otherwise indecently expose his or her person near any house or tenement...
That no person, or persons, shall fly any kite drive any hoop, run any race, or sing obscene ballads or songs in any of the streets or other public place...⁴⁶

Manchester's watchmen themselves, of course, were drawn broadly from the working and petty-capitalist populations, but for this very reason, their lives and habits were increasingly saddled with regulations intended to set them apart from their peers. Watchmen and later constables were to stay out of pubs and avoid gambling and violent sports. After the new 1830 regulations, they were in fact specifically prohibited from personal involvement in the working-class hospitality industry: "No watchman shall keep a public house, or sell liquor of any kind by his wife, or otherwise."⁴⁷ The attached report characterized the members of the watch as a caste apart:

It has been the constant aim of your committee to impress upon the men the responsibility of their situation, and to show them that they have nothing but their own good conduct to depend upon; and they are fully aware that no personal intercession can screen them from the effects of delinquency, the only mitigating circumstance being their previous good conduct whilst in service.

Following the same logic which had once been applied to Rome's auxiliary legions, Committees even began removing watchmen from rounds in their own neighbourhoods, lest local connections compete for their allegiances.⁴⁸

Indeed, if one has chiefly encountered nineteenth-century British policing through its generally class-averse historiography, the clarity of the class anxieties driving reform can be startling. One of the most significant figures in the history of Mancunian policing must certainly be Sir Charles Shaw, Chief Constable of the force from 1839 to 1842. Strictly speaking, Shaw

⁴⁶ MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/1: July 13, 1829.

⁴⁷ Ibid.: October 26, 1830.

⁴⁸ E.g.: *ibid.*, September 6, 1830: "[Resolved] that John Coleclough be removed to no 35 and Francis Duin to No 19 rounds as these men reside on their present rounds." Since at least one year previous (see the minutes of October 19, 1829), a watchman risked being fined if he failed to notify a superior when he moved, presumably in order to enable this policy.

was not the first Chief Constable of the Borough Constabulary, but his predecessor had only been on the job for a few months before Shaw, a military man, was pushed upon the new Borough by London to police Manchester through the Chartist agitation while litigation over the new Borough made its way through the courts.⁴⁹ Having received his position in these fraught circumstances, Shaw took an aggressive, missionary approach to his task, taking the already radically transformed force of the Police Commission and shearing it of all signs of the old “Watch” mentality. An outsider, but one with a romantic liberal outlook, Shaw saw it as his particular duty to determine what was *wrong* with the industrial north that should cause it to be so unruly. Toward the end of his tenure, he composed an extraordinary summary of his findings, published in pamphlet form as a letter to the great aristocratic technocrat Lord Brougham.

A few lines from this text appeared in the introduction to this dissertation. It is worth revisiting this passage with greater context at this juncture, as Shaw’s pamphlet provides us with one of the most unvarnished expressions of the Northern Exceptionalist mindset in the record, uttered by a figure of no small consequence for the development of law enforcement practices in Manchester:

In answer to some of the former Queries, I have assumed, and I think I am justified in so doing, that these districts are a new society or home colony. In the establishment of any new colony, all governments have looked upon the pure and impartial administration of justice as the basis of a well-regulated society, and to accomplish which government sends stipendiary magistrates to these colonies, who have no interested connexion with the general population, and whose employers are seldom appointed to sit on the bench of justice.

What is Manchester? A home colony ! ! to which crowds flock for the purpose of *rapidly* amassing fortunes, and then retiring.

Each census points out that the stream of population still flows thither, but it is a population always changing, and thus, consequently, remains in the position of a new colony. Although, within a few years, villages have become towns, yet, in a very great measure, the same system of government continues.

⁴⁹ Shaw makes his first appearance in the Watch Committee’s records in MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Watch Committee/1: October 14, 1839. For context, see Redford and Russell, Volume II: 41-52.

While the face of these districts is entirely changed, and its population has increased and is increasing, we must recollect that greater moral changes have taken place in that population, than even in the artificial changes which have been made in the features of the district which they inhabit.

It is a new class of men – a peculiar race.

So long as the people were kept in a state of ignorance they obeyed the laws, because *they were laws*; upon the principle that bigoted Catholics formerly obeyed what was told them by their priests, because *they were priests*. The days of such infatuation have passed away...

The administration of impartial justice is the basis of society; and I can see no beneficial method, except by placing these manufacturing districts under modified colonial government.⁵⁰

Needless to say, there is material for more than one study in this pamphlet; the instinctive alignment in Shaw's mind between colonial dynamics and the tensions thrown up by industrialization is particularly suggestive. Here, I will confine myself simply to pointing out how unhidden, how straightforward the class foundation of modern policing was in the assessment of one of its central architects. Policing was to develop into one of the more fraught and painfully contradictory institutions of modern society, and there is much complexity and nuance to be traced in its practical implementation; still, its origins in Manchester plainly and incontrovertibly lay in the distinctive class tensions of the nineteenth century.

By the 1830s, policing was not simply the unfortunate underbelly of an otherwise benign and class-blind state, a somewhat hypocritical side project undertaken by a liberalizing elite. Rather, it was fast becoming the *most* significant instrument of the modern state in Manchester to that state's managers; it was the non-negotiable reform, the one to which the most resources were devoted, and the one that garnered something like a total consensus across the political class. Indeed, there is a quiet hint to the increasing importance placed on policing in the very etymological shift which gave the new law-enforcement strategy its name. In the 1790s, the word

⁵⁰ Shaw, *Replies*: 43-44.

“police” in terms like the “Police Act” or the “Police Commission” meant something like what is today meant by “management” or “governance”, redolent of its etymological proximity to “policy”. By the 1820s (years before the arrival of the constabulary proper), the word “police” had increasingly attached itself to the growing numbers of uniformed law-enforcement officers who roamed Manchester’s streets – as if middle-class language had itself determined that policing was the real work of governing.⁵¹

Harder evidence of the growing significance of the police is to be found in civic budgets. The watch budgets of the 1790s were a significant item, but only made up a small minority of total spending – somewhere on the order of 10-15%. By the 1820s, the watch was fast becoming the largest expenditure year to year, responsible in no small part for ballooning civic budgets as a whole. By the time of incorporation, the cumulative re-evaluation of budgetary priorities would be radical. The terms of incorporation were to allow for the collection of two rates, one to pay for the constabulary, one for everything else. For Manchester proper – that is, the old city which the Commissioners had managed since 1792 – the general rate was £12,152, while the police rate was £11,345.⁵² Even still, this was not enough, and the town’s managers planned to supplement a significant portion of police costs with transfers from the borough’s general funds.⁵³

⁵¹ One can trace this shifting usage in the newspapers and public documents. In the late eighteenth century, when commissioners made resolutions pertaining to the town’s “police”, they were concerned not just with the watch, but with sanitation, tax collection, smoke abatement, and so on (e.g., MCL, GB127.M9/30/1/1: December 29, 1800: “The general and more important business of the police having been much impeded by repeated appeals at every meeting against the former year’s rate...”). As law enforcement grew to capture the middle-class imagination in the nineteenth century, it was increasingly the case that when “the police” were referred to in newspapers or speech, it was only their law-enforcement role which was meant: phrases like “known to the police”, “police officer”, and “police man” (one nineteenth-century meaning of “man” being “servant”) seem to have quickly taken on their modern connotation through this usage.

⁵² MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Council Proceedings/1: May 8, 1839.

⁵³ For the city as a whole, the Finance Committee anticipated general costs at £20,010, and police costs at £19,659, of which £6,120 would be paid from borough funds. Ibid.: April 26, 1839.

In fact, it seems clear that policing was a – if not the – major factor in the eventual push for incorporation itself. Manchester’s Police Commission had been unable to displace the manor authorities’ claim over the “day police”, nor could they coerce outer boroughs into participating in a coordinated policing program. Thoughts naturally turned to legislative solutions. One of the first public calls for incorporation was in fact made by Neild in his capacity as chair of an ad hoc Police Commission committee:

The advantages of placing the whole police establishment of the borough under one and the same direction must be too obvious to every one who reflects for a moment on the subject, to require from your committee, much if any comment. It would give to every individual within its limits, whenever he might require it, that protection and assistance which ought to be at all times available to every member of a civilized community...⁵⁴

Two years later, with the newly minted borough duly in effect, Neild claimed proudly that “I had the satisfaction of finding that Gentlemen of all parties concurred with me in opinion as to the absolute necessity of a change”.⁵⁵

From a small but significant line item, then, policing had grown to consume a budget nearly equivalent to every other municipal responsibility added together; not the underbelly, but the centrepiece of a new local state program. It would be going too far to say that the 1839 Corporation was a police force with a street-cleaning operation attached, and some major state institutions – notably the New Bailey prison and the workhouses – were still kept jurisdictionally apart from the borough, meaning one cannot equate “local state” with “corporation” entirely. There were a handful of comparable undertakings in other departments; for instance, the gas company’s expenses at times outran civic budgets, requiring ad hoc borrowing to finance expansions.⁵⁶ Still, by a significant and quantifiable margin, coercive law enforcement was the

⁵⁴ *MG*, January 7, 1837: 3. The Committee was an ad hoc body struck to inquire

⁵⁵ *MCL*, GB127.M9/30/5/4: June 3, 1839.

⁵⁶ See Chapter Six above.

innovation which the modern state's architects in Manchester most valued and prioritized, the legacy of their hegemony which most reflected their communal ideology and fears.

The impact of policing

The preceding pages make the case for awarding a prominent role for class antagonism and fear in structuring the emerging state system in high-industrial Manchester – much more prominent than is typically granted in existing models. Not all interactions between police and citizenry, of course, took the form of headlong conflict – “class warfare” in the twentieth-century sense of the term. Still, even in moments of voluntary working-class interaction with the police (“consensual” engagements) there is strong evidence of a deep-seated class friction playing out across working-class Manchester through the mechanisms of state.

Some of the Crown Court depositions actually capture the chaos and drama of these early moments of intervention. One of the most evocative of these involved the death of William Rowland in 1835.⁵⁷ The crime which spurred the inquest took place at the far northeastern edges of Ancoats, only a couple minutes' walk from the green fields along the Rochdale Canal. Still, this neighbourhood was deeply implicated in the sociocultural dynamics of classical industrialization, as nearly all of its residents – man, woman and child – were either factory or warehouse workers.⁵⁸

William Rowland died here from unknown causes early in the morning of November 19. Sometime before dawn of that day, his wife Betty Rowland appeared at her friend Ann Heaton's door and woke up the house. Heaton asked her what the matter was, and Heaton responded

⁵⁷ TNA, PL 27/11, “Rex agt. Betty Rowland.”

⁵⁸ The neighbourhood is often mentioned in the charity visiting notebook kept by John Layhe discussed at the opening of this dissertation.

simply, “My husband’s dead.” She asked Heaton to come home with her, on the way warning her, “It will be very awful for you, Nanny, for you will find him sat in his chair.” When they arrived at the house, Rowland opened the door and stood back. There indeed, erect in his chair, dressed in shirt and night cap and wrapped in Betty’s cloak, was William Rowland’s corpse.

Prior to his death, Betty and William had quarrelled frequently; their relationship had evidently been volatile enough that some neighbours’ suspicions were raised by the mere fact of William’s death. There also seems to have been some gossip about Betty’s past relationships. Shortly after noon, Jeremiah Crawley – a resident of nearby Boardman Square and a friend of William Rowland’s – heard of the tragedy. Crawley made his way quickly to the house, strode through the door, and levelled a shocking accusation at Betty: “Well you have disposed of this man as you have of others. You have actually poisoned him.” Friends were in the home helping lay out the body, meaning this was very much a public accusation, and Betty Rowland melted; “She made no reply but looked extremely embarrassed and her countenance changed much and she seemed as if she was fixed to the chair on which she sat.” No one in the room spoke; Crawley tried to stare Rowland down. Finally, she burst out, “Stop! Stop! I’ll tell you!”, but then rushed for the door. Crawley threw her back, crying, “No, wretch, I will not be stopped by you until I have given information to the coroner and the officers!” Leaving this threat hanging in the air, he left.

Neighbours helped prepare and lay out the body. On the Sunday following William Rowland’s death, 15 or 20 of them – likely all that could pack into the Rowlands’ home – arrived for the burial. They proceeded to become ritually drunk, each of them consuming rum, ale and tobacco, until the air was thick with smoke. The plan was to carry the body about a 15-minute walk down to the Swedenborgian Every Street burying ground.

As the party was preparing to depart, James Sawley, deputy constable of Manchester burst through the door, bringing the proceedings to an abrupt halt. Sawley demanded that the widow be identified, and so Betty Rowland stood. Sawley interrogated her before her guests: when had William died? Early Thursday morning. When had he taken ill? The day before. What was the nature of his complaint? Something to do with his bowels. Had he seen a surgeon? No. Upon eliciting this answer, Sawley announced that Betty could not bury the body until it had been seen by a coroner.

Tension broke into outrage. Rowland insisted that she would bury her husband that afternoon, and her friends and neighbours chimed in in her defence, some of them rising angrily from their chairs. Matching the escalation, Sawley seized Rowland and said that if they were intent on burying William, he would take her with him. A man Sawley later described as “tall and lusty” arose and told Sawley he would do no such thing. Eventually, Sawley managed to get Rowland out of the house by claiming he wished merely to ask her questions. Instead, he promptly marched her to a lockup and imprisoned her there.

Several of the funeralgoers had followed to ensure fair treatment. Witnessing Rowland’s imprisonment, they began to gather in numbers outside the lockup, threatening a riot. Sawley hastily consulted with J. Fredstoner, the coroner, and both agreed that they could not be responsible for an “outrage”. Sawley returned to the crowd and struck a somewhat macabre deal: Rowland would be released and the funeral would go ahead as planned, so long as the authorities were told which burying ground would be used. After a decent interval, they would then go, dig William up, and conduct the autopsy they so desired. The mourners agreed to this. Betty was released and William buried.

On November 27th, the body was exhumed. Henry Ollier, one of Manchester's chief medical men, directed the body be brought into a small shed adjoining the burial ground. William's corpse had been decaying for a week before Ollier cut it open, but he was still able to gather a sample from the stomach lining which later tested positive for arsenic. Betty was found and placed under arrest; she was hanged on April 9, 1836.⁵⁹

For many decades, historians have struggled to frame a coherent historical account of intrusions like these. On the one hand, there is a radical strain in the historiography, exemplified by Robert Storch's depiction of the New Police as "domestic missionaries", which characterizes the constables straightforwardly as ground troops in a coherent ideological program of class conflict.⁶⁰ Tending to focus on the most class-confrontational moments of policing – the strike-breaking, the suppression of popular past-times, and the attacks on popular protests that made up a significant portion of police work from its inception – this tradition stipulates a class-coercive *essence* to the modern police force. While constables may also have helped old ladies cross streets and returned lost children to their homes, it was the moments of violent class confrontation which gave policing its real purpose.

A contravening tendency has instead woven a narrative of policing that emphasizes voluntary engagement with the new forces. These accounts stress the moments of collaboration, even seeming celebration or endorsement of the police by the citizenry, with a special focus on

⁵⁹ "Executions", *Westmorland Gazette and Kendal Advertiser* (Kendal), April 16, 1836.

⁶⁰ See Robert D. Storch, "The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850–1880," *Journal of Social History* 9.4 (1976): 481–509; for other "radical" interpretations, see also Storch, "The Plague of Blue Locusts: Police Reform and Popular Resistance in Northern England, 1840–57," *International Review of Social History* 20.1 (1975): 61–90; V.A.C Gatrell, "Crime, Authority, and the Policeman State," in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain* Volume 3, edited by F.M.L. Thompson, 243–310 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Carolyn Steedman presents a slightly more complex but still markedly class-based analysis in the excellent *Policing the Victorian Community*.

the working class.⁶¹ The latest iteration of this pattern is David Churchill's recent work, in which he insists that "new modes of policing reshaped responses to crime in highly significant ways, yet without disempowering the civilian public." Churchill goes so far as to argue that the continued engagement of the public with law enforcement in the nineteenth century does away with what he calls "the state monopolisation thesis", "the notion that governance passed from the public to the police in the nineteenth century."⁶²

Before returning to the Rowland case, I would offer three observations on the debate as it currently stands:

- 1) The "state monopolisation thesis" appears to be Churchill's term, and I suspect many of its supposed proponents would chafe against it. Still, considering that Manchester's reforms involved a four-fold growth in police density in the city proper over the course of industrialization, the wholesale restructuring of police patrol patterns in the 1820s and 30s, and the routine application of coercive techniques to urban populations which had hitherto been restricted to military contexts and uprisings, the "New Police" mode must be considered a dramatic expansion of the state's infrastructural power if such terms of analysis are to have any meaning. Put another way, if the emergence of modern policing does not conform to one's expectations of state expansion – and, to be just, it might very well not do so – one must revise those expectations.

⁶¹ As a generally collaborationist account (typically with differing emphases on conflict and collaboration according to a chronological scale) has been and remains the hegemonic historiographical stance on policing, this generalization would take in the bulk of police scholarship published on the British example. Major works include Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); Stanley Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); David Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); and already cited works such as Elaine Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies* (1998), and John Beattie, *The First English Detectives* (2012).

⁶² David Churchill, *Crime Control*: 13. See also Churchill, "Rethinking the State Monopolisation Thesis."

- 2) The exchanges between the coercive and consensual schools have often amounted to emphatically pointing to one of two different patterns of evidence; if we see clearly, we find *both* patterns abundantly in evidence in the nineteenth century. Indeed, reading through the *Manchester Guardian* issues of a single year would provide one with plenty of exemplary cases of both Storchite and Churchillian policing.⁶³ The fact that there is such a perennial debate, then, might be symptomatic of a shared essentialist tendency. Both arguments rest on the problematic insistence that a subset of police actions reveals some core character of the whole.
- 3) This does not mean, however, that the two sides should be seen as equivalent: in at least acknowledging and seeking to come to terms with the coercive, class-saturated habits of policing, Storch and his few defenders came much closer to a comprehensive, evidence-based depiction of nineteenth-century policing – which whatever the complexities, had a clear and quantifiable class dimension, and was, of course, predicated on the deployment of violence.⁶⁴

The challenge as I see it, then, is to understand in a clear-eyed fashion how the “blue locusts” that Storch depicted could *also* be sought out and relied upon by working-class people on a routine basis – how policing could at once retain a strong class dynamic and become a tool used by some working-class people. A number of historians have sought their way out of this trap by

⁶³ Take, for instance, the “Local and Provincial Intelligence” section of a single issue of the *Manchester Guardian* – that of July 31, 1841. A “strong body of police” is credited with suppressing a bricklayers’ strike at the Manchester and Birmingham Railway Station, while Edmund Lister was committed for three months “for having attempted to rescue four lads from the police,” making him the fourth member of his family to be imprisoned, and John Turner and William White were both convicted of attacking county police officers. Meanwhile, Mrs. Baylis, the landlady of the Bird-in-Hand in Ancoats Street called in one of the new constables to arrest two of her customers for attempting to pay her with false coins.

⁶⁴ The random example in the note immediately above conveniently embodies these patterns of class behavior; a bricklayer might well go to the police in certain circumstances, but it is far easier to find evidence of pub owners like Mrs. Baylis doing so.

postulating shifting chronological patterns of police behaviour – for instance Patrick Joyce: “[It] took some time before the police pulled back from the public order and ‘domestic mission’ functions they had in the early days, and established the subtle reciprocities that enabled ‘policing by consent’ to operate.”⁶⁵ Joyce offers no archival evidence to support this chronology, but an analysis which postulates an essentially non-coercive police force at any point in history calls upon us to overlook the inherently coercive nature of police action.

I would suggest that complex cases like that of Betty Rowland can be immensely helpful in navigating a way out of this maze. The experiences of Rowland and her community are so illuminating precisely because they do not pull in a single interpretative direction, evoking instead the incoherence and contradictions of the police as a historical institution.

Firstly, Jeremiah Crawley’s actions make clear that an archetypal cotton-industry worker of the high industrial period might well have voluntarily invited police action. Indeed, Crawley’s deployment of “the officers” as a threat suggests that the increasing power of the police as an institution had already begun to seep into the working-class consciousness in surprising and non-linear ways.

Secondly, while it is doubtless true that the police were often notoriously ineffective when called upon to solve working-class problems, Sawley’s actions here remind us that there was no hidden conspiracy of capital which was effected through the police. Sawley exerted great personal energy in this case, placed himself in personal danger and in fact caused a disturbance, all for the sole purpose of punishing the murderer of a working-class man. Any explanation of policing which absolutely precludes such motivations, or postulates them as somehow less “real” or essential than others, must travesty the evidence.

⁶⁵ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*: 111.

Finally, however, this case makes clear that one cannot escape the essential class dynamics of police operations, even in cases where specific class questions or politics were not at issue. This is because class relations and tensions were not, in the end, the product of organized political campaigning, but rather were experienced first and most viscerally as clashes of culture. Put another way, class politics developed out of the experience of class – not the other way around. We do not know how Rowland’s community as a whole interpreted the events of William Rowland’s death. It is tempting to postulate that, knowing Betty was being abused, they were willing to excuse William’s murder; it is also entirely consistent with the evidence, however, to suggest that they simply did not believe Betty to be responsible, for reasons that are not apparent in the depositions. It is likewise possible that community sentiment was more complex than either of these hypotheticals. The clear point, however, is that whatever the dominant belief in Betty’s community was, the unambiguous, legally prescribed interpretation of the police was experienced as a painful and violent *external* imposition, one galling enough to provoke community resistance and riot. Crawley may have invited the police in, but in so doing, he called down an outside force. Many policemen may have been raised in working-class communities – perhaps even Sawley was from a weaving family – but as an institution, they were not of this culture, and were indeed instructed and trained to behave antagonistically to some of its common morals and institutions.

Even in the quotidian activity of policing, then, if one wishes to understand policing as it has historically operated, one should look less for a single technocratic rationale undergirding the new police mode than a dominant explanatory context for its emergence – and this context must, in the end, be the presiding class antagonisms of the emerging industrial society, the tensions and volatility which made “the public” drop its quaint objections to patrolling forces and embrace

street law enforcement on a scale of intensity no society had hitherto attempted. As Manchester entered the final stage of the development of its local state structures, then, the institution which lay at the heart of this development reflected and embodied the powerful class anxieties and antagonisms structuring industrial society.

The Borough

In 1835, the reformed British parliament passed the “Act to provide for the Regulation of Municipal Corporations in England and Wales,” intending to provide a useable administrative framework for the country’s newest large towns like Manchester, Birmingham and Sheffield. In the delicate balance of 1830s Police Commission politics, reformers did not in fact immediately seize the opportunity, though the Watch Committee’s frustrations with its inability to control the day police meant that change was clearly on the horizon. In 1837, the dam broke with the fight over William Neild’s involuntary appointment as boroughreeve; an outraged Richard Cobden published the classic pamphlet entitled *Incorporate Your Borough!*, and a definite campaign to incorporate was underway, spearheaded by the Reform leaders of the governing set.

After a brief but fractious partisan battle, corporate borough governance finally came to Manchester in 1838, largely on the reformers’ terms. The text of the Manchester Incorporation Act, in the voice of the recently crowned Victoria, proclaimed that:

We...by virtue of the powers and authorities given to us by the said recited Act, made and passed in the first year of our reign, do hereby grant and declare that the inhabitants of the borough of Manchester comprised within the district hereinbefore described, and their successors, shall be for ever hereafter one body politic and corporate, in deed, fact, and name; and that the said body corporate shall be called “The Mayor, Aldermen, and Burgesses of the borough of Manchester, in the county of Lancaster;” and them, by the name of the Mayor, Aldermen, and Burgesses of the borough of Manchester, in the county of Lancaster, into one body corporate and politic, in deed, fact, and name, do, for us, our heirs and successors, erect and constitute by these presents.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Council Proceedings/1: iii-v.

The structure of the new council involved a three-layered hierarchy: the councillors formed the general body of civic governance, who, meeting together, formed the “Borough Council”, the highest legislative body in the town; meanwhile, they elected the mayor and aldermen from among their own number to lead most routine business and long-term projects through dedicated committees. This was, of course, a solidified form of the system which the Police Commission had followed since 1828, but the edifice was extricated from all remaining tendrils of the Court Leet and its authority was extended over Chorlton-upon-Medlock, Hulme, Ardwick, Beswick, and Cheetham. While the Act preserved the historical eccentricity of maintaining Salford as a separate political entity, and even more surprisingly, working-class Newton managed to keep itself free of the clutches of the Borough (and would continue to do so until 1890), the Act otherwise – and for the first time – consolidated the contiguous urban sprawl around Manchester under one municipal jurisdiction.

Like its predecessor institutions, participation in the new government itself was firmly established as a property-based privilege, not a right. Cobden, the incorporation push’s most visible spokesman, made some effort to diffuse working-class opposition by presenting the effort in a maximally radical light, at times simply lying about the Act’s contents when speaking to working-class audiences. Pickering even quotes one meeting at which Cobden claimed the Act “guaranteed the democratic principle” with “annual parliaments, universal suffrage and vote by ballot.” Nonetheless, and as Pickering points out, a subsequent study of New Cross Ward found that the ward’s 9000 crowded homes would yield just 427 electors under the terms Cobden supported. The Act thus passed against vociferous opposition by local democrats. James Wroe, later to serve as the respectable face of the Chartist movement in Manchester, snorted that “he had advocated democracy when Mr. Cobden was in petticoats and he ought to know something

about it; this was no democracy.”⁶⁷ On November 1, 1838, a list of the qualifying Burgesses was posted around town; those who felt they had been erroneously left off were given a week to submit their claims. On November 8, the list was taken down again, and Manchester’s newly consolidated political class was established.⁶⁸

On December 14, elections were held for councillors, while on December 15 the aldermen and the mayoralty were chosen. At 6 pm that day, the new council met for the first time in the Manor Court Room on Brown Street, for some time the meeting place of the Court Leet. On January 3, 1839, the council laid out its governing priorities. Two ad hoc committees were struck to hammer out jurisdictional battles with the County, Court Leet, and the rump of the Police Commission: “A Committee to inquire into all matters relating to the administration of justice within the borough” and “A Committee to take all steps which may appear desirable, either in obtaining the opinion of Counsel or otherwise, in regard to the proceedings had, or to be had, under the Charter.” Only one department was immediately put into action:

the Council should, at its next meeting, appoint a “Watch Committee,” to be invested with all the powers given to such Committee by the Municipal Act; and as such Committee is one of great importance, and upon which considerable power has been conferred, it appears desirable that there should be included in its number, one gentleman nominated by each ward throughout the borough...⁶⁹

The priorities of the newly consolidated state were unmistakeable.

Reading through the Council Minutes one has the impression of something profound being built, but the rollout of the new council was still not as clean or straightforward as its proponents had likely wished. Pockets of resistance to the new way of doing business persisted across Manchester for several years. The newly-formed Watch Committee was plagued with

⁶⁷ Paul Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (New York: St. Martin, 1995): 75.

⁶⁸ MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Council Proceedings/1, October 29, 1838.

⁶⁹ Ibid., January 3, 1839.

recalcitrant local authorities who refused to turn over everything from lockup keys to watchmen's coats, rattles, and sticks.⁷⁰ A coalition of democratic Commissioners and embittered Tories even did their best to ignore the new borough's existence and keep Commission affairs running as before.⁷¹ The Manor Court, meanwhile, limped on until the Council finally bought the manor rights from the Mosley family in 1844, while the still generally Tory county authorities did their best to obstruct the borough's progress in petty battles over coroner's court jurisdictions and the like.⁷² Perhaps the most serious affront came when the county overseers refused to collect and turn over taxes for the new borough, denying its jurisdiction. In one of the more tangible examples of cotton wealth influencing state development, the wealthy councillors themselves simply paid the Borough budget out of their own pockets, with very uncertain prospects of being refunded: Sir Thomas Potter, the new mayor, led by example by putting up £1000 himself.⁷³

For many in the governing set, the most painful moment was doubtless the imposition of Sir Charles Shaw's leadership on the newly formed borough constabulary in the summer of 1839. While the borough council had succeeded in establishing a new constabulary by convincing the old watch to switch its allegiances from the Police Commission, a number of recalcitrant commissioners, in a fairly egregious act of provocation, simply replaced the Commission's former manpower by hiring dozens of new watchmen, while the Manor

⁷⁰ Notes on this theme appear throughout the 1839 minutes. Chorlton-upon-Medlock had apparently been particularly reluctant to join the corporation, having received a special sermon in *Incorporate Your Borough!* (Axon, *Cobden as Citizen*: 55-59), and as of late July 1839, was still refusing to grant the Corporation access to their lock-ups. By the time Shaw had taken over at the end of the year, the Committee was finally able to turn over the keys. Chorlton was a large and heterogenous area by this point, home to some of Manchester's wealthiest and poorest neighbourhoods, and it had been granted its own Improvement Act – meaning that, as in Manchester power, incorporation undid an existing locus of political power.

⁷¹ A body was still meeting as the Police Commissioners until 1843; see MCL, M9/30/1/8.

⁷² Redford and Russell gave an excellent account of these clashes in "Early Struggles of the Borough Council," in *Local Government in Manchester*, Vol. II: 27-63.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 41.

authorities refused to give up control of the limited “day police”. For a few chaotic months, Manchester was in the rather disturbing situation of possessing three police forces, each citing a mutually exclusive set of legal origins for its authority, and two of which actually patrolled the town in significant numbers. As the north started to experience mass Chartist meetings and the Borough’s authority was bogged down in the courts, the Home Office decided to take action. Through a new Act of Parliament, they imposed Shaw’s leadership from above, technically abolishing all three forces simultaneously, while functionally placing the Borough’s constabulary under Shaw’s command.⁷⁴ In the short term, this was a welcome development for the Council, as it removed through *deus ex machina* one of the more troublesome sources of obstruction while the Council devoted its attention to its litigation battles. Still, it meant a painful and humiliating abandonment of control over the centrepiece of local government after years of careful preparation. Neild and his associates did their best to be helpful to the new force, but Shaw never seems to have grasped the complexity or history of the situation he had been dropped into. Convinced both sides were equally to blame for the situation and therefore equally his enemies, he generally succeeded in alienating Manchester’s political class as a whole. The borough Watch Committee stopped its weekly meetings in October 1839, and ceased meeting altogether in May 1840; it was not to meet again until September of 1842, when Shaw’s tenure ended.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ In its structure and function, Shaw’s force was clearly a continuation of the borough force, and indeed borough constables made up the bulk of his hires; see MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Watch Committee/1: January 6, 1840. Shaw did, however, make some effort to hire men from all three forces, a policy which in his own estimation only caused him grief.

⁷⁵ Shaw’s tenure threw an indeterminate and somewhat chaotic element in the narrative of Mancunian local governance’s modernization. Taking a survey of the evidence of his years – which, admittedly, is not plentiful, given that the Watch Committee stopped meeting – he seems to have played a fundamentally ambiguous role. Going by the pamphlet he published after his departure, Shaw does not seem to have had a meaningful grasp on the political context he was entering into, and barely mentioned the new corporation in his assessment of local rule. He presented the co-existence of two police forces in the town upon his arrival as a sort of gift by the town’s ruling class as a whole, despite the fact that the Corporation force was barely four months old, and likewise that the Corporation’s legal battles to rationalize the situation had in part led to his own appointment (see Shaw: 10-13). More egregiously, he presented himself as the sole and heroic instigator of a police modernization programme that had in reality been substantively completed by the time of his arrival, stymied only by the recalcitrant Police Commission’s

For all these frustrations, however, the direction of travel was clear. Though obstructionism hobbled Council activity badly throughout 1839 and 1840, the Borough won favourable rulings in every single court case that was fought over the charter, and after two final rulings in 1841, the Corporation's Tory opponents gave up the fight. From this point onward, Manchester's governing class as a whole accepted the Borough as the appropriate arena for its political energies.

In the short term, incorporation powerfully legitimated the informal influence and administrative capacity the liberal governing set had been developing for two decades. Michael Turner's 11 "band" members, for instance, were at the forefront of borough activity: John Shuttleworth became an alderman, Prentice and Taylor were made councillors, and Sir Thomas Potter was elected mayor, while Richard Potter and Joseph Brotherton were already serving as MPs in the reformed Parliament.⁷⁶ Personal and business connections developed and strengthened over decades now gave Manchester's local governance direct access to national government. There were also dozens of anonymous and moderate liberals like Neild who had been developing networks and habits of governance under the umbrella of commission work for years, many of whom fell back into their places under the new system. Neild, of course, headed up the new Watch Committee, with other faithful members like Edward Shawcross by his side. In the long term, incorporation resolved the jurisdictional and administrative questions which had plagued industrial Manchester since radical population growth had begun in the mid-eighteenth century, allowing for unhindered future institutional growth and adaptation. There

interference. What is clear is that Shaw somewhat deliberately spurned his obvious allies in town – the reforming police enthusiasts such as Neild, who was in fact mayor upon his arrival. He spent much of his pamphlet excoriating not just the political, but the financial and industrial decision-making of local cotton capitalists, and presented himself as the only propertied man in Manchester who really understood the workers. According to Redford and Russell, the town's liberals tolerated Shaw in public as the leader of a force they saw as vital and in need of support, while begging London in private to be rid of him as soon as the legal status of the Corporation was settled.

⁷⁶ MCL, GB127.Council Minutes/Council Proceedings/1, December 15, 1838; see also Turner: 7-31.

were to be no more semi-formal public meetings, or street fights between wealthy factions; the legally legitimated state had expanded to encompass nearly the entire terrain of governing-class political contestation. To a meaningful extent, the reformers of 1838 gave Manchester the essential structure of governance which it has retained to this day.⁷⁷

Incorporation, then, stands as the single most consequential administrative act in the history of Mancunian governance. In the *Rule of Freedom*, Patrick Joyce, giving voice to the Foucauldian, institutionalist vision, gives a two-stage account of the development of local government: in his telling, an archaic, early modern *ancien regime* was blasted out of the water by a hyper-modern, liberal governmentality in 1838:

If jurisdictions [before 1838] overlapped and combined, qualification for membership of these various bodies varied greatly, for example between the often rather democratic, residence-based, form of the Parish Vestry, the property-based franchises of the Commissions, and the nomination of the Lord of the Manor. Election itself might be direct or indirect... In all of this, there was no clearly defined political subject. The 'political subject', as it were, was splintered between these different jurisdictions, functions, and franchises. At the same time, there was no clearly delineated public sphere, just as the civil was incompletely separated from the religious and the political. The general emergence of an autonomous political sphere is therefore evident in this area too. *The Municipal Corporations Act intervened upon this situation with a relentless, liberal logic, in part the product of Benthamite thinking. There was a radical simplification of political subjecthood, and a clear delineation of a discrete civil, political sphere.*⁷⁸ [emphasis added]

This account is not just flawed, but substantively incorrect. There was, of course, a fairly defined political subject in 1837: the Police Commission voter. Neither the Police Commission nor the Manor Court (nor, for that matter, the parish vestries) were abolished by incorporation: it took a six-year long process of litigation, petitioning, and subsequent parliamentary acts to grant the

⁷⁷ This generalization, of course, glosses over several amalgamations and rationalizations of Manchester-area governance since – indeed, Greater Manchester's current status as a metropolitan county is a late twentieth-century invention.

⁷⁸ Joyce, *Rule of Freedom*:107-8.

Borough uncontested sovereignty. In general, rather than “a relentless, liberal logic” revolutionizing Mancunian governance in 1838, 1838 saw the setting of the final capstone on a complex arrangement which was already substantially in place, having taken decades to form through incremental changes and disconnected decisions. The modern state had emerged in Manchester not in a moment of modernist transcendence, but as a gradual, societal alignment to a new set of material and social conditions.

Still, even as they found themselves buried in spiteful litigation and bureaucratic obstructions, the governing set which had taken the reins of state in the 1830s could congratulate themselves as the new year began in 1839 for a rather remarkable administrative achievement. The reforms and expansions which they had advocated for years had been enshrined into law. Their own influence and authority in the town had been legitimated by Parliament and continued to receive crucial Cabinet support, even though the majority of them were first-generation arrivals to Manchester. To be fair to Joyce, there is something remarkable for the state historian in witnessing such an achievement; rarely enough in history does one find a self-aware community seem to so effectively manifest its political vision as administrative reality. The core of the Foucauldian impulse, I believe, is an effort to capture and transmit the particular charisma of this coup.

Any sense of completion Manchester’s new governors may have felt, however, was to last a few months at most. It was not the petty bureaucratic wrangling and litigation which was to prove so disturbing: obstruction had been anticipated, and generally the reformers, as ever, warmed to the fight, confident this time of parliamentary support. The most jarring challenge came from below. Only months after modernity was to have been finally, decisively tamed in the

industrial city, the working people of the cotton districts rose up in the most decisive rejection of liberal technocratic politics yet seen.

Modernity untamed

In the evening golden hour of July 26, 1839, a few months after the founding of the Borough Council, around 2000 working people gathered in a field outside of Hulme. The meeting was just one of several that week that drew crowds of thousands in the Manchester area; as one *Guardian* reporter put it, “the topics were, as usual, abuse of the authorities and the police, and discussions as to the period for commencing the ‘National Holiday’.” Chartism had existed as an organized movement for roughly a year, with the People’s Charter having been published in London in May of 1838. In June, however, an overwhelming majority of MPs had voted to throw out the first Chartist petition, and the summer’s meetings therefore took on a new scale and a new edge.

The Hulme rally is of particular interest because of a preserved, fairly detailed record of its speeches, submitted to the borough’s anxious new magistrates by several informers and one constable.⁷⁹ Their testimonies provide something of the flavour of the moment. One of the first speakers was identified as “a man of the name of Taylor”, who was perhaps William Taylor, a lay preacher.⁸⁰

Taylor...said he was not for pistols, muskets spikes or spears, but the time was now come when they must have them, and grievances would not be redressed without them. He said the middling classes were against them in consequence of their connection with the aristocracy. He then represented in strong language the misery of the working classes, hundreds of whom, he said, never tasted meat but were obliged to divide a herring between a family – They knew their misery – they knew their degradation he said and quoted scripture to prove that it was no harm to destroy their oppressors.

⁷⁹ TNA, PL 27/11, “Regina v Linney Taylor and Jackson.”

⁸⁰ See Pickering: 113.

Taylor was then followed by another proletarian preacher, a former shoemaker known as the Reverend W. Jackson:

He said he was happy to be amongst them again and that he had come to the firm determination to do all in his power to work the freedom of the people. He asked if they were prepared to follow the Convention, and to go to any lengths, no matter how far, at any time – hour, or place they might tell them? He advised them all to be armed, and said there ought not to be a man, woman or child, who was not so. He said it was useless to leave their arms on their mantle shelves but bring them with them, not openly but concealed, and if they were Peterlooed, England should be in flames from one end to the other, and the soil should team with blood.

As this informant put it, “His speech was violent in the extreme – for universal suffrage and no surrender.”⁸¹

Unlike many earlier testimonies by spies, these quotes seem to be verbatim, or something close to it. Several of the testimonies capture nearly identical phrasings, and one of the witnesses, Walter Smythe, was in fact questioned about his shorthand ability, implying his evidence was transcribed.⁸² If the language of the Hulme meeting seems shocking when compared with the general euphemism and reticence displayed at earlier radical open-air gatherings, however, it was not atypical of Manchester Chartism in these years. Throughout the summer of 1839, Manchester’s magistrates collected dozens of independent testimonies carrying much the same flavour. A few days after the Hulme meeting, one of the Borough’s own clerks, Percival Jefferson, happened upon another rally on Every Street in Ancoats:

I attended a meeting on the first of this month behind W Sewell’s Chapel in Every Street in this Borough. A cart was placed for a hustings and a [Christopher] Doyle took the chair. Doyle said the object is to obtain universal suffrage or the Charter. They wished to use peaceable means but if not they would use forcible ones and they were fully prepared to do so.⁸³

⁸¹ “Regina v Linney.”

⁸² PL 27/11, “The Queen v William Jackson William Tillman & others.” Note that this meeting was the subject of multiple inquests, with some witnesses testifying more than once, hence the varying citations.

⁸³ PL 27/11, “The Queen v Christopher Doyle.”

On August 20, Robert Boyd, one of the Borough's freshly minted constables was able to offer this description of a meeting in Boardman Square:

[The speaker] Roberts said if the police had interfered at the meeting last Saturday in Stevenson's Square, the streets would have been flowing with blood... He also told them that Lord John Russell had recommended the higher classes to arm themselves to protect their own lives and property and of course the same recommendation would apply to the working classes.⁸⁴

At these meetings, there was to be no censorial intervention by "respectable" minds like Archibald Prentice. This is not to say these meetings were totally chaotic or non-hierarchical; they followed the same regulatory framework of electing and obeying a chairman as any other public meeting of the period, and seem to have generally maintained good order. Rather, the basic animating message of "universal suffrage and no surrender" was endorsed and adopted by these bodies as an explicit, intentional collective principle. A banner which was transcribed both by informers and *Guardian* reporters captured the broad democratic ethos of the northern working people's movement without ambiguity: "Every man has a right to have one vote in the choice of his representative in right of his existence – and his title deed is his person."⁸⁵

Chartism, of course, was a national movement, with broad participation across the British Isles. Nonetheless, when Manchester's democratic activists gathered in the summer of 1839, they were doing something more locally grounded and pointed than simply following the trends of a national movement. For one thing, all six of the Charter's points had by then held a broad currency in working-class politics in the north for decades, and most of Manchester's Chartist leaders had several years' experience as democratic activist leaders.⁸⁶ Manchester's recent struggles over representation and the franchise gave the Charter a particular resonance in the

⁸⁴ Ibid., "The Queen v Wm Butterworth."

⁸⁵ Cf. "Regina v Linney," "Local and Provincial Intelligence," *TMG*, August 3, 1839: 2.

⁸⁶ See Pickering, "'A Wall of Brotherhood' – The Reform Community," in *Chartism and the Chartists*: 34-55.

cotton districts, and the most cohesive attempt at a single national organization – the National Chartist Association – was founded in a New Cross pub in 1840. Perhaps most disturbingly for the borough magistrates, Manchester Chartism incorporated as one of its chief rhetorical points an emphatic, wholesale rejection of the new borough system. Sir Thomas Potter, who in his mayoral capacity as a magistrate personally conducted a number of the anti-Chartist inquests, was frequently called out by name from Chartist platforms: many of the July 26 witnesses agreed that Jackson had called Potter a “villainous wicked base wretch”, while William Tillman, another speaker, issued a specific threat: “He could tell Potter the self-constituted authority, – that had he (the speaker) held up his finger, [Potter] and his minions would have been swept from the face of the earth, and the place in which they were would have been levelled in the dust.”⁸⁷ Roberts, the speaker at Boardman Square, put the matter in plain terms: “there were two fashions of police, but for his part he would prefer the old.”⁸⁸

This confrontational approach was not just brinksmanship by a disproportionately radical leadership. The numbers which regularly turned out to these meetings are suggestive enough in themselves of broad-based support, but the extent to which Chartism had filtered throughout the working-class consciousness is preserved in the archive in multiple, sometimes surprising ways. Charity visitors, for example, noted increasingly frequent moments of confrontation with working-class democrats, who understood plainly enough the ideological valences of missionary activity. In a not uncommon arrangement, James Bembridge was employed by mill owner J.C. Worsley to hand out evangelical tracts in the slums and report back to Worsley the working-class *zeitgeist*. He often recorded the debates he would fall into with Chartists:

Conversed with two young men who are charterists one of them has been united with the Wesleyans, [I said] how came you to take such a step as that to leave the Wesleyans &

⁸⁷ “The Queen v William Jackson;” “Regina v Linney.”

⁸⁸ “The Queen v Wm Butterworth.”

join the Charterists perhaps the next step you take you will become a socialists [sic], no – no God forbid he ever should he believed the bible to be the word of God & he hoped he should be guided by it as long as he lived, but the Charterists genrally are irreligious men & many of them not only treat religion with indifference but with contempt, he says that is not the case now, most of the charterists lecturers are as good as religious & as intelligent men as any in England.⁸⁹

On other occasions Bembridge seemed less confident of his success:

There are in this neighbourhood several other characters to whom I have referred in former reports, charterists...they don't refuse taking the tracts but they are very violent characters a female the wife of a Charterist used the most awful imprecations against the wig government for imprisoning honor & Steppons & other charterist leaders & they will burden the poor with taxes & grind them to death there is no hope whatever for poor working men in this country & attempting to say we have many things to be thankful for to the Wigg government &c &c to recommend the gospel to their notice only increased their violence.⁹⁰

Bembridge was a plainly ideological missionary, chiefly visiting the slums to tutor the poor in Christian principles. John Layhe, the visitor for the Unitarian Ministry to the Poor whom we met in the first pages of this dissertation, provided much more tangible services to his charges in the form of food, blankets, and hospital tickets – but even he noted a number of similar experiences. In his diary entry for July 24, 1842, he wrote: “Had long and warm discussion with Jonathan Clough about the ‘Charter’ and ‘Machinery’ – he stated that every one was a rogue who did not advocate the Charter.” In September, he recorded of a new charge, “William Orrell, Canal Street. Old man – not well – a violent Chartist but seems honest.” He recorded moments of ambiguity as well, for example:

Woman in Hepworth's in allusion to expectations of improvement after Xmas said, it will be after Christmas yet before any good is done. She said that it was expected by the Chartists that everything would be set to rights by the turn out – and now they said it would be done at th' end of three years – but in three years there happen might be another hurdy-gurdy and then things would go on as before.

⁸⁹ MCL, “Journal of James Bembridge,” GB127.BR MS 259 B1, Volume I, letter of August 15, 1841.

⁹⁰ Ibid., letter of September 13, 1841.

He also preserved interesting evidence of the popularity of more meat-and-potatoes communal services that were organized under the Chartist banner: “Harrisons talk of sending their boys to Carpenter’s hall, Chartist school – where the father and many others from the neighbourhood often go on Sunday nights.”⁹¹ The ethos of social generosity remained a powerful force, despite Chartism’s strategic focus on the franchise.

Two things remain consistent throughout Layhe’s dozen or so run-ins with Chartists: Chartism was understood to be an organically working-class political expression, and Layhe himself, as an ideological missionary of middle-class respectability – if a notably benevolent one – was understood to be intrinsically antagonistic to it. Such evidence suggests Chartism had a broad currency in the working-class areas as the vessel of an entire radical tradition of democratic agitation. More anecdotally, it seems to have empowered individual working-class people to stand up against the proselytizers of respectability who appeared in their midst, to identify and condemn them as bearers of a distinctive class-based ideological package.

The fact that a particularly radical iteration of Chartism erupted in Manchester at the very moment at which the emerging capitalist governing culture achieved their final administrative goals presents us with a rich historical irony. Figures like Cobden, Prentice, and Kay-Shuttleworth had been explicit in their belief that an expanded liberal state would diffuse democratic energies and teach workers to be grateful to the industrial system. As Benjamin Heywood, banker to the new Corporation and Layhe’s patron put it, “It is a great point, when opportunity offers, quietly and kindly to help them to see the danger to themselves of universal

⁹¹ Layhe, entries for July 24, 1842; September 6, 1842; January 30, 1843; July 29, 1844.

suffrage.”⁹² Nonetheless, Chartism flourished in spite of and in the face of the new state techniques. The jubilant, defiant energy of Chartism, and the movement’s willingness to loudly proclaim radical sentiments which had been the stuff of back-alley graffiti and midnight meetings only decades previously, thus cast into relief the recurrent inability of Manchester’s governors to clearly anticipate the outcomes of their governance techniques and strategies. For the historian, it is a signal of the continuous autonomy and cohesion of a working people’s discourse around the state in the industrial north.

In a blunt sense, these reflections force one to mark the simple distance between ideology and effect, between ideals of governance and the historical, phenomenological reality of the operation of modern state power. It is easy to think of parallel ironies and incongruities in the years covered by this dissertation. Manchester’s magistrates invested heavily in the Howardian vision of prison reform, only to discover that the actual psychological effects of solitary confinement and corporal punishment were not to be docility or religiosity, but depression, psychosis and violence. Under the tutelage of figures like Kay-Shuttleworth and the Board of Health, Manchester placed itself at the bleeding edge of public health and sanitation practices, only to discover, in the 1860s, that the theory of disease upon which these foundations had been built was fallacious.

The proliferation of mass, transgressive activities like Chartism down through the decades thus serves as a sharp reminder that the state is not a smooth mechanism by which a godlike bureaucracy imposes its will on the world. Manchester led England in its adoption of the

⁹² Quoted in Edith and Thomas Kelly, “Introduction,” in David Winstanley, *A Schoolmaster’s Notebook*: 5. This text – a reproduction of teacher and rent collector David Winstanley’s personal notebook – is itself another invaluable record of the Bembridge/Layhe type, as Winstanley worked for Heywood as an informant at the same time as Layhe, and the two seem to have competed for the great man’s respect and attention. The original is UMA, David Winstanley Notebook (GB 133 ENG MS 1495), though the Kellys’ work is a faithful reproduction. Though of a labouring background himself, Winstanley, like Layhe and Bembridge, treated working-class democratic politics with hostility and encouraged his patron to do so as well.

modern carceral regime, the modern police force, and the “New Poor Law” workhouse regime. It was rewarded by becoming the epicentre of populist democratic agitation. To a great extent, one is left to regard the particular civic violence of the modern state – its prison networks, its police forces – not as canny instruments of rule, but as pathologies that develop between groups sharing a society with an unequal access to resources and social power, and wherein each group maintains a mutually exclusive way of interpreting modernity and anticipating its future.

With the specific example of Chartism placed before us, however, I would suggest we might take this meditation one step further. Mancunian Chartism was, plainly, an antagonistic and oppositional force to the liberal reform project: it made no secret of this hostility, and named the liberal state’s local advocates as its enemies. And yet Chartism very much was an expression of working-class sentiments *about* the state – how its elections should be run, how its officers should be chosen, and so on. If Chartism and the liberal state modality grew alongside each other, in the same socioeconomic environment, and responding to the same material conditions, I would suggest one might be tempted to view them as very different expressions of a similar thought about the emerging state system: both a recognition of the power of the emerging modern state, and an optimism about its malleability. And if we are willing to broach the idea that the modern state was not the magnum opus of a single ideological position, we might also open ourselves to the notion that other state-directed projects like Chartism might have had influence in the formation of the state as a historical phenomenon.

This is a problematic argument to propose in relation to Chartism, as in historical memory the movement is traditionally granted a markedly ambivalent legacy. When the movement dissipated at the close of the 1840s, it left each point of the Charter unfulfilled, and the mass petition of 1848 was rejected with as much finality and contempt as its predecessors of

1838 and 1842 had been. Chartism is also often tagged a failure as a strategic enterprise, in that it proved incapable of maintaining a national organization, and its few attempts at actually mounting insurrectionary contests for sovereignty ended in tragic routs.

On the other hand, of course, five out of six of the Charter's central points had been passed into law within a century of the movement's demise, a rather astonishing record of success for any subaltern movement. As historians, we tend to try to tie these contrary indications into a bundle by crediting Chartism as an "inspiration" to later activists or a noble challenge to a reprehensible status quo, but these rather limited characterizations never seem to capture the full force of the paradox.⁹³ We must somehow be able to historicize Chartism both as a tragic failure in its own lifetime, and as an oddly vengeful and effective ghost.

I would suggest we see Chartism not as a single agenda with a limited lifespan, but as a particularly intense application of a broad strategy which appeared coincidentally with industrial society, and persisted throughout the nineteenth century. As part of a century-long populist democratic tradition, Chartism itself should be seen as merely one moment or strategy within a longer-term politics of makeshifts. Historians of the movement are unanimous that Chartism was deeply interconnected with parallel working-people's organizations, in particular the labour movement, while maintaining a strategic organizational distance.⁹⁴ Indeed, the clarity of the Charter itself somewhat belies the heterogeneity of the Chartist strategy, which like prior

⁹³ E.g., "Chartism was not simply a political challenge, it was a challenge to authority and to doctrinaire ideology in a whole number of areas." ("Introduction" to James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982): 2); "Although the working man's vote was not obtained until 1867, the political landscape had been transformed by mid-century. 'Humble' men like [Leeds Chartist James] Watson had entered the political fray." (Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*: 213.) Griffin's citation of the 1867 Reform Act as a fulfillment of the Chartist program is, of course, a highly optimistic interpretation that most surviving Chartists did not share.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London: Temple Smith, 1984); Chase, *Chartism*; Pickering.

democratic movements merged a violent insurrectionary tendency and a “respectable” parliamentary agenda under one banner. One of the most dramatic moments of the Chartist era occurred on March 8, 1848, at the Newton toll bar in what was by then the heart of working-class Irish Manchester. A group of Manchester police were sent out with swords to stop a march of a couple thousand Chartists arriving from Oldham. According to Chief Superintendent Richard Beswick, the police had come prepared for a fight: “[The Chartist leader] Donovan said to me ‘The procession must pass to Manchester.’ I said, ‘We are stationed here by direction of the mayor to prevent any procession coming into town and whatever the consequence is it shall not pass thro’ the toll bar.’”⁹⁵ What Beswick did not know was that a march of equal size was on its way from Manchester at his back; upon its arrival, the police were forced to give way. Later, Beswick searched the house of an organizer in St. George’s road, where he found “20 swords, 6 pike heads, 1 bayonet, 1 pistol, 1 blunderbuss and 2 muskets.” Rather than straightforwardly trying to enact a legislative program – a course of action which was, of course, foreclosed to its disenfranchised supporters – Chartism, like all working-class democratic movements of the industrial period, was very much engaged in a full and exuberant politics of makeshifts, seeking to cajole, threaten, and convince those with a hand directly on the reins of state to act in certain ways. Though the movement rallied around the Charter as a cornerstone, generically it belongs to the kind of indirect pressure campaign which I referred to in previous chapters as “governing from below”, a concerted effort by tail to wag dog.

Of course, Chartism *did* have an impact, though most Chartists did not live to see the points of the Charter fulfilled. Even at the immediate, local level, Chartism’s influence was substantial. There can be little doubt, for example, that the incorporated Borough would have

⁹⁵ TNA, PL 27/12, “The Queen vs John Flynn, James Downey, John Mooney, Owen Quinn, Edward Birch.”

begun with a far higher property qualification had it not been for the early rumblings of Chartism; indeed, Cobden's *Incorporate Your Borough!*, which was explicitly designed to elicit radical-democratic endorsement for incorporation, can be taken as a catalogue of middle-class concessions to rising working-class anger. And while the coercive strength of the New Police was substantial, they were sent into the streets with a clear anxiety about waking the democratic beast. The 1830 regulations for the new constabulary, for example, stipulated that policemen must "be civil and attentive to all persons of every rank and class", and Shaw attributed his success to a similar restraint:

Before my arrival, the police of the local authorities had been ordered to carry '*sticks*;' But, as I looked upon those '*sticks*' as emblems of force and tyranny, I discarded them, and issued the strictest orders to all the constables, to consider themselves when on duty in the streets, as soldiers in the field of battle, exposed to a heavy fire, to be *cool*, *collected*, and *silent*, and to receive an abuse of words as a volley of musketry.⁹⁶

Once again, the salient point here is less the techniques deployed – "sticks" would soon make a return to the constabulary toolkit, and one might question whether many street constables reliably met verbal abuse with respectful silence – than the fact of state managers' close attunement to the fearsome potential of working-class anger.

There is an analytical risk in taking this point too far, thereby dissolving the historical power dynamics of the state into a misleading image of a perfectly responsive, pseudo-democratic organ. There can be no disguising the fact that in the short term – that is, during the most economically painful years of the high industrial era, the 1830s and 40s – the democratic movement's immediate achievements in Manchester and Britain at large were perilously thin. Paul Pickering notes that in the late 1830s and early 1840s local Chartists gained a foothold in the Police Commission – but of course, this was something like capturing a sinking ship, as by

⁹⁶ MCL, GB127.M9/30/5/1: October 26, 1830; Shaw: 38. It was this policy which Shaw credited with winning the working classes of Manchester over to his side.

this point the Corporation was establishing its hegemony as the real seat of power in the new Borough. Just as they were designed (in part) to do, property qualifications largely shut Chartists out of the new Council, with the lonely exception of radical publisher Abel Heywood.⁹⁷ While minor concessions continued to be won, and certain more adventurous politicians were even willing to begin toying with a pseudo-democratic vocabulary, the rejection of the root democratic ethic by liberal leaders remained total and unyielding. The “governing from below” strategy, of course, was not a true analogue for the power to govern from above: its achievements were by nature less predictable and more vulnerable, its ability to control and nuance outcomes nil.

Nonetheless, the irony of 1839 in Manchester – the liberal apotheosis of incorporation collapsing into the democratic angst and enthusiasm of Chartism – invites one to think critically about what agencies and influences were at work in determining the *longue durée* trajectory of the modern state. In the very moment at which the liberal monopoly on power was meant to be most apparent, its limitations were revealed in high contrast, and the energetic persistence of an autonomous, oppositional vision for the modern state in the face of radically expanded coercion was made unmistakably apparent. This chapter, then, in which an unprecedented expansion of infrastructural power was released to tame modernity, closes with an image of modernity decisively untamed. While the Chartist moment itself endured, the local response was to be instinctive, reactive, and antagonistic: more coercion, larger police budgets, and longer prison sentences for Chartists. In the long term, however, the nineteenth-century working-class, democratic ethos had secured a profound, consequential influence on the modern state form.

⁹⁷ Pickering: 77-81. It must be noted that Heywood did manage to carve out something of a career for himself on the left of the new Council politics, and even served two terms as mayor much later in 1862 and 1876. Unsurprisingly, Heywood, being perhaps the wealthiest local Chartist, with a successful bookselling and publishing business, was generally on the moderate wing of the movement.

Inequality and the modern state

Inequality, then – and specifically, the class tensions generated by the acceleration of the capitalist economy in south Lancashire – remained not just an important, but the essential causative factor in the appearance of the features of statehood which we now call “modern”: both its unprecedented expansionism, its drive toward professionalism, regularization, bureaucracy, and systematization, and its complex and fraught relationship to representation.

This is certainly a more prominent role for class and inequality in the origins of the modern state than has been granted in some time. In defense of this iconoclasm, I can only say that locating evidence of the primacy of inequality and class friction in the archives is far from difficult; indeed, as I have had several occasions to note, the original architects of the state – even the most advanced liberals – were never reticent before posterity in identifying early liberalism as a distinctively class-exclusive, hierarchical, and philosophically anti-democratic project. In identifying this dimension, one does not find oneself correcting the movement’s progenitors so much as their successors.

However – and here is a crucial point – neither is one moved to rescue Marx and Engel’s characterization of the emerging modern state: “The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” This was, of course, a polemical statement, not meant to be academically precise – but it seems to me it is not merely an overstatement, but a fundamental misdiagnosis. Two qualifications to the class origins of the state are necessary. The first and more mundane point is that *within* the governing class there was substantial space for contestation and conflict. Crucially, while decidedly class-based interests and program drove state expansion in the early nineteenth century, these were more often expressed (and, presumably, thought and felt) through a set of complex cultural languages

– what was the respectable, liberal, or simply “safe” course of action – than they were in any brute terms of economic interest, allowing for a high variance of interpretations and a multiplicity of “capitalist” politics and views. When one councillor argued that an augmentation of police funding would be a “liberal” policy, and another argued against him, these men were not seeking to disguise their views, nor was one of them acting as capital’s designated champion, while the other resisted him; rather, the material expression of liberal ideology was being worked out in real time. It has been a consistent belief throughout this dissertation that the influence of class patterns on politics – even in historical situations in which class patterns were so unvarnished as classical-industrial Manchester – appears meaningfully only in the aggregate, in the accumulation of recurrent outcomes over time.

The second point, however, is that even at the time of Marx and Engel’s writing, the working-class population of England had by and large concluded that the expansionist state was the most useful terrain of political contestation, that it was amenable to their influence, and indeed, had even begun to exercise that influence in identifiable ways. This was still an essentially anti-democratic political environment, and the terms of popular engagement with the state were by necessity more various, more indirect, more cynical and more contradictory than the highly earnest style of the mid-century middle-class liberal politician. Nonetheless, Marx and Engel’s comment must be critiqued as one of a number of views of the state which mischaracterize the modern state as a sort of machine of population control, totally available to the whims of whoever can seize the lever. In pragmatic terms, the modern state is, like all states, simply the enactment of a body of law. In broader terms, this means the state is a diachronic social activity, a broad pattern or alignment of behaviours and discourses, and thus it is continually buffeted and redirected by a variety of interests and collective agencies. The modern

state as it emerged in industrial Manchester was to be, in the final analysis, neither the machine of capital nor the machine of democratic will, but the terrain on which the multiplicity of interests generated by a complex new economic form met – albeit on unequal terms of access, and thus with dissimilar styles and strategies.

Conclusion: The Modernization of the State in Industrial Manchester

By the period this dissertation ends, the radical transformations which had possessed Manchester were beginning to creep around the world. In Massachusetts, Wallonia, and Lièges, small experiments in mass production were crystallizing into local industrial economies. In the 1840s, Manchester's Anti-Corn Law League flourished into a national movement. From its momentum, Cobden and a handful of associates would become figures of international fame, and major forces in an increasingly liberal, business-oriented Parliament. Manchester was no longer unique in this new world, but there was a much larger place for Manchester and Mancunians in it.

In the decades that have made up the central focus of this study, however, Manchester was unusual, and its inhabitants faced stresses and challenges that were only found in a handful of other places on the globe, nearly all of them within a few hours' ride of the town itself. Manchester was not "representative" of its era, and indeed, its extraordinary character means that by most sociological or cultural-analytical metrics, it did not closely resemble other "modern" societies to come. Distinctive pressures it faced, however – those generated by the industrial-capitalist mode of production and exchange – became globally consequential and remain potent with us today, even if they have undergone profound convolutions, transformations, and situational adaptations. It is Manchester's early and utterly unprepared exposure to these challenges which gives it an enduring historical resonance.

One central dynamic of this pioneer experience was an early and secular trend toward state expansion, regularization, and experimentation. Exploring clearly and with a qualitative specificity the substance of this connection – between industrial urbanization on the one hand,

and state modernization on the other – has been a central task of this dissertation.

Industrialization, via urban industrialization, caused the modern state. But why?

As stated in the introduction, state growth pushes against powerful forces of social entropy. State construction, in other words, does not just happen – it is not somehow simply natural or to be expected that human beings order their societies according to systems of written law. Mancunians of the late eighteenth-century, of course, were already enmeshed in a quite powerful state system, one of the more stable and sophisticated of its time. Still, to get from the fiscal-military state of the mid-eighteenth century to the burgeoning managerial, bureaucratic state of the mid-nineteenth century took an immense collective upheaval. The eighteenth-century state was only an intermittent presence in most of its territory, and depended on a great deal of informal voluntarism in the enforcement of its laws. Basic institutions at the ground level of governance – ecclesiastical courts, manor courts, Justices of the Peace – leaned for their social authority on hierarchies and systems of authority extraneous to the law: the traditions and patronage economies of stable landed wealth, the established Church. This was a sturdy, efficient system in its context, but it simply cannot be compared to the stiff bureaucratic architectures that would spring up like weeds in the following century.

The radical expansion of the scope of the civil state that we call “modernization”, then, did not only require vision, ambition, and sophisticated political theory; it required fear, uncertainty, and a widespread sense that there was no other tolerable option. I have remarked a handful of times in this dissertation upon the fact that much of the technology of the industrial revolution – steam power, the mechanized loom – had been theorized long before it was implemented; to flourish, this technology required a context in which it is profitable. In analogous pattern, from Plato to Thomas More, theorists had imagined societies governed by

regulated, interventionist states. The reality of the modern state, however, required more than for philosophers to imagine it; it required figures of the dullness and instinctive conservatism of Thomas Butterworth Bayley to consider it necessary.

So the question is refined: why did the experience of the industrial revolution make state expansion – generally speaking, an unloved and painful historical development – seem not just prudent, but necessary, unavoidable? A key component of the answer to this question has in large part become fully visible only in the past few decades through a truly impressive sophistication of econometric historical analysis, from Piketty's trendy *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*,¹ to the long trajectory of late-twentieth century industrial-revolution revisionism culminating in the work of Broadberry et al. – not to mention innumerable toilers in specialist fields such as the historiography of the English cotton industry and the historiography of bankruptcy. The answer is, in a word, instability. No economic system prior to the growth-based industrial economy had subjected its contemporaries to the same vicissitudes, the same rapidity and force of economic crisis that a market industrial economy could do.

The medieval peasant, drawing in a plentiful harvest in autumn, could look forward – barring warfare – to a plentiful year. Lean harvests led to lean years; a succession of lean years could accumulate into a lean period, and then an economic crisis could really start developing. The occasional food riot or even Jacquerie could be competently and appropriately addressed by ad-hoc, improvised forces of repression. In Britain, in the early modern period, the colonial-capitalist amendment to a still primarily agrarian economy created new sources of potential instability: a ship could sink, and take with it a firm, triggering local crises; on rare occasions,

¹ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

such as the South Sea Bubble, speculation could cause ricochet effects across the economy. The vast majority of the economy, however, remained locked in the relative slow motion of agrarian life.

In industrial Lancashire, by contrast, no one woke up on New Year's Day with a strong sense of what the year would hold. Crises roiled the local economy continually, whether on the small-scale of individual firm failures (which might still send hundreds of households into starvation mode), or on the cyclical scale of trade downturns and depressions (which could push the majority of the town's households into desperation manoeuvres). Once again, there was no comparison with what had come before.

The social effects of this instability were profound. A good deal of the problem was experienced by the capitalist privileged themselves, and one must ascribe a great deal of the anxiety for bureaucratization, regularization – for a colonization of the state by the ethos of the counting house – to intra-class strains faced by the capitalist wealthy who exercised the greatest power in industrial Lancashire. Still, if one wishes to truly understand the astonishing imperative for state expansion in the nineteenth century, one must turn one's attention to the institutions which drove this growth: prisons, workhouses, policing. One must ask the rudimentary question of what these institutions had in common. At its core, state expansion was initially driven by a fear of the effects that industrial-capitalist instability would have on workers. In short, state modernization was driven by class tension.

And yet... For myself, this dissertation contains a resonant "and yet", which developed in the course of its research and composition. I had begun this project with an expectation that class dynamics would prove to be integral to the process of state modernization, simply due to a prior

familiarity with the field and the archive. It seems, after all, intrinsically unlikely that the first nation to experience mass industrialization would just happen to be the first to experience state modernization, and that this modernization would occur earliest and with most urgency in the areas most impacted by industrialization. I imagined therefore, essentially as a matter of instinct, that the question of class in the modern state was simply *which* class made the modern state, and which class the modern state was made *for*; which class, in the final analysis, pulled the strings, saw its interests served by state action.

When I turned myself to the archive, however, I was confounded by two things. The first was a nagging awareness of what I will call the problem of capitalist progress. From the earliest stages, the more repressive instincts of the burgeoning modern state were tempered, the state's architects prone to compromise. Strong consensus among the capitalist middle class eroded with time, despite no obvious internal source for this softening – it is impossible, for example, to find any wealth holder in Manchester in the 1810s calling for a universal franchise or a gentler poor law regime; by a century later, England's liberals had convinced themselves these rights were central principles of liberalism.

This is not a moral point – one is under no obligation to be impressed by the liberal state's concessions – but it is an intellectual or analytical one of some significance. Where does this perennial trend originate? One conventional left-conspiratorial response, perhaps derived from the *Communist Manifesto* itself – that progress is merely a sop, a cynical ploy by which a fundamentally capitalist state buys complacency, at a calculated low cost to itself – seems to me empirically insufficient. Not only does it systematically deny agency to disenfranchised groups, it requires considering the full scope of two centuries of progress in the British state – from the first loosening of anti-union regulations in the early nineteenth century, through to the universal

franchise in 1928, through, if we like, to the welfare state, gay marriage or whatever else – as somehow unreal, illusory.

Secondly, I was confounded by the clear orientation of working people's politics toward state goals – protections for friendly societies, the weaver's arbitration system, and then, with unmistakable clarity, the demand for the franchise – from the earliest points captured in the archive, even as seemingly revolutionary or anti-state politics persisted in working communities also. This orientation had been obscured in the historiography by overly narrow visions of working people's politics – for example, analyses which figured the labour movement as extra-political. Turning to the archive, I found that it was rare indeed for a significant labour action or movement in Manchester's first half-century of industrialization to *not* engage with or make some demands on state power. If capitalist progress had always been a myth, a ploy, had working and marginalized people's movements been successfully conned from the moment of their inception?

These theoretical dissatisfactions demanded a conceptual adaptation. In simple terms, the problem of capitalist progress is only satisfyingly resolved by ascribing agency to the disenfranchised in the construction of the state. For example, the best final, *prima causa* explanation for why British working people ultimately achieved the vote is that they demanded it. Looking forward to the twentieth century, the only comprehensive case that explains the clear ancestral lineage of a number of state institutions in early industrial labour movements – unemployment insurance, healthcare provisions, old age pensions – was that British working people themselves successfully forced these institutions under the state umbrella. Certainly, extraneous factors and political contexts help one to understand why changes happened when

they did – for example, the demand for the franchise was no less forceful in 1838 than it would be in 1867 or 1918; it was the context that had changed, both the faith of the elite in the populace, and the perceived costs of not conceding. Still, in *longue durée* terms, the meaningful first cause of progress itself has to be the desire and agency of the enfranchised; any other explanation ultimately becomes circular or self-negating.

This is, in one sense, a subtle adjustment. It is an analytical or qualitative departure, not an empirical claim – that is, I am re-framing state development, not presenting new data per se. Whether one says that a governing class tossed a concession to its populace to buy their complacency, or whether the population forced change upon its rulers via the threat of unrest and revolution is to some extent a question of emphasis, of narration. And yet if one is willing to ascribe agency in the construction of the modern state to disenfranchised people – rather than, as V.A.C. Gatrell put it, politics being “fought over the heads of the poor”² – the analytical consequences can be profound. The state emerges as a truly social, relational phenomenon, not an apparatus floating above society and staging discrete interventions. This perspective shift changes the way one views the stakes of political contest, the trajectories by which progress and development might occur. Collective agency becomes immensely significant, while paradoxically individual agency is diminished in importance.

In this dissertation, I have narrated one such process in south Lancashire at the turn of the nineteenth century. My aim has not been to assert that Manchester’s workers had an analogous level of social power to the cottonocracy, or that the British state as it operated in Manchester at the terminal date of this dissertation was not a deeply and violently unequal, repressive

² Gatrell: 11.

phenomenon in general terms. Rather, I have been guided by the most enduring and perceptive comment about class in the British historiography: E.P. Thompson's observation, in the first pages of *The Making of the English Working Class*, that class is not a fixed, intrinsic category, but a *relation*. My emphasis in this dissertation has been on how a specific set of class relations was the specific cause of state expansion in a particularly resonant and consequential time and place.

On the one hand, it is doubtless true that from the 1780s or so onward, an enfranchised and privileged minority sought to expand the repressive power of the state to prop up the inherent instability of a fundamentally unequal social system. They did so not according to a single program, and indeed, with very little unity or even equanimity between them – rather, they built a repressive state out of instinct, out of a shared impulse about the direction things were moving in.

In the very urgency of this consensus, however, one can see how far the nightmare of working-class power haunted capital's imagination. Once again, it is worth emphasizing the immense social inertia and entropy which was overcome by this anxiety. This meant that, far from existing in a lofty sphere separate from the demands and desires of the majority, the architects of the modern state were deeply, almost neurotically enmeshed with the politics and demands of Manchester's expanding working population. This attention was often implicit, indirect, even subconscious. It certainly does not imply that they had a perfect understanding of working people's culture, or even any remarkable ability to anticipate the consequences of the state actions they undertook. I found myself left with no choice, however, other than to assert this contradictory, half-conscious social relation as the ultimate explanation for the initial form of

the modern state in the industrial north, and, indeed, its contradictions; why the modern state so characteristically builds hospitals with one hand and prisons with the other.

One central lesson of this shift I have tried to illustrate for my reader is that one must abandon without hesitation or qualification the notion of a transcendent class essence to the state. While class was fundamental to the conditions of the modern state's formation, no single class or class-based program constructed the modern state in isolation, and the class conflict *over* state power was never won by any one group. Indeed, it is not, and never shall be over so long as we have states. The state as a complete and composite historical phenomenon – that is, the complete enactment of a body of law within a given society, within a given time period – is not a machine, but an arena for social conflict and negotiation. Individual institutions within the state, to be sure, might operate as more straightforward tools of repression, and may be more or less successful in what their architects hope for them to achieve. Still, class conflict persists within the state as well as over the state – the state being, after all, much larger and less contained than the policy agenda of any given executive.

I am encouraged in this rather untidy formulation when I review the checkered two centuries of the modern state's existence. As historians of a stable, potent first-world state – a state which notoriously is able today to record nearly every square foot of its urban public space on video – British historians can become blinkered, assuming that the task of the historian of the modern state is to explain the emergence of an unshakeable machine of rule. This is, however, an impressionistic instinct, not an analysis drawn from a clear-eyed or broad survey of available historical cases. If one claims – as I certainly do – that the state form pioneered in nineteenth-century Britain has left a genetic marker on modern states from the US, to the People's Republic

of China, to Venezuela, to Kyrgyzstan, one must retain a realistic sense of the kind of phenomenon one is historicizing. In actual fact, the typical fate of the modern state in a global sense has been crisis, revolution, and dissolution. It should not surprise us then that in historicizing the modern state, one is historicizing a particular *disequilibrium*, a set of contradictory and mutually uncomplementary institutions by which an inherently unstable social system is kept from breaking down entirely.

The second lesson I draw from this case study is to a great degree an extension of the first. Surveying the crucial first few decades of experimentation in local governance in Manchester, what I am drawn to again and again is the lack of a single policy platform driving change, the lack of a coherent vision or program for state development – and nonetheless, the profundity of the final result. This leads me to reconfigure how we prioritize factors in the study of the early development of the modern state, and in the development of political trajectories generally in industrial society.

I am led to think that as a general rule, modern British historians have granted far too much significance to the year-to-year political battles over temporary executive power – that is, the vicissitudes of the field of politics proper, narrowly defined. This distorted valuation, I would assume, derives in no small part from historians' own experiences as political agents living in the straitened political circumstances of mature modern states, in which one is encouraged to consider the legitimated terrain of state as the only rightful and effective terrain on which to stage the contest for social power; perhaps also we are misled as the consumers of a news media utterly transfixed by the scandals, indignities, petty triumphs and absurdities of day-to-day parliamentary and party politics. We need to break free of this twentieth-century habit of mind; it

is something better than the kind of “great man theory” that historians once pilloried, but it is nonetheless problematically vague about the mechanisms by which agency is exercised in the state and in society, and thus oddly disconnected from concrete questions of cause and effect.

The history of the modern state in Britain since the nineteenth century has been fraught, convulsive, and often confusing. One can trace many different strands of development all charging ahead at once – social progress and democratization, the expansion of infrastructural power and capacity for repression, the ever-increasing sophistication with which the British state manages what has by the twenty-first century become a dizzyingly complex economic system. The state has been subject and vehicle for nationalism, imperialism, neo-imperialism; the British state has become ever more integrated in supra-state systems and organizations on the one hand – the UN, NATO, the “special relationship” with the US – while pursuing a much more complex and now, it would seem abortive course of integration with continental European powers.

Many of these developmental strands go beyond the restricted case study of this book. I suspect there is little that the Town-Hall clashes of Manchester’s early nineteenth century Police Commission can tell us about Brexit, the coronavirus response, or the future of the celebrity monarchy. In a book making some weighty claims about origins, I have tried to refrain from reading the tea leaves in this manner. Still, the trajectory of the British state since industrialization has retained a few constants. First, there is the increasing, irreversible expansion of legally legitimated forms of power in British society, with a secular trend toward a bureaucratic, managerial state shorn of earlier associations with extra-state forms of patronage and privilege. Second, there is the increasing integration of the British state in a now globalized capitalist economy, despite frequent anxieties about the “size” of the state. All Westminster parties today operate upon an unshakeable consensus that the primary task of a government is to

maintain the health and stability of a capitalist economy and ensure its growth; no other politics is made comfortably welcome in civil society. Finally, there is the continued valence and urgency of two experiences in this economy: that of owning, and that of earning. These two fundamentally distinct experiences – though today, both are experienced by nearly all Britons to varying degrees – continue to exert potent and mutually conflictual influences on the expectations Britons have of their state, and the kinds of pressures and demands placed upon state power.

A small stream can eventually carve a canyon – this is the kind of geological metaphor one relies on to make a plea for the significance of the *longue durée*. It is, however, equally important to remind oneself that not just any stream can accomplish this. Most rivers eventually change course, evaporate, or perhaps the spring at their source dries up; in any case, their long-term impact on the landscape proves to be trivial. When a river does carve a canyon, it expresses a profound fact about the watershed in which it lies, a larger set of circumstances so fundamental to the landscape that it can endure, sending the same reliable trickle of water over the same bed for millions of years. Industrialization, I am suggesting, has changed the course of state development.

As a historian of the modern state, and one with a particular interest in origins, I went looking for a eureka moment, a contemplative prelude in which thoughtful men drew out a design for the management of a new kind of society. Instead, when I turned my attention to one of the earliest places in which the modern state form began to appear, what I found overwhelmingly was distracted, half-thinking men of instinct and action; I found decisions made in the moment, with a view only to the next day or the next month – the next Finance Committee

review, the next crisis. And so I decided that what I was historicizing was not a coherent project or master plan, but a new set of social and cultural circumstances – a gradual shift in the terms of the cost-benefit analyses which Manchester’s governors applied to the choices that faced them, and, in a simultaneous and inextricable development, a shift in the kinds of pressure and demands that pushed up at them from below. Some of the particular decisions they made – the construction of prisons, the push for a modern constabulary, the early rudimentary focus on healthcare, education, urban zoning – seem, with the benefit of hindsight, profound and far-reaching; we live with their consequences today. Others, such as the almost neurotic anxieties about the behavioural impact of workhouse practices, or the hostility to the principle of the universal franchise, seem very much of a different century, a different politics. What is most important, I suggest, is simply the recurrent pattern of the fundamentals changing, the gradual but irreversible turn toward a far more expansive, intrusive, infrastructurally powerful state. I have attempted to chart the course of the first slow trickle of a stream whose current now carries the modern world.

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