Politic and party organisation in Oldham

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POLITICS AND PARTY ORGANISATION IN OLDHAM

1832 - 1914

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In one sense all politics are provincial politics. What Peel, Melbourne and Russell could do in the Houses of Parliament depended primarily on what happened in the constituencies. It is true that provincial politics were not immune from central influence, it is equally true that national politics were given their peculiar colour and flavour largely by provincial representatives and provincial interests and opinion.

(Norman Gash. Politics in the Age of Peel
Longmans, 1953, p.270)

C O N T E N T S

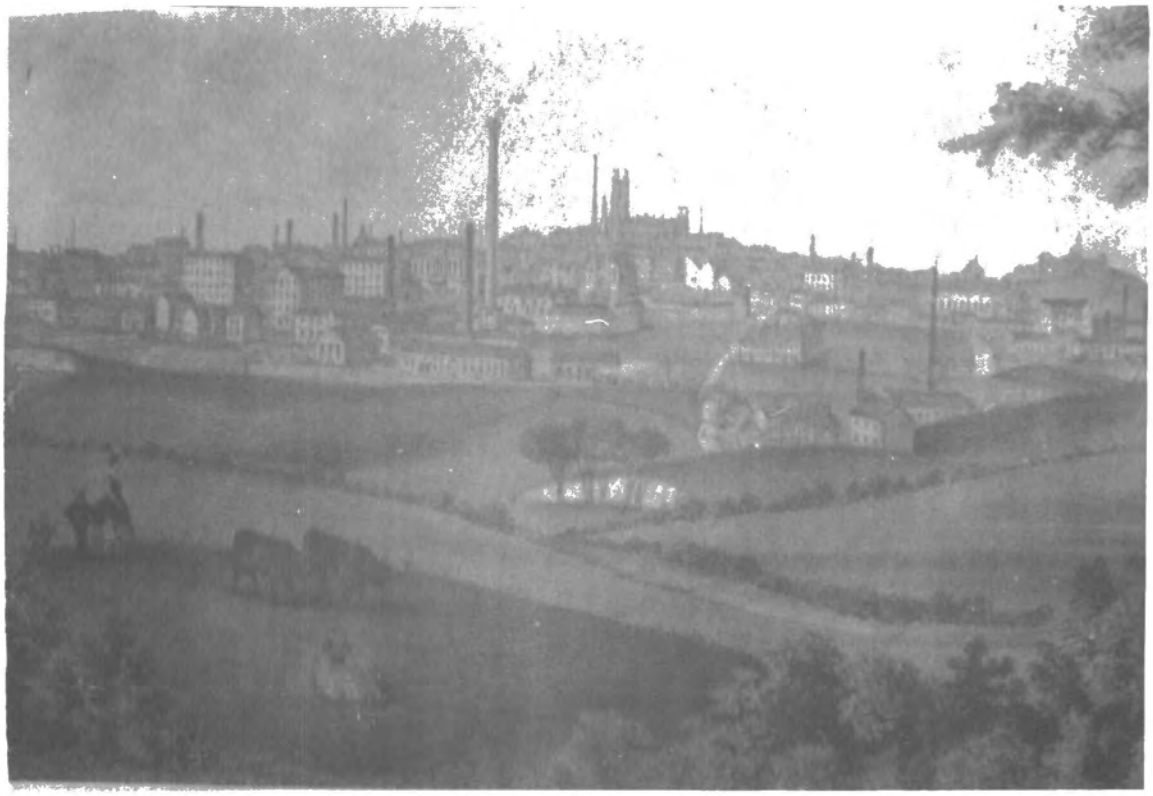
NOTES ON SOURCES.

1. Edwin Butterworth was born on 1st October, 1812, and died on 19th April, 1848. His father was James Butterworth the Oldham Postmaster. He began writing in 1829 when he published a Biography of Eminent Natives, Residents and Benefactors of the Town of Manchester, followed by a History of Oldham published in 1832. He won fame for the researches he undertook for Edward Baines' History of Lancashire published in 1831 and it was largely as a result of Baines' recommendation that he was appointed Registrar of births, marriages and deaths in Oldham. In 1830 he began a series of notebooks in which he recorded the principal events in Oldham until 1842. It is these notebooks which provide invaluable material for the 1830's. The notebooks themselves are rough, home made volumes with unnumbered pages and largely undated entries. This makes precise reference difficult.

2. The Oldham Chronicle was first published on 6th May, 1854, and was intended as a rival to the Manchester Guardian and Manchester Courier which had a wide distribution in Oldham. It was published weekly at first and then bi-weekly in 1877. The Oldham Evening Chronicle was brought out in March 1880. From the outset it was strongly Liberal in character . It continues today as the only existing local newspaper.

3. The Oldham Standard began publication in August 1859 as a Conservative counterblast to the Liberal Chronicle. It

was renamed the Oldham Daily Standard in July 1885 and ceased publication in July 1947.



Oldham from Glodwick, 1830

INTRODUCTION.

Oldham is situated eight miles to the north-east of Manchester on the main routes to the West Riding of Yorkshire. To the north, west and south of the town lie the townships of Shaw (Crompton), Royton, Chadderton, Hollinwood and Ashton-under-Lyne, whilst to the east lies the open moorland of the Pennines. The population of Oldham in 1831 was 32,381 but including Shaw, Royton, Chadderton and Hollinwood, the figure was 50,513. These figures represent a 49% increase over the 1821 census figures.

The bulk of this population was engaged in the cotton industry which thrived in the damp atmosphere of the district. Alderman James Middleton, Mayor of Oldham 1916 - 17, has written: "It has been established, that in this district 5% more yarn can be obtained from a given quantity of raw cotton than in any drier atmosphere."[1] The growth of the cotton industry, the introduction of machinery and the consequent development of the factory system gave rise to the "Jenny Gentry"[2] and a new operative class, torn from its roots providing fruitful ground for new political ideas during the 1830's and 1840's. Textile engineering was also established at the end of the eighteenth century in small shops making textile machinery which had not been

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1. H. Bateson A Centenary History of Oldham County Borough Council 1949.
2. E. Butterworth Oldham Notes. MSS.

effectively patented by the inventors. The most important single enterprise was that of Platt and Hibbert, a partnership formed in 1824. Henry Platt began making simple wooden machinery in 1821 at Garnett's Shop, Side-of-Moor. At about the same time Elijah Hibbert of Ashton-under-Lyne opened an iron and brass foundry at Soho, Greenacres Moor. Finding himself in financial difficulties Platt approached Hibbert for a loan and the partnership was formed. In 1828 the firm moved to larger premises at Mount Pleasant and soon after to its permanent home at the Hartford Works. From 500 employees in 1843 the firm rose to 14,000 in 1897, owned extensive collieries in the neighbourhood and rapidly won for itself a world wide reputation in the manufacture of textile machinery. This was the largest single firm in the neighbourhood and it had a great influence on the social and political life of the community. Hatting also flourished in Oldham at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Fine grade piled hats of wool or fur were made[1] until the advent of silk hats in the 1850's killed the industry. Coal mining developed to keep pace with expanding industry. From fourteen in 1807 the number of collieries rose to thirty seven in 1831 and fifty five in 1838. The great coalmasters of Oldham were John Evans and William Jones, later joined by John and Joseph Lees, who apart from some small collieries and those owned by Platt's, controlled the whole coal supply of the

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1. It is suggested that this is where the local name for Oldhamers, "Rough-heads", originates.

district.

Oldham did not have railway communication with Manchester until 1842 when the Manchester to Leeds Railway, later called the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway was built. Before this, passenger links with Manchester were by stage coach, whilst heavy goods came from Manchester to Hollinwood by way of the Oldham Canal.

Local government from 1826 was in the hands of Improvement Commissioners, more commonly known as the Police Commissioners. They were a non-elected body composed of property owners or professional men who either received £50 per annum from property or paid a rent of £30 per annum. By 1848 they numbered 360 members who met regularly in either the Albion Inn or the Grammar School. This was not convenient since on many occasions the meetings of the Commissioners clashed with other meetings, so in 1840 a Town Hall was built. The Commissioners were able to levy rates up to 2/6d. in the pound. They were responsible for sanitation, the repair of highways and the provisions of street lighting. As their name implied they controlled the police force, which was supplemented by special constables and the militia as the occasion demanded, and they also administered the fire brigade. The Commissioners however were not very efficient and throughout the 1830's and 1840's there was frequent criticism of the way in which they ran the town. In particular the inadequacy of the police force in the face of Chartist threats was attacked. In 1848 consequently the Commissioners disappeared, the town

received its Charter of Incorporation and local government came under the control of a mayor and an elected corporation.

Oldham did not have direct parliamentary representation until the 1832 Reform Act. The justice of giving representation to Oldham was undeniable. At a public meeting at the Grammar School called to petition for reform of the House of Commons, on 9th February, 1831[1] William Crompton, one of the head constables, claimed that Oldham was the eighth unrepresented town in order of population and that its population equalled those of thirty eight of the smallest boroughs then represented in parliament. Oldham however was not included in the first Reform Bill introduced in March 1831. Deputations were sent from Oldham and the outlying districts and Oldham was included in the second Reform Bill under Schedule D with one member. Following the arrival of boundary commissioners in November 1831. Oldham was given two members and the parliamentary borough was enlarged to include Shaw, Royton, Chadderton and Hollinwood.

Writing of the people of Oldham in the 1830's - the Earl of Ellesmere wrote[2]: " They are more indebted to art and industry than to nature, and they supply by that industry what nature has denied them. Their wealth depends upon the fruit of their own labour, so it is contended by some that as industry and parsimony have alone raised them

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1. Butterworth MSS under date quoted.

2. Edwin Butterworth History of Oldham. 1856 Edition.

to their present station, so industry and parsimony can alone guarantee the continuance of their prosperity. It cannot be denied, however, that parsimony is frequently carried to too great an excess and that all present enjoyment is sacrificed in an overweening anxiety to provide for the future. Rigorous and intolerant in their party contests, they are the more remarkable for their hearty spontaneous sociality of disposition to all sects and descriptions of men."

CHAPTER 1. RADICAL OLDHAM 1832 - 47.

a. Oldham Radicals 1832.

The radicals were the most active and best organised political group in Oldham in the early 1830's. Radicalism, after the repressive policy of the Peterloo era, from which Oldham radicals suffered greatly, was now gaining a certain respectability. Recruited from the working and lower middle classes, they completely dominated the political life of Oldham during its first 20 years as a Parliamentary borough.

Typical of Oldham radicals and the undisputed leader of radicalism in Oldham was John Knight,[1] a small scale cotton manufacturer, born in 1763 at Saddleworth. He was early attracted to radicalism and served several prison sentences for his activities in Oldham and surrounding districts. In July 1794 he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment at Manchester Quarter Sessions, to be served at Lancaster gaol, for wounding Joseph Taylor in self defence. This was the result of a riot which followed the breaking up of a meeting of the Friends of Parliamentary Reform at Royton, by a gang led by the Vicar of Royton, Rev. R. Berry, in the previous April. Arrested again in August 1812 by the notorious Joseph Nadin, head constable of Manchester, on a charge of administering Luddite oaths at a meeting in Manchester to form a club to promote Parliamentary Reform, he was tried at

1. A. Marcroft Landmarks of Local Liberalism. 191
   D. Read Peterloo Manchester University Press. 195
   H. Bateson A Centenary History of Oldham.
   The Annals of Oldham (S. Andrew, ed. Oldham Standard series from January 1st 1887).
   E. Butterworth Oldham Notes. MSS.

Lancaster and acquitted. In October 1816 he was responsible for the formation of the Oldham Union Society to co-operate with the Hampden Club. This was the reason for his arrest as an undesirable person in June 1817, following the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, and his imprisonment for ten months. Arrested again after Peterloo, he continued to attend radical meetings whilst on bail and was subsequently sentenced to two years' imprisonment. On his release he continued to attend meetings urging Parliamentary Reform and was the Oldham agent for the Northern Star in the 1830's.

Such was the politcal apprenticeship of John Knight which qualified him for leadership of the Oldham radicals. He commanded great respect amongst the radicals and working class of Oldham. In October, 1834, he was in trouble with the law again. He was tried on October 9th at Oldham Petty Sessions[1] charged with giving a false testimonial[2] to a spinner, Charles Robinson, signing himself Robert Ogden, Bank Top Mill. Charles Robinson could not do the work and further enquiry brought to light the fact that Knight had written it. Knight in defence said that he was prompted by motives of humanity and had been persuaded by Robinson to write the testimonial, which hadbeen lost, at Robinson's dictation. The cost of his defence was met by

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1. Manchester Guardian 11th October, 1834.
   Butterworth MSS under date quoted.

2. "Charles Robinson had been employed in my mill seven years, five piecing and two years spinning, an honest steady and upright man, single twist spinner two years."
   August 1st 1834. Signed Robert Ogden Bank Top Mill.

The Oldham Spinners' Union and his £20 fine paid by the radicals. A public dinner was given in his honour in November 1837 and he died in September 1838. His funeral drew vast crowds from Oldham and the surrounding districts. His cortege was that of a popular hero.

Foremost amongst the other radicals of Oldham were Alexander Taylor, William Fitton and James Halliday. Alexander Taylor was a grocer at Mumps who gained the vote in 1832.[1] He took an active part in radical politics speaking frequently with a "flighty way of oratory" and "buoyancy of spirits".[2] He became a Councillor in 1849 and later an Alderman. William Fitton was a surgeon from Royton. Taylor and Fitton represented the mainstream of Oldham radicalism. James Halliday, a dissenter,[3] was a cotton spinner whose mill was in Grosvenor Street and also gained the vote in 1832.[4] He was representative of a break away group of radicals which favoured a more extreme form of radicalism, in particular the complete separation of Church and State. In 1847 Halliday became a rival candidate to John Fielden, Oldham's radical M.P. for fifteen years. Another dissenting radical was William Knott,

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1. Poll Book 1832.

2. Butterworth MSS.

3. The term "nonconformist" was less commonly used than "dissenters" in the early years of the nineteenth century. E.L. Woodward. The Age of Reform 1815 - 70. Oxford 1938. p. 483.

4. Poll Book 1832.

a hatter whose business was in King Street. He was a Wesleyan and frequently preached in the chapel and taught in sunday school, consequently he was named by his enemies, the Rev. William Knott.[1] He was Mayor of Oldham between 1865 and 1866. Other active radicals were Thomas Swire, a clogger, James Mills, a hatter, John Halliwell, a master spinner, Frederick Taylor and William Spier both tailors.

The beginnings of organisation amongst the radicals can be seen in the revival of the Political Union in 1831. In November 1831,[2] 350 of the leading radicals met to form a branch Union of the Grand National Union to effect a complete reform of the House of Commons. A Committee of nine members was appointed to be known as the Oldham Political Council, to draw up the rules of the Union and submit them to the next meeting. Alexander Taylor was the Chairman and John Knight the Secretary. The other members were Stepney, Halliday, Swire, Knott, Mills, Halliwell and Frederick Taylor. This Committee reported to

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1. The following extract is from an electioneering poster 1847 giving the mock order of procession in the annual "wakes" walks.

   "The Rev. William Knott, hat manufacturer carrying a small black banner, on which will be inscribed the prices paid by him, which show that they are from 15 to 20 per cent less than the respectable houses in the trade pay for the same description of work".

2. Butterworth MSS under date quoted.

its members early in December and outlined the rules and functions of the Union. Secret meetings were to be avoided; a regular account of expenditure was to be kept; pamphlets were to be distributed; it was to support universal suffrage, annual parliaments and vote by ballot; meetings were to be held at least once a month for the discussion of political topics. The subscription was fixed at 1d. on joining with a monthly fee of 1d. to suit the pockets of its members, and a room was taken over the Duke of York Inn for reading and discussion. At about this time the Chadderton Union of 113 members united with the Oldham Union and similar organisations were established in Saddleworth, Lees and in Royton under the guidance of William Fitton.

This Oldham Political Union did not flourish however.[1] In January 1832[2] small attendances were reported at the meetings of the Union. In February[3] the Union was in debt and unable to contribute to the subscription then being raised to assist in the defence of Curran and Broadhurst, the New Cross agitators. Again in April 1832,[4] the Union was

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1. M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and Organisation of Political Parties.
   Macmillan, 1902. Vol. 1. p.124.
2. Butterworth MSS under date quoted.
3. Manchester Courier 25th February, 1832.
4. Butterworth MSS under date quoted.

reported as almost failing for want of support. Yet it was the Political Union which gave the radicals of Oldham the organisation which played such an important part in securing the return of radical members at Oldham's first election.[1] It provided the personnel, the party framework and programme, and training in political activity.[2]

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1. Sir Ivor Jennings. Party Politics. Vol. 1. Appeal to the People. Cambridge 1960. p. 120.

2. Dr. Arnold in Sheffield Courant quoted by S. Maccoby. English Radicalism 1832-52. Allen and Unwin 1935.p.62.

"In travelling lately through some of the great manufacturing towns of Lancashire, I was struck by the various placards on the walls of every quarter relating to the ensuing election, if one opened a newspaper its columns were full of the same subject - who are the new borough mongers whose influence threatens the real liberty of electors as much as it was ever threatened by the old ones? Who are now setting up tyrants over us? - They are the agitators of the Political Union and the newspapers - the brazen, shallow and insolent speakers."

b. Oldham's First Election 1832.

As early as December 1831,[1] names of prospective candidates were being circulated, including that of William Cobbett which received much support. In January 1832[2] R. Otway Cave, a Leicestershire tory was being discussed. By April[1] many other names were being tentatively put forward. James Holford of Sedgley, Prestwich,"a violent Tory", invited the principal cotton spinners to dine and offered himself as a candidate. John Taylor, the Captain of the Oldham Yeomanry, not likely to be popular with Oldham radicals after Peterloo which was still a living issue, was mentioned, as was the Hon. E.G. Stanley, the Secretary of State for Ireland. By mid June, however, no candidate had been invited to stand and the Manchester Courier[3] was writing of a lack of enthusiasm in Oldham regarding the coming election. It was the radicals who took the first positive step towards inviting candidates, urged on by rumours of the impending invitation of two whigs, Williams and Creevey.

In early July[4] the radical voters assembled at the Albion Inn and issued a placard urging that votes should not be pledged until after all claims had been fully considered. A committee was appointed to draw up pledges which should be

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
2. Manchester Guardian 26th January, 1832.
3. Manchester Courier 14th June, 1832.
4. Manchester Guardian 7th July, 1832.

put to candidates, a canvass was begun on behalf of Cobbett and a fund started to defray the expenses of the election. Cobbett was informed of the steps which hadbeen taken on his behalf on the 9th July,[1] in a letter written by William Fitton. John Fielden of Todmorden was also asked to stand, by a deputation led by Joshua Milne of Crompton and Halliwell during the previous week, and had agreed on condition that Cobbett should be his colleague.[2] By late July[3] the radical election machine had been formed in the Oldham Political Association. Its purpose was to secure the return of radical members and it was recruited mainly from the members of the Political Union. Its president was an operative spinner named Bentley whilst the secretary was John Knight.

The contribution made by the Political Association to the success of the election was four fold. They undertook canvasses for their candidates, the traditional and very important method of winning a seat at a time when parties were not well organised and party "labels" were vague.[4] More significant, however, and peculiar to the radicals, the organised public meetings and processions, drew up pledges which became the radical party programme to be submitted to all candidates, and were responsible for the operation of

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1. Political Register 21st July, 1832.
2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
   Manchester Courier 6th July, 1832.
3. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
4. Ostrogorski op. cit., p.153.

exclusive dealing, the practice of dealing with shops and firms of approved political allegiance, as a means of influencing the election.

The radicals were amongst the first to make use of the "mass meeting". Other parties developed this practice at a much later date. There were throughout the election period, many examples of public meetings held on waste ground, often at the back of the Albion, the radical headquarters, attended by huge crowds of up to 12,000. The candidates were invited to address such meetings as election day approached, timed to coincide with the meal breaks of the local factories so that the workers could hear the "popular" candidates. Cobbett in particular was very much at his ease addressing these huge crowds which revelled in his colourful language, his sweeping attacks on the establishment and his appeals for a return to the golden days of English history. Whenever rival candidates dared to address such meetings, they had to face hostile crowds and reports of their speeches are punctuated with "hisses" and "boos" as compared to the "hurrahs" of the radical candidates.

A new element was introduced into elections by the radicals, that of election according to policy.[1] The political meeting at which the candidate explained his policy was a late development and in Oldham took the form of drawing up pledges and presenting them to the candidate for their acceptance as a test of their political views. These pledges were also regarded by the radicals as a means by

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1. Jennings, op. cit., p. 201.

which candidates could be made more dependent on the electors in the absence of annual elections.[1] A further step in this direction was taken with the insistence that the member should resign his seat on the request of his constituents. In July 1832 the National Political Union issued a list of pledges to be put to candidates,[2] further Parliamentary reform, including the ballot and shorter Parliaments, legal reforms, financial reforms, trade reforms church reforms, the abolition of slavery and the abolition of taxes on knowledge.

By September[3] the Oldham Political Association had drawn up a list of 14 pledges which foreshadowed Chartist demands and those of the Anti-Corn Law League.

1. Abolition of sinecures.
2. Reduction of the standing army.
3. Abolition of taxes on malt, hops and other necessaries.
4. Appropriation of Church, Crown and Royal Duchy lands for the public service.
5. Abolition of the Corn Laws.
6. Abolition of paper money.
7. Repeal of the law of Primogeniture.

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1. Norman Gash. Politics in the Age of Peel. Longmans, 1953, p.29.
2. "On Pledges to be Given by Candidates" quoted S.Maccoby. English Radicalism 1832 - 52. Allen and Unwin 1935.
3. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

8. Abolition of taxes on knowledge.

9. Abolition of the game laws.

10. Modification of the laws relating to libel.

11. Removal of the property qualification for members of Parliament.

12. Support for vote by ballot and the shortening of the duration of Parliament.

13. Support for the Ten Hour Bill.

14. Adjourning of the House of Commons after dusk.

These pledges were to play a central part in the coming election campaign and were put to all the main candidates as a test of their fitness to represent the borough. Though not included in this list, views on the national debt was another point upon which candidates were expected to give a satisfactory reply. The debt was seen by the radicals as the cause of the high taxation which distressed the people of England.[1]

A more direct way of influencing the election was found in exclusive dealing or dealing only with those shop keepers who used their votes as the customers demanded. This was the only practical method of influence available to the radicals of the working class, in a political world which still regarded influence as an acceptable, indeed necessary aspect of elections.[2] Though rumours of exclusive dealing were circulating as early as July,[3] it was not officially announced until November. On 23rd

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1. Vide p. 23 footnote for fuller discussion.

2. Gash, op. cit., p. 175.

3. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

November the Political Association issued a poster urging the electors to do their duty by returning Cobbett and Fielden and threatening that support would be withdrawn from those who refused to "assist in the regeneration" of the country.[1] A further announcement on December 8th gave notice of the publication of The People's Remembrancer[2] after the election to show how traders cast their vote. Other non-official posters expressed in less guarded terms also made their appearance.[3]

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1. B. Grime "Memory Sketches" Part I, Parliamentary Elections, Hirst & Rennie Oldham 1887. p. 14.

2. A list of the voters in the borough of Oldham, Royton, Crompton and Chadderton who elected the first members of that borough under the Reform Bill in the year 1832, showing also for which of the 5 candidates each elector voted. Published by John Knight.

3. Quoted Grime op. cit., p. 14.

Power of Exclusive Dealing

"The enemies of reform are everywhere alarmed at the non-electors adopting exclusive dealing. The nation and your enemies know the power of the working classes; they know they can accomplish anything they set their minds upon. Therefore, working men, if you wish well to yourselves, lay out your money with those electors who support the two Liberal candidates - Messrs. Cobbett and Fielden. Surely you have the right to give any person your custom whose conduct you think is for the national good and who is determined to exercise his elective right for your advantage. Act resolutely and you are triumphant. Everything depends on the working man. The elector's franchise is a trust to be used for your benefit and not a right to be used against you."

Waterhead Mill November 22nd 1832. Plutarch.

- Plutarch was probably William Knott.

The Remembrancer was published after the election with an accompanying letter written by William Spier justifying the practice and urging attendance at the meetings of the Political Union. In early December 1832 there were disturbances arising from exclusive dealing. A Mr. Evans was arrested for attempting to stop customers entering a shop which supported Bright, the Whig candidate. On another occasion three operatives, King, Brierley and Tetlow were charged with threatening customers entering a shop which again supported Bright.[1]

There were five candidates in the 1832 election. The two radical candidates were William Cobbett (1762 - 1835) the farmer, soldier, journalist, reformer and John Fielden[2] (1784 - 1849) the Todmorden cotton manufacturer of Fielden Brothers, Waterside Mill, one of the largest mills in the country. Fielden was a great admirer of Cobbett and agreed to stand for election only on condition that Cobbett was returned with him. Cobbett was in fact already a candidate for Manchester and very confident as to his eventual return for that borough, declaring that his Oldham supporters had agreed that he should sit for Manchester rather than Oldham if elected because of the greater weight in the affairs of the state a seat for Manchester would give him.[3] Throughout the election

1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

2. D.N.B.

3. W.H. Chaloner, "Cobbett and Manchester. The First Election Address", Manchester Guardian 16th May, 1955.

proceedings and during their brief life in Parliament together, Cobbett was the dominant partner as was to be expected with a man of his temperament and standing. It was he who invariably spoke first, longest and with greatest effect, being a far easier orator than Fielden who was never at ease when speaking in public and spoke on economic rather than popular issues.

These two candidates were invited to stand by the Oldham Political Association in July 1832, the invitations being accompanied by requisitions signed by some 500 electors. By mid October a third candidate had been introduced by the whigs, Benjamin Heywood Bright. A canvass was undertaken on his behalf and a total of 130 names were collected in support.[1] In mid November the fourth candidate, a tory, made his appearance. He was William Burge, a member for the rotten borough of Eye who had lost his seat following the redistribution of the Reform Act. His choice was a disastrous one for the Oldham tories for two reasons. He had opposed the passage of the Reform Act, a fact which was seized upon by the radicals. As Butterworth put it, "though a candidate for our suffrage he would have prevented us having any if possible". In addition he was an agent for the West Indian planters and was consequently connected in the popular mind with slavery, which was attacked by the radicals. Thus it was that a fifth candidate came on to the scene in early December, the nephew of Wilberforce, George

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1. Manchester Courier 20th October, 1832.

Stephens, a London barrister and solicitor of the Anti-Slavery Society.[1]

Cobbett paid his first election visit to Oldham on Wednesday, 12th September, making his headquarters at the Albion Inn.[1] The election committee had made arrangements for both Cobbett and Fielden to tour the district, but Fielden was ill and Cobbett had to campaign on his own. In the evening he addressed a crowd of some 8,000 on waste ground near Lord Street for an hour, being frequently interrupted by cheers. He declared that his object was to obtain a good standard of living for the working class and restore the constitution to its "ancient purity". He attacked the standing army and explained the vicious circle which made it necessary to collect the taxes and the taxes necessary to support the army. He criticised the magistrates who usurped trial by jury, the trespass Acts, which he traced back to the time of William the Conqueror, and sinecurists. He appealed for the removal of malt and soap taxes, tithes and the corn laws, in that order. He concluded by referring to the persecution suffered by John Knight during the "gagging time " of 1819 for which he would demand compensation if elected. Substantially the same address was repeated the next day at Royton and Crompton.

On Saturday 15th[1] Cobbett was joined by Fielden in

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

Oldham and they were introduced to a crowd of 12,000 by John Knight. It was at this meeting that the Oldham radicals submitted their pledges to their candidates for their consideration. A list of the pledges was handed to Cobbett by John Knight. These were read to the assembled crowd by Cobbett who commented on them as he read. He declared his agreement with all the pledges with a few qualifications. He agreed to support the abolition of the Corn Laws after tithes and the malt tax had been abolished. Without this farmers would have been badly hit by the abolition of the Corn Laws. He was not prepared to support repeal of the law of primogeniture on the grounds that it would affect the succession to the Crown, but offered to resign if his future constituents felt strongly enough about this. Cobbett was followed by Fielden who spoke for only a few minutes on the cause of the general distress in the country.

On Friday, 16th November[1] the radical candidates again visited Oldham, Cobbett passing through the town on his way south from a lecture tour in Scotland. Again Fielden was not with Cobbett at the beginning of his visit owing to a mistake as to the date of the visit. After spending 2 - 3 hours with his committee, Cobbett spoke to a large crowd swollen by workers during the dinner hour. He declared that there would be no good government until universal suffrage had been gained and that those with votes should use them honestly in the interest of those who had

1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

not, who meanwhile had the right to persuade and use influence to ensure that votes were cast in the general interest. He attacked his whig opponent "the bright fellow", who, he said had a brother in Parliament who had done all in his power to perpetuate slavery, and once again declared his determination to work for the improvement of the lot of the working classes. A meeting to be held at the Baptist Chapel in the evening had to be transferred to the open air owing to the size of the crowd.

On the next day Cobbett was joined by Fielden, who was greeted with deafening cheers. Once again he referred to the distressing state of the country and traced its origin to excessive taxation, which made it impossible for employers to pay bigger wages.[1] Like Cobbett he attacked the large standing army which absorbed the great bulk of taxation and which was used to oppress the people. He illustrated his accusation by referring to an enquiry which he had made into distress in the Pendle area in 1829, a copy of which had been sent to Peel. Peel's reply was a promise to send troops to avoid disturbances.

Benjamin Bright made his first appearance on Thursday, 4th October.[2] He was met at Hollinwood on his journey from Manchester and was conducted into the town by a band and 100 followers and met by a crowd of 2 - 3,000 at the Market Place. Once again the proceedings were dominated by the

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1. This would seem to be a reference to the Wage Fund theory of wages current at this time.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

radicals, the crowd being addressed by Alexander Taylor and John Knight before Bright had an opportunity to speak. At the end of Knight's address, during which he asked Bright how long he had been a reformer, he put a reduced list of pledges to him. He was called to give his support to:-

1. Abolition of pensions and places.
2. Reduction of the standing army.
3. An equitable adjustment of the national debt.[1]
4. Abolition of tithes.
5. Abolition of the game laws.
6. Vote by ballot.
7. Abolition of property qualifications for Members of Parliament.
8. Shorter Parliaments.
9. Adjournment of the House of Commons after dusk.

Bright refused to commit himself and was hissed by the crowd though he did promise to investigate the merits of pensions and try to secure the abolition of tithes and the game laws.

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1. To radicals the equitable adjustment of the national debt meant relieving the poor of the burden imposed by indirect taxes. It was accepted by Peel that indirect taxation had reached its limit and that a more equitable tax would be a property tax, which he favoured. (A Political Diary 1823 - 30, Edward Law - Lord Ellenborough. pub. Richard Bentley 1881.p.216) Cobbett's particular objection to the debt was that it had been incurred in depreciated paper money and was being repaid in gold since the return to the gold standard. When returned to Parliament he moved the impeachment of Peel for promoting the return to thegold standard in 1819. To him equitable adjustment involved the repudiation of the debt with the exception of small holdings.

He was of the opinion that the other pledges would not benefit the people. In reply to a further question put by Knight, Bright refused to resign his seat when requested by his constituents. This Cobbett had promised to do when requested by a majority of the people over 21.[1] Further questions, put by Halliday at that meeting and by other radicals including Knott at Waterhead later in the day, did not receive replies satisfactory to the radicals.

The next day[2] Bright went to Royton where he was again subjected to searching questioning, this time by William Fitton. These questions went further than those of the previous day, touching on his attitude towards the Septennial Act; Universal Suffrage; abolition of sinecures, the standing army, corn laws and taxes on malt, hops and soap; the application of Church and Crown lands to public use; the abolition of taxes on knowledge and the amendment of the libel laws; the separation of church and state; support for the Ten Hour Bill and the resignation of his seat on request. Bright replied that he was anxious to give the Reform Act a fair trial before the life of Parliament was shortened, though it was possible that five years would be better than seven. He could not sanction universal suffrage, but would do his best to secure the abolition of sinecures. Whilst the army was too large, a reduction would not be beneficial to the country. A lower

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1. Political Register 12th September, 1832. p.707.
2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

duty on corn would be desirable, he suggested 5/-. per quarter, but preferred lowering the duty on raw materials to the advantage of manufacturers rather than the abolition of duty on malt and hops. He supported the substitution of a fixed duty on land in lieu of tithes, but had not yet made up his mind regarding the correct use of Church and Crown lands. He did not favour the separation of church and state and refused to agree to resign his seat on request. His statement that he knew little of factory conditions and could not, therefore, comment on the Ten Hour Bill was understandably met with cries of "He's not fit to be sent".

Burge did not deliver a public address and did not therefore have to run the gauntlet of the radical pledges. He published his election address privately, in which he referred to his attachment to the constitution; the need for economy; the removal of undue restrictions on commerce and a fixed duty on corn; and the gradual emancipation of slaves. Stephens who had been brought forward for the express purpose of opposing Burge stood little chance, except in the event of the retirement of Fielden through ill-health, a rumour which gained force during the election, or Cobbett's return for Manchester. He addressed the people of Oldham only on the day of the election and was concerned solely with the question of slavery.

The system of registration of electors after 1832 provided another task for the political parties of the time.[1]

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1. Gash op. cit., p.118.

It became their task to ensure that supporters were duly registered whilst opponents were crossed off the list, usually because of some technical fault in the qualification of the elector. Expenses encountered in registration were usually defrayed by the party concerned, though there is no evidence that this took place in Oldham in 1832. On the 21st October, 1832[1] the Borough Court for the revision and correction of the list of voters met at the Angel Inn, with the returning barristers, overseers, collectors of rates, the returning officer, Joseph Jones of Walshaw House, and the radical and whig committees in attendance. Six Oldham voters were disqualified for non-residence and thirty new claims were put forward, namely by people who occupied separate rooms in factories and had only paid the last rate. On the grounds that rate had not been paid for a sufficient length of time, their votes were not allowed. Forty names accidentally omitted were allowed. Twenty more names were struck off in Crompton and nine in Royton, whilst in Chadderton there was only one dispute. A farmer demanded the vote for land upon which he did not occupy a house. His claim was allowed on the grounds that three quarters of a stable belonging to him was built on his land. This gave a

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

total number of electors for Oldham's first election of 1130.[1]

Formal proceedings began on Wednesday 12th December.[2] The day was fine and had a festive appearance with bells ringing and flags hanging from windows. Most of the shops, though few of the factories, closed. The hustings were in the centre of the town, opposite the Church. The platform party was assembled by 9. 0 a.m. but the assembled crowd was considered too small for the proceedings to begin. By 10. 0 a.m., however, the area in front of the hustings was filled and all the available windows commanding a view were filled with spectators. The radicals were very much in evidence, their green and white colours being worn by most of the assembled crowd. Three bands were playing in support of the radical candidates and there were many flags bearing radical slogans such as "Equitable Adjustment", "The People the foundation of all power", "Cobbett's 14 Propositions", "Remember the foul deeds of Peterloo". Other parties did not date show their colours. A large force of special constables had been enrolled to maintain order.

At 10. 0 a.m. the candidates were introduced. Fielden was proposed by Joshua Milne of Milne, Travis and Milne of

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
   Grimes. op. cit., p. 12. gives the figure as 1131.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

Crompton, as "one of the most extensive, humane, liberal, honest and experienced manufacturers in this country". He was seconded by William Taylor of Vale House, Crompton. Cobbett was proposed by James Halliday, who said that they ought to be represented by the father of reform, and seconded by John Halliwell. James Mellor, a master cotton spinner, proposed Bright, to the accompaniment of hisses, as a man of liberal, honest and enlightened views. James Whitehead, a solicitor, seconded. George Wright, a hatter, proposed Burge, who was seconded by John Taylor, the Captain of the Yeomanry. Stephens was introduced by two clergymen, the Rev. William Eullarton Walker, a Weslyan Minister, and the Rev. Thomas Fernoux Jordan, a Baptist Minister, as a second candidate, should Cobbett be returned for Manchester, to oppose those who sanctioned slavery.

Following this the candidates addressed the crowd, Cobbett, who was in Manchester, being represented by William Fitton. Fielden and Fitton made traditional radical speeches, referring to the points contained in the radical pledges. An interesting exchange developed when Burge, defending his return for the rotten borough of Eye and his connection with slavery, accused Bright of not being above suspicion in this respect, whose father was, he declared, a slave owner.

Polling began at 9. 0 a.m. on Thuesday, 13th December at three centres, the Grammar School for Oldham below town, St. James' Sunday School, Greenacres Moor, for

Oldham above town and the village school Royton for Crompton, Royton and Chadderton. By 1. 0 p.m. the voting stood at Fielden 588, Cobbett 557, Bright 98, Burge 59 and Stephens 2. Little voting took place in the afternoon and the poll closed at 4. 0 p.m. The poll re-opened at 9. 0 a.m. on Friday 14th. The final figures at the close of the poll that day were Fielden 675, Cobbett 642, Bright 153, Burge 101 and Stephens 3.

Thus ended Oldham's first election which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the radicals,[1] a victory which can be accounted for by the radical temper of the borough and the organisation of the radicals as seen in exclusive dealing and their organisation and handling of public meetings. It was an election free from corruption and violence. Mr. Casson, on behalf of the returning officer, spoke of the propriety of the election.[2] The only violent incidents were in connection with exclusive dealing and were isolated cases. Both Cobbett[3] and Fielden[4] referred to the purity of the election and only £100[3] was spent by the

1. McCord claims that in the 1830's it was a considerable achievement for a radical manufacturer to capture a seat in the House of Commons. vide Norman McCord. The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-46. Allen and Unwin 1958. p.29.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

3. Bateson, op. cit., p. 105.

4. Manchester Chronicle 29th December, 1832 - Anonymous letter.

radicals on election expenses. Exclusive dealing did not long survive the election and it was reported as being on the wane by January 1833,[1] along with the party spirit.

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1. Manchester Courier 18th January, 1833.

c. The Ranks Divided.

The period 1832 to 1847 was marked by a split in the solidarity of the ranks of the radicals who had won such a convincing victory at Oldham's first election. To understand this division it is necessary to consider first of all the economic distress and discontent and secondly by the religious differences within the borough at this time which frayed tempers and upset established loyalties.

The cause of the economic distress and discontent was four fold. It was due to the rising cost of living, the depressed state of the hand loom weavers, the uncertainty of trade and the increased risk of unemployment and wage cutting.

Food prices fell from 1814 to about 1821 - 2 by which time the cost of food was roughly what it had been in 1790. After 1821 - 2 however prices rose and did not fall again until 1840.[1] Though offset to some extent by falls in other prices, particularly clothing, this rise in the cost of living produced considerable hardship. An illustration of the high prices and the reaction to them can be seen in Oldham in the milk boycott of 1829. In July 1829 a meeting was held at the White Horse Inn, Oldham, to consider the best means of reducing the exorbitant price of milk.[2] There is no record of what that price was, but the meeting demanded a more reasonable price of eightpence a pound for

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1. E.L. Woodward, The Age of Reform 1815 - 70. Oxford, 1938, p.11.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

butter, halfpenny a quart for buttermilk, penny a quart for old milk and threehalfpence a quart for new milk. To enforce these reductions it was agreed to boycott milk and butter sold by local farmers.[1] The same decision was reached at another meeting at Bent Green with resolutions being passed urging that milk men should not be molested. For a time farmers returned with milk unsold but on 6th August a compromise was reached. The price of milk was reduced, though not to the price demanded by the meetings.

The introduction of new inventions into industry took place at a rapid rate at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Particularly was this so with the cotton industry where the introduction of machines brought with it not only increased production, but also unemployment as workmen were thrown out of work by the new machines. The distress amongst hand loom weavers was one of the grimmest features of working class life in England by the 1830's. Between 1815 and 1835 their wages fell by a half to two thirds.[2] Butterworth reported[3] with depressing regularity during the 1830's that whilst other trades might be enjoying a fair measure of success, the hand loom weavers were in a very depressed condition. In May 1830 he wrote that many hand loom weavers in Shaw and Royton were turning away from their normal fustian weaving, to silk weaving where demand was

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1. An interesting forerunner of exclusive dealing.
2. Woodward, op. cit., p. 5 - 6.
3. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

stronger, " a strong inducement for that miserable class to change trades". Again in August 1830 he wrote that the hand loom weavers were cheerful despite their shocking low wages of 4/- a week. The Oldham Vestry reported in 1833 that after providing for all the classes of needy people, the hand loom weavers demanded the most attention.[1] By May 1835 reported Butterworth,[2] the power loom had almost put an end to hand loom weaving and the looms were being sold for firewood, fetching as many shillings as once they did pounds.

The new industries brought with them also uncertainty and the increased risk of unemployment as the result of the fluctuation of trade. Butterworth's comments on the state of trade in Oldham in the 1830's show a constantly fluctuating cotton industry. In October 1833 he wrote,[2] "depression, fluctuation and want of stability at present agitate the cotton industry." Particularly bad times seem to have been the autumn of 1831, a slump ascribed to the failure of the Reform Bill and the risk of disturbances and cholera in north Germany which affected demand. Again trade slumped in the

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1. Bateson, op. cit., p. 107.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

autumn of 1833 and in 1834, when three of the largest public houses in Oldham closed, a sure sign of lack of money. In 1839, once again the cotton trade was reported as being in a "most gloomy and appalling state" with half to two thirds time being worked.

Politically the most disturbing element in the economic situation in Oldham at this time was the tendency towards wage cutting, the result of the employers habit of putting a large proportion of their earnings back into their businesses. The workers bore much of the burden of providing capital for industrialisation.[1] Even when trade was good, Butterworth reported low wages or wage cutting. In 1831 he reported that five new mills were being built but that power loom weavers were earning only 10/- a week, a considerable sum when compared with the hand loom weavers 4/- a week, but surely an indication of industrialisation at the expense of wages. In October 1833 there was a strike of power loom operative at Werneth Mill which was caused by wage cutting. Frequently poorer rate payers were summoned because of their inability to pay the rates. It was because of this wage cutting that the spinning operatives formed a trade union in 1834.

Wage cutting was the last straw and when combined with the formation of the trade union, an extremely inflamatory situation was produced which gave rise to the Bankside riots.[2] Bankside Mill, owned by Richard Thompson,

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1. Woodward, op. cit., p.11.

2. For a full account of the riots see Butterworth MSS, for April, 1834.

was the scene of several disturbances during 1834 because when the operatives went on strike in January, 1834, new hands were taken on, known to the town as "knobsticks", to break the strike. Early in February the displaced hands went round the houses of the "knobsticks" breaking windows. On the 22nd February three men and a woman, until the strike workers at Bankside, were charged with assaulting one of the new hands, Richard Scott. They were bound over to keep the peace paying sureties of £20. Again in April, Joseph Mills, an old hand, accused Scott of assaulting him with a blunderbuss. Scott claimed that he was acting in self defence and the magistrates dismissed the case. Matters came to a head on 14th April.

Three of the Constables, William Heywood, John Page and Alfred Heslop, believing that an assault on the new hands at Bankside Mill was being planned, went to the King William IV Hotel in Cotton Street. There they found a meeting of the new spinners' union in progress with about fifty people attending. The lights were put out and the members rushed for the door. Two prisoners were secured however, along with the Union's books. News of these events quickly spread through the town and there were rumours that the prisoners would be transported.[1] Groups of people gathered early next morning around the police station and when the Constables emerged with their prisoners and the Union's books, to take them to the

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1. In March 1834 the "Tolpuddle Martyrs" had been transported for union activities.

magistrates at Hollinwood, the mob followed them. Many factories on the route stopped work and by 9. 0 a.m. an immense crowd had gathered around the Constables. The road to Hollinwood lay directly past Bankside and when the "knobsticks" were seen this proved too much for the already inflamed temper of the crowd. The Constables were set upon the prisoners released, and then the crowd turned its attention to Bankside. Stones were thrown, some of the Bankside workers produced blunderbusses and a member of the crowd, James Bentley, was shot. Following this the crowd lost all control, broke into the factory and ransacked it along with Thompson's house and some cottages nearby. Not until the Riot Act had been read and the 12th Lancers had arrived from Hulme Barracks, Manchester, did the crowd disperse at midday. Two days later detachments of the 34th and 35th Regiments of Foot were garrisoned in the town.

The partiality of the authorities can be seen in the fate of the rioters. Five of them were eventually hanged for their part in the affair which amounted only to throwing stones and destruction of property. The men who had shot at the crowd were not even brought to trial.

These events served to divide opinion within the borough. On the one side stood the radicals who sympathised with the rioters. On the other stood a strong body of moderate opinion, which at one time had sympathised with the radicals, but which was now alarmed at the danger to life and property which the Bankside riot in particular and extreme political ideas in general,

presented. The division occasioned by the Bankside riot can be seen at a meeting of the ley payers held on 30th July 1834[1] to decide whether the Constables accounts for the past three months, which contained large sums spent during the riots, should be passed. The total amount came to £273. 1. 5½d. but of this £234. 6. 8½d. were for the renting of barracks, equipping the barracks and provisions for the soldiers who had come to the borough in April. At this meeting the two groups crystallised, the radicals who opposed the paying of the accounts and a group which Butterworth called the "commercial party", mill owners and tradesmen, who approved the accounts, the radicals were victorious. The military items were disallowed and only the civil expenses were passed.

The economic situation at this time robbed the radicals of much support from their moderate supporters. The religious differences at this time resulted in a further loss of support.

This further split within the radical ranks was over the question of the separation of Church and State and was led by a group of dissenting radicals led by Halliday, Knott and Swire who were frequently referred to by Butterworth as the Huntites or Hetheringtonites.[2] Disputes regarding the established church were not new in

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

2. D.N.B.

Oldham and were in keeping with the prevalent mood of dissenters who in particular objected to the payment of church rates for the upkeep of churches which they did not attend.[1] Such was the issue in Oldham. In 1824 a scheme was put forward for the rebuilding of the sixteenth century Parish Church to accommodate the increased population. This scheme was opposed by the Anglicans of Shaw, Royton and Crompton who had their own churches to support and antiquarians who denounced the demolition of the old structure, but particularly by the radicals who objected to the payment of the new rates to cover the cost and the secretive manner in which the trustees administered the rebuilding fund. Despite opposition the "New Church" party triumphed and the church was rebuilt 1827 - 30. The trustees were empowered to levy a rate without the ratepayers' consent and were not accountable to anybody for expenditure. It was promised, however, that the cost should not exceed £12,000. The radicals were determined to force an enquiry into the administration of the funds and the expenses involved and in 1833 Oldham and other townships succeeded in electing radical church wardens, amongst them John Halliwell. The accounts, when published, revealed that the total cost of rebuilding had been £30,400. An Order in Council dated 1835 directed that on the next vacancy

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1. Woodward op. cit., p.492.

NORTH-EAST VIEW OF THE OLD PARISH CHURCH OF OLDHAM

in the Rectory of Prestwich the rates for the rebuilding of the Parish Church would be discontinued, in the out districts. The Rector died shortly after the rate of 1836 had been levied and with him died the authority to levy a rate on the out districts. The out districts were, however, in arrears and in March 1837, William Fitton was summoned for non-payment of a rate of 4/2d.[1]

It is against this background that the growth of the party of dissenting radicals must be viewed. Halliday and Knott were present at a meeting of dissenters in February 1834[2] as a result of which a memorial was sent to Fielden which was to be presented to Grey. Cobbett was already out of favour with the dissenters because of his lack of enthusiasm for the dissenters' cause. He had failed to support the separation of Church and State and the admission of dissenters to the Universities. The memorial appealed for exemption from tithes, the right to attend Oxford and Cambridge Universities, to bury their dead in the Parochial Burial ground and to be married before magistrates or in chapels. This was followed in March by a public meeting to petition for the total separation of Church and State, with a second meeting in June on the same theme. According to Butterworth and the Manchester Chronicle[3] this split in the radical

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1. Bateson, op. cit., p. 115.
2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
3. Manchester Chronicle 27th December, 1834.

ranks, between the Cobbettite radicals and the malcontent radicals led by the dissenters was common knowledge by the end of 1834.

So apparent had the split become that early in December the members visited Oldham to give an account of their stewardship.[1] The meeting was held at the back of the Albion Inn. Fielden spoke first, giving an account of all the votes which he had cast and declared that it was the duty of a member of Parliament to explain his conduct to his constituents. At the conclusion of his address, three cheers were proposed by Knott. Cobbett was received more coolly. The expected cross-examination did not materialise though one "drunken fellow" exclaimed several times, "What's become of the 14 propositions?" Cobbett declared that he could not give details of all his votes but said that he had always voted against the Whigs. He then went on to consider two of the main problems which had troubled the malcontent radicals. He had refused to support petitions for the separation of Church and State on the grounds that tithes would simply pass into the hands of landlords. On the question of education he said that he wasno enemy of education but was afraid that schoolmasters would become government spies paid out of the taxes.[2] In the evening a

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

2. A similar attitude was current at the time of the establishment of the police force. vid. Woodward, op. cit., p.448.

public dinner was held but it was difficult for those who were not of the "right radical sort" to get into the room. The next day the members visited the out townships where the crowds were small, with many children, and then left the borough without acclaim.

Such was the state of politics when the 1835 election surprised Oldham. Parliament was dissolved on the 29th December, 1834, the writ for the election was received on January 1st, 1835, and polling day was fixed for January 7th. It was this fact, that the election came so soon after the dissolution, that prevented the split in the radical ranks becoming open and accounted for the uncontested election in January 1835. Neither the other political parties in Oldham nor the break away group of radicals had time to bring forward another candidate.

The nearest the dissenting radicals came to choosing a rival candidate was at a meeting called by them on the 26th December.[1] An earlier meeting on 24th December at the Grapes Inn to invite Charles Hindley of Dukinfield, already a candidate for Ashton under Lyne and Warrington, to stand as a radical candidate was broken up by Cobbettites. The meeting on the 26th was again disorderly and crowded, so much so in fact that Butterworth found it impossible to make notes and had to rely on his memory after the meeting. Most of the discussion centred around the question whether or not

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

the meeting was public. The chairman, Jesse Ainsworth, declared that it was a meeting of Mr. Hindley's friends but that others might stay but not speak. His ruling was reinforced by Knott and Halliday who said that it was a meeting to watch over dissenters' interests. The Cobbettites, notably Haigh and Alexander Taylor, claimed that they had no right to exclude anyone from meetings where the suitability of candidates was being discussed. Even old John Knights' thick stick was not sufficient to keep order during the altercations which followed. Despite a final plea from the Cobbettites that no new candidates should be brought forward because of the dangers involved in splitting the radical ranks, Hindley was approached by the dissenting radicals. Hindley did not accept the invitation and other names were discussed. The Tories showed signs of activity, no doubt encouraged by these signs of division amongst the radicals, and again approached John Taylor (a local hatter and at one time Captain of the Oldham Yeomanry). These tentative manoeuvres were, however, out short by the announcement of the election.

Thus it was that Fielden and Cobbett were unopposed at Oldham's second election which, says Butterworth,[1] was an extremely dull affair. There was only one band on this occasion and t wo flags, with a crowd before the hustings of a mere 1,200. Fielden was again proposed and seconded by Joshua Milne and John Travis of Crompton,

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

whilst Alexander Taylor not Halliday as previously, proposed Cobbett.

The dissenting radicals, however, got a second chance to introduce their own candidate in July 1835. William Cobbett died on 18th June, 1835, thereby occasioning Oldham's first bye-election. A letter[1] from John Morgan Cobbett, William Cobbett's son, reached Cobbett's committee a few days later informing them of his father's death and immediately the radicals, with their usual vigour, began the election campaign.

The radical committee met at the Albion[1] and agreed to approach Joshua Milne of Crompton, who had proposed Fielden in 1832 and January 1835. Placards with black borders were distributed informing the borough of Cobbett's death and requesting that the electors should withhold their vote until a suitable candidate had been brought forward. On the 20th Milne declined the invitation and the committee resolved to write to John Morgan Cobbett inviting him to stand.[2] This prompted the dissenting radicals to meet on the 22nd to reject Cobbett as a candidate and discuss other possible names. An invitation

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1. Manchester Chronicle 27th June, 1835.
2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

was sent to Mr. Doubleday of Newcastle who later declined the offer.[1] It would appear that no definite candidate was chosen by the dissenting radicals and that when Feargus O'Connor[2] arrived on the 26th to present himself as a radical candidate, his visit came as a surprise.[3] The fact that O'Connor had received no invitation was seized upon by the Cobbettites who tried to use this fact to weaken his position, claiming that he had come uninvited to split the radical ranks.

The tories also began to prepare for the coming election. Following their resounding defeat in 1832 and encouraged by the apparent lack of unity amongst the radicals, they had begun to take steps to improve their organisation. In May 1835 a branch association of the South Lancashire Conservative Association was formed, meeting at the Angel Inn.[3] Pinning their faith on a local man they approached Joseph Jones of Walshaw House, and on the 21st June placards were distributed urging the electors to reserve their votes until a local man was brought forward.[3] Jones declined the invitation and the tory choice finally fell on John Frederick Lees.[4] Lees

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1. Manchester Chronicle 27th June, 1835.
2. Vide Donald Read and Eric Glasgow, Feargus O'Connor, Irishman and Chartist, Arnold 1961, p. 45. O'Connor had no previous connection with Oldham which he described as, " my English political birth place".
3. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
4. Grimes op. cit., p. 26.

was a member of an old and influential Oldham family his father being Lord of the Manor of Werneth. He lived at Werneth Lodge moving to Werneth Hall, the old manor house, when his father died.

During the election campaign controversy between the Cobbettites and O'Connor supporters centred on Cobbett's radicalism, with particular reference to the separation of Church and State, and O'Connor's alleged promise to Fielden that he had come to Oldham to support not oppose Cobbett.

When O'Connor, the "blazing Irish orator", came to Oldham on the 26th June he declared himself to be an out and out radical, though Butterworth considered that republican would be nearer the truth. He declared himself to be in favour of the separation of Church and State; the equitable adjustment of the national debt, universal suffrage, vote by ballot, annual parliaments; expulsion of Bishops from the House of Lords; the election of magistrates and judges and free trade.[1] Later in the day a meeting was called by the dissenting radicals which met behind the Albion,[2] to choose a suitable candidate. Knott was the chairman. At this meeting O'Connor re-emphasised his support for separation and repeated the points he had made earlier in the day with a promise to resign when requested by a majority of Oldham people. He then went on to say that he had not

1. O'Connor later became a protectionist, vide Glasgow and Read, op. cit.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

come to divide the Oldham radicals and would retire from the contest if Cobbett proved satisfactory. George Condy, the Editor of the "Manchester and Salford Advertiser" and frequent attender at radical functions spoke, saying that whilst he knew of the dissenters' dissatisfaction with Cobbett, they must beware of the dangers of a split in their ranks. He asked O'Connor to suspend electioneering until Cobbett, who was attending his father's funeral, could come in person and explain his views in detail. O'Connor stressed again that he had not come to create a diversion but did not promise to stop his campaign.

The next day, 27th June, the Cobbettites called a meeting on the same spot with Knight as the chairman.[1] A Mr. Hodgetts of Manchester accused O'Connor of saying to Fielden that he was coming to Oldham to speak in Cobbett's favour. O'Connor replied that he had told Fielden that he would support Cobbett if he took the necessary pledges and was acceptable to the people of Oldham. On coming to Oldham, however, he found that the test of a radical candidate was a pledge to support separation of Church and State. He understood that Cobbett would not give that pledge and so had offered himself as a candidate. If Cobbett did give the necessary pledges he would still support him. At this meeting Cobbett's address was distributed. On the question of separation he wrote, "I know of no practical man who will go further." This says Butterworth was considered too vague for the dissenters.

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

Following the meeting the split between Cobbettites and dissenters became open and complete with the removal of the dissenters' headquarters from the Albion to the George Inn and the beginning of a subscription to defray O'Connor's election costs.

John Morgan Cobbett finally came to Oldham on 30th June, arriving between 6 and 7p.m., and spoke later in the evening. He was described by Butterworth[1] as "a thin sallow dark-looking personage conveying a good idea of an hard student in law and sober matters and not at all possessed of a resemblance of his father externally. His tone, however, occasionally reminded the hearer of his parent." He was greeted by a large crowd anxious to see William Cobbett's son. Having referred to his recent bereavement he again accused O'Connor of having promised to support him. As for his politics, he declared himself to be a radical reformer like his father. He supported annual parliaments and universal suffrage. On the question of vote by ballot, he liked the open vote as a sign of independence but regretted that much intimidation resulted from it. He disliked the poor law,[2] and attacked

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

2. Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834, which tried to put an end to the payment of out-door relief and aroused widespread hostility, throughout the country and especially in Oldham. Fielden condemned the Act and was supported by the people of Oldham who refused to implement the Act. In 1837 six Guardians were chosen by the Improvement Commissioners, despite radical posters urging a boycott of the meeting, but only two attended the first meeting of the Guardians. It was not until after Incorporation in 1849 that the Poor Law Amendment Act was put into force.

the standing army. On the vexed church question he put forward the argument to which he was to adhere throughout the election. It was, he said, a very difficult question complicated by the fact that tithes belonged to individuals by right of inheritance[1] and could not be taken away without compensation being given. It is easy to understand where the charges of toryism which were levelled against Cobbett originated. He agreed that church rates should be abolished. Whilst he was willing to take pledges he would only pledge on those matters which he knew and understood. When he had finished speaking O'Connor again stressed that he had made no definite promises to Fielden. He went on to say that Cobbett was not a true radical, many Whigs supporting universal suffrage and vote by ballot, he had given no satisfaction on the question of separation and had not touched on the equitable adjustment of the debt. Following the meeting Butterworth[2] noted that many of his friends feared that Lees would be elected if the breach were not healed.

Nomination day was on July 3rd.[3] It had been rumoured that many Irish would arrive from surrounding districts to support O'Connor. They did not materialise and the crowd which assembled was a small one, but

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1. Woodward op. cit., p. 491
2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
3. Manchester Times 4th July, 1835.
   Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

because of the strength of party feeling the authorities had recruited 100 special constables to help maintain order. O'Connor was proposed by Jesse Ainsworth and seconded by Halliday. Halliday commenting on Fielden's support of Cobbett claimed that Fielden had no right to interfere in the election. This was an interesting statement in view of developments in 1847 when Fielden again supporting Cobbett, was accused of dictating to the people of Oldham and lost his seat. Cobbett was proposed by William Taylor of the Vale Mill, Crompton, who said that it was Cobbett's caution and scruples on the Church question which had been responsible for the hosility of the rival radicals, but he stressed that Cobbett was prepared to go to all just lengths. William Fitton seconding referred to Halliday's criticism of Fielden saying that Fielden knew Cobbett well, he became Fielden's son-in-law in 1847, and was a man who was not lavish in his praises. Alexander Taylor further seconded Cobbett since there was some doubt as to Fitton's qualification for the vote. Lees was proposed by Joseph Jones of Walshaw House, the first Returning Officer and James Lees, the third Returning Officer. Both stressed Lees' qualification as a local man and referred to Ashton under Lyne, Rochdale, Bury and Bolton where local men had been elected.

O'Connor spoke first, re-stating his radical beliefs including the need for cheap law.[1] Again he excused his

1. Litigation was slow and expensive and despite the reforms of Peel and Brougham remained too expensive for the common man. vide Woodward op. cit., p. 472.

appearance in Oldham to contest the election declaring that many preferred him to the non-descript chosen by Fielden.

Cobbett spoke at greater length mainly re-stating the points he had made on the 30th June, though enlarging upon some items. Whilst in the main in agreement with O'Connors' beliefs he thought some of them too wild. If for example judges were to be elected by the bar all judges would be "hot Tories" since from his experience[1] he knew that the majority of barristers were tory. This remark was followed by cries of "You are too!" from the crowd. He attacked the standing army which it was said was necessary to maintain the nation's credit. Yet this army had been used to help the Queen of Spain[2] retain her throne against her uncle. This

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1. J.M. Cobbett was a barrister. A firm of solicitors bearing the same name still exists in Manchester.

2. In 1829 Ferdinand VII of Spain lost his third wife, having no child to succeed him. To the disappointment of Don Carlos and his party, Ferdinand married again, Maria Christina of Naples and in October, 1830, a daughter was born. Following the death of Ferdinand in September 1833, the Carlist faction refused to recognise the regency of Maria Christina for her daughter. By the terms of a treaty 22nd April, 1834, Palmerston promised a naval force to assist his new ally, Spain, in expelling the Carlists. vide Woodward op. cit., p.220.

made British solderies into mercenaries./ He saw the national debt as the prime cause of misery and favoured the equitable adjustment of the debt. But the adjustment must be truly equitable since, as was the case with tithes, families depended on the interest from the debt and would suffer hardship if it was taken away. Cobbett was closely questioned, first by Mr. Nicholls, a beer seller, who asked if he considered tithes unjust. Cobbett replied that they were no more unjust than rent and that attacks on tithes and rent raised the whole question of the division of property. In reply to a further question on the same matter put by Halliday, Cobbett said that the abolition of the tithe and the payment of compensation might be a greater burden than the original tithe. Halliday also asked if Cobbett would move a motion for universal suffrage and annual parliaments. Cobbett replied that he would but could not say when. Replying to a further question Cobbett said that he would never support the expulsion of Bishops from the House of Lords since this was a breach of the constitution.

Lees spoke last and since this was his first speech, he was listened to intently. He spoke, said Butterworth, with timidity and trepidation common to the young and bashful. He declared himself to be a liberal - conservative, strongly attached to the constitution though willing to root out defects. His motto would be, "renovate the body politic but not destroy". His main duty was, he considered, to forward the interests of his native town and, since all his money was within the borough his and their interests were inseparable.

In the three days between nomination day and polling day tempers rose.[1] Threats of exclusive dealing were made by O'Connor's party, whose support came mainly from the working class. A heated exchange of correspondence took place between Cobbett and O'Connor which was published on placards and in the Manchester Chronicle.[2] It was confidently predicted[1] that a duel would be fought between Cobbett and O'Connor.

The election which followed proved to be an extremely close contest. At 11. 0 a.m.[1] on the first day, 6th July, Lees had polled 132, Cobbett 90 and O'Connor 30. When O'Connor had polled 32 votes he retired from the contests. No lead was given as to how his supporters were to act. By 2. 30 p.m. the figures were Lees 270, Cobbett 231, the gap had narrowed to Lees 314, Cobbett 304 by 4. 0 p.m. when the poll closed for the day. There was general amazement said Butterworth that Lees, a tory should be in the lead. By 11. 30 the next day Lees had a majority of 1 with 356 over Cobbett's 355. Soon after they had reached a level position, it was at this stage that both parties began to enter objections to the qualification of voters. Lees, however, continued to pull ahead and when the poll finally closed

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

2. Manchester Chronicle 4th July, 1835.

Lees had polled 394 and Cobbett 381.[1]

This result caused a great sensation in the neighbouring towns which found it difficult to believe that so radical a place as Oldham could return a tory.[2] Naturally there were many attempts to account for the result. Cobbett speaking afterwards at the Albion[2] said that it was due to the division in the radical ranks, and the "wiles and artifices" of the tories. The Manchester Times[3] echoed this feeling, urging that next time a canvass should be held if two candidates were brought forward and the weakest retire.

The radical defeat was due, as Cobbett said, to the divisions within the radical ranks. The division over the church question was of first importance for the thirty two votes which O'Connor received would have given Cobbett a clear majority. That the division continued to its disastrous conclusion was due, said Butterworth, to the arrogance of the Cobbettites and the obstinacy of O'Connor and his supporters. The division which resulted from the

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1. Poll Book containing the names and residences of the Electors who voted for a Member of Parliament in the room of the late W. CobbettEsq.for the Borough of Oldham.
   Published by Cobbett's Committee July 16th, 1835.
2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.
3. Manchester Times 11th July, 1835.

Bankside riot also robbed the radicals of much support. A comparison of the 1832 and 1835 Poll Books shows that the electors who voted for Cobbett and Fielden in 1832 and then voted for Lees in 1835, were mainly tradesmen, spinners and publicans, the class which would have been alarmed by the disturbances. It should be noted also that there was no mention of exclusive dealing at this election. This would have left the tradesmen free to cast their votes as they wished. Other factors were the fact that Lees was a townsman, a fact which he stressed throughout the election and which must have won him many votes, and a member of a wealthy family which could wield much influence in the town. The introduction to the Poll Book published by Cobbett's Committee spoke of intimidation by Lees' supporters. As well as wielding the stick Lees' Committee made use of the carrot. Lees' voters were treated on the day of the opening of the poll to breakfast, dinner and liquor. Both Butterworth and Cobbett's Committee feared that the independence of many voters had suffered accordingly.

Encouraged by this victory the Oldham tories began to further develop their party organisation./ In addition to the flourishing Conservative Association which had contributed to the recent success, an Operatives' Conservative Association [1] was formed in September, 1835.[2]

1. Vide. R.L. Hill Toryism and the People 1832 - 46. Constable 1926 for an account of the origins of conservative associations and operative societies.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

Its formation was rendered necessary, said its members, by the activity of the enemies of the constitution. The Society met at the Rope and Anchor Inn and it was agreed that it should meet regularly and "disseminate useful knowledge". At their annual dinner on January 1st, 1836[1] they were 300 strong. In December of that year a similar society was formed at Crompton and others at Chadderton and Lees in April 1837. In August 1837 Conservative Societies catering for women were formed. In January 1837 the Operatives' Conservative Society approached Joseph Jones who had refused to stand at the last election, to become a candidate at the next general election.

Whilst the tories were exulting over their victory and preparing to capture the second seat from the radicals, the radicals were looking at themselves with a critical eye. On August 24th 1835,[1] the radicals met at the Albion to revive the Political Union and adopt means of returning true radicals to Parliament. The Political Association was re-organised and a larger committee elected. On the 1st January, 1836[1] whilst the Conservatives were holding their annual dinner, Fielden visited Oldham and stressed the need for unity. He referred to the fable of the bundle of sticks, individually they were weak but collectively they were strong. As a result of this visit there were frequent and crowded meetings of the Political Union when efforts to heal the division were made. It was decided during

1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

these meetings that both Cobbett and O'Connor should be withdrawn and a single candidate chosen, acceptable to both sides. Whilst so much was easily agreed upon it was more difficult to choose the candidate. The Cobbettites favoured William Fitton but he was considered too moderate by the dissenting radicals. In January 1837[1] Fielden again visited Oldham and declared that he would withdraw from the representation of Oldham unless a radical colleague was returned at the next election. At last in February 1837, after many unsuccessful attempts, a candidate acceptable to all radicals was approached, Major-General William A. Johnson.

General Johnson[2] was a native of Wytham, Lincolnshire and a radical of the same type as William Cobbett. He had been High Sheriff of Lincolnshire and Member of Parliament for Boston. He refused to be returned again for Boston because of his disgust at the venality of the electors of Boston. In the letter[1] which Johnson wrote accepting the invitation to stand as candidate for Oldham, he declared his support for universal suffrage, annual or short parliaments and vote by ballot. He favoured the separation of Church and State and was opposed to many aspects of the new poor law. To conclude he declared that he would not spend more money on the coming election than the law allowed. At a

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

2. D.N.B.

public meeting called by the radicals in mid February,[1] both the radical groups were present and Johnson was unanimously adopted as the radical candidate at the next election. During the course of this meeting Joseph Quarmby, who was at this time becoming prominent amongst Oldham radicals, declared that once more Oldham would be "radically regenerated". Committees were formed to begin a canvass, to sound support for Fielden and Johnson. By 20th March[1] the return showed that Johnson had the support of 549 electors, a figure which had risen to 600 by 27th March.[1] Writing at the end of March 1837 Butterworth referred to the "hitherto divided ranks now cordially and enthusiastically united".

News of the death of William IV reached Oldham on 21st June, 1837[1] and the two political parties in Oldham began at once to make preparations for the coming election. The radicals continued their canvass on behalf of Fielden and Johnson called a meeting for July 3rd to demonstrate the support for the radical candidates. Similarly the tories began to canvass for Lees and Jones, though it was still by no means certain that Jones would stand as a candidate, and Lees returned from London to add his weight to the election campaign.

The radical meeting called for 3rd July further illustrated the complete unity which now existed amongst

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

the radicals. Alexander Taylor, the chairman, said that at the last election the radicals had been unhappily split but were now completely united. Halliday, the recent opponent of Taylor and Fitton, declared that Fitton supported the people whilst Lees did not. Fitton attacked Jones as a man who had supported the building of the new church, with the expense that it involved, and the barracks.

Once more radicalism dominated the borough. The canvass showed a large radical majority. Rival canvassers were attacked by radicals and a force of 130 special constables was appointed. There were frequent meetings in support of Fielden and Johnson and radical posters were in full evidence throughout the town. The radicals made use of exclusive dealing and the tories countered with threats of both exclusive dealing and exclusive employment. Butterworth reported that "many" voters, he does not say how many, left the borough in order to avoid the various pressures which were being placed upon them.

On 21st July, 1837,[1] Fielden and Johnson visited Oldham and addressed a huge crowd of some 15,000. Fielden gave the usual account of his conduct in Parliament claiming that he had followed a constantly radical line in the interests of the people. Johnson who spoke after Fielden declared that he would have acted in the same way

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

and went on to attack the tories who gave the people dry bread and muddy water and the whigs who gave rather better bread with a little cheese. He continued by re-stating at greater length the points he had made in his letter of acceptance[1] in February. He made a special reference to the corn laws which he opposed as being against the interest of the working class, despite the fact that as a landowner himself the corn laws were in his interest.[2]

The election of July 1837 was similar to that of 1832 in the scene which it presented and in the result. The streets were crowded with excited people displaying once more the radical colours. The space before the hustings was soon filled and there was great competition for a seat on the hustings with the candidates. Fielden was again proposed by Joshua Milne who spoke of Fielden's long service as member of Parliament, and was seconded by William Taylor. Lees was next proposed by his brother

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1. Vide p.56.

2. Whilst representing the unenfranchised majority, the Parliamentary radicals had the weakness of men defending the interests of a class to which they did not belong. Their political views were often a revolt against a society to which they could not adapt themselves.

   Woodward op. cit., p.90.

James Lees to the accompaniment of much hissing and booing from the crowd and his local connections were again stressed. He was seconded by Samuel Taylor. Jones, proposed by another of Frederick Lees' brothers, George Lees, and seconded by Edward Abbot, was greeted with such a bout of hissing and booing that Fitton and William Taylor had to plead with the crowd for a fair hearing. Johnson was proposed by Halliday who attacked local connection and wealth as a qualification for a member of Parliament, and was seconded by Fitton.

During the speeched by the candidates which followed, Fielden re-stated his old pledges and Johnson agreed with them. Lees again made much of his local connections and declared that he had as much concern for the welfare of the working class as the radicals. Jones expressed his reluctance to stand as a candidate and declared himself to be in favour of practical reform and an admirer of Peel.

The poll on the 27th July 1837 was a triumph for the radicals. By 10. 30 a.m. the figures stood at Johnson 381, Fielden 380, Jones 227 and Lees 207. At 10. 30 Lees and Jones withdrew from the election and the poll finally closed at 11. 0 a.m. the final figures being Johnson 548, Fielden 544, Jones 305, and Lees 273.

Thus was the radical hold over Oldham established once more leaving the tories, wrote Butterworth, in a "state of mortification". The radical ranks were re-united for election purposes and had once again brought their

influence to bear on the local tradesmen. So complete was the radical return to power that Fielden and Johnson were unopposed at the next election in 1841 and remained members of Parliament for Oldham until 1847. This however is not the end of the story. The divisions within the radical ranks continued, despite this enforced agreement for election purposes, and can be seen again the progress of chartism in the borough.

Chartism was at first welcomed by all the radicals of Oldham. A torchlight meeting, a picturesque and popular method of arousing interest and passions, was held on the 8th November, 1838[1] to carry resolutions in support of the People's Charter and to elect a delegate to represent Oldham at the National Convention. The meeting was attended by radicals of all shades of opnion and a crowd of 3,000, composed mainly of hand loom weavers and unemployed factory hands, gathered carrying torches, made from broken hand looms, and electioneering flags. The unanimity of the meeting can be seen in the movers and seconders of the resolutions. The first resolution approving the points of the charter was proposed by William Fitton and seconded by Alexander Taylor, both strong Cobbettite radicals. The second resolution however moving the adoption of the Birmingham National Petition was proposed by Halliday and

1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

seconded by Joseph Lockwood Quarmby[1] both dissenting radicals. Signs of discord were present however at this meeting. The meeting was attended also by O'Connor and the Rev. Joseph Raynor Stephens, a Weslyan Minister from Ashton under Lyne who had resigned his ministry as a protest against his suspension for attending meetings in support of disestablishment, both of whom were extreme, "physical force" chartists. They addressed the meeting in violent tones, O'Connor declaring that they should wait only twelve months for universal suffrage before they took violent action. This tirade was not acceptable to the great bulk of the meeting which, after selecting James Mills as the delegate to the National Convention, broke up with cheers for Fielden.

This radical unanimity collapsed completely as chartism grew more violent. Mills left the Convention in alarm. In March 1839, Butterworth[2] reported that whilst there were many radicals in Oldham who favoured the charter, they were divided between those who wanted to obtain their ends by peaceful means, the Cobbettites, and those who wanted to use force if necessary, the more extreme dissenting radicals. These latter were bringing arms into the town and were drilling.

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1. Vide p. 57 and 67.

2. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

The final break came in May 1839.[1] The "physical force" chartists called a meeting for the 25th which was banned by the Constables. They decided then to join a mass demonstration at Kersal Moor Racecourse, Manchester. To challenge the extremists the Cobbettites called a meeting on the same day. The infuriated O'Connor began a poster campaign in which he attacked the Cobbettites as "sham radicals" and claimed that their meeting was called by frightened politicians and landlords to keep the people from going to Kersal Moor. Knight replied in posters which denied that the Cobbettites were "sham radicals". On the 25th May, O'Connor marched off to Manchester with " a meagre following". The radical meeting was several thousand strong and was addressed by Fielden who declared his support for the principles of the charter, but stressed that peaceful means of obtaining them must be employed.

With this failure to win Oldham over to violence and the failure of the petition in July 1839, chartism degenerated into a series of riots and industrial disturbances. The worst of these was in August 1842. On the 8th August [2] almost every factory in Oldham was stopped when workers from Ashton under Lyne, Hyde and Stalybridge, joined by some Oldham workers, knocked the plugs out of the boilers. Most masters closed their factories and kept them closed until the disturbances died down. The police

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1. Butterworth MSS, under date quoted.

2. Bateson op. cit., p. 111 - 112.

were powerless to help those few masters who tried to defy the rioters. For days the workers paraded the streets shouting their slogan, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work".

The chartist revival of 1848 met with little success in Oldham. In June a man was arrested [1] for openly carrying a pike in the street and in July the chartists were reported to be forming a National Guard. By this time however the old radicalism of the 1830's was dead and new issues had arisen in Oldham politics.

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1. Bateson, op. cit., p.111 - 112.

CHAPTER 2. THE GROWTH OF THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTIES 1847 - 67.

a. The collapse of old radicalism.

During the fifteen years 1832 - 1847 Fielden had been the radical member for Oldham. He was the representative of that main stream of radicalism which had dominated the political life of Oldham since 1832 with his and William Cobbett's election, and which was about to come to an end. In 1847 he was rejected by the Oldham electorate, being placed at the bottom of the poll. The reasons for this failure appear to be two-fold. First there was the re-appearance of John Morgan Cobbett and the insistence on the part of Fielden, termed dictation by his opponents, that he would not sit as a Member of Parliament for Oldham unless Cobbett was returned with him. Secondly there was the opposition which his support of the Ten Hour Bill had aroused amongst the manufacturers of Oldham.[1]

As the general election of 1847 approached, it became increasingly apparent that General Johnson would not offer himself for re-election and that consequently a new candidate would be required to take his place. Once again the radical ranks were divided, as in 1835, over the choice of a suitable successor. On this occasion the split

1. The Ten Hour Bill was brought forward by Lord Ashley in January 1846 but was postponed becauseof the political crisis over the Corn Laws. Ashley lost his seat because he took the side of repeal and was succeeded by Fielden as the leader of the Ten Hour movement in Parliament. The bill was passed with little opposition in May 1847.

was a three-fold one, and proved much more disasterous to the radical cause.

The old Cobbettite radicals led by Alexander Taylor, and consequently known as "Taylor and Co." in the town, continued to support John Fielden and again brought forward John Morgan Cobbett as their prospective candidate. They made their stand on the past record and achievements of Fielden, stressing particularly his support of the Ten Hour Bill, and loyalty to William Cobbett of whom his son they claimed was a worthy successor. They had great popular support from the operatives and non-electors mainly because of Fielden's work on their behalf. Fielden declared that he would not sit in Parliament unless Cobbett was returned with him. It was this which gave rise to accusations that politics in the borough were falling into the hands of a "junta" which was attempting to dictate to the people.

Another group of radicals brought forward William Johnson Fox[1] (1786 - 1864) to take the place of the retiring member. Fox was a Unitarian minister and political writer. He was active on behalf of the Anti-Corn Law League and had composed the address from the Anti-Corn Law League in 1840, a task entrusted to him by Cobden. He wrote under the name of the "Norwich Weaver Boy" which was much used on election posters in Oldham. He was supported by the radicals who disapproved of Cobbett and Fielden's dictation, free traders and

1. D.N.B.

dissenters. Fielden did not wholeheartedly support the Anti-Corn Law League, considering that high taxation was the main burden of the people[2] and that the agitation of the League diverted people's attention from more serious abuses in society, whilst Cobbett had ten years previously shown his lack of enthusiasm for the separation of church and state. At a meeting on the 23rd July, 1847,[2] the dissenting congregations of Oldham agreed to give their support to Fox along with the third radical candidate, Halliday. The secretary of Fox's election Committee was James Radcliff, a solicitor.

The ultra radicals[3] chose James Halliday[4] as their candidate who, like Fox, was supported by the radical dissenters. His party claimed that he was the representative of the non-electors. Party affairs were managed by William Knott and Joseph Lockwood Quarmby, who was rapidly achieving prominence on local affairs. Quarmby was either a bookseller or a schoolmaster known locally as the grammarian since he had published a grammar in which the parts of speech were reduced to six. He was the secretary of Halliday's election committee which met at the Grapes Inn.

Hoping to take advantage of this division as they had

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1. Manchester Courier 14th July, 1847.
2. Ibid 28th July, 1847.
3. Ibid 12th June, 1847.
4. Vide p.8

in 1835 the Conservatives[1] began to look for a suitable candidate. Their choice first fell on Nathan Worthington as being "friendly to the measures of Sir Robert Peel".[2] He was a cotton spinner, a magistrate and the active leader of the Conservatives in Oldham. He declined the invitation[3] and the choice finally fell on John Duncuft[4] of Westwood House. Duncuft began his career as a cotton spinner in a small way but later invested in railway shares, becoming Chairman of the Oldham Alliance Railway Co. Like Halliday he had the support of those electors who favoured a local candidate and was supported also by the Operatives' Conservative Association which continued to be active, meeting quarterly.

This new radical division began at the beginning of 1846. In January 1846[5] the radical election committee appointed a sub-committee to consider suitable radical candidates. This sub-committee reported back on 17th

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1. Sir Ivor Jennings, Party Politics, vol.II, The Growth of Parties, Cambridge, 1961. vid. p.59. footnote for discussion of the origin of the name, Conservative party.
2. Manchester Courier, 14th March, 1846.
3. Ibid 26th June, 1847.
4. Ibid 10th July, 1847.
5. Ibid 21st February, 1846.

February 1846[1] to a full meeting of the election committee at the Hare and Hounds Inn, Yorkshire Street under the chairmanship of old William Taylor of Crompton, to the effect that it was divided as to choice of candidate, 6 voting for Fox, 4 for Cobbett and 1 for Halliday. The choice was then put to the full meeting when the voting was 33 for Fox, 32 for Cobbett and 26 for Halliday. In March 1846 it was stated in the Manchester Courier[2] that Cobbett's supporters would bring him forward whatever the consequences and that he would certainly be opposed by the supporters of Fox and Halliday.

Such was the background to the election campaign of 1847 in which all the rival groups joined in attacking Fielden and his protégé Cobbett.

The charge of dictation which had been rumoured for many months, came into the open in June 1847. On the 28th June[3] Quarmby, on behalf of Halliday's committee, wrote to Fielden asking it if was his intention to sit in Parliament with Halliday if the two were returned together. Fielden replied that a similar request about his intention to sit again as Oldham's Member of Parliament had been put some months previously and he gave the same reply now as he had then, "if my health

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1. Manchester Courier 21st February, 1846.
2. Ibid 14th March, 1846.
3. Manchester Courier 3rd July, 1847.
   Manchester Guardian 3rd July, 1847.

permit and if Mr. John Cobbett be returned as my colleague, I will consent to do so, but not otherwise". Fielden repeated this condition again on 10th July 1847 when he and General Johnson visited the borough.[1] This reply was immediately seized upon by his rivals and made into political capital. The whole correspondence, along with an appeal to the people of Oldham not to become the slaves of John Fielden and to rid themselves of this local faction, was published in placard form by Halliday's committee.

When it became apparent that a storm had been aroused by this condition laid down by Fielden, he justified his position by declaring that he had a right to choose the person who, in his opinion, would work most harmoniously with him.[2] He pointed out that he had made similar conditions regarding William Cobbett when he had first been approached to stand as radical candidate for Oldham in 1832, without meeting any objection.

A further anonymous attack was made on Fielden on the grounds that he had introduced a new type of machine into his factory at Todmorden which had resulted in much unemployment. The statement, that these machines needed only four people to work them and turned out the same work as 19 people working conventional machinery, was first made

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1. Manchester Courier 14th July, 1847.

2. Vide Grimes op.cit., p. 42 - 44.

in the Manchester Examiner,[1] and was published in placard form on 22nd July, 1847. This allegation was denied on 23rd July[2] by Alexander Taylor, speaking from the window of the Albion Inn, who said that the machinery was not of the type stated but similar to that used in several mills in the neighbourhood. To confirm this a deputation of operatives visited Fielden's mill on the 24th and reported back to the effect that the report was false. Fielden's election campaign was not all defence and justification. His election committee also took up the attack, in particular, Fox was accused of being simply the tool of a group of manufacturers who opposed Fielden because of his efforts in support of the Ten Hour Bill. At a meeting of Cobbett and Fielden's friends on the 14th June 1847,[3] Jonathan Mellor, a cotton spinner, first made this accusation. It was repeated on 1st July[4] by an operative, Richard Cooper, who declared Fox's party to be an "incomprehensible body".

This charge damaged Fox's cause[5] but both he and his supporters denied the charge, pointing out that Fox had

1. Manchester Examiner 20th July, 1847.
2. Manchester Courier 28th July, 1847.
3. Manchester Courier 16th June, 1847.
4. Manchester Courier. Manchester Guardian 3rd July, 1847.
5. Manchester Courier 17th July, 1847.

frequently spoken for the Ten Hour Bill, and had been brought forward to replace Johnson, not Fielden.

Fielden's committee with its larger popular following again resorted to exclusive dealing.[1] Posters and handbills were circulated urging the non-electors to make use of their only weapon in influencing the election. They also announced that a Remembrancer would be published after the election to guide the non-electors in the choice of shopkeepers in the future. To justify exclusive dealing the committee quoted from the writings of Fox. "Of the subsidiary means to be employed in the assertion of a claim to the franchise there is one which has not been resorted to, but might with great propriety be more extensively employed - I mean that of the non-electors distinctly and formally making their wishes known at the time of the election ..... they might by their arrangements, show the electoral body what their principles and wishes were in the contest that would remain to be actually fought by the privileged; and this would be very useful, especially with the mean and sordid part of the trading community who are sure to know the wishes of their wealthy customers. Let them know the wishes of their poorer customers too."[2]

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1. Grimes, op. cit., p.49.
2. Lectures Addressed Chiefly to the Working Classes. vol. 2. p.46 - quoted Grimes, op.cit., p. 60.

In reply to his threat over 100 manufacturers gave notice that they would resort to exclusive employment.[1] Exclusive dealing was practised to such an extent after the election that many shopkeepers were forced out of business. As they lost business that of pro Fielden and Cobbett tradesmen, particularly Alexander Taylor, increased.[2]

On 27th July[3] Halliday retired from the contest convinced that he could not gain a majority, and, on nomination day 29th July,[3] he proposed Fox who was seconded by John Platt a member of a wellknown family of textile machinery manufacturers. Fielden was again proposed and seconded by Joshua Milne and William Taylor, whilst Cobbett was proposed by Jonathan Mellor and seconded by Alexander Taylor. Duncuft was proposed by James Lees and seconded by Nathan Worthington.

Fielden who spoke first pointed out that it was exactly fifteen years since he had first addressed the electors of Oldham, and again stressed that he had then said that he had only agreed to become Member of Parliament on condition that William Cobbett was returned with him. He referred to the Ten Hour Bill and the good which would result from it, speaking of it as both a

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1. Manchester Guardian, 24th July, 1847. Vide Grimes, op. cit., p.60 - 61.
2. Grimes, op. cit., p. 59.
3. Manchester Courier, 31st July, 1847.

righteous measure and good for industry. He went on to say that his political views were the same as in 1832. Then, as now, he stressed excessive taxation as being at the root of the people's misery not the Corn Laws, the repeal of which had done little to help the operative class. The Irish problem he went on to say could be solved only by finding employment for the Irish.

Cobbett echoed Fielden's comments about Ireland declaring that emigration was no solution, and went on to say that on the question of annual parliaments, universal suffrage and the ballot, he went quite as far as Fielden. Once again he said that he did not see how the separation of church and state could equitably be brought about.

Fox began his address by saying that before he had presented himself as a candidate he had tried to stop the division in the radical ranks appearing but the other groups would not agree to support that candidate who had the best chance of success. He showed himself to be a thorough radical over the question of universal suffrage, annual parliaments and the ballot, and went on to urge the abolition of the property qualification for and payment of Members of Parliament. He was in favour of the separation of church and state, including the expulsion of bishops from the House of Lords, which far from destroying the church would strengthen it under the guidance of its purely spiritual leaders. He spoke of his support for the abolition of the Corn Laws and agreement with the extension

of free trade. He concluded by stressing his support for the Ten Hour Bill.

Duncuft's address was brief, stressing his local connections and declaring that he had come forward to overcome dictation. He denied a rumour which was prevalent at that time that he had been a member of the cavalry detachment at Peterloo. His political views were expanded more fully in an address published on 15th July 1847[1] in which he stressed the rights of dissenters, the need for education, reform in Ireland, the development of the colonies and the need for humanising the poor law.

Special constables had been appointed for the election but at first all was quiet since the popular candidates, Fielden and Cobbett were in the lead. As the situation changed the mob grew hostile. The driver of a cab bearing conservative colours was pulled from his seat and his cab overturned. The windows of the Angel Inn, the conservative headquarters, were broken and Alexander Taylor had to appeal to the crowd for order.[2]

At the close of the poll on 30th July 1847 Fox was placed at the head with 723 votes, Duncuft next with 692, Cobbett third with 624 and Fielden at the bottom of the poll with 612. When the final result was known the

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1. Quoted Grimes, op. cit., p.55.

2. Manchester Courier 4th August, 1847.

pro-Fielden mob got completely out of hand raining stones at the windows of Fox's and Duncuft's supporters.[1] So great did the disturbances become that the Riot Act was read and special constables dispersed the crowd before the military arrived.

According to the Remembrancer[2] 198 mill owners and other employers voted against Fielden indicating that much opposition to Fielden was based on dislike of the Ten Hour Bill rather than dictation. Of the old radicals, Knott and Halliday plumped for Fox whilst Alexander Taylor remained faithful to Fielden and Cobbett.

Fielden was overheard[3] to remark some weeks later that he was "only going out to grass" and would be ready to take his place again before long. He did not, however, live to see another election for he died on 29th May, 1849, his death hastened, his friends said, by his defeat.

The 1847 election was a dividing line in the political history of Oldham for, with this final split in the radical ranks and the rejection of John Fielden,

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1. Manchester Courier 4th August, 1847.
2. The Remembrancer shewing how the Electors of the Borough of Oldham voted at the Great Election which took place July 30th 1847 - published by the Committee of Working Men.
3. Grimes, op. cit., p. 57.

the radical domination of the borough came to an end. New names and groupings appeared in politics from which emerged the Liberal and Conservative parties of the second half of the nineteenth century.

b. The Development of Party Organisation 1847 - 65.

The years following the break up of the old radical party were years of active growth and development in party and party organisation within the borough. Playing a large part in this development was the struggle for incorporation which took place 1848 - 9. This struggle served to crystallise the new party groupings which came into being after 1847. The success of incorporation kept alive party spirit, since a semi-permanent arena for party differences was provided by the monthly meetings of the Council, and made necessary more permanent party organisation to manage the more frequent municipal elections.

Early attempts to gain a Charter in 1833 and 1839 had failed. A new attempt was made in 1848, occasioned by the inadequacy of the police force in the face of the Chartist menace of that year. In July 1848 they were reported to be forming a National Guard.[1] In the late summer of 1848 and spring of 1849 several meetings were held to discuss incorporation[2] during which two parties developed, the Charterites and the Anti-Charterites. The Anti-Charterites were the Cobbettite radicals led by Alexander Taylor and the Conservatives represented by Nathan Worthington. This was the beginning of union from which was to emerge the

1. Manchester Courier 15th July, 1848.

2. Manchester Courier August 1848 - February 1849.

the Conservative party of the late nineteenth century. They opposed the Charter because it would make local government more expensive and because it was supported by the party which had supported the Poor Law and was responsible for the defeat of Fielden in 1847.[1] The Charterites were the Foxite party, represented by the Platt family, Quarmby, Halliday and Knott,[2] the future

1. Ibid 19th August, 1848.

2. Copy of a foolscap document preserved with the Charter

" We whose names are herewith subscribed do hereby undertake and agree to guarantee the payment of any and all expenses which may be incurred by or on account of the Committee for promoting a Charter of Incorporation for the Township of Oldham, and to indemnify any and all parties who shall advance money for the payment of such expenses to be equitably apportioned on the sums which we have set opposite to our respective names. Dated this Twenty-first day of August one thousand eight hundred and forty eight:-"

	£	s.	d.
Jno. and James Platt	100.	0.	0.
Miss Radcliffe, Lower House	50.	0.	0.
Jas. Halliday	20.	0.	0.
John Bentley	10.	0.	0.
J. Bradley	10.	0.	0.
Edward Wright	20.	0.	0.
John G. Blackburne	10.	0.	0.
William Ingham	10.	0.	0.
John Taylor	10.	0.	0.
Danl. Collinge	20.	0.	0.
Thomas Gartside	20.	0.	0.
William Knott	5.	0.	0.
J.L. Quarmby	5.	0.	0.
J. Ascroft	10.	0.	0.

Liberal[1] party.

The borough received its Charter in March 1849 and was divided into eight wards (St. Mary's, St. Peter's, Westwood, Werneth, St. James's, Clarksfield, Waterhead and Mumps). Each ward had three Councillors and an Alderman and the voters' list for 1849 contained 2,916 names. Municipal elections were fought between Charterites and Anti-Charterites. Both parties held meetings to choose candidates and committees were established in each ward to canvass.[2] Both parties agreed not to interfere in the process of registration at the time of the first election but on later occasions it was the municipal rather than the parliamentary register which aroused party feeling.[3] The first municipal election resulted in a victory for the Anti-Charterites with 17 seats as opposed to 7 gained by the Charterites. Thus the Anti-Charterites were able to make their candidates, William Jones, the Mayor and John Summerscales, Town Clerk. Summerscales had acted as

1. Jennings op. cit., vid. p. footnote for discussion of the origin of the name, Liberal party. The name came into common use sometime between 1852 and 1859.

2. Manchester Courier 17th April, 1849.

3. Ibid 13th October, 1849.

legal adviser to the Anti-Charterites and he replaced Kay Clegg, the clerk to the old Commissioners. He held the office until 1862. The union of the Cobbettite radicals and the Conservatives over the Charter issue continued after Incorporation. A dinner in December 1849 in honour of William Jones was attended by both Alexander Taylor and Nathan Worthington.[1]

Subsequent municipal elections show that this new party division continued. In November 1849[2] 4 out of 8 wards were contested and great feeling was aroused, particularly in Westwood ward where the Anti-Charterite Councillor, William Wrigley, was opposed by James Platt. There were fights over the right to conduct wavering voters to the poll, one man being brought with 6 of each party accompanying him. He declared that he would not cast his vote until a new coat had been bought to replace the one torn from his back. Platt won the contest and at a dinner held in his honour afterwards it was claimed that he had won in the face if an alliance of "extreme radicals and Tories". Throughout the 1850's municipal elections continued to arouse interest and were marked by exciting and sometimes violent struggles.

A second factor which must be taken into account during this time of development is the powerful support given to the emerging Liberal party by the Platt family.[3]

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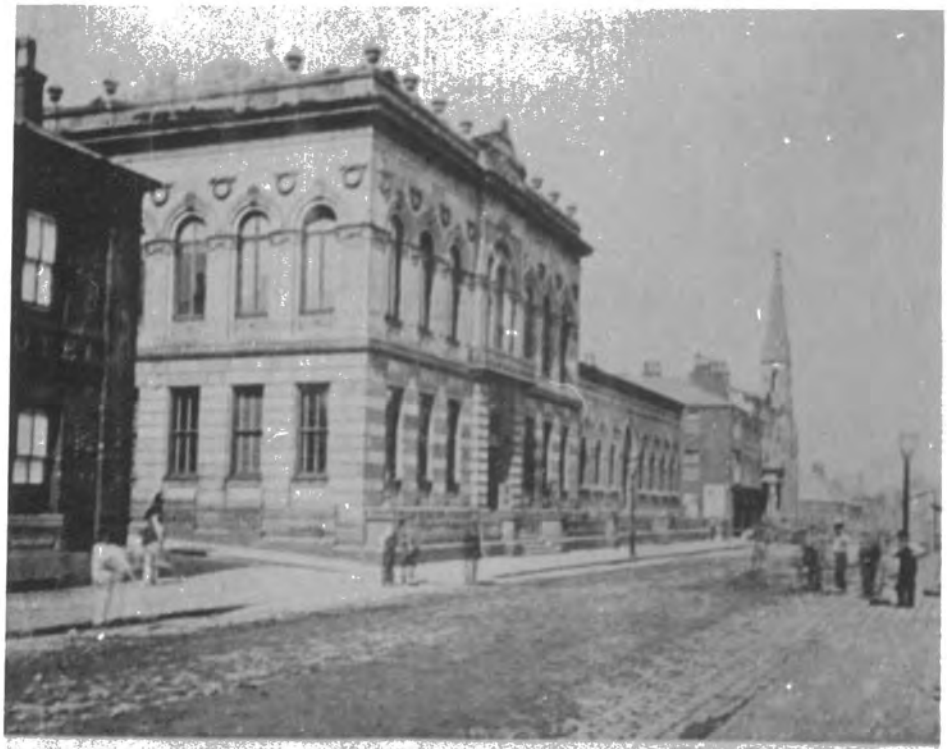
1. Manchester Courier 15th December, 1849.
2. Ibid 3rd November, 1849.
3. Marcroft, op. cit.,

In 1821 a small firm making textile machinery was established by Henry Platt. He was assisted financially by Elijah Hibbert of Ashton-under-Lyne and the two entered into partnership in 1824. By 1843 the firm employed 500 men and was rapidly expanding. Henry Platt had three sons, Joseph (1815 - 45), John 1817 - 72) and James (1824 -57) and it was John and James who dominated the political life of the borough during the middle years of the century. James became a partner in the firm in 1845 on the premature death of Joseph. He represented Westwood ward as Councillor, later becoming Alderman, until March 1857 when he became member of Parliament for Oldham. He was a member of Parliament for only five months for he was accidentally shot in August 1857. Known particularly for his interest in education he took a leading part in the running of the Lyceum and the establishment of other educational institutions attached to the works. John, the second son, entered the firm in 1837. He became Head Constable of the borough, with his political opponent Alexander Taylor as a fellow constable, and represented St. James's ward until 1865 as Councillor and Alderman. Between 1854 and 1856, and 1861 and 1862, he was Mayor of Oldham, the first Liberal Mayor since incorporation. He was invited to become Oldham's first Mayor in 1849 but refused because of a condition that he should accept Summerscales, an Anti-Charterite, as Town Clerk. In 1860 he purchased the manor and estate of Bryn-y-Neudd, Llanfairfechan and, as well as being Deputy Lieutenant of



OLDHAM LYCEUM (*Photo Print by Knoff*)

of Caernarvon was later High Sheriff of Caernarvon.[1] In 1865 he became member of Parliament for Oldham and remained so until his death in 1872. He was an ardent free-trader, accompanying Cobden to Paris to assist in the negotiations for the Cobden Treaty, and like his brother he encouraged education giving financial assistance to the Lyceum, the Mechanics Institute, the School of Science and Art and Owen's College Manchester.

The Liberals also had two organisations to assist them in their activities within the borough, the Oldham Reform Association and the Liberal Registration Society.

The Oldham Reform Association was active by February 1854[2] and continued so throughout these years. It was organised by the leading Liberals and its purpose was "to promote the advancement of the people and the best interest of society"[3] which meant an extension of the franchise. The membership fee was modest, 3d.., and its members were recruited from a wide section of the community. It may be regarded as a descendant of the

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1. W. Ogwen Jones. Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society. Vol. 18 1957. "The Platts of Oldham".

2. It is difficult to discover the exact date of the foundation of the Association but there is no mention of it in the Oldham and Manchester newspapers before 1854.

3. Oldham Chronicle 9th April, 1859.

Political Union of the 1830's. The Association called public meetings to discuss parliamentary reform, support Liberal candidates and censure their opponents. Representatives from the Association attended annual conferences of the National Reform Union. Branches were later formed in the outlying districts.

A more significant development was the formation of the Liberal Registration Society in 1859. Hitherto registration had played only a small part in the political life of Oldham but now, possibly because of annual municipal elections, it began to assume greater importance. The Society met at the King's Arms Inn and, as its name implies, its primary purpose was to ensure that Liberal voters were registered. In January 1860 it was claimed that the Register had been so altered that if an election was to take place immediately 25% of the doubtful voters would vote Conservative whilst the other 75% would vote Liberal. The final figures would be Fox 1207, Hibbert (the second Liberal candidate) 1130 and Cobbett 1103.[1] The society also adopted candidates. This had been a difficulty in Oldham politics, that there had been no party machine for officially adopting candidates other than unwieldy public meetings which frequently led to confusion. It acted as the executive committee during elections and organised canvassing. In 1865 it took the unusual step of

1. Ibid 21st January, 1860.

arranging for the Secretary, William Wrigley, and some of its officials to be present at the King's Arms to discuss problems with electors.[1] This was copied later by the Conservatives. Social functions also played a considerable part in the work of the Society, many of its meetings being followed by a Ball.

The Conservatives were active at the beginning and end of the period. During the middle years no official Conservative candidate was put forward, though[2] it was claimed that Cobbett represented the Conservatives. The Conservative Association[3] continued to meet spasmodically but the Operatives' Conservative Society[4] ceased to meet soon after incorporation. It was not until January 1865 that the Oldham Operatives' Conservative Society was reformed.[5] The reason for this revival was the lack of combined action amongst the

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1. Ibid 24th June, 1865.

2. H.J. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, Politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone. Longmans, 1959. p.197.
"During the fifties it had been customary to leave hopeless or near hopeless seats altogether uncontested the Conservatives could not find candidates in the boroughs; the Liberals could not find candidates in the counties."

3. Vide p. 44

4. Vide p. 54

5. Oldham Chronicle 4th February, 1865.

Conservatives of the borough as opposed to those of the county; the strength of the Liberal party, in particular the monopoly of public office which they enjoyed at that time; and the need to register Conservative electors, neglected because of lack of funds and a properly organised Committee. It assisted the Conservative Association to register electors. Thus it would seem that the Operatives' Conservative Society was an answer to the challenge of the Liberal Registration Society. The inaugural meeting was attended by three Conservative county members, the Hon. Algernon Egerton, W.J. Legh and Charles Turner. Egerton speaking at the meeting laid down the basic principles of Conservative policy; opposition to, sweeping reform, the separation of Church and State, and voting by ballot.

In addition to an improved party organisation the Conservatives also gained the support of the Oldham Standard a Conservative newspaper, which, served as a counterblast to the Liberal Oldham Chronicle. It first appeared in August, 1859, and was published by James Norton of Back Chapel Street, Oldham.

c. Confusion in Politics 1848 - 65.

In national politics a long period of confusion and instability followed the break up of the Conservative party in 1846.[1] The old issues of the early nineteenth century had largely been solved and the hard division in politics into the Liberal and Conservative parties of Gladstone and Disraeli had not yet taken place. From the beginning of 1846 to 1867, the year of the second Reform Act, there were nine administrations. It was a time too when men's political allegiances changed. Spinks, the Conservative candidate for Oldham in 1865, pointed out that most of the eminent men in the present ministry had started their careers as tories and gave Palmerston, Gladstone and Cardwell as examples.[2]

This confusion at the national level was reflected at the local level, though in the case of Oldham the confusion was occasioned by the break up of the old radical party in 1847. Out of the melting pot came three distinct groups; the old Cobbett and Fielden party of radicals which remained faithful to the memory of Fielden and Cobbett by supporting Cobbett's son, Fielden's son-in-law, John Morgan Cobbett and which was led by Alexander Taylor; the Foxite radicals dominated by the Platt family; and the Conservative party under the guidance of Nathan Worthington. During this period the

1. Woodward op. cit., p. 154.

2. Oldham Chronicle 22nd June, 1865.

Liberal and Conservative parties developed out of these groups. The old radicals joined forces with the Conservatives to form the Conservative party of the latter part of the century, whilst the Foxites became the future Liberal party. The Foxites became identified with the employer class, or "millocracy" which had opposed the Ten Hour Bill, repeatedly broke it and had been responsible for the defeat of Fielden. Consequently they drew little support from the working class which mistrusted the middle-class free traders and found little to attract them in the programme of the Manchester reformers. The developing Conservative party on the other hand, in the absence of local magnates, became the popular party.[1]

The period 1848 - 65 may be sub-divided into three divisions. 1848 - 52 saw the merging of the Cobbettite radicals and Conservative groups. They dominated politics at the local level through the new town council and also at the parliamentary level. The years 1852 - 65 saw a straightforward struggle for power between Cobbett and the Liberals, with Cobbett becoming increasingly identified with conservatism, and 1865 saw the final identification of Cobbett with the Conservative party.

The union between the Cobbettite radicals and

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1. Hanham, op. cit., p.313.

conservatives became apparent during the struggle for incorporation[1] but with the approach of the 1852 election attempts were made to unite Cobbett's and Fox's supporters and present a common front to overthrow Duncuft. On 17th April, 1852,[2] 2,000 non-electors met behind the Albion to discuss the propriety of returning Cobbett and Fox. It was resolved at that meeting that the misunderstanding which had existed amongst the various groups of reformers was to be regretted and a new union was urged. Commenting on this William H. Mellor,[3] a Cobbettite, said that a union between Foxites and Cobbettites was impossible following the treatment which Fielden had received at the hands of the Foxites in

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1. Vide p.78-79.

2. Manchester Courier 24th April, 1852.

3. W.H. Mellor was a furrier whose business was in Manchester Street. He was powerfully built, his face was that of a boxer, he had a habit of clenching his fists and waving them about when speaking and he was extremely fiery tempered. Consequently he was called "Bendigo" after a prize fighter of the time.

1847. "The Foxites have sown the wind and they must reap the whirlwind." He went on to move an amendment of no confidence in Fox and his supporters, censuring them for throwing out Fielden, the champion of the Ten Hour Act and true friend of the people. The amendment seconded by James Dixon of Chadderton, was carried by a large majority and the Cobbettites left the meeting.

In May 1852, the determination of the Cobbettite radicals to join forces with Conservatives became clear. At a meeting on 24th May[1] called by the Foxites at Hollinwood Weslyan Association School Room, Alexander Taylor proposed that Fox did not represent the wishes of the electors and that the meeting should do all in its power to ensure the return of Cobbett and Duncuft. This motion was declared to have been carried by the Chairman, James Dixon who had become chairman following a struggle at the beginning of the meeting between Foxites and Cobbettites.[2] On 21st June [3] Cobbett visited the borough and at a meeting of some 20,000 one of the largest gatherings ever witnessed, he was unanimously

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1. Manchester Courier 29th May, 1852.

2. This struggle for chairmanship of meetings between Foxites and Cobbettites was a feature of the 1852 election. Success enabled the victorious party to manage the meeting, affect its decisions and use them for propaganda purposes with the borough.

3. Manchester Courier 26th June, 1852.

accepted as a candidate and there was a "strong majority" in favour of Duncuft. The next day, addressing a meeting at Greenacres Moor, Cobbett attacked the Foxites as being the same party which in 1835 had brought forward O'Connor.[1] In reply to a charge that he was a Conservative he said that he thought little of party names but declared that he would rather be called a Conservative than a Liberal[2] or Whig. He observed that it was Liberal masters who violated the Factory Acts not Conservative.[3] He went on to say that he was not a protectionist,[4] he wanted to repeal the malt and hop taxes so that the working man might have a big loaf and

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1. Foxites had the support of Halliday and Knott.

2. The earliest record of the word Liberal in Oldham.

3. The Ten Hour Act referred only to women and children. It was considered that restriction of their hours would automatically restrict the hours of the men since mills could not work without female and child labour. Owing, however, to faulty drafting the act did not prevent the employment of women and children on a relay system thereby keeping men working for more then ten hours. Fielden had been working for a restriction of the "moving power" in order to prevent this. The various loopholes were not finally closed until 1853. Woodward p. 149.

4. Wagers had been made that his election address would show him to be a protectionist.

a big pot of beer to drink with it, but condemned the motives of the Anti-Corn Law League as being simply to reduce wages. Again Cobbett was unanimously accepted as a candidate and Duncuft, proposed by Alexander Taylor and seconded by Mellor, was accepted by a large majority.

Nomination day, July 7th,[1] was in many ways reminiscent of the 1832 election with processions, bands, flags, and a stuffed fox with the inscription "No Go" and bearing the exhortation to "Remember John Fielden Esq. M.P. and the Ten Hour Factory Bill". Fox was proposed by James Cheetham who, referring to accusations that Fox was an unbeliever,[2] regretted that religion had been introduced into the election since it was a matter between the individual and his maker. He was seconded by John Heap another Royton cotton spinner. Duncuft was proposed by Nathan Worthington, who again referred to Fox's religious views and said that he did not know how anyone, dissenter or church man, could vote for such a man, and was seconded by Edward Wright who listed the satisfactory votes which Duncuft had given in the House of Commons. Cobbett was proposed by Mellor who said that Fox should return to London to ponder on his "spiritual religion" until it was based on more Christian principles.

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1. Manchester Courier 10th July, 1852.
   Manchester Guardian 10th July, 1852.

2. His opponents accused Fox of atheism and made available copies of his book, Religious Ideas, which they claimed proved this charge, for the public to examine.

Alexander Taylor who seconded attacked the Foxites as untrustworthy. Before the last election he had offered to drop 47 objections to inclusions on the register if they dropped their objections. After agreeing to this the Foxites failed to carry out their promise. Whilst he was a radical he would support the Conservatives in preference to untrustworthy Foxites. He further attacked his opponents for evading the Factory Acts and reducing wages.

Fox, who spoke first, declared that he was not responsible for the actions of his supporters. He supported the Ten Hour Act and was prepared to vote for measures to ensure that it was carried out. Duncuft declared himself to be a well known friend of free trade and education on Christian principles[1] and whilst he would not pledge himself, he would act in the interest of all classes. He was a churchman he said, but wished to abolish the abuses which had crept into it. Cobbett now came out clearly in opposition to the separation of Church and State. Up to this time he had hedged on this question referring to the difficulties of the problem and the injustices which might result

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1. Fox supported secular education which was also free from government control. This he made clear in his election address 1847: "Education should be neither governmental nor sectarian, but natural". This was not popular with the governments of the day which considered that "all instruction should be hallowed by the influence of religion" to counteract the irreligion and "pernicious opinions" of the masses, and that schools, especially those in receipt of government grants, should be subject to state regulation. p.460. Woodward, op. cit.

from it. He opposed secular education and advocated rather education based on scriptural principles. He had been brought up he said from infancy as a radical reformer. He supported repeal of the Corn Laws, but thought that it ought to have been accompanied by a general reduction in taxation, and a thorough implementation of the Ten Hour Act. In conclusion he agreed to meet his constituents every year to give an account of his stewardship. Questioned later about their attitude to annual parliaments, ballot and universal suffrage, Fox and Cobbett declared their support for them whilst Duncuft was not prepared to give any promises.

The election on the 10th July was quiet, largely owing to the fact that Cobbett and Duncuft, the popular candidates, were in the lead throughout the contest. The final result was Cobbett 947, Duncuft 868 and Fox 777. This victory for the combined radical and Conservative forces was due to respect for Fielden and disgust at the result of the 1847 election wrote the Manchester Courier.[1] In a message to the electors at the close of the poll,[1] Fox wrote that Oldham had again become a pocket borough and he alleged that intimidation had been used to achieve results.

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1. Manchester Courier 10th July, 1852.

The solidarity of the radical - Conservative alliance was further demonstrated later in 1852 when, following the death of Duncuft on the 27th July both groups gave their support to James Heald[1] the late Conservative member for Stockport who had been defeated at the 1852 election. There were frequent meetings throughout September and October in support of Heald, addressed by Alexander Taylor and Mellor[2] and working class demonstrations in his favour.

The best explanation of the radical case for supporting first Duncuft and later Heald was presented in a letter to the Manchester Courier by a "Radical Non-Elector".[2] The radicals, he wrote, had been accused of abandoning their principles in supporting Duncuft and Heald, but Heald was supported in preference to Fox who was himself returned in 1847 following an alliance with the Conservatives. True radicals could not support Fox because of the actions of his supporters. They had begun the practice of objecting to registration of electors and had not held true to their promise not to object to the Cobbettites placed on the register. They used bribery and as millowners could intimidate. To consolidate their control over the borough after 1847

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1. Manchester Courier 14th August 1852
2. Manchester Courier 11th September, 1852

they had pressed for incorporation in the hope that they would dominate the council. They had been foiled in this by the Conservatives. Fox was supported by men who supported the new poor law and opposed the Ten Hour Act which was continuallybroken by them. Finally the writer claimed that Fox had been sent to oppose Fielden by the Anti-Corn Law League.[1] Heald's supporters on the other hand did not break the Ten Hour Act. Heald himself had supported the Bill and had lost his seat because of this.

Party feeling ran high during the second half of 1852 and during the municipal elections there were frequent riots. Consequently on 15th November[2] the Foxites petitioned the magistrates to take steps to preserve the peace at the coming election, since they believed their supporters would be molested by the pro-Heald mobs. Objections were made by the rival party on the grounds that the police force and special constables normally recruited for elections would be

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1. Manchester Courier 26th June 1852. S. Fielden, John Fielden's son, speaking in Oldham said that his father had been opposed over the Ten Hour Bill by such men as Bright and he noted that Fox was supported by such pro-Bright men as the Platt family, "well known amongst a large body of working men of Oldham for that sort of 'liberality' which needed no description" (cheers and groans).

2. Manchester Courier 17th November, 1852.

sufficient. Alexander Taylor claimed, before being brought to order by the magistrates, that the disturbances were caused by Liberal employers intimidating their workpeople by means of "the screw". The result of the dispute is not recorded but the Foxites must have won the day since the magistrates ordered troops to be stationed in the district during the election.

On nomination day, 1st December,[1] Fox was again proposed by James Cheetham and seconded by John Heap. Cheetham proposed Fox as an opponent of the Corn Laws and a supporter of education separated from religious instruction which was the concern of ministers. Heald was proposed by Nathan Worthington who said that education should not be secular but based on the Bible. He critised Fox's committe for its attempts to defame Heald[2] and made

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1. Manchester Courier 4th December, 1852.

2. Heald had opposed attempts by Russell's government to repeal the sugar duty a fact which was seized upon by his opponents and used against him in the election campaign. Posters were printed showing sour "seaur" fruit pies, children called "No seaur pie Jammie" in the streets and many rhymes were written with "seaur pie" as their theme. The Conservatives countered by claiming that the heavy duty on slave grown sugar was the best method of putting down slavery as it could not then compete with free grown sugar. vide "The Oldham Vindication" - Devoted to the Exposure of Whiggery League Interference and Dictation" - one of many election newspapers issued by both parties in 1852.

the point again that to elect Fox would be to give way to the dictates of the League. He was seconded by Alexander Taylor who again referred to the coercion being used by Liberal manufacturers. Fox, who was ill, was represented by Sir Joshua Walmsley who declared that Fox would attend to the interests of the productive class and support universal franchise and the ballot. Heald said that he had been invited by many of the electors to stand and that, unlike the Foxites, he had not used intimidation. He had supported the Ten Hour Bill, favoured repeal of the tax on knowledge and extension of the suffrage, but not universal suffrage.

These proceedings were marked by outbursts of violence between the two parties, the Conservatives being supported by "Bendigo's lambs"[1] The two groups armed with flags, sticks and stones manoeuvred and fought for a favourable position in front of the hustings, the Conservative gang being urged by Mellor and Alexander Taylor from the platform to "fill up" the centre. The police and specials did their best to maintain order but could do little and there was an appeal from the Foxites for the reading of the Riot Act. Fights broke out elsewhere in the town, public houses being attacked following rumours of "bottling" by Foxites, and gangs patrolled the streets breaking windows. This disorder

1. The name given to the roughs commanded by Mellor.

continued on polling day, Foxite supporters in particular suffering from the crowd. Finally the Riot Act was read and the troops were called in.

The result of the election was Fox 895 and Heald 783, a result due, wrote the Manchester Courier to the "screw" employed by Liberal employers. Alexander Taylor went so far as to declare that Fox had been elected at the point of the bayonet.

Following this defeat in December 1852 the Conservatives did not put forward another candidate until 1865, but were represented by Cobbett.[1] The years 1852 - 65 which included 2 general and 2 by-elections saw the development of Cobbett as a Conservative having been finally rejected as a radical.

As the likelihood of a general election became apparent in 1857[2] the Liberals began to take steps to consolidate their position and at a meeting at the King's Arms on the 11th March, 1857,[3] James Platt was

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1. Oldham Chronicle 24th June, 1865.
2. Palmerston's conduct over the "Arrow" affair led to criticism in Parliament organised by Cobden but including both Gladstone and Disraeli. The voting went against Palmerston, Cobbett voting with the government, and he appealed to the country.
3. Oldham Chronicle 14th March, 1857.

chosen as a second candidate, satisfaction having been given by his proposers as to his views regarding universal suffrage, the ballot, annual parliaments, separation of Church and State and the Factory Acts, in order to unite the Liberal interest. It was proposed that a large public meeting shou ld be organised to demonstrate support for Platt but the idea was rejected as being unlikely to win votes which could only be won by individual action [1] and personal canvass. No doubt the memory of the 1852 election and the efforts of "Bendigo's lambs" still lingered. Summing up the situation at the beginning of the 1857 contest the Liberal Oldham Chronicle[2] wrote that it was unlikely that the Conservatives would bring forward a candidate and that there would be three candidates competing; Fox, the venerable, faithful, brilliant advocate of Liberal principles; Platt the "local genius" who represented local interests; and Cobbett, the "doubtful friend" who was cherished for the sake of old times and who appeared to be the government candidate.

The campaign by the Liberals against Cobbett centred round his conduct over the "Arrow" affair when he supported the government against Cobden's motion, that the incident was simply a pretext for the spoliation of

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1. Possibly a reference to the use of intimidation so often alleged.

2. Oldham Chronicle 14th March, 1857.

China, and on 9th March[1] a letter explaining his vote was read to his supporters at the Cobbett anniversary supper. He justified his vote since Cobden's motion was an attempt to dislodge the ministry at an unfavourable time. The incoming ministry would be faced with great risk, humiliation and cost if the government apologised for its actions and paid indemnity as Cobden suggested.

On nomination day, 28th March, 1857[2] Cobbett, who was proposed by John Schofield and seconded by William Barlow, asked for a renewal of the trust placed in him in 1852 and replied to two charges made against him, that he was hand in glove with the bishops and in the pay of the Ecclesiastical Commission, and that he had voted against the third reading of the Colliery Inspection Bill.[3] Cobbett replied that in fact the Ecclesiastical Commission had been twice threatened with dissolution, that he had supported the motion on both occasions and that he had not received a penny from the Commission. He also

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1. Oldham Chronicle 14th March, 1857.
   Manchester Courier 4th April, 1857.

2. Manchester Courier 4th April, 1857.

3. Mining accidents were particularly prevalent at this time. The Oldham and Manchester newspapers report accidents in almost every edition.

declared that he had supported the Bill in question, attending regularly at the committee of enquiry into accidents in coal mines. Fox was proposed by Knott and seconded by H.T. Robberds and said that the election should not turn simply on the "Arrow" affair but that electors should remember their Liberal principles. If defeated he said that he would end his parliamentary career. Platt, proposed by Thomas Noton and seconded by Alderman Leach, stressed his qualifications as a local man, claiming that it was the general wish that one of the borough representatives should be a local man.

This appeal to the local sympathies of the electors was successful in 1857 as it had been on earlier occasions, Cobbett, the popular candidate, leading the poll with 949 votes, and Platt gaining 934 votes as opposed to 898 by Fox.

In the Liberal ranks there was strong criticism of the election committee which had brought Platt forward. At the end of August, however, the Liberals got a chance to repair the damage, when Platt was accidentally shot whilst attending a shooting party on Saddleworth moors. Following Fox's statement that he would retire, names had been put forward, including that of Richard Cobden, but within a week of Platt's death Fox was ready to take his place.[1] The Conservatives

1. Manchester Courier 5th September, 1857.

met to discuss the possibility of bringing forward a candidate but no one suitable could be found. Fox was returned unopposed on 19th October, 1857.

Again a second Liberal candidate was brought forward in 1859.[1] At a meeting on 7th April, 1859[2] the Liberals again chose Fox as their candidate and urged that the borough should return two true reformers. Cobbett was attacked as having proved false to his principles in supporting the Derby-Disraeli Reform Bill. John Platt was proposed as a second candidate but declined and the choice eventually fell on John Tomlinson Hibbert, whose name had also been mentioned by the Conservatives.[3]

At Royton on 11th April[4] Cobbett defended his

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1. The Derby-Disraeli Ministry (Feb.1858-June 1859) drew up a Reform Bill reducing the county occupation franchise from £50 to the borough figure of £10, creating special franchises which would give the vote to the "upper working class" (fancy franchise), redistributing 15 seats and depriving the 40/- freeholder in the borough of his vote in the county. At the end of March the government was defeated by a combination of those who thought it went too far and those who thought it did not go far enough. Parliament was dissolved and a general election took place.

2. Oldham Chronicle, Manchester Courier 9th April, 1859.

3. Oldham Chronicle 26th April, 1862.

4. Ibid 23rd April, 1859.

conduct over the Reform Bill following a vote of censure by the Royton Reform Association. He said that there had been talk of a Reform Bill since he first entered the House of Commons but none had been brought forward. At last a Bill had been introduced and he had voted for it, so that it could be amended later in the committee stage, and also to force Russell to say what kind of a Bill he would introduce, since so far he had been very reluctant to commit himself. Now, however, as a result of the rejection of this Bill, reform had been put off for an indefinite period. In closing he claimed that the vote of censure had not been unanimous as claimed, but had been carried by a majority vote taken by only 19 out of the 40 members.

The Liberal Oldham Chronicle repeatedly attacked Cobbett for his professions of radicalism but his Conservative actions "We look upon hi m as a real Tory whilst professing to be a Radical".[1] It pointed out in particular[2] three occasions when Cobbett had voted with the Conservatives; for the rejection of the Bill to relieve Roman Catholic members of part of their oath and the Intestacy Bill to allow the equal distribution of property amongst the family of men who died without leaving a will and in support of the

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1. Oldham Chronicle 30th April, 1859.
2. Ibid 23rd April, 1859.

Derby-Disraeli Reform Bill.

On nomination day, 29th April,[1] Cobbett was proposed by John Bentley and seconded by Eli Harrop and spoke at some considerable length, his speech being interrupted by shouts of "put a blue and green hat on! " He again referred to accusations that he was a Conservative and declared that if Conservatives acted in the general interest then he would support them. He pointed out that it had been Conservatives who had supported Fielden, not the Liberals. The Reform Bill was, he agreed, not the one that was desired but he pointed out again Russell's reluctance to introduce one. He defended the taking away of the dual vote in county and borough on the grounds that they had different interests. Over the Intestacy Bill dispute, he said that many men wanted their eldest son to inherit and under the present system had no need to go to the expense of making a will. Others he said had opposed the removal of the oath for Roman Catholics but had not been branded as "Tories". For himself he said that he could not destroy the established Church. He concluded by referring to a promise which, he alleged, Platt had made at the close of the 1857 election, to the effect that he would not oppose Cobbett in future contests.

Fox was proposed by Knott and seconded by McDougall.

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1. Oldham Chronicle, Manchester Courier 30th April,1859.

Speaking for Fox, whose doctor would not allow him to appear in the inclement weather, Platt replied that he had promised Cobbett that so long as he remained true to reform principles he would not oppose him since their conflict was political and not personal. If Cobbett had not joined the Conservatives he said, the election would not have been contested but, as it was, his actions and speeches were an insult to radicals. As to Fox, he said, his principles were well known and had been demonstrated by his conduct in Parliament. He had voted for the Intestacy Bill and the removal of the oath for Catholic members, and against the Reform Bill.

Hibbert, proposed by Alderman Leach and seconded by Councillor W. Rye, stressed his local connections and knowledge of the interests of manufacturers. He came forward he said, to oppose the Conservative candidate, Cobbett, because of his vote for the Reform Bill which would disfranchise borough freeholders who had voted for 400 years. These men were Liberals and this was known by the Conservatives who were attempting to rob Liberals of their support. He supported rating suffrage, the ballot, redistribution of seats and the Intestacy Bill, declared his interest in education, pointing out the need for an educated electorate, his support for religious liberty and desire for peace.[1]

1. There was talk of intervention in the coming war between Piedmont and Italy.

In the election which followed,[1] Fox headed the poll with 1041 votes, Cobbett came second with 986 and Hibbert third with 956, a victory wrote the Oldham Chronicle for "Toryism".

An analysis of Cobbett's support at this time was given in a letter to the Oldham Chronicle[2] by "an Elector". It came, the writer said, from influential Conservatives, radical traitors, publicans and those Foxites who were afraid of voting for another candidate for fear of letting in an avowed Conservative.

When Fox retired in April 1862, Hibbert was elected in his place without opposition. At his election on 5th May, 1862[3] he declared himself in favour of extension of the franchise and vote by ballot. He supported abolition of church rates, though himself a churchman, since the church would be strengthened if dependent on voluntary support. He wished to see a reduction of national expenditure and the colonies contributing to their own defence. Referring to the American Civil War and the resulting cotton famine he supported non-intervention, the promotion of cotton

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1. Oldham Chronicle, Manchester Courier 7th May, 1859.
2. Oldham Chronicle 9th April, 1859.
3. Manchester Courier 10th May, 1862.

cultivation in India and other dependencies and the granting of more power to guardians to relieve distress.

1865 saw the revival of Conservative activity and the final identification of Cobbett with the Conservatives. The reason for the revival of the Conservatives was the almost complete domination of the borough by the Liberals[1] and the introduction of yet another Liberal candidate which threatened to make Oldham into a completely Liberal preserve. Sergeant Spinks, the Conservative candidate, in his introductory speech to the borough on 22nd June 1865[2], said that the Liberals should have been content with one member and later, at Royton on the 24th June, he said that the Conservative dog had been sleeping for too long and, if lashed too hard, it would awaken and bite. At this point two dogs began to fight much to the amusement of the crowd and the glee of the Liberal Oldham Chronicle which made much of the incident. Later, on nomination day, Spinks said that he had presented himself for election to prevent the town from falling into the hands of a clique.[3]

The election campaign centred on whether or not Cobbett was a Conservative and a traitor to his principles. This was not a new attack on Cobbett,

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1. Vide p.85-86 the revival of the Operatives' Conservatives Society.
2. Oldham Chronicle 1st July, 1865.
3. Ibid 15th July, 1865.

similar accusations had been made throughout his political career. Now, however, the matter came to a head and Cobbett was finally identified in his true colours as a Conservative. The Oldham Chronicle never ceased attacking Cobbett as a Conservative.

His election campaign was managed by a Joint Committee representing both Spinks and Cobbett. In his introductory address on the 22nd June Spinks openly claimed Cobbett as a Conservative declaring that he had represented the Conservative interest as well as that of the working class, and had acted in unison with the Conservatives in Parliament. The Oldham Chronicle[1] also claimed Cobbett as the partial representative of the Conservatives in Oldham and declared that the Conservatives would no longer support him unless he in turn supported Spinks. These claims appear to have harmed Cobbett's reputation in the borough and Spinks tried to temper the effect of his statement by saying that Cobbett voted against the Conservatives though occasionally with them and that he, Spinks, was the only Conservative candidate.[2]

The Liberals brought forward John Platt as their second candidate at a meeting of the Liberal Registration Society on 30th May[3] on the grounds that Cobbett had been

1. Oldham Chronicle 24th June, 1865.
2. Ibid 1st July, 1865.
3. Ibid 3rd June, 1865.

proved not to be a consistent reformer, being one thing in Oldham and another in London. It was necessary it was stated, that Oldham reformers should secure the nomination and election of consistent Liberal candidates. There were some misgivings amongst some members of the Society on the grounds that both he and Hibbert were connected with the same firm and it might appear as if the borough was falling economically and politically under the control of the Platt family. These fears were stilled when it was clearly stated that Hibbert's share in the firm was a very small one.[1] The Conservatives, however, seized upon this g ap in the Liberal armour and claimed that they were trying to prevent the borough representation from fåling into the hands of one firm.

The two Liberal candidates stated their politics clearly at a meeting outside the King's Arms attended by some 8 - 10,000, on 30th June.[2] Hibbert declared that, whilst he had opposed the government on occasions, he had voted for measures which were in the public interest. He referred to the benefits which had resulted from the Cobden Treaty, £23 million being added to the nation's trade, and pointed out that it had been opposed

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1. Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society- In 1846, Elijah Hibbert died and in 1854 John and James Platt acquired the Hibbert's share in the business.

2. Oldham Chronicle 24th June, 1865.

by the Conservatives. The government he said had kept peace, had not gone to war over Poland, Denmark or America and in Italy had prevented French intervention. He criticised the Government, however, for its reluctance to introduce parliamentary reform after their opposition to the Derby-Disraeli Bill in 1859. His support had been given to the Union Chargeability Bill, freeing labourers from the parish to which they belonged thereby enabling them to sell their labour in the highest market,[1] the abolition of the Test Acts and, though himself a churchman, the abolition of Church rates.

Platt, who in his address published on 23rd June wrote that he had presented himself as a result of numerous requests and the appearance of a second Conservative candidate, made his appeal on grounds of commercial and religious freedom. Throughout the election proceedings he constantly stressed the part he had played in the negotiations for the Cobden Treaty. The Church he declared must stand on the affections of the people and not be financed by compulsory payments. He declared his support for the abolition of the religious tests and indicated the prosperity which resulted from free trade. He gave his support also to the extension of the franchise,[2] the ballot and shorter parliaments.

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1. An early reference to the need for mobility of labour.

2. He later qualified this to apply to all rated occupiers of tenements and the industrious working class.

Members became indifferent to the demands of their constituents, he said, with a long lease of power. This comment was no doubt aimed at Cobbett. In support of a more equal distribution of seats he instanced Oldham with a population of 95,000 and 2,229 electors returning only two members whilst a small borough like Knaresborough also returned two members. Like Hibbert he supported a policy of non-intervention.

Spinks stated his case on 22nd June[1] on the Temmyfield declaring that Conservatives were not the enemies of progress and that he was prepared to enquire into abuses. He attacked in particular abuse and mismanagement in the army, and navy and government extravagance. He condemned also the refusal to help Denmark which had been pushed to the point of war by promises of support which had not materialised.[2] On the question of the franchise, he agreed that it should be extended but to those who had shown themselves worthy by thrift or academic achievement. In reply to a question about the extension of the franchise, he said that the process ought to be gradual. He refused to support the ballot. He was questioned further about church rates and teetotalism. Church rates he said could be abolished gradually but small churches which were poorly endowed must not suffer as a result. On

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1. Oldham Chronicle 1st July, 1865.

2. Treaty of London 1852.

the teetotal question he said that it must come about through education not by banning the sale of drink.

Cobbett did not speak in the borough until 6th July when he addressed a meeting of 10 - 12,000 arranged by the Joint Committee. He opened by renewing the charge he had made in 1859 that Platt had promised, following the 1857 election, not to oppose him. Platt he said was not a gentleman and it had been his ambition for years, despite this promise, to defeat Cobbett.[1] He had been called, he said, a "Tory" and he was going to stand with a Conservative, Spinks, for whom he had a high regard, as on the first occasion when he had been elected. To justify this he said that he would rather trust the Conservatives to benefit the working class than the Liberals. As yet there had been no sign of a Reform Bill from the Liberals yet the Conservatives had introduced the Derby-Disraeli Bill. Mellor reviewing the political situation since 1847 said at that meeting that Fielden had been turned out by the Liberals angry at the Ten Hour Act and Cobbett had been opposed by them because he was linked with Fielden and the Act. The operatives had Fielden to thank for being able to

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1. This developed into an extremely bitter personal conflict between Cobbett and Platt. Platt again explained at a meeting the next day that the promise had been made only on condition that Cobbett remained true to radical principles.

attend the present meetings and manufacturers had not suffered by it. Now Cobbett was called a Conservative and untrue to his principles. On the contrary it was the Liberals who were untrue to their principle of religious liberty since both Knott and Platt supported Gladstone, who was a churchman who would not vote against church rates and bishops, in the South Lancashire election .

Nomination day was 11th July[1]. Cobbett was proposed by John Bentley who said that the proof of Cobbett's qualities, was in his thirteen years as member for Oldham, and was seconded by William Simmons. Hibbert was proposed by John Radcliffe as a staunch reformer and was seconded by Jonathan Mellor. Spinks was proposed by James Booth and seconded by T.E. Lees who referred to his local connection by marriage and the part he had played in drafting the Ten Hour Bill. Platt was proposed by John Riley who stressed his local connections and was seconded by Knott. In speeches by candidates which followed, Cobbett again stressed his support for the Factory Act and its extension and defended his Conservative votes as benefitting the work man. Platt pointed out that the Factory Act had nothing to do with Cobbett, it was passed before he became a member of Parliament. Cobbett he said, would carry Oldham into the Conservative camp.

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1. Oldham Chronicle 15th July, 1865.

OLDHAM FROM GLODWICK, 1860

CHAPTER 3 POLITICS 1867 - 1910.

a. The swing of the pendulum.

Sir Ivor Jennings[1] claims that the result of an election during the period of the second and third Reform Acts, depended more on hazard than opinion. The changed loyalties of a few thousand electors could drastically change the political picture. Professor Seymour[2] has shown for example, that the swing of two thousand electors in 1880 in the right places, would have produced a Conservative victory. This was the case in Oldham. Out of the confusion which resulted from the collapse of old radicalism in 1847, there had emerged by 1867, two well distinguished and fairly evenly matched parties. The elections between 1868 and 1900 show how the fortunes of candidates were determined by the swing of a few hundred electors who shifted their allegiances. An analysis of the polls between 1868 and 1900 show parties alternating with one another for pride of place with election majorities ranging from six out of a total poll of over 12,000 to 1,427 out of a total poll of over 19,000. It was only in 1906 that Liberal victories became substantial. In November 1910 the Manchester Guardian[3] declared that Oldham was a

1. Sir Ivor Jennings, Party Politics, vol. I Appeal to the People, Cambridge, 1960, p.23.
2. C. Seymour, Electoral Reform in England and Wales, New Haven, 1915, p.490-1.
3. Manchester Guardian 20th November, 1910.

notoriously "wobbly" seat which was just achieving some stability. It is thus necessary to discover what occasioned these changes of loyalties and why the pendulum swung in the fashion in which it did, during these years.

The 1867 Reform Act doubled the national electorate from approximately one million to approximately two million. At the General Election of 1868 Gladstone and the Liberal Party were put into office by this new electorate with a majority of 112 seats. In Oldham the electorate was increased from 3,013 to over 13,000,[1] but many of the new electors in Oldham favoured the Conservative Party. The Liberal hold over the borough, established in July 1865, was narrowly maintained in 1868 when the Liberals won an overall majority of six. At the by-election of 1872, caused by the death of John Platt, a Conservative, John Morgan Cobbett, was returned and at the General Election of 1874, two Conservatives were returned. This success of the Conservatives during the years between 1868 and 1874 was due to four factors.

First of all there was the conservatism of the ordinary South Lancashire working man who, claims Hanham,[2]

1. Oldham Almanack and Year Books 1867 - 1869, Hirst and Fish, Oldham Public Library. See p225-7 for a discussion of the increased polls during this period.

2. H.J. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, Politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone, Longmans, 1959, p.303.

bought his house through a building society, owned shares in the cotton mills of the district, was a patriot and more likely to be a member of the Church of England than a dissenter. The Oldham Chronicle[1] warned that the working men, enfranchised by the Act would be of mixed political allegiance, there being some who, "for some inexplicable cause",[2] ignorance and prejudice, would support the Conservatives.

Next there was the identification of Liberalism in Oldham with the employer class and the application of "the screw". Further there was the identification of Liberalism with support of the Catholic Irish which was particularly harmful to the Liberals in Oldham where there was hostility towards the Catholic Irish caused by the immigration of Irish labour, the Fenian movement, and the activities of an Orange lecturer named William Murphy. The Fenian disturbances in Manchester in September 1867 caused alarm in Oldham[3] and in October 1867[4] Fenians were

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1. Oldham Chronicle 24th August, 1867.
2. Ibid 2nd February, 1867.
3. Ibid 21st September, 1867.
4. Ibid 12th October, 1867.

said to number some 400 to 500 and were drilling in the neighbourhood. On 6th of January 1868[1] Murphy began a series of lectures in the Co-operative hall. He paid a second visit in February[2] and visited Ashton-under-Lyne in May,[3] where there were anti-Catholic riots which spread to Oldham. These riots were the result, wrote the Oldham Chronicle [4] of Murphy's visit, hostility towards the Fenians and a deep rooted dislike amongst the working class of the Irish in England. Atthe 1868 election the Catholic population pledged their support to Hibbert and Platt, the Liberal candidates, because of their support of disestablishment of the Irish Church[5], a fact which further identified the Liberals with support of the hated Irish.

Finally there was the split in the Liberal ranks which was first brought about by the conduct of the two Liberal members during the passage of the Reform Act. In March 1867 Disraeli, following negotiations

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1. Oldham Chronicle 11th January, 1868.
2. Ibid 15th February, 1868.
3. Ibid 16th May, 1868.
4. Ibid 30th May, 1868.
5. Ibid 8th August, 1868.

within the party, eventually framed a Bill granting household suffrage with safeguards including the double vote and the redistribution of 30 seats, 15 to counties, 14 to boroughs and one to the University of London. Gladstone attacked the "fancy franchise" and the redistribution and at the end of March, proposed instead a £5 rating qualification in the boroughs. In the face of this opposition Disraeli abandoned the "fancy franchise" and household suffrage was carried on 15th August, 1867. A number of Liberal members, including Hibbert and Platt, opposed Gladstone's suggestion of the rating qualification and abstained from voting in support of Gladstone in March. On the 5th February 1868[1] the members visited Oldham to explain their conduct. Hibbert declared that they could have either blindly supported their leader and voted against household suffrage, or voted independently for household suffrage against their leader. They could not turn their backs on household suffrage, nor did they want to vote against their leader and so they abstained. Liberal opinion in Oldham was divided over this action and a heated correspondence took place in the Oldham Chronicle.[2] The Oldham Chronicle came down firmly on the side of the two Liberal members.[3] Members of Parliament were not bound to act with their leaders on every occasion for unquestioned obedience was the equivalent

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1. Oldham Chronicle 8th February, 1868.
2. Ibid 9th November, 1867, 16th November, 1867, 30th November, 1867.
3. Ibid 30th November, 1867.

of dictatorship, but it also warned against disunion amonst the Liberals which would help the Conservatives.[1] This division, however, continued throughout the period over such matters as temperance, disestablishment of the English Church and Home Rule in 1886.

Electioneering for the 1868 election was fierce and protracted. The candidates made their first election visit at the end of July.[2] Hibbert and Platt addressed a crowd of 12 - 14,000 in front of the King's Arms on 28th July. Hibbert, referring to his conduct during the passage of the Reform Act, said that he was not ashamed of abstaining since that was in accordance with his principles. The Liberals, he claimed, had been responsible for the enforcement of the Factory Acts in all kinds of businesses, the abolition of compulsory Church rates, commutation of tithes, criminal law reform, removal of Jewish disabilities and the extension of free trade. An important point which figured largely in the 1868 election was the disestablishment of the Irish Church. Hibbert said that he supported Gladstone's policy and commented on the failings of the church in Ireland. He concluded by saying that the House of Commons had become a real "house of commons" and was no longer a class parliament. Platt stressed his support of the present Reform Bill, declaring that he had no fears about its result but that it made the ballot more necessary than before. He, like Hibbert, declared his support for the disestablishment of the

1. Oldham Chronicle 18th January, 1868.

2. Ibid 1st August, 1868.

Irish Church which he said, had been imposed by conquest. He concluded by warning against support of Cobbett simply because he was the son of the great William Cobbett.

The next day, 29th July, Cobbett and Spinks received an enthusiastic welcome from a crowd of some 22,000 on the Tommyfield. Cobbett again referred to the claims that he was a Conservative and again gave the reply, given on so many other occasions, that he supported the Conservatives when they acted in the interest of the working class. The Liberals he said had deserted the people. He reminded his audience of his warning in 1859[1] that if reform was not achieved then through the Derby Bill it would be delayed five or six years. In fact it had been delayed for eight years. In their search for further reform in an attempt to win popularity the Liberals had hit on the disestablishment of the Irish Church which had been endowed by pious people. If the Commission of enquiry found abuse, he said, then the Church should be reformed. He also itemised Liberal action of the past years mentioning in particular, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, coercion in Ireland and Liberal hostility to household suffrage. He would not, he said, be a party man, but would as in the past, vote for good measures, which were rare from the Liberals. Spinks again answered the criticism that he was a stranger in Oldham by

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1. Vide p.104.

pointing out that he was connected by marriage, friendship and property. He had also been attacked for being a lawyer. In reply to this he said that it was right that he should go to where laws were made. He attacked Russell's Reform Bill of 1866 and criticised the Liberals for going out of office rather than amend it. The Conservatives, on the other hand, had amended their Bill, allowing themselves to be guided by the wishes of the people who wanted household suffrage. Touching on the ballot question he said that it was necessary to free the new electorate from intimidation.

The 1868 election was the last full-scale election to be held on the hustings before they disappeared with the passing of the Ballot Act. Vast crowds turned out for the nominations on 16th November.[1] There was the usual jostling by the party groups for prominent positions before the platform with Conservative calls of "The iron screw", answered by Liberal calls of "Peterloo", and "Turncoat", to Cobbett. Hibbert was proposed by John Radcliffe as a townsman, responsible for changing many non-electors to electors, and was seconded by John Lees the owner of Primrose Mills. Platt was proposed by James Newton, who said that no man in the country was better able to represent the important interests of the borough, and was seconded by J.G. Holden the Chairman of the Liberal Registration

1. Oldham Chronicle 21st November, 1868.

Association. Cobbett was proposed by John Bentley, who trusted that those who had been given votes by the Conservatives would exercise them in their favour, and was seconded by William Nield. Spinks was proposed by Captain Lees of Werneth as a strong yet independent supporter of the Derby-Disraeli Ministry, and was seconded by Henry Milne as a friend of the working class.

Hibbert, who spoke first, repeated his catalogue of benefits brought about by the Liberals and declared that whilst the Conservatives wished to keep things as they were, the Liberals wanted to reduce government expenditure, introduce the ballot to end intimidation, extend education, and bring justice to Ireland. "England and Oldham" he said, "expects every true man to do his duty". Platt similarly repeated the attacks on the Conservatives. He spoke at length about Cobbett who had first appeared as a radical, then "half and half" and now as a Conservative, and urged the electors to follow the principles of Cobbett's father and show that they were the same men as their forefathers.

Cobbett reminded the electors of his thirteen years service as their member and that the Conservatives had been responsible for the passage of the Reform Act. Again he criticised Liberal attempts to disestablish the Irish Church. Spinks itemised the benefits which had resulted from Conservative rule. He attacked the disestablishment of the Irish Church claiming that the Protestant Church in Ireland had been a "light shining amidst ignorance" for the past 300 years.

At the close of the poll on 17th November the result was a victory for the two Liberal candidates but by a very narrow majority, Hibbert 6140, Platt 6122, Cobbett 6116, Spinks 6084.[1] The Oldham Chronicle[2] wrote that the Liberals in Lancashire had fared badly[3] and that the Liberals in Oldham could not be jubilant with so narrow a majority. Cobbett accused the Liberals of impersonation whilst Spinks charged them with intimidation and claimed that the victory really belonged to the Conservatives. Six, he said, was a nominal majority and he felt sure that Cobbett would be a member of parliament for Oldham before long.

Spinks' prophecy was fulfilled in June 1872. Platt died in Paris on 18th May, 1872[4] and both parties began to prepare for the coming by-election.[5] The Conservatives were at first concerned about the age and health of Cobbett. It was felt by some that Spinks would be a better choice. Cobbett was chosen as their candidate by the Conservatives finally, on the grounds that he would

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1. Poll Book 1868.
2. Oldham Chronicle 21st November, 1868.
3. Vide Hanham op. cit., p.313. Even Gladstone was defeated in the S.W. Lancashire election of 1868.
4. Oldham Chronicle 25th May, 1872.
5. Ibid 1st June, 1872.

secure both Conservative and pro-Cobbett votes. The Liberals first proposed John Radcliffe, who had played a leading part in Liberal affairs over the past years, but he refused to stand. Their choice finally fell on the Hon. E. Lyulph Stanley who was chosen by a meeting of Liberals from the various wards at the King's Arms Inn on 25th May. He was formally adopted on the evening of the 27th at the King's Arms by the Executive Committee of the Liberal Association.

Stanley[1] was the second son of Lord Stanley of Alderley but succeeded to the title on the death of his brother. He had been the Liberal member for Stalybridge but had lost his seat in 1868. He was relatively unknown in Oldham, a factor which helps to explain his failure, coming into contact with the borough earlier in 1872 as member of a commission of enquiry into the working of Friendly Societies. Representing Oldham between 1880 and 1885 he came to be regarded as the more radical of the two Liberal representatives.

Criticising the Conservatives for putting forward a candidate to take Platt's vacant seat, the Oldham Chronicle[2] claimed that Stamley enjoyed massive support in the borough having been invited to stand by the Trades Council[3], a council of trade union representatives,

1. Vide Marcroft op. cit., p. 213.

2. Oldham Chronicle 1st June, 1872.

3. Vide p. 254

a public meeting held on the 27th May, and the Liberal Executive Committee, "a district organisation composed of the recognised leaders of the party".

Cobbett, though he was not well enough to attend, was also adopted by a public meeting of 5000 as well as by the Conservative party organisation.

On nomination day, 3rd June 1872[1], Cobbett was proposed by Councillor Eli Harrop and was seconded by Robert Taylor. Cobbett was still not well enough to attend in person and his address was given by Spinks. Spinks referred to Cobbett's connection with William Cobbett and John Fielden. He declared his opposition to the Criminal Law Amendment Act[2] and support for the

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1. Oldham Chronicle 3rd June, 1872.

2. Gladstone's Criminal Law Amendment Act 1871 seriously restricted the ability of the Trade Unions to conduct strikes. It defined, "molestation, obstruction and intimidation", so widely as to make any strike action extremely dangerous for trade unionists. In 1875 Disraeli repealed this measure and replaced it by a Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act which legalised peaceful picketing.

Mines Regulation Bill which was not making the progress it should. He was in favour of religious education for children and approved of the 25th Clause of the Education Act,[1] which helped to provide this. Drunkenness he condemned, but he was also opposed to interference in a matter which affected the people's comforts and the business of licensed victuallers. Reluctantly he accepted the ballot which, he considered was regretably

1. When a parent was compelled to send a child to a school and was unable to pay the fees, the School Board paid, but the parents had the option of deciding to which school the child should be sent. This clause which had slipped through almost unobserved infuriated the National Education League which was staunchly supported by Chamberlain. The League demanded universal, compulsory, unsectarian and free education and cried against the payment of rates to assist religious education. Chamberlain declared that he would suffer distraint of his possessions rather than pay for denominational schools. See J.L. Garvin, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, Macmillan, 1934, p. 104 - 123.

   In Oldham, Clause 25 brought special problems. In 1876 the payments of school fees was transferred from the School Board to the Poor Law Guardians. The need to visit the workhouse to have applications entered was onerous, so in 1880 the payment of fees was put back with the School Board when a School Fees Enquiring Office was opened.

necessary to protect voters. He attacked government inefficiency, particularly the income tax increase of 2d. and concluded with an appeal for the reduction of local rates and care for the aged.

Stanley was proposed by William Wrigley and was seconded by J.B. Tattersall. He said that the details of his programme were outlined in his published address and he spoke generally in support of radical progress which was constantly blocked by the Conservatives, particularly in the Lords. He also justified the actions of the Liberal party about which he said many workmen had the wrong idea. In his published address[1] he declared his support for the separation of church and state and opposition to denominational teaching which led to division and bitterness within the country. On the question of the Criminal Law Amendment Act he was more guarded than Cobbett, speaking more vaguely of the need to establish full equality between employer and employee. He supported the Truck and Mines Regulation Bills and Mundella's Bill for the reduction of the hours of labour of women and children. He favoured a reduction of expenditure and taxation and non-intervention in foreign affairs.

The election resulted in a victory for the Conservatives, Cobbett gaining 7278 votes as opposed to Stanley's 6984.[2]

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1. Oldham Chronicle 1st June, 1872.
2. Poll Book 1872.

The Ballot Act of 1872 finally robbed the employers of the power to intimidate and enabled the working man to cast his vote freely. It completed the Conservative reaction in Oldham which had begun in 1868. At the 1874 election the two Conservatives, Cobbett and Spinks were returned.

Nominations on the 31st January 1874[1] were held in private in the Town Hall. Hibbert was proposed by John Lees and was seconded by William Wrigley. Stanley was proposed by Charles Yardley, the President of the Working Men's Liberal Reform Association, and was seconded by Robert Whittaker. Cobbett was again proposed by Councillor Harrop and seconded by John Bentley. Spinks was proposed by J.E. Lees and was seconded by Joseph Berry. No speeches were made on this occasion, most of the electioneering being done in the week between nomination day and the election. The published address took on from this time a much greater importance.

Hibbert's address[2] stressed the part he had played over the past twelve years in extending civil and religious rights and improving social conditions. He appealed for economy and the abolition of income tax and other taxes on necessitities, the equalising of the county and borough franchise, the reduction of the hours of

1. Oldham Chronicle 7th February, 1874.

2. Ibid 31st January, 1874.

labour as outlined by Mundella, the repeal of the more objectionable clauses of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, universal compulsory education and the modernisation of the laws relating to the transfer and occupation of property. Stanley's address was similar. He blamed the severity of the Criminal Law Amendment Act on the opposition of the Conservatives and the House of Lords, and urged that the expenses of general elections should be charged to public funds to allow less wealthy candidates to stand.

Cobbett's address[1] attacked the extravagance of the government, pledged his support for the extension of the borough franchise to the county and repeated his opposition to the abolition of religious education in schools. Spinks re-stated these points but in addition stressed his support for all measures calculated to increase the comfort of the working class. Speaking at the Rock Street Schoolrooms on 29th January[2] Spinks declared that the government had upset every class in Britain and urged the electors to complete the victory of 1872.

This victory was completed with the return of Spinks (8582 votes) and Cobbett (8541 votes) and the defeat of Hibbert (8397 votes) and Stanley (8360 votes).

The Conservative majorities of 1874 however were

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1. Oldham Standard 31st January, 1874.
2. Oldham Chronicle 31st January, 1874.

not large enough to offer any hope of permanent Conservative supremacy and the Liberals were successful in 1877 and 1880. The death of John Morgan Cobbett, who had been intimately concerned with the political life of the borough for 22 years, in February 1877, marked the beginning of the swing away from Conservatism, with which he had come to be identified, and the revival of Liberalism. The reasons for this revival were threefold.

Throughout the Manchester district, the Conservatives grew complacent,[1] particularly was this so in Oldham following the double victory of 1874 whilst the Liberals with an already sound political organisation further improved their organisation.[2]

Further the Conservative period of supremacy coincided with a period of economic depression which was aggravated by high government expenditure and taxation. The slump which began in 1876 and continued for three years severely affected British industry, including Oldham's cotton industry. The effect this slump had on Oldham may be seen by reference to figures given by the Board of Guardians for those in receipt of outdoor relief, which show considerable increases from 1876 onwards.

On January 8th 1876 the number of people in receipt of relief stood at 649 and the cost of relief was £49. 5. 2d. These figures increased gradually

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1. Hanham op. cit., p.322.

2. Vide p. 234-237

through the year until on January 6th 1877 the figures stood at 750 and £60. 1. 6d. By January 5th 1878 the figures had soared to 1164 and £78. 8. 3d. A peak was reached on January 11th 1879 with 2,848 people receiving relief at a cost of £148. 11. 0d. After this the figures dropped rapidly in 1880, as trade slowly recovered, to half those of the peak months

By the end of 1878 the situation had grown so serious that a special relief fund was started. Committees met in several wards to administer the fund for the first time on 30th December, 1878[1] when many depressing tales were heard. There were 1,166 applications for relief and an expenditure for that week of £137. 2. 0d. Money was distributed on the basis of 2/- for a single person, 3/- for a married couple, 4/- for a family of three and so on.

Typical and illustrative of this depression was the bankruptcy of Eli Harrop, a cotton spinner, one of Cobbett's supporters, in September, 1878.[2] He held many shares in local limited companies which had depreciated as much as 60% since the date of purchase.

The Liberals made much of this economic collapse. The Liberal National Reform Union issued circulars and placards blaming the Conservative government for the depression in the cotton industry on the grounds that it had increased government expenditure and had imposed a

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1. Oldham Chronicle 4th January, 1879.

2. Ibid 7th September, 1878.

tariff of 5% on manufacturered cotton goods entering India. The Oldham Chronicle [1] thundered away about the merits of free trade ignoring the fact that the depression existed despite free trade, and declared that it was difficult to believe that there were still some who considered protection to be the best way of helping native industry.

Perhaps the most important reason for the Conservative collapse was the removal of Cobbett from the political scene and the desertion from the Conservative party by Cobbett's personal supporters. Cobbett died on 13th February, 1877 and immediately the Oldham Chronicle [2] wrote of the probability of the secession of a large section of the Cobbettites from the Conservative ranks. The reason for the breakaway was declared to be the dissatisfaction on the part of the Cobbettites at the treatment received by Cobbett at the hands of the Conservatives. Earlier in 1872 there had been a reluctance on the part of the Conservatives to accept Cobbett as a candidate, [3] a reluctance which was overcome

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1. Oldham Chronicle 18th March, 1876.
2. Ibid 17th February, 1877.
3. Vide p. 125

by the prestige which his name carried. Since that time the situation had grown worse. According to the Oldham Chronicle[1] Cobbett had been treated with contempt by the "purse proud" Conservatives who either patronised him or ignored him. The Cobbettites were also, it was claimed, large investors in local mills and were concerned about the bad trade and the loss of dividends.

The Conservatives met on the 15th February to select a successor, doorkeepers taking care that only those of the right political colour should be present at the meeting. Lieutenant Colonel Lees was chosen. Lees was Lieutenant-Colonel of the Volunteers, a county magistrate, deputy lieutenant of the county and a staunch churchman. He was the son of James Lees, a cotton spinner, who had been Mayor 1853 - 4. The Liberals met at the Kings Arms on the same day and selected Hibbert. Both choices were confirmed by public meetings, the Liberals on the 19th and the Conservatives on the 20th.

The 1877 by-election centred on foreign policy, in particular Disraeli's handling of the Bulgarian crisis, and the charges of extravagance and financial mismanagement levelled against the Conservatives by the Liberals.

Hibbert's address was published on the 19th February, 1877. It drew attention to his years of service. He declared that he supported all measures to extend civil and religious freedom and had nothing to

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1. Oldham Chronicle 17th February, 1877.

add to his former statements of liberal principles. He appealed for a firm and decided policy on behalf of the Christians within the Turkish Empire and attacked the extravagance of the government which had added £7 million to the annual expenditure since it had taken office.

Hibbert spoke to a Liberal meeting at Royton on the 21st February[1] and was introduced by J.G. Holden who said that the election was a matter of policy not of personality as it had been so many times in the past. The issues involved were support of Gladstone and the reduction of taxation, or Beaconsfield and increased taxes. Hibbert attacked the Conservatives for not keeping their promise to reduce expenditure and taxation whilst claiming that Gladstone would have abolished income tax had he been in office. The five years of Liberal rule he said gave an average surplus of £19 million, whilst the Conservative surplus was only £1¼ million. The Liberals had reduced the National Debt by £30 million during their last term of office whilst the Conservatives had so far only reduced it by £10 million.[2] He criticised the government's Agricultural Holdings Act, 1875[3] which gave compensation to farmers for unexhausted

1. Oldham Chronicle 24th February, 1877.
2. The Zulu War 1879 finally forced the Conservatives to suspend the Sinking Fund.
3. The Duke of Richmond's Agricultural Holdings Act, 1875 was intended to give security to tenants for capital invested in the soil. Its provisions however were not compulsory until 1883.

improvements on the grounds that its provisions were not made compulsory, the Royal Titles Act, with its foreign sounding title of "Empress" and the government's handling of the Bulgarian situation.

Lees' address appeared on 17th February.[1] He declared himself to be a native of Oldham engaged in cotton spinning, the staple trade of the locality, and was thus closely linked with the interests of the borough. He was a supporter he said of the government and favoured reform of proved abuses, mentioning in particular measures for improving dwellings, and the shortening of hours for women and children. He supported the government's statesmanlike handling of foreign affairs.

At a meeting in Crompton on the 21st February[2] one of Cobbett's strongholds, he paid tribute to Cobbett and stressed the support which he had given to him in the past. He stressed again his local connections and his support of Disraeli and made a fuller defence of the government's foreign and economic

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1. Oldham Standard 24th February 1877.
2. Oldham Chronicle 24th February 1877

policies. He claimed that the government had maintained peace and safeguarded against Russian aggression without abetting Turkish misgovernment,[1] and that Britain could not interfere in the internal affairs of another country. Referring to the charges of extravagance and mismanagement of public finance, Lees pointed out that any money spent had been well spent on education, the necessary raising of soldiers' pay and settling the "Alabama" claims agreed upon by Gladstone. A supplement to the Oldham Standard, published on 24th February, 1877, made the point that any increase in expenditure was either due to Liberal neglect of the public interest or resulted from Liberal actions over which the present government had no control.

Both candidates were interviewed by a deputation from the Oldham Trades Council.[2] Questions were put concerning their opinion on such questions as Macdonald's Bill for the compensation of workmen injured as a result of the employer's negligence; the appointment of professional, stipendiary magistrates[3] and the imposition o:

1. Constantinople Conference 12th December, 1876 - 20th January, 1877.
2. Oldham Chronicle 24th February, 1877.
3. The Trades Council claimed that magistrates were recruited from the employer class and used the extra power which their position gave them against their employees. The appointment of a stipendiary magistrate would have given impartiality. In 1888 E. Mellor, President of the Oldham Provincial Operative Cotton Spinners Association became the first working-class magistrate in Oldham.

heavy costs which led to imprisonment because of an inability to pay; the right of working men to sit on juries with compensation for loss of income, and the reform of the patent laws so that working men could patent their own inventions without excessive cost. Lees said that he was not prepared to express an opinion about Macdonald's Bill since it was still in the committee stage but agreed that negligence ought to be penalised. He agreed that the present method of appointing magistrates was not perfect but pointed out that they had clerks who knew the law to assist them and that the appointment of stipendiary magistrates would cost Oldham about £800 per annum. He agreed that workingman should be represented on juries and compensated for loss of wages and that the cost of patenting was too high. Hibbert sympathised with the object of Macdonald's Bill and would support it, he suggested peripatetic stipendiary magistrates and the payment of fines by instalment and, like Lees, supported working men on juries and cheaper patenting costs.

At the election on 1st March, 1877,[1] Hibbert gained 9543 votes and Lees 8880, a majority for Hibbert of 663. According to the Oldham Chronicle this was a very large poll with only 200 abstentions, the result of much hard canvassing and intense interest on the part of both parties. The figures it claimed, gave great encouragement to the Liberals of the borough and were the result of a thorough and complete union of every section of the party. The

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1. Oldham Chronicle 3rd March, 1877.

Oldham Standard[1] charged the Liberals with impersonation made easy by the fact that they controlled the election machinery. At the declaration of the result, Hibbert made special reference to William Wrigley[2], "To whom we are greatly indebted for our victory today."

On the 8th March, 1880, Disraeli misjudging the mood of the country following two Conservative by-election victories at Liverpool and Southwark, dissolved Parliament. The Oldham Liberals entered the contest with great confidence bringing forward Hibbert and Stanley as their candidates, the final selection being made by the Liberal Registration Association on 11th March.[3] The Conservatives put forward Spinks again and Smith-Taylor - Whitehead, a local cotton spinner, at a public meeting held at theTown Hall on the 10th March[4] which pledged its support for both candidates. Lees was dropped because he was not considered to be a strong enough candidate.

Hibbert in his address published on 16th March, 1880[5]

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1. Oldham Standard 3rd March, 1877.
2. Vide p.234-5.
3. Oldham Chronicle 13th March, 1880.
4. Ibid 13th March, 1880.
5. Ibid 20th March, 1880.

said that he had supported the Liberal opposition in its efforts against the government's foreign policy which had been "mischievous, aggressive and dangerous". He had supported all domestic improvements but the government had done little and had made domestic policy subservient to foreign policy. The government's management of the National Debt was criticised along with the increase in taxation by £7 million since 1874. Over the past three years there had been an annual deficit of £8 million met by increases in taxation and the diversion of the Sinking Fund.[1] He supported all matters affecting the interest of the people and favoured just and equal laws to promote prosperity in Ireland and draw the union closer. Stanley in his address published on the same day declared himself to be an "advanced Liberal"[2] prepared to follow the leader of the party and a policy of peace, retrenchment and reform. Like Hibbert he criticised the government's foreign policy, its extravagance and neglect

1. In 1875 Sir Stafford Northcote established a Sinking Fund to pay off the National Debt of £28 million. The flaw in the scheme was the possibility of drawing from the Fund should a chancellor consider it necessary. This Northcote did after the Zulu War in 1879.

2. This is how Stanley described himself and can be taken to mean radical. Vide p. 147 By 1885 he had emerged as an avowed radical and as such was rejected by the Liberal Party organisation.

of domestic legislation. The unity of the nation was he said, being endangered by the Conservatives' refusal to grant justice to Ireland.

Spinks' address appeared on the 12th March.[1] He appealed for a repetition of the confidence placed in him in 1874, and defended the government's conduct of which he generally approved. Disraeli's firm foreign policy he claimed, had done much to prevent general war. He declared his opposition to disestablishment and home rule which would interfere with the social and economic progress of Ireland. Taylor-Whitehead's address appeared two days earlier[2] on the 10th of March. He offered himself as a candidate as a local man connected with the cotton trade, in accordance with a promise to do so given over a year earlier. As a newcomer his address was lengthier than those of the other candidates. There were, he said, momentous issues at stake, the unity of the Empire and the maintenance of Britain's position amongst the nations. He favoured a foreign policy which defended the country's interests whilst keeping peace and a colonial policy which linked the colonies with the mother country but which granted some measure of self-government where this was practicable. He opposed the ending of the union between England and Ireland which was against the interests of both countries. It was the

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1. Oldham Standard 27th March, 1880.
2. Ibid 27th March, 1880.

agitation of demagogues which kept Ireland in turmoil, not a popular desire to break away. He appealed for economy in government expenditure. He approved of the social legislation of the government and declared his support for household suffrage in the counties and a redistribution of seats. He concluded by referring to his opposition to attempts to diminish the power of the Church of England but he considered it his duty to abolish the remaining disabilities of the dissenters.[1]

The Liberal candidates repeated and expanded their points at an enthusiastic meeting held at the Alexandria Skating Rink, Union Street on the 16th March under the chairmanship of Alderman Bodden the President of the Liberal Registration Association. Hibbert criticised the Bulgarian policy which had failed, since Bulgaria had gained its independence as a result of Russian, not British intervention; the Zulu War he condemned as likely to bring little honour and declared that a friendly Afghanistan would be a better protection against Russian designs on India than an unfriendly Afghanistan. Again he returned to his theme that domestic affairs had been neglected because of pre-occupation with foreign affairs. In particular he pointed to the neglect of the county franchise settlement, laws which would give greater security to farmers[2] and temperance reform. He wanted to

1. One of the outstanding remaining grievances at this time was the question of the place and form of burials. Often this had to be in the parish churchyard, which was the only burial place, with Church of England religious forms The Burials Act, 1880, finally removed the grievances by permitting dissenters to bury their dead in parish church yard with religious forms selected by themselves or with no ceremony at all.
2. A further reference to the faults of the Agricultural

see the limitation of the number of public houses and the compensation of publicans whose licenses were discontinued.[1] He made a plea for sympathy with Ireland but warned against any action which would endanger the union. Stanley spoke briefly because of the noise. He did not discuss politics but said quite simply that he considered the meeting to be a demonstration of support.

At a meeting on the 18th March[2] at the Constitutional Rooms, Royton, Spinks proposed that the question of erecting a memorial to Cobbett, stopped by the distress in the area eighteen months earlier, should be revived if times continued to improve. Following a defence of the government's policy he urged that the Conservative's election defeat of 1877 in Oldham be retrieved. Smith-Taylor regretted that Royton did not have very prominent Conservative leaders but believed that they would stay true to their Conservative principles. He attacked Liberal

1. This was a milder attack on the liquor trade then was usual amongst Liberal's. In 1871 the Liberals Home Secretary, H.A. Bruce, introduced an abortive Licensing Bill which proposed that existing licensees should remain undisturbed for ten years. Then the magistrates should determine the number of public houses required for a district and put the running of them up for auction. The proceeds of the auction would go, not to compensation, but to establish a special public house police force. The Bill seriously alarmed the liquor trade and made almost every public house into a Conservative committee room. No doubt Hibbert's mildness was an attempt to win back some support.

2. Oldham Chronicle 20th March, 1880.

misrepresentation of the trade depression.

At the election which followed on 31st March 1880, the Liberal revival was completed with the return of Hibbert and Stanley with a considerable majority, Hibbert 10,630, Stanley 10,409, Spinks 8,982, Taylor-Whitehead 8,593.[1] To achieve this victory claimed the OldhamStandard[2] the Liberals had glossed over the differences between their two candidates, Hibbert being a moderate whilst Stanley was a radical, and urged moderate Liberals to bear this difference in mind in the future. Previously at the close of the 1877 election the Oldham Standard[3] had claimed that Hibbert's success was due in part to his moderation which induced those of undecided political opinions to support him.

In 1885 the Liberal hold over the borough established in 1877 and 1880 was shaken when Stanley was defeated by a Conservative newcomer James Mackenzie

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1. This election was a very expensive contest with votes costing as much as £3 and £2 each. The election expenses in Oldham on this occasion were the lowest fo the whole country, the average expenditure per vote being ½d. vide C.O'Leary, The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections 1868 - 1911, Oxford 1962, p. 156 - 7.
2. Oldham Standard 5th April, 1880.
3. Ibid 3rd March, 1877.

Maclean, who lived in Chiswick and had recently returned from India where he had been the Editor of the Bombay Gazette. He was chosen by the Oldham Conservatives at the beginning of May 1882.[1] The reasons for this swing of the pendulum in favour of the Conservatives were fourfold. The early 1880's saw increased activity on the part of the Conservative Party.[2] It was popularly considered, especially in the boroughs, that the foreign policy of Gladstone's second ministry had been inept.[3] Again charges of radicalism were levelled against Stanley and, perhaps most significant of all, the Irish voters of Oldham withdrew their support from Stanley. Class feeling in Oldham was very bitter because of a protracted lockout, July to October 1885, to enforce a 10% wage reduction. This too undoubtedly upset political allegiances and contributed to the election result.

On several occasions before1885 the Conservatives through the pages of the Standard. had warned moderate Liberals of the consequences of supporting Stanley whose views were considered to be much more extreme than

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1. Oldham Standard 4th May, 1882.
2. Vide p. 231
3. R.C.K. Ensor, England 1870 - 1914, Oxford, 1936, p. 94.

Hibbert's. By 1885 Stanley had become completely identified with radicalism and the views of Joseph Chamberlain. Hibbert on the other hand remained the highly respectable, uncontroversial Liberal who had been linked with the political lifeof the borough since 1859.

Hibbert's address published on the 29th October, 1885,[1] pointed to his twenty three years service as the representative for Oldham with the exception of one short period. He emphasised again his Liberal principles and his support of the Third Reform Act. As to Ireland, he stressed that it should be treated fairly and the unity of the Empire preserved. Later in the election campaign in a speech at Greenacres,[1] he referred to himself as a Liberal churchman favouring reform of the church where abuses were proved. Throughout the election Hibbert's speeches were concerned with relatively uncontroversial topics. He was particularly concerned with defending free trade and confined himself to attacks on the Conservatives as the enemies of reform, and a catalogue of Liberal achievements.[2]

Stanley on the other hand, touched frequently on a variety of controversial topics. His address,[3] published

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1. Oldham Chronicle 17th November, 1885.
2. See in particular Oldham Evening Chronicle 13th November, 1885. Oldham Chronicle 14th November, 1885.
3. Oldham Chronicle 17th November, 1885.

on the same day as Hibbert's was long, detailed and extreme in tone, much more advanced than anything he had previously issued. He applauded the passage of the Reform Act and pointed out that Gladstone's manifesto had outlined much more work for the Liberal party. He would work, he said, to maintain the unity of the party under Gladstone. The church he said, should be disestablished and its endowments should go to the nation. He attacked the idea of an hereditary legislative chamber which was not consistent with the theory of representative government and urged that the House of Lords should cease to have any legislative power. He appealed for free public elementary education and took up Chamberlain's cry of "three acres and a cow", urging a reform of the land laws which would facilitate an increase in the ownership of the land and discourage the accumulation of land. It should be made easy for corporations to acquire land for public use and for leaseholders to acquire the freehold of their houses or land, without paying extortionate compensation. Peace, he maintained, was essential for this country with its trading commitments and need to import food. Following a declaration that the life of parliaments should be reduced to four years, he passed on to the vexed question of Ireland. He had always recognised the suffering of Ireland and the existence of a national spirit there. He argued that Liberal land legislation had done much to improve the situation. He supported local self-government for Ireland consistent with the

supremacy of the Empire.

Continually throughout the election Stanley returned to his criticism of the House of Lords, dominated by the Conservatives, which blocked Liberal measures, unless there was strong feeling aroused in the country; the necessity of having a complete system of state elementary education, a particular interest of his as a member of the London School Board; and disestablishment. The Standard[1] commented that his attack on the church would lose him a lot of support.

The Conservatives took a line, directly opposed to that of Stanley. Taylor-Whitehead in his address published on the 23rd October, 1885, began by declaring himself a firm supporter of the constitution in church and state and opposed to disestablishment and disendowment. In the call for free public education he saw an attempt to abolish voluntary schools and religious education. He criticised excessive public expenditure and the costly foreign policy and appealed for more equal taxation. Whilst favouring cheaper and easier transfer of land, an increase in the number of owners and the encouragement of allotments, he was opposed to the compulsory acquisition of property to bring this about. He welcomed the appointment of a commission of inquiry into trade conditions opposed by the Liberals because of their blind allegiance to free trade. In fact the Liberal dominated Oldham

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1. Oldham Standard 1st April, 1885.

Chamber of Commerce, had boycotted the inquiry.[1] In conclusion he stressed his support of Salisbury's Irish policy and wanted to see some measure of self-government given to Ireland.

The new Conservative candidate, Maclean, issued a lengthy address on 23rd October.[2] Gladstone, he said, had followed a disastrous policy, had been abandoned by his supporters, and had gone out of office four months earlier leaving England enfeebled. In particular he criticised Liberal Foreign policy which was made up of "costly, ignoble, sanguinary and fruitless military expeditions". The building of the Manchester Ship Canal he said, showed that Lancashire business men had not lost their energy. He appealed for a permanent improvement in trade by making raw materials cheaper and, like Taylor-Whitehead, criticised the Liberals for not supporting the commission of inquiry. He attacked Chamberlain's radical policy of threatening to plundering the rich now that the poor had gained political power, a policy which set class against class and frightened away capital from

1. The Oldham Chamber of Commerce was formed on 23rd November, 1882, at a public meeting called by the Mayor, Samuel Ogden, at the request of a group of influential citizens. The President of the Chamber between 1902 and 1906 was Alfred Emmott. During its early years the Chamber of Commerce won many concessions, cheaper rail charges and improved postal facilities.

2. Oldham Chronicle 17th November, 1885.

industry. The passing of the yeoman he declared, was regretted by all, but the process of consolidating small farms into larger units was an economic process which had been going on for some time. Yet he favoured reform of land laws to make transfer of land cheap and easy. Like Taylor-Whitehead he condemned Chamberlain's desire to substitute state, secular education for voluntary education. He opposed disestablishment and disendowment. Gladstone with "blandishments and blows" had failed to satisfy Ireland he said. Maclean ended by saying that he could not believe that many Irish wanted the union ended and he looked to a just and generous treatment.

At a meeting at Shaw on 9th November[1] the Conservative candidates declared that the fight was against Chamberlain and the radicals of the Liberal party who would let Gladstone lead the party as long as it suited them and then take over the leadership themselves. Taylor-Whitehead warned against disestablishment, pointed once more to the uneconomic features of Chamberlain's smallholding policy and criticised free public education as leading to enormous expense and interfering with the earning powers of the family.

Parnell, disappointed at Gladstone's apparent lack of enthusiasm for home rule, pinned his hopes on the Conservatives and on 21st November issued a manifesto ordering the Irish in Great Britain to vote Conservative.

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 10th November, 1885.

Reluctantly[1] the Oldham Irish obeyed Parnell's instructions and deserted the Liberal cause which they had supported for many years. Irish antagonism was turned in particular against Stanley since his name was linked with support of coercion in Ireland and state education, as opposed to religious education.

The task of organising the Oldham Irish in accordance with Parnell's wishes fell to Doctor Howard. T.P. O'Connor addressed a large meeting of Irish electors at the Co-operative Hall, King Street on 16th November.[2] O'Connor urged the electors to reject the Liberals but reserved his bitterest attacks for Stanley "the most objectionable specimen of liberalism that could be found in the party". It was generally considered he said that radicals were opposed to coercion, the exception to this was Stanley who had supported coercion and claimed that he would do so again. The meeting was punctuated by calls of, "Put Stanley out". Doctor Howard proposing a vote of thanks to O'Connor said that there had been a time when Irishmen had hoped for much from the Liberals, but that time was now past. At a Liberal meeting at the Co-operative Hall Greenacres[3] on the same

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1. Vide p.157

2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 17th November, 1885. Oldham Daily Standard 17th November, 1885, for further account.

3. Oldham Evening Chronicle 17th November, 1885.

evening, Stanley anticipated O'Connor's attack and issued a defence in advance. He would continue, he said, to support extraordinary measures to restore law and order when ordinary measures had failed, no matter where that disorder occurred. On the 22nd November the Roman Catholic electors met at St. Mary's, St. Patrick's, St. Anne's, Corpus Christi, St. Edward's and at Shaw and decided to support the Conservative candidates. Earlier a letter dated 9th November, 1885, was published in the Standard[1] written by George S. Lynch of Fitzalon House, The Strand, urging Catholic electors to support Maclean. He had, the writer declared, known Maclean for twenty years and pointed out that during Maclean's years as Editor of the Bombay Gazette he had done much to help the Indian Catholics by praising their schools and institutions and supporting their appeals for money.

The result of the election was Hibbert 12,259, Maclean 11,992, Stanley 11,847, Taylor-Whitehead 11,491. The Chronicle[2] wrote that to their regret, but not their surprise, Stanley had been defeated as a result of the "thunderings of the parsons and Parnellites", the latter undoubtedly contributing most to the defeat. Hibbert conceded the Standard,[3] had fought well and had not been

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 12th November, 1885.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 26th November, 1885.
3. Oldham Daily Standard 26th November, 1885.

deserted by the Irish much of their hostility being disarmed by Hibbert's attitude towards education and his support of voluntary schools as opposed to Stanley's desire to see the end of the voluntary system. When the results were known T.P. O'Connor sent a telegram to Doctor Howard,[1] congratulating the Oldham Irish on their victory over the "coercionist" Stanley.

Parnell's manoeuvres had given between twenty-five and forty seats to the Conservative's[2] but with the conversion of Gladstone to home rule the Conservative Party moved against home rule. Gladstone with a majority of 86 came into office in February 1886 and introduced his first Home Rule Bill on 26th March, 1886. It was defeated on its second reading 343 to 313, with 93 Liberals voting with the majority. On 8th June Gladstone decided to dissolve Parliament and in July the Liberals and Parnellites engaged as allies in a common campaign. This election was fought in Oldham, as throughout the country, on the home rule question. The Standard[3] wrote that the election was unique in Oldham since never before had an election been contested over one point.

The National Liberal Federation with the exception of Chamberlain's Birmingham, declared its support for

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 26th November, 1885.

2. Ensor op. cit., p. 95.

3. Oldham Daily Standard 26th June, 1886.

Gladstone and so did the Oldham Liberal party. It was for this reason that Stanley was dropped by the Liberals as being opposed to Gladstone and home rule. On 15th June[1] the General Council of the Oldham Liberal Registration Society, known as the Liberal Six Hundred, met at the Priory Chambers to select the candidates, The President, William Bodden, read the minutes which included a resolution passed in April expressing approval of Gladstone's measures for the better government of Ireland, and the meeting passed a further resolution that it would only support candidates who supported Gladstone. A letter from Hibbert was read, in which he assured the Council of his confidence in Gladstone, following which he was immediately adopted again as the Liberal candidate. Stanley's letter had not arrived, but he had written earlier to Bodden expressing disapproval of Gladstone's Bill. The meeting divided, some wanting to select a Gladstonian candidate at once, whilst others urged the meeting to wait until Stanley's present views were known. The meeting was adjourned until the next day[2] by which time Stanley's letter had arrived. In it he declared that he would support self-government in Ireland consistent with the unity of the Empire, supremacy of Parliament, protection of the Irish Protestant minority and due consideration for the English taxpayer, but he did not think that any measures which would be introduced

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 16th June, 1886.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 17th June, 1886.

by Gladstone would satisfy these requirements. Thus it was that Stanley was reluctantly rejected as a candidate and Joshua Milne Cheetham, a Crompton cotton spinner, was chosen as a strong supporter of Gladstone on the Irish question.

The Conservatives at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Oldham Conservative Registration Association, meeting at the Central Club, Union Street on the 14th June,1886 [1] selected Maclean again. A letter was read from Taylor-Whitehead, in which he declared his intent to retire as a candidate since a stronger candidate was needed. Elliot Lees the son of Lieutenant Colonel Lees who had fought the 1877 by-election, was chosen.

The addresses of the candidates reflect the issue at stake. The two Liberal candidates published their addresses on the 25th June, 1886[2] and came down firmly in support of Gladstone and home rule which, Hibbert claimed, would bring about a real union of hearts and sympathies. Cheetham stressed that home rule would not endanger the Empire. This reassurance was made necessary by the Conservative attacks on home rule. Both Maclean and Lees[3] stressed that home rule would make Ireland a base

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 15th June, 1886.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 25th June, 1886.
3. Oldham Daily Standard 19th June, 1886.

from which England's enemies could strike. Gladstone, said Maclean, wanted to hand over the government of Ireland to the agents of a conspiracy maintained by foreigners and pointed out, quite correctly, that the working men of Lancashire were sensitive over questions of national honour. The Conservative case against home rule was very well put by Councillor Harrison at a Conservative meeting held on 23rd of June[1] when he said that, "Irish daggers and American money would be used against England on every possible occasion."

The Irish voters who had deserted the Liberals in 1885 now returned to their old allegiance. At a meeting of Irish electors organised by the Irish National Society on 1st July, 1886,[2] Doctor Howard said that at the last election it had been a difficult task getting the Irish to vote against the Liberals as Parnell had wished. The Liberals had however relieved him of much responsibility and anxiety for now he could urge the Irish in Oldham to vote for the Liberal candidates. The meeting was attended by Hibbert and Cheetham and a vote was taken declaring the meeting's confidence in the two candidates.

The return of Irish support however failed to balance the defection of a considerable number of Liberal Unionists who either went over to the Conservative camp,

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 24th June, 1886.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 2nd July, 1886.

or abstained. The Oldham Daily Standard[1] throughout the election gave much publicity to news of Liberals who were giving their support to the Conservatives. On the 26th June, 1886[2] a Mr. Sanderson who had been a Liberal by conviction and family association, declared himself a Liberal Unionist and stressed that he would use his influence to get other Liberals to support the Conservatives on the home rule issue. The Conservatives were particularly proud of the defection of John Lees J.P. and Alfred Butterworth J.P., two prominent Liberals. Butterworth addressed a Conservative meeting on 28th June[3] and said that this was the first time he had stood on a Conservative platform, but that he would oppose his dearest friend if they turned out to be like Hibbert and Cheetham. It would appear that the Liberals had declared that Butterworth and Lees were of little use to the Liberal party and accused the Conservative's of underhand methods in seducing their supporters. The Standard[4] in reply accused the Liberals of sour grapes and claimed that no inducement was necessary. Liberal claims that they were winning Conservative deserters were not very

1. Oldham Daily Standard 29th June, 1886.
2. Ibid 28th June, 1886.
3. Ibid 29th June, 1886.
4. Ibid 2nd July, 1886.

convincing.

The result of the 1886 election was a double Conservative victory, Maclean 11,606, Lees 11,484, Hibbert 10,921, Cheetham 10,891. This defeat, one of the most serious inflicted so far, wrote the Chronicle[1] was made worse by the fact that it had been inflicted by those who had been their friends. The Liberal votes transferred to Conservatives, it continued, far out numbered the Irish votes regained by the Liberals and the defeat was made even more sure by the abstention of some four hundred Liberal Unionists.

In 1892 the pendulum swung in the opposite direction and Cheetham,12,619 and Hibbert,12,541, headed the poll, followed by Lees,12,205 with Maclean coming last with 11,952, votes. The primary reason for this was the bankruptcy of the Conservative's policy which failed to compete with the Newcastle programme. In addition to home rule the Newcastle programme offered the disestablishment of the Church in England and Wales, the local veto on the sale of liquor, "one man one vote", (i.e., the abolition of the plural franchise), triennial parliaments, reform of land laws, the creation of district and parish councils, the provision of land for allotments and other public purposes. The Trade Unions were offered employers liability for accidents, the limitation of factory hours and a promise of the payment of members of parliament. This programme was criticised

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 5th July, 1886.

by its opponents as an attempt to gain a majority by combining minorities. It proved to be a success in Oldham. More particularly Maclean was the target of a campaign, given much publicity in the Chronicle, designed to present him as the enemy of the working class and of working class legislation.

The Liberal addresses, published on the 22nd June, 1892,[1] reflected the influence of the Newcastle programme. Hibbert re-emphasised his support for home rule and opposition to the latest coercion acts which were discreditable to the government which had passed them. He favoured disestablishment of the Church in Wales and Scotland, the amendment of the registration laws to reduce the period necessary for qualification to three months, giving wider powers to local government by the establishment of district and parish councils, the abolition of plural voting and the limitation of the hours of labour. Again he declared in favour of the reform of the land laws. To assist working class candidates to undertake parliamentary duties he suggested that the returning officers' charges should be placed on the rates and that membersof Parliament should be paid. Cheetham's address was similar in tone. He declared himself in complete harmony with the Newcastle programme adding to Hibbert's list, support for reform of the licensing system with local option, the reduction

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 27th June, 1892.

of hours for coal miners and railway workers in particular and improvement of the conditions of agricultural labourers. He urged the just division of rates between owner and occupier, the equitable taxation of land values, ground rents, mining royalties and the reform of death duties so that landowners should bear an equal burden of taxation to the relief of other taxpayers.

With this programme the Liberals entered the contest with confidence. The Chronicle[1] wrote that even in 1886 when so many Liberals deserted to the enemy and others abstained due to uncertainty and perplexity, they were not far behind. Now the failure of the Conservative's Irish policy had been made apparent and the need for progressive legislation, which the Conservatives could not offer, demonstrated and provided by the Liberals. This would unite the party and bring victory.

The Newcastle programme was not enough for the new Oldham and District Independent Labour Party formed in June 1892. This new party was determined to support only Labour candidates and withdrew its support from the other established parties, preferring to abstain until a Labour candidate was brought forward. The Liberals considered this to be a suicidal policy. They stressed the importance of the election and urged working men to support the Newcastle programme.

The Conservative policy had little new to offer and

1. Oldham Chronicle 18th June, 1892.

because of its reservations on issues which were of concern to the working classes, was not popular. The Conservative addresses, published on the 24th June, 1892[1] were uninspiring documents concerned mainly with recounting the achievements of the government. Maclean said that it had been proved that Ireland could be effectively ruled from Westminster and discussed the difficulties attendant upon giving home rule. The government had pursued a successful foreign policy, yet the country was called upon to restore a government which had had such a disastrous foreign policy in the past. After listing the domestic achievements of the government, the rest of the address was negative in tone. He warned of the consequences of reducing the hours of work for miners and the effect it would have on the country's international trading position. He favoured registration reform, but not a reduction of the period of qualification and did not favour the abolition of plural voting. Lees took a similar line drawing attention to the increase in the navy and urged the reduction of taxation. He declared his support for reform of the poor law, simple land purchase, improvement in registration, the provision of district councils and the extension of allotments and smallholdings. Whilst approving of shorter hours in principle he did not support legislation to this

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 27th June, 1892.

end considering that the state should be interfere with the freedom of grown men to dispose of their labour.

At a Conservative meeting at the Theatre Royal on the 22nd June 1892[1] Maclean spoke further of his objection to the ending of plural voting. Whilst he objected to Irishmen coming to England and getting a second vote in addition to a vote in Ireland on the grounds that Ireland was already overrepresented, he did not object to a man with a large stake in society, paying heavy rates, having a second vote. He also declared his support for an eight hour day[2] for miners and cotton operatives, but said that he would not support the working class to the detrimen of the whole community. The Chronicle took the speeches delivered by the conservative candidates on this occasion as illustrating the barrenness of Conservative policy. It was claimed that the conservatives had no programme, wanted to maintain things unchanged and only carried out improvements when they were forced to, taking over

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 23rd June, 1892.
2. The demand for an eight hour day began to appear betwee 1889 and 1897. vida S. and B. Webb. Industrial Democracy 1897. p. 353 n.

Liberal measures and watering them down. This, it was claimed, was why Maclean and Lees did not commit themselves to any direct opposition to the Newcastle programme.

Maclean's lukewarmness over factory reform came under fire and developed into a bitter personal attack which prompted Maclean to declare that the contest had been conducted in a very unfair spirit.[1] This attack was carried on in the Chronicle, which made use of extracts from the Cotton Factory Times, condemning in particular Maclean's lack of support for the 1891 Factory Act.[2] The three principal opponents of that Bill it was claimed[3] were the radical Illingworth of Bradford, the Liberal Hoyle

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1. Oldham Chronicle 7th July, 1892.

2. Raised the minimum age for employment of children in factories to eleven and fixed maximum hours of labour for women at twelve with an hour and a half for meals.

3. The Cotton Factory Times 27th February, 1891. The Cotton Factory Times was first published on 16th January, 1885, at Manchester. The Editor was William Glover. It declared itself to be "the advocate of the operative" to counter the "employers press".

of Heywood and the Conservative Maclean of Oldham, not because it did not go far enough, but because it went too far. Further[1] it was stated that Maclean had sneered at the Bill and its promoters, since oppression was unknown in the cotton industry, and declared that he intended to represent the employers. Two of Maclean's votes at the committee stage were particularly criticised,[2] his vote against compulsory fire escapes and his vote against giving notice of the dates of annual holidays during the first week of January which would prevent employers calling stoppages for repairs, holidays. Maclean wanted only fourteen days notice.

Secondary factors in the defeat of the Conservatives were the continued Irish support for the Liberals and a false sense of security on the part of the Conservatives coupled with very energetic Liberal activity. A post mortem conducted by the Standard[3] decided that the Conservatives had become over confident with the success of the 1886 elections, a feeling which had been reinforced by large and enthusiastic meetings during the election. There

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1. Cotton Factory Times 20th February, 1891.

2. Ibid 17th April, 1891.

3. Oldham Daily Standard 7th July, 1892.

were frequent references in the Standard during June and July 1892 to "eager crowds", "crowds of enthusiastic supporters", "three hours' enthusiasm", "magnificent Unionist demonstrations". On the day of the election, 6th July, 1892, it rained and whilst the Liberals had many conveyances, the Conservatives much to the annoyance of the electors, had only a few. The dissolution came before the Whitsuntide holidays and as soon as the holidays were over, on the 7th June, the Liberals began to prepare. A Liberal meeting in Shaw on 20th June, 1892[1] was one of the largest held in a notoriously Conservative region. Hibbert congratulated the Shaw and Crompton Liberal Association on such a splendid meeting.

Thus were the two Liberal candidates returned only to be rejected again in 1895.

In the mid-Victorian period Britain was one of the leading exporters of manufactured goods but because of hostile tariffs which protectionist policy was setting up in one country after another by the end of the century, the sales of many of Britain's basic exports, including cotton goods, were falling. In 1880 this country exported over £75½ million worth of cotton goods, by 1900 the figure had dropped to below £70 million. Further, machinery was exported and installed which in the

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 21st June, 1892.

long run aggravated the situation. The consumption of raw cotton between 1871 and 1875 was 1,228.6 million pounds, by 1896 to 1900 this had increased to 1,686.5 million pounds but cotton consumption in Europe increased from 856.6 million pounds to 2,251.9 million pounds and in the U.S.A. from 524.7 million pounds to 1,572.1 million pounds during the same period.[1] The cotton industry became the most important of India's large scale industries. By 1914 there were 271 mills with 6,788,895 spindles, 104,179 looms and 260,276 workers.[2] The cotton industry's problem was made even more difficult by the imposition in 1894 of a general customs duty of 5% in India and a tax on cotton goods, whether imported or made in India, of 3½%. This tax obviously affected Oldham and the cotton industry stagnated throughout the district. In the months before the 1895 election unemployed spinners varied between 3% and 7% of the local labour force, whilst unemployed cardroom operatives remained steady at 9%.[3] It is against this background that the 1895 election must be viewed. It was a "bread and butter" election so far

1. Vide Ensor. op. cit., p. 275.
2. Encyclopaedia Britannica (1951) Vol. 12 p.196.
3. Thomas Ashton, General Secretary of the Oldham Operative Spinners Association quoted in Oldham Standard 20th April, 1895, 16th May, 1895, Oldham Evening Chronicle 16th July, 1895.

as Oldham was concerned.

There were three new candidates. Maclean became a candidate for Cardiff, Lees stood for Birkenhead and Cheetham retired from political life because of ill health. The veteran Liberal, Hibbert, was the only candidate who had stood for Oldham in the past.

The Liberals had difficulty in finding a new candidate to replace Cheetham. He announced his retirement at the beginning of 1895 but no new candidate had been chosen by May 1895 and the Oldham Liberals were growing alarmed. In an anonymous letter published on the 6th May, 1895 in the Chronicle,[1] the writer declared his surprise that no names had been announced at the half yearly meeting of the Liberal Union[2] held at the end of April and criticised the Liberal Executive which appeared "to be like so many Rip Van Winkles". A further letter[3] suggested that Alfred Emmott, a leading local Liberal would make an ideal candidate. The Conservatives rejoiced at this lack of preparedness with an election in the offing.[4] It was not until the 1st July,[5] sixteen

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 6th May, 1895.
2. Vide p.238.
3. Ibid 8th May, 1895.
4. Oldham Daily Standard 25th June, 1895.
5. Oldham Evening Chronicle 2nd July, 1895.

days before the election, that the Liberal's choice was announced. On the 24th June a deputation went to see the party leaders in London before the final choice was made.[1] Ascroft, one of the new Conservative candidates, suggested that the deputation had been sent to London to see if the Liberal Whips could find a suitable candidate since they were unable to find a local man.[2] At a meeting of the Council of the Oldham Liberal Registration Association Adam Lee a local coalmerchant, "the political coalman" as Oswald, the other Conservative candidate, called him, was adopted as the new candidate. His working class background was stressed by the Liberals to counter the Labour Party's criticism that the candidates of the two traditional parties could not be supported by the working class. Albert Marcroft,[3] a prominent Liberal writing in 1913 with an intimate knowledge of Liberal affairs, claimed that there were divisions within the Liberal ranks over this choice, but there is little evidence to support this. Nevertheless the late introduction of the second candidate must have had a bearing on the election.,

The Conservative's chose their candidates in good time at the beginning of 1893. James F. Oswald Q.C., was

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 25th June, 1895.
2. Oldham Daily Standard 28th June, 1895.
3. A. Marcroft Landmarks in Local Liberalism, p. 145.

the senior candidate and completely unknown to Oldham. He was attacked as a "carpet bagger". The second candidate was Robert Ascroft, a very popular local solicitor. He was the legal adviser to the Card and Blowing Room Association and had played a leading part in bringing the twenty week lockout in 1892 to a satisfactory conclusion. The employers began a lockout in October 1892 to enforce a 5% wage reduction. Never before, claimed Thomas Ashton, at that time Secretary of the Oldham Operative Cotton Spinners Association, had a union had such a large number of its members out of work for such a long time in receipt of lockout pay, as had the Card and Blowing Room Association. The lockout pay was 2/6d. per man a week with 3d. for each child under 10. A woman member received 2/0d. whilst a girl member received 1/6d. The local Relief Committee investigated many cases of semi-starvation.[1] Ascroft drew up proposals which led to a joint conference in March 1893, at the Brooklands Hotel, Brooklands, Cheshire, which resulted in a compromise, the so called "Brooklands Agreement". A 2.91% reduction was accepted by both sides and three courts were set up to deal with future disputes. The popularity which resulted from this intervention on behalf of the working class, undoubtedly helped Ascroft to gain the head of the poll. He died in 1899 and in 1903 a statue to his memory was unveiled in

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1. Bateson A Centenary History of Oldham, p. 179.

Alexandra Park[1] bearing the inscription, "The People's Friend".

By 1895 the country was tired of the Liberals with their unpopular measures such as Harcourt's Local Veto Bill, and their failure to give expression to imperialism which was becoming popular at this time.[2] The limited appeal of the Liberals and the wider appeal of the Conservatives was reflected in the candidates' addresses.

Hibbert's address, published on 3rd July, 1895,[3] was brief. He reaffirmed his belief in civil, religious and commercial freedom and home rule. He declared his support for local veto and the abolition of the Indian import tariff. Lee's address, published on the same day, put the abolition of the Indian tariff near the bottom of the list. At the top stood home rule. He supported the Employers' Liability Bill of 1894 as passed by the Home of Commons and without the changes imposed by the House of Lords.[4] He favoured disestablishment in

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1. Laid out 1863 - 65 to provide work for the unemployed during the cotton famine.
2. Ensor op. cit., p. 221.
3. Oldham Evening Chronicle 5th July, 1895.
4. Asquith's Employer's Liability Bill 1894, was killed by the Lords by the insertion of a contracting out clause.

England and Wales and an eight hour day for mine workers, the local veto, shorter residence qualification for the franchise the ending of plural voting, shorter parliaments and the holding of elections on one day. He wanted to see the taxing of ground rents and mining royalties and the cheaper transfer of land. Following his support for the abolition of the Indian tariff, he appealed for the reform of the House of Lords in order to take away its veto,

The Conservative addresses were much fuller, covering a wide range of subjects, and had a popular ring. Oswald's address was published on 28th June.[1] He appealed as a Unionist for the unity of the Empire and justice for Ireland. He opposed disestablishment and disendowment and appealed for public aid to voluntary schools to help religious education. Local veto, he claimed, would create an illicit source of supply[2] and make compensation dependent on the vote of a "prejudiced and inconsiderate majority". Trade and commerce he said were of deep concern, especially in Oldham and he attacked unfair competition in the shape of import duties and hostile tariffs which ought to be resisted. He urged that new markets abroad should be developed, railways extended to

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 5th July, 1895.

2. Presumably Oswald envisaged a problem similar to that of the U.S.A. during the prohibition period.

open up these markets, and the need of a powerful army and navy to protect trade. Labour disputes he pointed out hindered trade and he approved the establishment of Conciliation and Arbitration Boards. He declared his support for the humanising of the poor law and the establishment of a pension scheme for disabled workers working through the Friendly Societies to which the working class owed so much. Ascroft's address, published on the 28th June, began by declaring that the cotton question must take precedence over all others. He commented on the unsatisfactory state of the textile industry and demanded the immediate abolition of the Indian import duties. He demanded also rating relief for cotton factories and urged the development of railways in India and Africa to open up new markets. The Employers Liability Bill he said, must give the greatest possible protection and he urged a reduction of hours of work. He stressed his connection with the local cotton unions and his share in the settlement of trade disputes. He favoured reform of the House of Lords and public support for voluntary schools and opposed the weakening of the churches. On the local veto issue he declared himself opposed to interference with people's livelihoods.

The election campaign developed into a duel between Hibbert and Ascroft over the cotton question. Hibbert claimed that there were other matters equally as important as trade to be taken into consideration, whilst Ascroft denied this. He even went so far as to suggest that a trade party should be set up in Lancashire.

Hibbert had since 1872 been a member of the Liberal administrations as Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board 1872 - 1874 and 1880 - 1883. In 1883 he became Under Secretary to the Home Office in 1884 Financial Secretary to the Treasury and in 1885 and again in 1892 Secretary to the Admiralty. This put him in an awkward position when the question of the abolition of the Indian duties, which were so harmful to the trade of Oldham, was brought up by Sir Henry James. He could not vote against the government, nor could be vote against his constituent's interests, so he abstained. He defended his action at the meeting at the Town Hall under the chairmanship of Adam Lee on 9th April, 1895.[1] On 3rd July[2] at the Co-operative Hall, the chairman on this occasion being Alfred Emmott, Hibbert declared that, whilst trade was important it was not the only question that should be considered. "Where would this country have been," he said, "if this bread and butter policy, as I call it, had been carried out?". The Liberal party, he continued, stood for a wide platform of civil, religious and commercial liberty. As to the Indian tariff, he declared that he would support its abolition when India's financial position permitted. Again on 8th July,[3] at

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 10th April, 1895.
2. Oldham Chronicle 6th July, 1895.
3. Oldham Evening Chronicle 9th July, 1895.

Hollinwood, he said that there were great questions besides trade and that he had done as much as anyone in his position could have done about the Indian tariff.

All this gave plenty of ammunition to the Conservatives, particularly Ascroft. At a meeting at the Theatre Royal on the 4th July[1] Oswald posed and answered the question, "What does a starving man care about a vote? You must give him his bread and butter first". Ascroft declared quite openly that trade was the most important problem to be considered despite Hibbert's protestations. In reply to Hibbert's question of the 3rd of July, he said that if a "bread and butter policy" had been followed, there would have been double the number of mules and spindles in Oldham and machinery would not have been sent abroad to India, China and Japan, and there would not have been thousands of young operatives without hope of employment. To illustrate Hibbert's desertion of his constituents over the Indian tariff, he told the well known local story of the man who, whilst travelling to Ashton from Oldham with six pigs, called at the Half Way House, and had them surreptitiously changed for six puppies. On the return journey the reverse happened and the puppies were exchanged for pigs. His astonishment on reaching Oldham prompted him to exclaim, "Pigs in Oldham, dogs in Ashton! " Such a man, said Ascroft, was Hibbert, one thing in Oldham, another in

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 5th July, 1895.

London.

The vote of confidence in Oswald and Ascroft at that meeting, claimed the Standard illustrated the feeling of the electors over the trade question. The Liberal government had worked for disestablishment the dismemberment of the Empire and harassed the liquor industry which employed thousandsof people and provided a large amount of taxation.

Such was the background to the narrow Conservative victory of the 15th July, 1895. Ascroft took the lead with 13,085, Oswald came second with 12,465, followed by Lee, 12,249 and Hibbert 12,092. This was Hibbert's last contest, he retired from politics and he died in 1908. Thus for the second time, the first in 1847, Oldham rejected a veteran politician.

In 1899 a new force came on to the political scene in the person Alfred Emmott and with him came a greater stability in politics.

The Emmott family came to Oldham in 1823 from Keighley. George Emmot was a joiner and cabinet maker, but in 1825 he became an employee of the newly formed Gas and Water Company. He eventually rose to be head engineer and retired in 1865. His son, Thomas, became a cotton spinner and opened his own business in 1847 which rapidly became one of the largest concerns of the district. Alfred Emmott,[1] Thomas Emmott's son was born in 1858 and was educated at the Society of Friends schools at Kendal and Grove House Tottenham and London University before entering the family business. Though

1. Marcroft op. cit., p. 217 - 9.
Emmott Papers, obituary notices December 1926.

brought up as a Quaker he later became a member of the Church of England. In 1883 he became Liberal Councillor for Mumps Ward and in 1887 Alderman for Waterhead Ward. Between 1891 and 1892 he was Mayor and he retired from the Council in 1895. He was an active member of the Oldham Chamber of Commerce and the Oldham Master Cotton Spinners Association and took a leading part in the Liberal Party organisation. He was actively connected with the Liberal Union declining its Presidency in 1883, but becoming Treasurer in 1885. Between 1895 and 1899 he was President of the Liberal Registration Association. In 1899 he became Liberal member of Parliament for Oldham and the leading figure in the political life of Oldham, holding the seat for twelve years.

Oswald, because of ill health, did not prove to be a very active member of Parliament and it was claimed by the Liberals in 1899 that his resignation had long been in the hands of the local executive. The Conservatives as after their double victory in 1874, again became complacent and began to look for a replacement for Oswald without any sense of urgency. Ascroft approached Winston Churchill in May 1899[1]

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1. W. Churchill, My Early Life, Chapter XVII.

about the possibility of his becoming the second Conservative candidate at the next election. Churchill expressed surprise that the invitation should have been so informal. The sudden death of Ascroft on 19th June at the age of fifty-two and the decision of the Conservative Central Office to fight both seats, caught the Conservatives completely unprepared. Churchill was immediately selected on 23rd June, 1899.[1] He was officially adopted at a meeting of the General Council of the Conservative Party at the Central Conservative Club, Union Street, on 24th June.[2] At this meeting James Mawdsley, the General Secretary of the Operative Cotton Spinners Amalgamation, was brought forward as the second candidate. The selection of Mawdsley was a surprise to the whole borough and was a very sudden choice. Mawdsley did not address the meeting for he had only just been given permission to stand by the Union and had had no time to prepare an address. Both Conservative choices, "the original and the after thought"[3] were confirmed at a public meeting on the same evening.

At first sight the Conservatives appeared, despite the hurried selection, to be in a strong position. In

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1. Oldham Chronicle 24th June, 1899.
2. Ibid 26th June, 1899.
3. Oldham Evening Chronicle 27th June, 1899.

Mawdsley they had a working class candidate and in Churchill, an illustrious name, always popular with the Lancashire working man. The 1899 election, claimed the Standard,[1] marked a new era in politics with, " a Marlborough and a spinner" in double harness. This was a combination it was claimed, which had cheered the Conservatives and administered a stunning blow to the Liberals. In fact the strength of the candidates was more apparent than real, Churchill was inexperienced and Mawdsley was controversial.[2] Churchill engaged in an exchange of differences with S.H. Watts, a leading Conservative and a staunch churchman, on a public platform in Shaw in January 1899.[3] Watts said that he wanted no interference with the ritualists who were doing good work in slum districts. Churchill interrupted declaring that he did not agree and he had to be restrained by other members of the platform party. Mawdsley not only caused dismay amongst the Conservatives,[4]

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1. Oldham Standard 1st July, 1899.
2. Peter de Mendelssohn, The Age of Churchill, Heritage and Adventure 1874 - 1911, Thames and Hudson, 1961, p. 136.
3. Oldham Evening Chronicle 29th June, 1899.
4. W. Churchill, op. cit., Chpt. XVII.

not least Robert Whittaker[1] the President of the Conservative General Council, but many Union members were unsure of the desirability of the action which Mawdsley was taking. The decision of the Union to allow Mawdsley leave of absence to enable him to stand as a candidate was not unanimous. Out of 130 members entitled to vote on this matter, 59 were for, 37 were against whilst the remaining 34 abstained.[2] A special meeting of the Royton Branch of the Oldham Operative Cotton Spinners Association the backbone of the Amalgamation, passed a resolution protesting against the leave of absence, on the grounds that the Union ought to keep out of politics, by 107 to 54 votes.[3] The Chronicle[4] wrote scathingly of the Spinners' Secretary being out on hire to the Conservatives. Fred Maddison, Labour Member of Parliament for Sheffield, declared Mawdsley a danger to his class.[5]

The Liberals with their selection were in a much stronger position. Determined not to be caught unprepared as in 1895, Emmott, their replacement for Oswald, though

1. Oldham Chronicle 28th June, 1899.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 26th June, 1899.
3. Ibid 4th July, 1899.
4. Ibid 25th June, 1899.
5. Oldham Chronicle 1st July, 1899.

not officially adopted until 27th June, 1899[1] had been nursing the borough unofficially for many months. Adam Lee had been approached to stand again as a candidate[2] or suggest a candidate as strong. It was he who had suggested Emmott. Churchill recognised the strength of Emmott, "wealthy, experienced, in the prime of life, woven into the texture of the town, with abilitities which afterwards raised him to high official rank, at the head of the popular party in opposition to the government, he was an antagonist not easily to be surpassed".[3] The second Liberal candidate was Walter Runciman, a Newcastle shipowner who had failed to gain a seat at Gravesend in 1898. He inevitably came under fire from the Conservatives as a carpet bagger and a "political Don Juan",[4] but it was claimed by the Liberals that they had been in communication with Runciman for a long time and that they had invited him to stand long before Ascroft's death.[5]

Emmott's address published on 27th June, 1899[5] was a comprehensive survey of his views which he summed up as fair dealing abroad and social amelioration at home. He rejoiced that the Conservatives had at last summoned up

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 27th June, 1899.
2. Ibid 8th July, 1899.
3. W. Churchill op . cit., Chpt. XVII.
4. Oldham Daily Standard 27th June, 1899.
5. Oldham Evening Chronicle 28th June, 1899.

enough courage to make use of Oswald's resignation. He attacked Conservative foreign policy as lacking in foresight and vacillating, dictated by Jingoism and the spirit of surrender. The Indian import duty which had been denounced in 1895 was still pressing on Lancashire's trade and ought to be repealed at the first opportunity. The Empire should be consolidated and developed rather than extended and the army and navy made fit to meet any calls that might be made upon it. He approved of the Hague Peace Conference as beginning a new era in international relations. On the home rule question he claimed that the Conservative's Local Government Act[1] would prove the ability of the Irish to govern themselves. As a member of the Church of England he considered that the best interests of the church would be served by disestablishment. He approved of the Sunday closing of public houses and local control of the liquor trade. Education was of great interest to Emmott and he devoted much attention to it. He claimed that the quarrels between Board and voluntary schools led to much waste and inefficiency, and proposed the extension of Board Schools to those districts where children were forced to attend schools of an unacceptable denomination and financial support to voluntary schools coupled with effective popular control. The government he

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1. The Local Government Act of 1898 vested all local government in popularly elected bodies. Vide P.S. O'Hegarty, A History of Ireland under the Union 1801-1922, Methuen, 1952, p.608.

said had done nothing to honour its pledges about old age pensions[1] and housing the poor and he advocated the extension of compensation for accidents to the industries not included in the existing acts.[2] He advocated extensive electoral reform with the appointment of paid registration officials, a shorter qualifying period, one man one vote, the payment of members, the payment of official election expenses out of public funds and the restriction of the House of Lords veto. He opposed the Agricultural Rating Act which granted relief to agriculture but to no other industries, the reduction of the Sinking Fund and approved the taxation of land values. Commenting on Emmott's address the Standard[3]

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1. Following the report of the Liberal appointed Royal Commission on the Aged Poor in 1895, the Conservative government appointed a Committee on Old Age Pensions in 1896. It failed to reach agreement on a suitable scheme. Another enquiry was set on foot in 1899 at the instigation of Chamberlain but its recommendations could not be put into practice because of the Boer War.

2. The Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897, made amends for what the Lords had done in 1894, (vide p.171 footnote). Chamberlain enacted simply that accidents which occurred in an industry must be paid for by that industry. It did not however extend to seamen, domestic servants and agricultural labourers.

3. Oldham Daily Standard 27th June, 1899.

wrote that it was a blind, unreasoning Liberal address which condemned the government without putting forward arguments to support the condemnation. Runciman's address, published on the same day, accused the Conservatives of increasing the interests of the privileged classes and failing to fulfil their election pledges and condemned the extravagance of the government with its unnecessary gifts to landlords and the clergy.[1] He favoured disestablishment and opposed any efforts to add to the endowment of the Church out of public funds. The Commons he said should not be subservient to the Lords. His trading interests he said were similar to those of Oldham and he would work for an improvement in trade. His views on Ireland, temperance, electoral reform and foreign policy were identical with those of Emmott and he appealed like Emmott for an extension of the national education system to develop the intellectual, moral and industrial life of the people.

Emmott's foreign and imperial policy was amplified at a meeting on 27th June at a meeting at Unity Hall.[2] He declared himself a "Sane Imperialist" and regarded the

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1. A reference to the Agricultural Rating Bill and the Clerical Tithes Bill, a Conservative measure aimed at easing the lot of the poor clergy affected by the slump in wheat prices of the middle nineties upon which their stipends were based. The nonconformist Liberals attacked this.

2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 28th June, 1899.

British Empire as the best governed empire in the civilised world. He preached justice towards the weaker nations and firmness towards the stronger. Criticising Conservative foreign policy he pointed to their failure to uphold Britain's interests in the border disputes between British Guiana and Venezuala, the loss of trading rights in Madagascar following French annexation in 1896, the loss of territory in Siam, a disadvantageous treaty with Tunis, failure to take action against Turkey following the Armenian massacres in 1896, the acquisition of Chinese ports by Germany. (Kiao - chan) and Russia (Port Arthur) and Salisbury's reluctance to settle the dispute between Germany and Turkey over Crete without the assistance of the other powers. Any credit for the reconquest of the Sudan, he claimed, belonged to Kitchener rather than the government. On the 29th June at Royton Liberal Club[1] he spoke further of education, pointing to the superior systems of the U.S.A. and Germany which, he claimed, were responsible for the industrial and commercial development of these countries. The money spent on the army and navy to defend trade would be better spent on education to increase trade. Runciman, at the meeting at Unity Hall,[2] returned to the Agricultural Rating Bill and the Clerical Tithes Bill. Agriculture he claimed was not the only depressed industry which deserved

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 30th June, 1899.
2. Ibid 28th June, 1899.

relief. The "Clerical Doles Bill" he said would give £87,000 to ten or eleven thousand Church of England clergy, about £8 per head. This, he claimed, could have been found by the Church. Again on 27th June at Greenacres,[1] Runciman criticised the government for failing to honour its pledges. Two thirds of the present Parliament's life had passed and old age pensions were no nearer than the appointment of a Royal Commission, whilst compensation for workmen still did not apply to all workers.

Churchill's address was published on 24th June, 1899.[2] He declared himself a "Tory Democrat", a supporter of the constitution and in favour of the improvement of the condition of the people, particularly the provision of old age pensions. The introduction of Mawdsley as a Conservative candidate he claimed was an act of national importance, strengthening the friendship between Conservatism and labour. Mawdsley would give him information about local industrial questions and he would act closely with him. Throughout the campaign Churchill claimed that he was taking over Ascroft's role and that his motto would be "something for Oldham". The home rule issue was withdrawn from the political arena for the time being but he warned that it would re-appear. Church discipline[3] figures largely in his address and subsequent speeches. The strength of the Church of England he claimed was its toleration but extremist clergy were taking

1. Oldham Chronicle 1st July, 1899.
2. Oldham Daily Standard 1st July, 1899.
3. The rapid spread of ritualism within the Church of England during the eighties and nineties brought to prominence the problem of discipline with the Church.

advantage of this and introducing alien ceremonies and practices. Existing ecclesiastical machinery had failed to deal with this indiscipline and it ought to be replaced. On the drink question he followed the by now traditional Conservative policy and opposed local veto. Conservative foreign policy he claimed needed no vindication and had resulted in prosperous trade. He made no reference to the "Clerical Doles Bill" in his address. Churchill reluctantly supported this Conservative measure though he would have preferred grants to all religious denominations according to their size.[1] This unorthodox attitude was not popular with his committee but the Bill was so unpopular in Oldham that half way through the campaign he declared his opposition to it.[2] Mawdsley's address published on the same day was brief, he had had little time to prepare, and was concerned mainly with social issues.He appealed for old age pensions, an eight hour day for miners and an extension of compensation for accidents at work. He opposed the local veto on the grounds that depriving people of free will was a greater evil than drink

1. It is difficult to arrive at the exact sizes of the denominations in Oldham. An indication is however given by the distribution of representatives on the Board. In 1871 when the first Board was formed in Oldham there was no election and as a result of an agreement between the religious groups, places on the Board were allocated according to the size of the denominations. There were six Church of England members, six Dissenters and one Roman Catholic. Throughout the life of the School Board, even when elections took place, the Board remained balanced.

2. W. Churchill op. cit.

He looked to a foreign policy which would develop trade.

Emmott criticised Mawdsley's address on the grounds that it said little about trade, particularly the ruinous Indian tariff. Mawdsley replied at a meeting at the Theatre Royal on 27th June[1] that the Liberals' reference to this tariff was unfortunate since they had imposed it in the first place. Returning to foreign policy he said that trade, particularly the cotton trade, depended on colonies. In the five months ending May 1898, 1,430 million yards out of 2,218 million yards of cotton cloth produced, went to the colonies.

Strong candidates and party organisation won the day for the Liberals. Emmott headed the pol with 12,976 votes and thus established himself as Oldham's senior representative. Runciman came second with 12,770, followed by Churchill, 11,477, and Mawdsley 11,449. The Conservatives had been affected by their usual over confidence which followed the victory in 1895. The Standard[2] put its finger on the fault when it pointed out the Liberals' anticipation of Oswald's resignation and the fact that they had kept their organisation in a state of perfection with a candidate, Emmott, picked well in advance. They were on the

1. Oldham Daily Standard 28th June, 1899.
2. Ibid 8th July, 1899.

alert. The Conservative Manchester Courier[1] wrote of the attacks on Mawdsley and the failure of the Conservative organisation despite the efforts of a faithful few. It claimed that since 1895 the party had relied on the personal prestige of Ascroft.[2]

When Churchill returned to Oldham in 1900 he was no longer an unknown quantity, relying for prestige on his family connections. His escapades in South Africa, his capture and dramatic escape aided by Mr. Dewsnap, an Oldham engineer, caught the imagination of the patriotic of Oldham. His popularity was unquestionable. He made a triumphal entry into Oldham in September 1900 in a procession of ten landaus with a band playing, "See the Conquering Hero Comes".[3] Reports of meetings mention, "a vast sea of human faces", "magnificent enthusiasm". At a meeting at the Lees Co-operative Hall on 24th September, 1900,[4] every available seat was taken well before time and patriotic songs were sung until the meeting began. A meeting at the Empire Theatre addressed

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1. Quoted Oldham Daily Standard 7th July, 1899.
2. For a fuller account of the 1899 election see Trevor Park, unpublished mss. Sheffield University.
3. W. Churchill op. cit., Chapter XVII. Bateson op. cit., p.181.
4. Oldham Daily Standard 25th September, 1900.

by Chamberlain was packed, "from floor to ceiling". "The siege of the Empire" began before 5. 0 p.m. and the doors were closed at 6. 30 p.m. with 5,000 inside the building and many thousands outside. Again patriotic songs were sung to pass the time.[1] Yet even enjoying such immense popularity Churchill could not shake Emmott's hold over the borough, coming only second to Emmott in September 1900. The Liberals were unimpressed by Churchill's candidature. The Chronicle[2] wrote that a man who could write admirably of "My Adventures in Cuba, the Sudan and the Transvaal" would not necessarily benefit the working class.

Mawdsley's candidature had patently failed in 1899 and in 1900 Churchill's colleague was Charles B. Crisp a London financier. The Liberals were again represented by Emmott and Runciman.

The dissolution of October 1900 was an attempt to take advantage of the patriotism engendered by the war. The issue was presented by the Conservatives as support for them being support for the nation and the army, whilst support fo the Liberals was support for the Boers. The Liberals were represented as pacifists and pro - Boers and it was

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 26th September, 1900.

2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 19th September, 1900.

claimed by the Conservatives that the Boers were holding on, hoping for a Liberal victory at the election.[1] The Liberals warned that the election was a means of covering up the neglect of the past five years and criticised Conservative handling of the South African problem.

A controversy carried on in the columns of the Chronicle and Standard[2] between Churchill and Jackson Brierley, the Liberal Mayor of Oldham 1898 to 1899, illustrates the differences, as popularly presented, between the Conservatives and the Liberals. In a speech made in mid August 1900 Churchill accused Jackson Brierley of proposing to the Watch Committee that an Oldham policeman, P.C. Coltman, who had been called up as a reservist, should lose his pay. On the 29th August Jackson Brierley wrote to Churchill refuting the charge and referred him to a report of the Watch Committee proceedings dated 26th October, 1899. Jackson Brierley had in fact proposed that P.C. Coltman's family should be supported during his absence. This was agreed upon and had become established practice. Churchill replied on the 5th September, 1900. He agreed that his statement had been incorrect but he too referred to a report of the Watch Committee proceedings of 11th October, 1899, when Jackson Brierley had said that P.C. Coltman should have more sense than to enlist and that soldiers were

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 13th September, 1900.
2. For a complete account see Oldham Evening Chronicle 11th September, 1900.

"pensioned killers" who expected to have their jobs kept open for them. He voted against P.C. Coltman's position being kept for him. This interchange damaged the Liberals cause. The Chronicle remained quiet on this matter and tried to interpret Jackson Brierley's dislike of soldiers as deep concern that the police force should not become a military organisation.

The Liberal campaign took the war enthusiasm of Oldham into account and steered a cautious course, supporting the war but criticising its conduct, taking care that no charges of pro-Boer sympathy could be levelled against them. On 17th September, 1900[1], Captain Renton, who had taken part in the relief of Mafeking, spoke at a Liberal meeting at the Hill Stores. This invitation was undoubtedly a feeble attempt to identify Liberalism with the government's policy in South africa in order to offset Churchill's popularity. Captain Renton, criticising the Conservative motive in the timing of the election, began by declaring that whilst khaki served as camouflage in the veldt it stood out against a background of black deeds. The government had drifted into a war, he said, without preparation which should have been ended in three months. The Liberals he stressed, contrary to Conservative claims, did not want to hand the Transvaal and Orange Free State back to the Boers. Emmott at a meeting on 12th September, 1900[2] at the

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 18th September, 1900.
2. Ibid 13th September, 1900.

Co-operative Hall, King Street said that he belonged neither to that school which considered the war to be inevitable nor to the school which considered it to be avoidable but believed that since it had broken out it should be finished as quickly as possible. He had been accused by Churchill, he said, of changing his views on the war issue for the purpose of the election. This said Emmott, was a charge which came ill from Churchill who had "wobbled" over the Tithes Bill in 1899.[1]

Emmott's address, published on 21st September, 1900, continued this cautious theme. He supported the government in its policy of bringing the war to a speedy and victorious end but he criticised the government for pushing negotiations to a dangerous extreme whilst the country was unprepared for war. The Boers he claimed had been underestimated and had been fought by too few men who were badly equipped. Consequently there had been much unnecessary waste in money and lives and he advocated sweeping army reform. He approved the annexation of the Boer provinces but stressed that the government must keep its pledges to grant self-government. Passing to other matters he criticised the timing of the election declaring that it should not have taken place until the new register had come into force. He contrasted

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1. Oldham Chronicle 22nd September, 1900.

the present haste to hold an election with the two year's delay during Oswald's illness. India should have been helped during the recent famine by a grant from the Imperial fund. The educational facilities of the state must be increased or Great Britain would lose its race with other industrial nations. He re-affirmed his belief in home rule, and the reduction of the power of the House of Lords and pointed out that nothing had been done about old age pensions. He again opposed the Agricultural Rating Act, which was due for renewal, as giving relief to the landlord and being unfair to towns. Runciman in his address, pointed out that the Conservatives were relying for election on the achievements of soldiers. Like Emmott he accused the government of blundering into a war for which it was not prepared, its mistakes being retrieved by the army. He stressed the need for a just settlement in South Africa and army reform, mentioning in particular the findings of the Army Contracts Committee. He again opposed the Agricultural Rating Act which would cost Oldham £8,000, and the "Clerical Doles Bill". He bemoaned the loss of Britain's trading position, pointing in particular to the loss to Russia of trading interests in China. This country's failure to help India he regarded as a dereliction of Imperial duty. He appealed for housing for the poor, registration reform to give one man one vote, reform of the House of Lords and public payment of election expenses.

Churchill at a meeting at the Co-operative Hall on the 19th September, 1900[1] said that Liberal policy was that the

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 20th September, 1900.

war was unjust and unnecessary, extolling the virtues of Kruger and condemning Chamberlain's provocation. The present Liberal candidates however had rejected the Liberal party line on the war and followed the Conservative line. This was the origin of references to turtle, the Conservative candidates following Conservative policy, and mock turtle, Liberal candidates pretending to follow Conservative policy.

Churchill's undated address[1] stated quite clearly that the country had been fighting a just, righteous and inevitable war with the Boers and that the votes cast at the election would either ratify or condemn the policy of the government and the work of the soldiers. He also claimed that Chamberlain would be a better man to negotiate the peace than Harcourt. In answer to criticism of the government's conduct of the war he pointed out the tremendous task of transporting 200,000 men, 7,000 miles and keeping them supplied in an inhospitable country and turned to the Liberal failures in South Africa in 1881, when the army fought the Boers in red coats, and in the Sudan, with the murder of Gordon. Turning to domestic matters he warned that if the Liberals came to power their policies of home rule and reform of the House of Lords would so weaken the Empire and divide society that social reform would be held up for a long time.

1. Oldham Daily Standard 22nd September, 1900.

Peace he maintained was best achieved by preparation for war and he advocated reform of the army based on volunteers and the enlistment of the strength of the colonies to aid in the defence of the Empire. He briefly mentioned the need for new markets, old age pensions, simpler property transfer, an extension of compensation and a third member of parliament for Oldham. Crisp declared[1] that there were three main questions to be answered. Shall there be a permanent settlement in South Africa? Was the war a righteous war? Has the blood of gallant troops been shed in vain? The war he claimed was a natural consequence of Liberal policies and if the Liberals were returned, the war would continue. The return of the Conservatives on the other hand would ensure continuity of policy. He advocated the consolidation and extension of trade with the Empire, army reform, maintenance of the establishment, sound temperance reform and the establishment of peace between capital and labour.

The last word was said by Chamberlain when he visited the Empire Theatre on 25th September, 1900[2] when he summed up the election campaign as, "The fight for the flag". Even this however, linked with the personal popularity of Churchill could not shake Emmott's hold

1. Oldham Daily Standard 22nd September, 1900.
2. Ibid 26th September, 1900.

over the borough. The result was close but Emmott headed the poll with 12,947 votes whilst Churchill came second with 12,931. Runciman gained 12,709 votes whilst Crisp finished at the bottom of the poll with 12,522 votes.

The burning issue of the 1906 General Election was that of protection as opposed to free trade, a question which greatly aroused public opinion and changed party loyalties as the home rule question had in 1886. Tariff reform began as a means of unifying the Empire but protection for the Empire's sake, quickly became protection for its own sake to protect British industry faced with hostile foreign tariffs and unfair competition. The issue was sparked off by the Colonial Conference of July 1902 when the colonies represented,[1] acquiring a sense of colonial nationhood following their exploits in the Boer War, began to display centrifugal tendencies. One of the few points of agreement was over trade and resolutions were passed favouring the principle of imperial preference. Chamberlain declared his secession from free trade and his belief in imperial preference on 15th May, 1903 and split the Conservative party. The rank and file supported Chamberlain, the leaders opposed him. Throughout the summer of 1903 Balfour struggled to keep the party united and put forward a compromise[2] by

1. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Cape Colony and Natal.

2. A.J. Balfour, Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade, September 1903.

which the government should be empowered to force down foreign tariffs by means of retaliatory duties. Chamberlain however resigned on 16th September, 1903 and began forcefully to preach the gospel of imperial preference. A Tariff Reform League was formed, to supply funds for the campaign, and a Tariff Commission to supply facts and propaganda. By the 14th November, 1905 he had gained the support of the National Union of Conservative Associations. Earlier however the Chamberlainites and Balfourites had agreed on a compromise drawn up by Balfour in January 1905 which included duties to be used for negotiation and retaliation, duties to stop dumping and the calling of a new Colonial Conference to discuss closer commercial union. This temporarily, if unconvincingly, united the party and the Conservatives entered the election of 1906 after a long period in office during which they had been associated with many unpopular measures, including the employment of Chinese labour in the Transvaal and the scandal of the war contracts, as a divided group.

The national picture was faithfully mirrored in Oldham. There too, imperial preference captured the Conservative party and its organisation and there too the party was divided over this issue. Churchill refused to abandon free trade and moved over to the Liberal point of view. On 23rd December, 1903[1] the Executive Committee

1. Oldham Daily Standard 24th December, 1903.

of the Oldham Conservative Registration Association which was firm in its support of imperial preference, passed a unanimous resolution that Churchill had lost the confidence of the Association and sent it to Churchill.[1] At a further meeting on 7th January, 1904, Churchill's reply was read in which he said that he had no intention of relying on the Association for assistance in the future, or on any similar organisation which was protectionist in character. He pointed out that when he fought and won the 1900 election for the Conservatives in Oldham, the Conservatives had been a free trade party. The chairman of the Association, JamesTravis-Clegg, urged that there should be no split in the party over this issue, but even at that meeting the split in the Conservatives' ranks was becoming apparent. A vote of no confidence in the Secretary of the Association, Fred Brierley, a free trader, was passed. It was claimed that he had kept information from the Association and called meetings without authority, but there can be little doubt that the real reason was disagreement over imperial preference. Samuel Smethurst, another leading member of the Executive, left the Association and steps were taken to form a Free Trade League to counteract the influence of the Fiscal Reform

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 8th January, 1904.

Committee which had been formed. Churchill wrote to Travis-Clegg on 4th April, 1904[1] offering to resign his seat, but was urged not to since the Conservatives were reluctant to contest a by-election at that time. A fortnight later, on 19th April, 1904,[2] his candidature as a Liberal for North West Manchester was announced. Crisp, who had continued as the Conservative candidate after his defeat in 1900, withdrew in September, 1903[3] owing to a misunderstanding. He disagreed with Churchill over imperial preference and was under the impression that Churchill's views were shared by the party organisation. He withdrew to prevent a division in the Conservative ranks. Thus at the beginning of 1904 the Conservatives of Oldham were a divided party with no candidates.

Immediately a search for a new candidate was begun. In May 1904[4] Edwin Leach Hartley, a barrister whose family owned cotton mills in Blackburn and Preston, was approached and officially adopted on 17th June, 1904. Crisp was contacted again in early June 1904 when the misunderstanding had been cleared up, but he was ill and

1. Oldham Daily Standard 11th April, 1904.
2. Ibid 19th April, 1904.
3. Letter Crisp to Samuel Smethurst Oldham Daily Standard 15th October, 1903.
4. Ibid 25th November, 1905.

holidaying in Italy. The choice finally fell on Charles L. Samson of Manchester, who was adopted on 23rd September, 1904. By the end of 1904 it seemed that the unpromising position at the beginning of the year had been retrieved but on 16th November, 1905, just two months before the election, Samson resigned his candidature because of the pressure of his business commitments. This was a blow to the Conservatives. The Executive Committee of the Registration Association was a hive of activity in late November and early December 1905. At a meeting of the General Council of the Registration Association on 22nd November,[1] at the Central Conservative Club, Samson's resignation was announced and it was urged that a new candidate should be selected as soon as possible so that he could tour the clubs and become known to the workers. Earlier on 18th November 1905,[2] at a meeting of the Executive Committee, Travis-Clegg had been approached but he was already a candidate for Stalybridge and Dukinfield. A deputation went to Crisp on 4th December, 1905[3] who finally accepted. He was officially re-adopted by the General Council on the 8th December, 1905.

Runciman also did not continue as the Liberal candidate, having become the Liberal member for Dewsbury

1. Oldham Daily Standard 25th November, 1905.
2. Ibid 21st November, 1905.
3. Ibid 2nd December, 1905.

in 1902, and the Liberals did not immediately set about choosing a replacement. Instead they gave their support to the Labour candidate, ThomasAshton, a "union of the progressive forces" as Emmott called it. The Liberals were anxious to gain the support of the unions in return for Liberal support of the Labour candidate, but this move was not popular throughout the Liberal ranks.[1] In October 1905 however, Ashton fell ill and resigned his candidature. The Labour party went on to look for a replacement but the Liberals, no doubt to heal any division, refused to continue the alliance and looked for a second Liberal candidate. They justified their action by saying that the agreement applied only to Ashton's candidature and they doubted very much if the Labour party could find another suitable candidate.[2] A Liberal selection committee, within the Executive Committee of the Liberal Registration Association was formed and John Albert Bright of Rochdale, the eldest son of John Bright, was chosen on 31st November, 1905.[3] This was a particularly suitable choice considering the issue of the election, since he was intimately linked with the cause of free trade.

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 27th November, 1905.
2. Oldham Chronicle 4th November, 1905.
3. Ibid 1st December, 1905.

The Labour party did fail to select a candidate acceptable to the whole party and so the election was a straight fight between Liberal and Conservative parties. Both parties entered the election with a second candidate introduced late into the contest, but, whilst the Liberals were united in defence of free trade, the Conservatives at both the national and local level were hopelessly divided. This proved to be a decisive factor in the election.

The campaign was fought over four main issues, imperial preference and fiscal reform, "the big loaf and the little loaf", at the centre around which everything revolved, home rule, education and the employment of Chinese labour in South Africa. The Conservatives argued that imperial preference was necessary to protect trade, unite the Empire and relieve the domestic tax burden by making foreign imports pay their share. It was presented not as protection but as free trade within the Empire. They condemned home rule as a threat to imperial unity and state education as a threat to religion. It was on this argument that they appealed to the Catholics. The employment of Chinese labour was defended on the grounds of necessity. The Liberals countered by attacking imperial preference as the thin end of the wedge of protection and also delighted in pointing out the differences between the two Conservative candidates. Home rule was presented simply as a means of giving greater Irish control over domestic affairs.

The Liberals continued to press home their attacks on Chinese labour.

Crisp's address, published on 1st January, 1906[1] only touched on the question of imperial preference. He made a general attack on the Liberal "free food" argument, saying that food was never free and that imperial preference would give cheap food. He called himself a Tory democrat and the Conservative party the progressive party. The political creed of the Liberals, he said, was the worship of cheapness and he pointedout that trade unions were right when they said that fair wages and good markets were more important. He wanted to make Ireland prosperous and put land in the hands of peasant proprietors and pointed to government grants to accomplish this, a benefit which Ireland would not get if it became independent. He also appealed to the Irish on religious grounds, stressing the right of the young to be trained in the religion of their fathers. The attacks on the Church of Wales he said, were carried out by enemies of religion who would in due course attack the Nonconformist church. He concluded by appealing for three members of parliament for Oldham. Hartley declared himself a supporter of the constitutiom and the established church. He applauded the Education Act of 1902 as the greatest advance in educational reform giving an opportunity for the poorest to gain the highest positions in the land. It also gave a fair compromise on

1. Oldham Daily Standard 2nd January, 1906.

religion. He opposed home rule, urged a strong navy and an efficient army, favoured the Trades Dispute Bill, the extension of compensation and the redistribution of seats. On the question of imperial preference he said that foreign goods should be made to contribute to revenue. He was anxious that no tax should be imposed on imported raw material and that the government should have the power to retaliate against countries which attacked home industries by hostile tariffs, dumping and bounties. He concluded by urging a conference with the colonies to devise a scheme for the unification of the Empire and mutual trade.

Crisp expanded his views on imperial preference particularly at an open air meeting on 4th January, 1906.[1] During the past twenty years the produce of the colonies had increased and would continue to increase and it was proposed to give preference to this over foreign manufacturers. Such a move would support the colonies to the detriment of the U.S.A. and Germany. The present taxes which fell mainly on tea, sugar, cocoa, coffee, raisins, beer and tobacco would be reduced, the revenue being recouped by tariffs on foreign commodities. Whilst the Empire had been built on free trade he said, conditions had changed. At that meeting Hartley pointed out that British goods paid 25% tax in Germany and 40% tax in France,

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 4th January, 1906.

whilst the goods of these countries in Great Britain bore no tax. At an earlier meeting on 12th December[1] he said that the income from tariffs would relieve employers of heavy taxation and make possible greater capital growth which in turn would increase employment.

The Conservatives' support for religious education found support from both the established church and the Catholics. The Rev. A.A. Swan[2] at a Conservative meeting at St. Mark's Schoolroom, Heyside on 2nd January, 1906 said that his vote and influence would go to that party which would see justice done to the church schools. To harm these schools would be to harm religion and he urged churchmen, "not to take this lying down". Hussey Walsh, Secretary of the Irish Industries Society of Great Britain, said at the Mechanics Institute at Werneth,[3] a Liberal stronghold, that the most important question of the election was religious liberty and equity. The Liberals he said wanted to destroy Church of England Schools and then, on grounds of complete religious equality, destroy Catholic Schools.

The employment of Chinese labour was stoutly defended by Hartley. He argued that the heavy demand for kaffir

1. Oldham Daily Standard 13th December, 1905.
2. Ibid 3rd January, 1906.
3. Ibid 5th January, 1906.

labour had increased their wages which meant that white men's wages had to be reduced. The introduction of Chinese labour would thus help to safeguard the white man's interest and he believed in looking after his fellow whites first. He also argued that the employment of Chinese created employment for white men, including Lancashire workers, who made machinery for the mines.[1]

The Liberals were anxious to show up the differences between the views of Crisp and Hartley. Crisp in particular was criticised for his inconsistencies. The Chronicle[2] wrote that Crisp claimed to follow both Balfour and Chamberlain but that this was impossible since Balfour was a tree-trader. They portrayed Crisp as staggering like a drunken man between two policemen, a sight, " no more dignified in a politician than in a drunken man". Emmott, speaking at Lees said[2] that Crisp was a supporter of Chamberlain, not Balfour and if returned would be no more help to the party leader than Churchill had been. Hartley on the other hand was not content with either party leader, it appeared, for he put forward a s cheme of his own which belonged to neither Chamberlain nor Balfour.

Emmott's address, published on 1st January, 1906,[3] warned of the disastrous consequences of protection and

1. Oldham Daily Standard 2nd January, 4th January, 1906.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 4th January, 1906.
3. Ibid 4th January, 1906.

preference which would bring friction with foreign powers and damage good understanding with the colonies because of the constant bargaining. He stood first and foremost as a free trader. He supported the Trades Dispute Bill, the extension of compensation for accidents, popular control of education, the abolition of sectarian tests for teachers and popular control of liquor licences. The independent Irish parliament had been raised as a bogey for the purpose of the election to lure people from the real issue, all that he wanted was that Ireland should be given greater control over its own affairs. He appealed for a greater share to be taken by women in local authorities. Bright opposed the re-establishment of protection arguing that a fall in imports would automatically bring a fall in exports and seriously injure Oldham's cotton industry which had been built on free trade. Like Emmott he urged popular control of education and the abolition of sectarian tests and appealed for a clarification of Trade Union law. He favoured reform of the land laws to make landowners contribute to the rates, provide allotments and give greater security to the tenant farmer, and the disestablishment of the Church of England and Wales.

Emmott carried the burden of the early part of the campaign, since Bright was ill and did not appear at meetings until the 8th January. There was great rivalry between the Chronicle and the Standard during the election with accusations that the other was misreporting meetings

to give a false impression of the support at that meeting. When Bright finally appeared he declared that it was about time he came to show that he was still alive or otherwise the Standard might print an account of his funeral. Emmott meanwhile continued to snipe at Conservative policies, imperial preference in particular. Protection, he argued, would increase the cost of production of manufactured goods which would still be sold in competition with foreign goods.[1] He pointed out the difficulty of drawing a line between manufactured goods and raw material, instancing pig iron and steel which, as partly manufactured commodities, would pay duty but which were also a basic raw material.[2] Bright further argued that protection would increase the cost of production and that a fractional rise in the price of yarn would lose markets and the least modern mills would soom be on short time.[3]

A summary of Emmott's attack on the employment of Chinese labour is found in a speech made on 28th December[2] at the St. James' Liberal Club. The government, he said, should have waited until South Africa had responsible

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 21st December, 1905.
2. Ibid 29th December, 1905.
3. Ibid 10th January, 1906.

government before such a step was taken and he criticised the degrading terms by which the Chinese could not buy property, could not enter any other forms of commerce or work and were deported when their term was up. Such terms he said, were not found anywhere else where coolie labour was employed.

The result of the poll on the 15th January, 1906 was a massive victory for the Liberals. At last the Liberals had achieved a breakthrough and had escaped from the relatively narrow majorities which had troubled Oldham politics since 1868. Emmott again headed the poll with 17,397 votes with Bright, carried to victory according to the Conservatives on Emmott's back,[1] coming second with 16,672. Crisp and Hartley lagged behind with 11,989 and 11,391 votes. The Standard[2] admitted that a Liberal majority of 3,000 was not unlikely, but the majority of over 5,000 was a surprise to both friends and opponents. These votes came from Conservatives who had deserted over protection. Liberal canvassers boasted of at least 2,000, Conservative pledges for the Liberal candidates.

The two elections of 1910 completed Emmott's triumph. An experienced politician and parliamentarian, he had been Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and Deputy Speaker since 1906, representing free trade and opposition to the

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 18th January, 1910.

2. Ibid 16th January, 1906.

dictation of the House of Lords, his position was unchallengeable.

In 1909 Lloyd George, attempting to kill two birds with one stone, increase the revenue to meet the cost of old age pensions for which Asquith had underestimated and the Dreadnoughts which public opinion demanded, and challenge the House of Lords which had persistently destroyed Liberal Bills, introduced his controversial budget. He planned to raise more than £14 million by increasing death duties, tobacco and spirit taxes, liquor licence duties and increased income tax and introducing super-tax and a tax on land value which levied a 20% duty on the unearned increment when land changed hands. The Conservatives, divided over tariff reform, had no real leader to preach restraint, took Lloyd George's bait and opposed the budget. Despite warnings from the King, the budget was thrown out of the Lords on 30th November, 1909 and the scene was set for the General Election of January 1910. The Conservatives were in an unenviable position. Emmott put the position well when in December 1909[1] he said that it was the task of the Conservatives to prove that the Lords knew better than the Commons. If he had tried he could not have made a more difficult task for them.

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 8th December, 1909.

There were three new candidates. Bright had not enjoyed good health and consequently had not been in the public eye. The Liberal Executive had known for about a year that he would not present himself for re-election, and a special sub-committee was set up to find a new candidate. Frederick Isherwood was approached but after failing to get a local man, always a popular choice in Oldham, they chose William Barton of William Barton and Co., calico printers of Manchester and a member of the Manchester City Council, in October 1909.[1] The Conservatives pointed to a recent defeat of Barton in a Manchester ward and declared that a man rejected at a local election could not represent Oldham.[2] Barton's defence was that he had represented a small ward with a long record of Conservatism. At the time that he won the seat no other Liberal had won a seat from a Conservative. During his period of office he had been instrumental in a great deal of improvement of slum property. The consequent increase in rents were blamed on Barton and the Rector of the parish church had used Bible classes for young men to attack Barton. Crisp and Hartley disappeared from the political scene immediately after the 1906 election but the

1. Oldham Chronicle 2nd October, 1909.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 8th December, 1909.

Conservatives took fairly rapid steps to replace them. They chose local men, Philip Sydney Stott, a local architect who specialised in factory building and who was for a short time Chairman of the Conservative Registration Association, in November 1907,[1] and Joseph Hilton, the original President of the Conservatives' Working Men's League[2] in December 1908.[3]

The Liberals took the offensive, declaring quite clearly that the central issue of the election was the unconstitutional step taken by the Lords in throwing out the Finance Bill. Emmott speaking at a meeting at the Co-operative Hall in December 1909, said that it was "the most important election that I should think the oldest person in this room remembers".[4] Throughout they forced the pace and it was left to the Conservatives to defend an almost indefensible position as best they could.

Emmott in his address[5] began by referring to his virtual withdrawal from politics as Deputy Speaker but maintained that his "retirement" had only served to strengthen his Liberal principles. He immediately passed

1. Oldham Chronicle 2nd October, 1909.
2. Vide p. 233-4.
3. Oldham Daily Standard 2nd December, 1908.
4. Oldham Evening Chronicle 14th December, 1909.
5. Ibid 28th December, 1909.

on to the central issue which was the rejection of a Finance Bill, which was an unconstitutional step and which carried with it a claim to reject further Bills. He appealed for support to exclude the Lords from interference in finance, a step of paramount importance. The controversial budget he supported as finding necessary money by taxing those who could best afford it. Briefly he rejected tariff reform and declared that the work of the Liberal Government would have been more effective without the obstruction of the House of Lords. He summed up the issue of the election as "Representative Government, Free Trade, Social Reform or Government by the Lords, Bread Taxes, and Reaction". Barton pursued a similar line fearing the action of the Lords as a precedent and attacking them as a party organisation opposing Liberal measures yet leaving Conservative measures unopposed. On the future of the Lords he was more specific than Emmott. This is interesting since Barton's views on the Lords were more extreme than those of Emmott. He considered the hereditary principle to be unsound and wanted to deprive the Lords of their power over finance and restrict the power of the veto. Like Emmott he praised the budget as a just one and supported free trade. He concluded by referring to the jingoism of the time as a threat to peace.

Emmott again put the issue clearly when he said to the young Liberals at a meeting on 7th December, 1909[1] that: "Every Conservative vote at this election will be a vote

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 8th December, 1909.

given in favour of voting away a part of his own inheritance as a free born Englishman with the right of self government and the right of self taxation". It was a struggle of the people against the Lords. He did not however want to end the Lords, he was himself very shortly to become a peer, and went on to say that no Liberal Minister had ever suggested that the House of Lords should be abolished. He wanted, he said, simply to curb its influence over Finance Bills. Barton however at that same meeting considered that people were ready to leave legisalation to one house. Again in reply to questions put to him at a meeting at the Co-operative Hall on the 23rd December he said that he was in favour of the abolition of the veto and the hereditary principle and he thought there would be little left of the House of Lords[1] after that.

The Conservative campaign was an attempt to broaden the issues of the election and divert as much attention as possible from the House of Lords. Stott began his address[2] by referring to imperial defence, appealing for a strong and efficient navy equal to those of any two nations cambined. He stressed the right of parents to determine the religious education of their children, declared tariff reform to be

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 23rd December, 1909.

2. Oldham Daily Standard 11th January, 1910.

the only way of checking unemployment and appealed for reform of the poor laws and compulsory purchase of land to create private ownership of small holdings. Only then did he refer to the Lords, denying that they should be abolished yet favouring the adoption of some more representative system. He declared his opposition to home rule arguing that when the Irish owned their own land, they would cease to agitate. He favoured old age pensions and suggested amendments to the Liberal Act of 1908, preferring that pensions should be contributory and drawn as a right not as a charity, that they should be received by those on parochial relief and that they should be received at 65 rather than 70. The budget, presented as the poor man's budget, would, he claimed, serve only to make the poor man poorer. It taxed land and drink for political reasons since these interests opposed the Liberals and he warned that it was the thin end of the wedge of socialism, approved by the socialists. On the drink question he claimed that Balfour's Act of 1904[1] was working well and that the Liberals were bigoted and had deliberately set out to ruin, "the trade". He concluded by declaring his opposition to disestablishment and support of the suffrage for spinsters and widows. Hilton's address was similar ranging over a wide range of subjects. After referring to his local connections he

1. This Act provided compensation when licenses were taken away as a matter of policy from a fund provided by the trade.

began by emphasising the necessity of religious education, the need for a strong army and navy as the best guarantee of peace and condemned the vindictiveness of Liberal policy towards the liquor trade. He too believed that old age pensions should be contributory and payable at 65 and condemned the budget as the first step to socialism, though here there was a contradiction for in the same paragraph he pointed out that the working class was expected to pay £6 million of the £16 million. Only at this stage did he refer to the House of Lords favouring some measure of reform. Like Stott he supported the alteration of the poor laws, the ownership of smallholdings to give security and incentive, and tariff reform and opposed disestablishment and home rule.

Throughout the campaign this pattern of priorities continued with the question of the Lords sandwiched between other, at that time less vital, matters. The references to the Lords were unconvincing, stating their support for some reform but failing to say what, whilst pointing out that reform would only make the Lords stronger. The Standard's headlines to reports of meetings indicate the emphasis which the Conservatives of Oldham were trying to give to the campaign: "Home Rule and Education", "Socialism and Tariff Reform", "Dumping Yarn Ousting Oldham's Workers", "The Danger to Church and Schools". It was this which prompted Emmott to point out at a meeting at the Co-operative Hall on 20th December,[1] that the

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 21st December, 1909.

Conservatives were making every effort to divert people's minds from the real issue.

The only real defence of the Lords came from Lord Curzon when he visited the Empire Theatre on 15th December, 1909.[1] This visit declared Barton,[2] coming as it did at the pantomime season, would be regarded as a threat by theatre owners. Curzon pointed out that the House of Lords had developed gradually and had met with general satisfaction. He defended the hereditary principle by pointing to the monarchy and the famous families of British history, and the conduct of the Lords by saying that it was its duty to delay hasty and ill conceived measures and refer them back to the people. In defence of the recent action of the Lords, he accused the government of trying to "smuggle into law", Bills which ought to have been submitted independently and which were socialist in principle. If the House of Lords had its powers taken away he warned that it would become either a reward for the Liberals or a prison for Conservative peers who wanted to get into the House of Commons,[3] and that there would be no check against home rule.

Curzon's defence was spirited, but ineffective and the result of the election of 17th January, 1910, was a massive victory for the Liberals with Emmott 19,252,

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 18th December, 1909.
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 8th December, 1909.
3. A prophetic statement in view of the elevation of Emmott in 1911.

Barton 18,840, Hilton 13,462 and Stott 12,577. Again the Standard[1] claimed that Emmott had carried the junior candidate on his back and had prevented the electors having a proper appreciation of the issues at stake. The Chronicle[2] however claimed that the issues had been clearly stated, a free parliament, the liberties of the nation and a budget with just taxation.

The Liberals were returned to power but they were now dependant on Irish and Labour support for their majority. After prolonged discussion two distinct programmes emerged as to the future of the House of Lords. The Liberals put forward the Parliament Bill whilst Lord Lansdowne's alternative stressed that disputed Bills should be dealt with by a joint sitting whilst bills which related to matters of "great gravity", should be submitted to the people. No decision had been reached by November 1910 and Asquith dissolved Parliament on 25th November.

The January 1910 election left the Liberals jubilant and the Conservatives stunned. The Liberal majority of over 5000 was the highest ever gained and marked at last a complete breakthrough after vacillations of the past forty and more years. The year 1910 was indeed a black year for the Conservatives in Oldham for on the eve of the December election, they were again

1. Oldham Daily Standard 18th January, 1910.

2. Oldham Chronicle 18th January, 1910.

soundly defeated in the municipal elections. In November 1910, out of twelve seats contested, six of which had previously been held by the Liberals and six by the Conservatives, the Liberals won eleven.

Hilton and Stott retired as Conservative candidates after the election and no replacements were found until November 1910. This gave them little time to prepare for the election which took place on the 5th December 1910. The reasons for this delay were undoubtedly apathy after the defeat in January and the difficulty of finding anyone willing to fight such hopeless seats.[1] The candidats eventually selected were E.R. Bartley Denniss,[2] a London barrister, selected on 4th November 1910 and Arthur Edward Wrigley, head of Lees and Wrigley, Greenbank Mills, Glodwick, selected on 19th November 1910.[3] The Manchester Guardian[4] reporting their appointment said that they were scarcely known politically in Oldham, Wrigley making a single speech at the last election and Denniss appearing at one public meeting. Both parties in Oldham however accepted that they were rather stronger

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 21st November, 1910.

2. Oldham Daily Standard 5th November, 1910.

3. Ibid 21st November, 1910.

4. Manchester Guardian 20th November, 1910.

candidates than Stott and Hilton.

Again the Conservatives fought the election on a wider issue than the future of the House of Lords. Their addresses[1] were almost exact replicas of those of Stott and Hilton in January. Denniss referred to his Oldham connections through his wife, the daughter of George Barlow of Glodwick. He claimed that the Liberals were being dictated to by the Irish party which held the balance in the House of Commons and urged the people of Oldham to throw off this dictation. Of the government's threat to force the creation of peers he warned that they were trying to make the House of Lords into an aristocratic debating society. Wrigley came up with the, by now, familiar threat of home rule if the power of the House of Lords was taken away completely and urged conscription to improve the defences of the Empire.

The Liberals did not publish addresses but their speeches made it quite clear that the election was being fought over the sameissue as the last. Again Barton showed his extreme dislike of the House of Lords declaring that it made his blood boil when arguments were put to him which assumed that the House of Lords and the House of Commons were equal bodies. It would be no loss, he said, if the House of Lords was abolished to morrow.[2]

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 26th November, 1910.

2. Oldham Chronicle 26th November, 1910.

Again the "people" triumphed over the "peers" but with a reduced majority. Emmott gained 17,108 votes whilst Barton gained 16,941, a total drop of some 4,000 votes. The Conservative candidates on the other hand received an almost identical number of votes as the Conservative candidates had received in January 1910, Wrigley 13,440, Denniss 13,281. The Conservatives exulted at this and claimed[1] that the fall in the Liberal poll was due to the withdrawal of the Irish vote of some 3,000 over the education question.[2] There is little to support this claim however. The education question figured only briefly in the campaign. In December 1909, the Standard[3] published a pastoral letter from Westminster urging Catholics to exact a pledge from candidates that religious education should be safeguarded, but this seems to have had little effect on the result in January 1910 and there seems no reason why it should have affected the result in December 1910. A much more plausible

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 6th December, 1910.

2. The 1902 Education Act was welcomed by the Catholics as giving state aid to voluntary schools. In 1906 Birrell introduced a measure designed to accommodate nonconformist opposition to the Act. The measure was thrown out by the Lords but it rallied Catholics in defence of the Act.

3. Oldham Daily Standard 27th December, 1909.

answer was suggested by the Liberals.[1] They pointed to the wastage of the Register. Isherwood said that there had been 10,000 removals in Oldham since the last election. Had the election been fought on a new Register, the victory would have been as great as in January.

Emmott had fought five elections and had headed the poll on each occasion. His popularity was not to be tested a sixth time. On his appointment as Under Secretary of State for the Colonies in October 1911 he was elevated to the peerage. The Conservatives received the news with delight. The Standard[2] wrote that like many other Liberals he had gone to the Upper Chamber after abusing it for many years. But even they had to admit that this honour was well deserved.

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 6th December, 1910.

2. Oldham Daily Standard 24th October, 1911.

b. Party Organisation 1867 - 1910.

The period 1867 to 1910 was marked by a considerable increase in the electorate. From 2,229[1] electors at the 1865 election, the electorate had jumped to over 13,000 in 1868. Between 1868 and 1885 the electorate increased at each election to some 24,000. After 1885 the rate of growth slackened, but the electorate had reached 30,000 by 1906 and then sprang to 32,000 in 1910. There were three main reasons for this growth.

Above all else there was the Reform Act of 1867 which gave the vote to almost all settled householders in the boroughs, putting working class voters in the majority. The Act added 938,000 voters to an electorate of 1,057,000 in England and Wales.[2] Whilst nationally the electorate almost doubled in Oldham the increase was more than fourfold, from 3,013 in 1867 to 13,454 in 1868.[3] In addition boroughs of less than 10,000 inhabitants lost a member and the forty five seats were redistributed. Oldham with its population of 80,000 was unaffected by this redistribution. Similarily Oldham was unaffected by the redistribution in 1885, remaining a two member borough with a population of

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1. The Oldham Poll Book, Standard Office, 1865.

2. Woodward, op. cit., p. 187.

3. Oldham Almanack and Year Book, 1867 and 1868, Hirst and Fish, Yorkshire Street, Oldham.

about 112,000.

This increase in the electorate coincided with a great increase in the population of Oldham[1] as the following figures demonstrate.

1861	-	72,333.
1871	-	82,629.
1881	-	111,343.
1891	-	131,463.
1901	-	137,246.
1911	-	147,483.

The reason for this increase was the expansion of the town due to the expansion of the cotton industry which, despite the slump which reached its peak in 1878 - 1879, continued to grow until checked by the competition which began to develop in the 1890's.[2] Out of an increase in spindleage throughout Great Britain between 1870 and 1887 of six and three quarter million, four and a half million were in Oldham.[3]

The third reason lay in the activities of the political parties as faced with the terrific task of

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1. This period saw a considerable amount of growth in all towns, especially in manufacturing areas. G.D.A. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The Common People 1746 - 1946, Methuen, 1938, p. 347 and 451.

2. Vide p.166-7.

3. Bateson, op. cit., p.157.

organising this rising population, each worked hard to organise and register the new electors and get their supporters to the poll. To cope with this urgent task the parties looked to their organisation and between 1867 and 1883 three main developments took place; the increase in direction from the centre; the improvement of associations dealing with registration and the growth of additional organisations to support the registration associations.

The main outlines of Conservative organisation at the centre were established during the 1850's with the foundation of the Conservative Central Office and the appointment of Philip Rose, Disraeli's own solicitor, as the Principal Agent with control of party organisation in 1852. His assistant was Markham Spofforth who had the particular task of interviewing candidates and advising constituents. Rose was succeeded by Spofforth in 1859 who was given two assistants, one of whom acted as Secretary of the Conservative Registration Association which was founded in 1863/4. The 1867 Reform Act brought changes in organisation and personnel. The Conservative Union later called the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, was founded in 1867 to organise the newly enfranchised working men. It assisted in the promotion of Conservative Working Men's Associations and Constitutional Associations, its first secretary, Leonard Sedgwick, and a group of volunteers spending 1868 touring the country explaining how such Associations could best be formed. In addition it

organised propaganda, sponsoring in particular a series of pamphlets entitled Conservative Legislation for the Working Classes of which the most influential was on legislation for mines and factories. At the end of 1869 Spofforth resigned and was replaced by John Gorst. Gorst was a young barrister who had lost his seat in Parliament at the 1868 election. He established his headquarters in offices occupied by the Conservative Registration Association, which was reorganised in 1867, and was assisted by Major Keith-Falconer who became first Secretary of the Central Conservative Office, took charge of the Central Press Agency which helped to foster the Conservative provincial press, and acted with Gorst as joint secretary of the National Union.

From 1870 onwards the work of the Conservative Central Office under the direction of Gorst steadily increased. It gave advice to constituencies on registration, assisted local leaders to find suitable candidates, helped to form new Associations, provided speakers for local meetings, issued pamphlets and provided articles for the Conservative provincial press.[1] After the Conservative victory of 1847 however, Gorst became embittered at what he considered to be a lack of adequate reward and after three years of

1. For a full account of the work of the Conservative Central Office see H.J. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone, Longmans, 1959, p.359 - 361.

quarrelling he was replaced by W.B. Skene. Skene lacked Gorst's enthusiasm and knowledge and after 1877 the party machine began to run down. Following the Conservative defeat of 1880, Gorst was recalled only to retire in 1882. This falling off of effort after success was a marked feature of Conservative activity and can be seen in Oldham as well as at the centre.

The Liberal central organisation came later than that of the Conservatives, derived its inspiration from the Birmingham Liberal Association and was made necessary by the Liberal defeats of 1874. The most pressing problem for the Liberal party after 1874 was the reconstruction of the urban Liberal Associations, which were given impetus by the formation of the National Liberal Federation[1] in June 1877 based on the Birmingham Liberal Association. The Birmingham Association was a democratic organisation. All those who declared themselves in agreement with the principles of Liberalism were considered to be members. It was organised on three levels. The central body was a General Committee, called the "Committee of Six Hundred " and was elected annually at a public meeting of Liberals. Its activities included discussion of political subjects, the selection of School Board and Parliamentary candidates

1. F.H. Herrick, "The Origins of the National Liberal Federation", Journal of Modern History XVII, 1945, p. 116 - 29.

and the decision of the general policy of the Association. Each ward elected a number of members to constitute an Executive Committee to test the feeling of the General Committee and carry out its wishes. Within each ward there was a ward committee, the Chairman and Secretary of the ward committees being automatically members of the General and Executive Committees. It was proposed that all Liberal Associations established on a similar popular basis should enter the Federation, there was to be no interference with the independence of the Associations and the Federation was to encourage the formation of other local branches.

Dealing first with the Conservative local organisation, since they were the successful party during the early part of the period, a rather jerky and inconsistent development can be seen with increased activity leading to success, followed by complacency leading to defeat. The hard work of the 1860's for example led to the success of 1872 and 1874 and the developments of the early 1880's contributed to the revived fortunes in 1885.

Party organisation centred around registration which had been carried out by the Oldham Conservative Association,[1] called the Oldham Conservative Registration

1. Vide p.44 and 85.

Association after 1863, assisted by the Oldham Operatives' Conservative Association. The Oldham Conservative Registration Association had had its committee rooms at the Crown and Anchor Hotel, Henshaw Street, until 1874 when it moved to the new Central Conservative Club, Union Street. With the passing of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act, 1883, the Association had to move next door to the club, since no place could be used for election purposes which was also used for the sale of drink. By the early 1880's the Association had modelled itself on the lines of the Birmingham Liberal Association with a General Committee and an Executive Committee, a formalisation of organisation made necessary by the need for a compact inner committee to deal with the many detailed problems involved in organising such a large electorate. A further factor in this development was to counter Liberal criticism that the Conservative party machine was undemocratic. The exact date of this reorganisation is difficult to ascertain because of the lack of party records and the failure of newspapers to report such events. This new organisation was certainly in existence by 1886. At this time also the details of registration passed into the hands of a registration agent. From 1885 to 1898 the agent was James William Walkden (1865 - 1920), who, according to the Oldham Chronicle[1] knew

1. Oldham Chronicle 17th July, 1920.

and practised all the "tricks of the trade".

The principal support organisations were the Operatives' Conservative Association founded in 1835 and still functioning, and the new Constitutional Associations. The Operatives' Conservative Association met in February 1867[1] after a lapse of two years. The Secretary of the Association, Robert Lucas, claimed that Conservatism was strong in Oldham, but was still in need of further organisation. The Operatives' Conservative Association gave way to theWorking Men's Conservative Society, organised at the ward level with similar functions, providing social and educational facilities.[2] Lucas' appeal for greater organisation bore fruit in 1868 when, encouraged by the National Union, the Conservatives founded Constitutional Associations in the various wards which assisted in registration. The Chadderton Association, one of the earliest, declared in particular that it would answer objections to inclusion on the Register to save an individual's time and money.[3] In 1869 the Constitutional Associations were reorganised and a Central Association was formed.[4]

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1. Oldham Chronicle 2nd February, 1867.
2. Oldham Daily Standard 23rd January, 1869.
3. Oldham Chronicle 11th July, 1868.
4. Oldham Chronicle 16th January, 1869.

The years following the Reform Act of 1867 saw the rapid development of clubs within both political parties since it was considered unsuitable that political meetings should be held in public houses as they had in the past. These clubs served two purposes, they helped to establish party loyalties and provided permanent houses for the various Associations. In 1874 the Central Conservative Club was opened in Union Street to co-ordinate the political activities of the ward clubs. The subscription was £1. 1. 6d. reduced to 19/6d. in 1888, and 5/-d. for junior members. Opening the Hollinwood and South Chadderton Conservative Club in October 1880,[1] Smith Taylor Whitehead, the unsuccessful Conservative candidate in 1880, speaking of the merits of political clubs, said that they enabled men of a like political colour to meet together for discussion.

The political clubs however did not live up to these high hopes. They developed into social rather than political organisations, so in August 1880 a new Conservative organisation, the Working Men's League, was formed. Its purpose was to band working men together as voluntary workers to help the Conservative Party and Conservative principles by means of lectures, meetings and debates.[2] This organisation grew out of the meetings of the non-party

1. Oldham Daily Standard 16th October, 1880.

2. Oldham Daily Standard 21st August, 1880.

Oldham Political Debating Society which was very active in 1880 and 1881. The first president of the League between 1880 and 1887 was Joseph Hilton (1854 - 1919), a cotton operative at the Derker Mills. He relinquished his post to go to Brazil to supervise production in a cotton mill built by Platts' textile engineering firm. The Working Men's League was particularly active from 1880 to 1890, holding regular fortnightly meetings.

A more steady growth can be seen in the local Liberal Party organisation. Throughout the period, the Liberals were well organised and improved their organisation to keep pace with the developments within the Conservative Party. The force behind the Liberal Party organisation was William Wrigley. Even a hostile witness such as Thomas E. Lees, the chairman of the Operatives' Conservative Association, speaking in February 1867,[1] had to acknowledge that the Liberals were as well organised as it was possible to be, having an ideal organiser in William Wrigley.[2]

Wrigley was born in 1813 at Tottington near Bury and came to Oldham in 1827 to serve his apprenticeship with Peter Roscoe, a wheelwright. He grew to political

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1. Oldham Chronicle 2nd February, 1867.

2. Oldham Chronicle 19th July, 1890, obituary notice.

maturity in the 1840's with the radicals and in 1847 vigorously protested against Fielden's dictatorship, identifying himself with Fox and the struggle for incorporation. He quickly became one of the leading spirits of the developing Liberal party, becoming Liberal Councillor for Werneth ward in 1870. In 1872 he became Mayor and shocked the borough because, as a Unitarian, he preferred to attend his own chapel rather than the church, as was expected, on taking office. He refused to become an Alderman in 1877 believing that they should be elected by the ratepayers as were Councillors, and he resigned from the Council on this issue. His contribution to the Liberal party organisation was of paramount importance. He was a man of great energy and organising ability, called by the Chronicle, " a political Moltke". As one of the local rate collectors he had at hand much useful knowledge connected with registration which was his special interest. He rapidly became the greatest authority on the political views of the voters of the district. Perhaps the final assessment of Wrigley's power was given by the Oldham Express[1] which referred to him on his death in 1890 as "Warwick the King Maker."

The Liberal Registration Association, founded in 1859, continued to be the backbone of the Liberal Party organisation under the presidency, first of William Wrigley and later William Bodden, a Liberal Councillor and an

1. Oldham Express 19th November, 1881.

energetic party worker. After 1876 the Association was organised on the line of the Birmingham Liberal Association. The General Council of some six hundred members, known as the "Liberal Six Hundred", met about twice a year or as occasion demanded, at the Priory Buildings. It was made up of representatives elected from the various wards of the borough. An Executive Council met more frequently to deal with registration. In 1895 the General Council increased to seven hundred members, an increase in membership which reflected the growth in the population over this period. Some indication of the activities of the Liberal Registration Association can be gathered from a complaint made by the Secretary of the Association, Frederick George Isherwood, in 1898,[1] when he pointed to the ever increasing cost of registration with at least 10,000 removals to and from the borough each year.[2]

The main Liberal support organisations were the Working Men's Liberal Associations (later called the Working Men's Liberal Reform Associations) which were introduced into the wards in July 1868 to offset the influence of the Conservative's Constitutional Associations and the Working Men's Conservative Society. They provided social and educational facilities and helped in

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 11th March, 1898.

2. At this time the working population tended to be much more mobile than is the case today. There was in most industrial towns a large floating population which moved to find work and better pay.

registration. One of the first of these Associations was founded in Chadderton in July 1868 and others followed rapidly. An Association was founded in the Waterhead ward, normally a safe Liberal ward, in January 1870[1] to counteract the Conservative reaction in the ward. It was claimed that a "lukewarmness" had come over the party which hitherto had been seated "in calm security".

The Liberals, like the Conservatives, opened clubs, though they were behind the Conservatives in this respect. The introduction of Liberal clubs into the wards began in 1877, but it was not until 1881 that a central club was opened in Union Street to provide a place where, "Liberal politicians", could meet. Before a candidate could be elected to the club the committee had to be satisfied that he was a Liberal in politics. The fees were a guinea per annum for honorary members and 10/6d. per annum for ordinary members, but to meet the requirements of working men a payment of 3/-d. per quarter was possible. No drinking or gambling was allowed on the premises, a rule which was soon relaxed. The trustees were Samuel Radcliffe Platt, the son of John Platt, Thomas Emmott, William Wrigley, William Noton and Thomas Dornan.[2]

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1. Oldham Chronicle 15th January, 1870.

2. Rules and Regulations of the Oldham Reform Club - Oldham Public Library.

The Liberal clubs however suffered from the same difficulties as the Conservative clubs, the neglect of political activity. It was claimed in 1885 by a disgruntled Liberal and a member of the breakaway Radical Association, founded in 1883[1] that he had been a member of a Liberal club for six months and had not once heard politics discussed.[2] To overcome this difficulty and to counteract the influence of the Conservative's Working Men's League, the Liberal Union was formed in September 1881. Like the Working Men's League, it too grew out of the proceedings of the Oldham Political Debating Society. The announcement of the formation of the Union appeared on 14th September 1881 and it urged all Liberals favourable to the formation of an active Liberal organisation, to attend A letter published on 15th September 1881,[3] written by Alfred Ingham, a leading Liberal and the future Secretary of the Liberal Union, amplified this bare announcement, touching again on the criticism of the Liberal Clubs which were too concerned with the provision of social facilities. He went on to declare that the aim of the Union was the political education of Liberal working men by uniting club members into a central organisation. At the inaugural

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1. Vide, p. 240.

2. Oldham Chronicle 4th April, 1885.

3. Oldham Chronicle 16th September, 1881.

meeting on 19th September 1881,[1] Joseph Travis was made the President and Alfred Ingham the Secretary.

The Union was not an immediate success. By September 1883 there were only 530 members and Travis complained that the attendance of club representatives at committee meetings was not satisfactory. By 1884 however the Union had grown to 1,100 members. At the half yearly meeting in 1885 it was reported that there had been a great increase in subscriptions, due not so much to an increase in membership but to the increase in the amount of individual contributions. The Union had in turn made contributions to the National Reform Union, the National Liberal Federation and the Financial Reform Association. In October 1884 Sir Charles Dilke speaking in Oldham at the invitation of the Union spoke of the Union as an energetic political organisation.[2] In 1887 Adam Lee, the Liberal candidate at the 1895 election, became President of the Union, a presentation being made to him by the Union in 1890 in recognition of his work. It was claimed that under his presidency the Union had steadily and successfully advanced Liberal principles.[3]

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1. Oldham Chronicle 20th September, 1881.

2. Oldham Chronicle 18th October, 1884.

3. Oldham Evening Chronicle 30th December, 1890.

In the 1880's the growing force of radicalism was struggling to make an impression on the Liberal party and bring it over to its point of view. With the passing of the Reform Act in 1884, Chamberlain declared that, "Radicalism, which had been the creed of the most numerous section of the Liberal Party outside the House of Commons, will henceforth be a powerful faction inside the walls of the popular Chamber".[1] Radicalism however was not strong in Oldham and at the end of 1883 the Oldham Radical Association was founded to further progress and the radical cause. At the inaugural meeting on 9th November, 1883[2] at the Greaves Arms Hotel, J. Greenwood said that while the moderate Liberals contended that the present Liberal party catered for all reformers, this was not so, the Liberal Party was incapable of gaining a sufficient degree of reform and progress. He further maintained that the Oldham Radical Association would not necessarily be antagonistic towards Liberal organisations but would act as an auxilliary to them. George Silk, the Secretary, at the quarterly meeting of the Association on 3rd of April, 1885[3] declared that the Association had striven to bring before the public a line of thought in advance of that usually put forward by the

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1. Quoted G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The Common People 1746 - 1946, p. 413.
2. Oldham Chronicle 10th November, 1883.
3. Oldham Chronicle 4th April, 1885.

established parties. Its zeal however outran its finances and at that meeting it was announced that the Association had a debt of £1. 5. 11½d. but nevertheless it was agreed that a club should be established. A club was thought necessary to avoid holding public meetings in public houses and to attract further members. It was claimed that in a year's time the Association would number 1000 and if only 70 of these regularly contributed 2d. per week, sufficient money could be raised to open and run a club. The club was opened in February 1886[1] by Stanley, Oldham's recently defeated radical member. He claimed that Oldham had had a long tradition of radicalism and that the Association was recruited from energetic men who were anxious to make Liberalism a reality.

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1. Oldham Chronicle 6th February, 1886.

CHAPTER 4. THE LABOUR PARTY.

a. Trade Unions and Industrial Discontent.

The growth of the Labour Party in this country was due to the enfranchisement of the manual worker in 1867 and 1884, the failure of the Liberal and Conservative parties to permanently capture the allegiances of the new electorate and the growing concept of a single working class. In the early nineteenth century it was usual to speak and write in the plural of the "labouring classes", whilst in the 1870's and 1880's there developed the idea of a single"working class".[1] This development was due mainly to the advancement of the Industrial Revolution and the replacement of the individual craftsman by the factory worker and the privately owned workshop by the Limited Liability Company.[2] As the century proceeded this process spread to most industries, including those such as printing[3] which had remained unchanged for centuries. Along with this development went a decline in the personal master

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1. Asa Briggs The Age of Improvement 1783 - 1867 Longmans 1959 p. 287.

2. The first Limited Liability Company in Oldham was the Sun Mill built in 1860 in which several operatives were shareholders and directors. The American Civil War and the resulting cotton famine held up the development but from 1863 onwards there was a tremendous growth in the number of such companies. By 1880 there were between sixty and seventy.

3. A.E. Musson The Typographical Association Manchester University Press. 1954.

and worker relationship[1] of the early century, the elevation of personal quarrels into disputes between labour and capital and the corresponding growth of large industrial unions embracing all workers both skilled and unskilled. This process can be seen at work particularly within the textile unions.[2]

The increase in the size and influence of trade unions in Oldham must be seen against a background of industrial strife. The growth of competition from expanding industrial nations towards the end of the nineteenth century has already been mentioned.[3] The developing cotton industry of India made life very difficult for Lancashire cotton manufacturers, particularly the coarse spinning trade of Oldham, during the last decade of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, for as the industry's export potential declined,

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1. An illustration of the intimate relationship which often existed in early cotton mills is given in a manuscript account of the life of Dame Sarah Lees (1842 - 1935), a local benefactor, written by her daughter Miss Marjory Lees. Miss Lees writes: "My grandfather (John Buckley of Carr Mill) knew all the workpeople employed at his mill and took a personal interest in them. In the winter, if the weather was stormy and threatening, he would close the mill early and see that the children employed were put in the care of the older workers going the same way home."
2. H.A. Turner Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy Allen and Unwin 1962.
3. Vide. p. 166.

competition became more intense. To counteract this competition the cutting of wages was begun by Oldham employers in an attempt to cut down prices. This sparked off a series of bitter strikes and lockouts.

The clashes started as early as 1869 when the employers declared war with a 5% reduction in wages. The matter was referred to an arbitration committee, under Rupert Kettle, a County Court Judge from Wolverhampton, which decided in favour of the employers. In 1871, the spinning operatives demanded a 12 noon finish on Saturday instead of the existing 2 p.m. Following a lockout which lasted a week, a compromise was reached, working finishing at 1 p.m.[1]

A more serious dispute arose in 1875 over the method of payment of piecers. Piecers were in great demand at this time because of the competition for labour presented by the textile engineering firm of the Platt family and consequently could claim and win higher wages. In 1870 they were receiving 16½% more than piecers in other towns.[1] It was the custom for piecers to be paid a percentage of the minder's wage by the minder, but the recent big increases had been paid by the employers. In May 1875[2] the Oldham Master Cotton Spinners Association,

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1. Bateson A Centenary History of Oldham p. 159.

2. Oldham Daily Standard 29th May, 1875.

replying to a wage demand by the operatives, proposed that they should revert to the original practice of leaving the minders to bargain personally with the piecers. Matters came to a head in July 1875 and a lockout began on 26th July. The lockout lasted until 4th September and aroused bitter feelings. It ended only when the operatives gave way.

This lockout broke the nerve of the spinners who did not pursue their disputes to such extremes for the next ten years, until 1885. In October 1877 the Operative Cotton Spinners Association accepted a 5% cut in wages on the advice of the Operative Cotton Spinners Amalgamation.[1] There was strong feeling against striking over such a small cut.[2] Again in April - May 1878 the Operative Cotton Spinners Association failed to support a strike in Lancashire against a 10% cut in wages but sent £20 to the Burnley Spinners. They eventually accepted yet another 5% cut.[3] Later in that year a further 10% cut was proposed and the Spinning operatives came out on strike briefly on 30th November. But when some mills opened and offered work at a 5% cut, many returned to work.[4] Yet again the

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1. A time of trade depression. Vide p. 132.
2. Oldham Daily Standard 20th October, 1877.
3. Ibid 25th May, 1878.
4. Ibid 14th December 1878.

spinning operatives accepted a 5% cut in October 1879. From reports delivered at the meeting of the Operative Cotton Spinners Association from the branches, it can be seen that there was strong feeling against the repeated reductions and some branches had instructed their delegates to vote for a strike. The majority however protested, but failed to vote for strike action.[1] A hint of greater militancy can be seen in 1881 when the employers granted a 5% increase to certain classes of spinners, self-actor minders, card and blowing room operatives, but refused to extend the rise to twiners. The twiners went on strike for twenty six weeks and the Operative Cotton Spinners Association gave strike pay with an extra 5/-d. per week to each male operative to support the strike.[2]

More stubborn resistance to the employers during this period, 1875 to 1885, came from the weavers. On 21st February 1878 a lockout of weavers began at Collinge's Commercial Mill over a 5% cut in wages. The weavers claimed that they had had no increase since 1834 and favoured short time working to overcome the effect of the depression. In a letter dated 27th February 1878[3] James Collinge defended his conduct. He wrote that he

1. Oldham Daily Standard 18th October, 1879.
2. Ibid 29th January, 1881.
3. Ibid 2nd March, 1878.

had kept his looms working when others had stopped, had stocked £30,000 worth of cloth, had given the best yard price possible to make good wages and had often sold imperfect cloth at a loss. Here also, however, there was no unity. In mid March the weavers at other mills accepted the 5% reduction and canvassed the workers at Collinge's Mill to go back to work.[1] The lockout ended on 22nd March.

The immediate outcome of these events w as an increase in the strength of the spinners union as the realisation grew that a more efficient organisation was necessary to combat the employers and the repeated wage reductions. This growth can best be seen in the career of Thomas Ashton[2] the Secretary of the Oldham Provincial Operative Cotton Spinners' Association between 1868 and 1913. Born on the 15th August 1841, his father was a piecer and his mother a weaver at Tattersall's Mill. His childhood was spent amidst poverty and he once confessed that when a magistrate he often dealt leniently with offenders accused of stealing coal, since he had done the same himself of necessity. He began work as a piecer on half time at 2/6d.aweek and later full time at 3/6d. a week. At nineteen he took over his father's mules since

1. Oldham Daily Standard 23rd March, 1878.

2. Oldham Chronicle 20th September, 1919.

his father's eyesight was failing. During his years in the mill, he said he was struck by the ineffectiveness of factory regulations and the inefficiency of factory inspectors. The next eight years he spent studying at night school becoming a "fair scholar" and early in 1868 he left the mill to open a school. This enterprise did not last long for he was approached to stand as a candidate for the Secretaryship of the Operative Cotton Spinners' Association. There were six candidates in all and the contest was rather like a General Election with each candidate touring the districts and making speeches. He gained 908 votes, whilst the others shared 926 votes, and he took office on the 9th August 1868 at the age of twenty seven.

He found the Association completely disorganised the main problem being lack of centralised control. The Association was made up of nine district branches with a total membership of 2,282. Each district had its own set of rules and its own funds. There was constant rivalry between the branches as to which could levy the smallest subscription and give the greatest benefit. Thus by this inter-union rivalry they weakened each other's position and played into the hands of the employers. Employers refused to allow union officials onto their premises. Ashton's personal reminiscences illustrate the depths to which the Association had sunk.

On the first morning at his new post, Ashton went to the headquarters at the Coach and Horses Inn and on asking for his office was shown into the tap room

and informed that, "they generally sit there with the navvies, playing dominoes." Weekly meetings often developed into discussions of the relative merits of the members' whippets, which were brought to the meetings, and there was much drunkenness. The Chairman, John Riley, kept the Association's "books" inside his top hat.

It was Ashton's task to convert this disorganised federation into a strong union. Starting in 1868, though meeting with success only in the late 1870's, Ashton accomplished this. He persuaded the district branches to unite their forces by adopting one code of rules and a common fund. A start was made in 1870 when the Association moved away from the public house to rented offices in Union Street and later, as membership increased, permanent offices were built in Rock Street at a cost of £10,000. The branches began to pay their levies into a central fund administered by a Central or Provincial Council which laid down rules and administered benefits. Each branch sent a delegate to the Council. The growing strength of the Association can be seen in the membership figures, 1870 - 1, 2110; 1880 - 1, 3,755; 1890 - 1, 6,150.[1] By 1913, on Ashton's retirement, the membership was

1. Sydney J. Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry, Manchester University Press, 1904. p.234.

19,731. The concessions won by the Association during Ashton's tenure of office present an impressive list.

1. The payment of wages weekly instead of fortnightly.
2. The payment of wages before Friday night instead of Saturday afternoon.
3. The establishment of a list of wages and conditions of work for the Oldham district.
4. The fixing of piece work rates so as to enable minders to earn the list wages.
5. The ending of the system whereby one minder operated two pairs of mules.
6. The reduction of Saturday working from 2 p.m. to 12 noon.
7. The payment of wages according to length rather than weight of yard.
8. The ending of fining operatives for trivial offences.
9. The reduction of working hours from sixty to fifty six and a half and the revision of the list of wages to ensure that there was no drop in wages in consequence of this reduction.
10. The establishment of a recognised list of holidays.
11. The abolition of cleaning and other work during meal times.
12. The compensation of minders for the loss of wages due to bad work.

Ashton was also the Secretary of the Movable Committee, founded to organise cotton operatives on a wider scale (Rochdale, Stockport, Blackburn, Huddersfield, Bradford, Halifax). The Oldham Operative Cotton Spinners' Association provided half its membership. This committee fell into disuse as the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners, founded in 1853 but weak until 1869 because of the abstention of such areas as Bolton and Oldham,[1] grew in strength. Ashton was the President of the Amalgamated Association for thirty five years (1878-1913) and was largely responsible for revitalising it.

On his death in 1919 the Chronicle[1] wrote that the Operative Cotton Spinners' Association was his monument. It also declared that, "Mr. Ashton succeeded in his life work which was to make the Oldham Operative Spinners trade union a strong, enduring and respected association, he led it from weakness to strength and with it the larger union of Lancashire Spinners."

The test of Ashton's work came in 1885 during a strike which lasted from 20th July to the 13th

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1 Oldham Chronicle 20th September 1919

October. Banks, the Preston spinner, speaking of this strike said: "We are glad that the battlefield has been removed from this part of Lancashire to a younger battalion, whose souls are in arms for the fray."[1] The employers imposed a 10% cut in wages and the operatives offered to accept a 5% reduction. The offer was rejected and the strike began. Strike pay was paid by the Association, 12/-d. for a minder and 1/-d. for each child, 6/-d. for a big piecer and 3/-d. for a little piecer.[2] With 3,000 of its 5,000 members on strike, this meant a weekly payment of at least £1,000.[3] The Association was well able to afford this with a fund of £20,000[4] and ample help from other unions. Whilst there was considerable distress amongst the other branches of the textile industry which were not so well organised, the spinners continued to be financially sound. By September 65.03% of its membership was on strike. Yet, wrote the Chronicle[5] judging from the opinions expressed by the operatives there was

1. Turner op. cit p.124
2. The term "big piecer" and "little piecer" refer to senior and junior spinning apprentices or "learners".
3. Oldham Daily Standard 24th July 1885
4. Ibid 29th July 1885
5. Oldham Evening Chronicle 4th September, 1885

no anxiety to end the strike. The employers were forced to give way and a settlement was reached at a 5% cut.

Just as the revitalised Spinners Association had grown out of the strikes and setbacks of the 1870's, so out of this 1885 strike there grew an improved Cardroom and Blowing Room Operatives' Association.[1] It suffered from the same problems as the Spinners Association, lack of centralisation and low membership, which were clearly shown during the strike. The victory in October, 1885, helped to bring in new members who were encouraged by the suspension of subscriptions for three months. The branches were reorganised and put under the control of a central council which was elected by the branches.[2]

Further, the Oldham Weavers' Association, begun in Shaw in 1859 at the Moulders Arms by a group of dissatisfied weavers, was reorganised in the 1880's. By 1890 it had a membership of 5,000 but after the strike of 1892 to 1893[3] its membership dropped to 2,000 in 1905. When James Bell became the Secretary in 1905, there was a dramatic increase

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1. Turner op cit. p. 144
2. Oldham Daily Standard 30th October 1885
3. vide p. 170.

in membership which jumped to 5,250 in 1909. This increase was due to the abolition of the system of paying subscriptions fortnightly, which involved large payments often difficult to find, and the introduction of more convenient weekly payments. A fortnightly collection in April 1906 amounted to £60, in the last week of November 1907 the weekly collection was £80.[1]

Indicative of the increased interest in trade unionism was the formation of the Oldham and District Amalgamated Trades Council in 1867 (renamed the Oldham and District Trades and Labour Council in 1898) as a union of trade unions formed to centralise the activities of trade unions. "The Trade Councils exist to promote a centre of communication, a medium of assistance to all, a means of interchanging opinions and a conveyance of the wishes and desires of the working class."[2] The Secretary between 1886 and 1893 was Thomas Ashton, between 1894 and 1912 J.R. Clynes,[3] 1913, A.H. Smethurst and in 1914 James Bell of the Weavers Association. Writing of the work of the Trades

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 25th December 1909 Jubilee account.
2. 31st Annual Report of the Oldham and District Trades and Labour Council 1898.
3. J.R. Clynes Memoirs 1869-1924 Hutchinson 1937.

Council in 1917. Clynes wrote that it stimulated an interest in the affairs of labour, advertised their grievances and pressed claims which would have been impossible by the efforts of individual unions.[1] The Trades Council served to bridge the gap between the trade union activity of the unions and the political activity of the Labour Party. In September 1914 it was fused with the Labour Party. The last President of the Council and the first Labour Party Agent was Eli Bottomley, a spinning operative who later entered the upholstery trade and eventually set up his own business.

The final seal on the strength of trade unionism in Oldham was set in 1892 to 1893. In October 1892 there began a lock-out which lasted for twenty weeks and three days, to enforce a 5% cut in wages. The lock-out ended, thanks to the intervention of Robert Ascroft,[2] in a compromise with a 2.91% cut and the establishment of Courts of Appeal to consider disputes before they got to the extent of a strike or lock-out. During this lock-out Ashton said that this was the great conflict which he had forecast for many years, and declared that trade unions would rise from the ashes, Phoenix like, stronger than ever.[3]

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1. Oldham and District Trades and Labour Council, Jubilee Souvenir 1917.
2. vide, p. 170
3. Oldham Daily Standard 15th March 1893

b. The Labour Party and its early difficulties

Trade unions had done much to improve the conditions of the working class of Oldham during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, but it was felt that no real advance could be made until the working class had direct parliamentary representation. Addressing the newly formed Labour Party in March, 1893, Miss Conway said that: "Trade unionism would never, by itself, win for the workers all they required; they would only get that by securing representation on all public bodies."[1]

The Oldham and District Independent Labour Party was founded on 14th June, 1892,[2] at a public meeting at the Gaiety Theatre, Union Street. The Chairman, A. Leonard, said that the party had been formed because many people had come to the conclusion that the time had come for working men to separate themselves from the Conservatives and the Liberals. John Trevor pointed out that the interests of labour and capital were not identical. The constitution of the party was published on the previous day.[3]

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 13th March 1893
2. Oldham Daily Standard 15th June 1892
   Oldham Evening Chronicle 15th June 1892
3. Oldham Chronicle 13th June 1892

1. That the programme of the party be the nationalisation of the land and other instruments of production.
2. That the party shall devote itself to securing the election of members to all representative bodies for the purpose of realising the programme of the party.
3. That no member of any organisation connected with the Liberal, Liberal Unionist or Conservative Parties, be eligible for membership in this party.
4. That all members of this party pledge themselves to abstain from voting for any candidate for election to any representative body who is in any way a nominee of the Liberal, Liberal Unionist or Conservative parties.

This fourth clause proved to be the most controversial but it was felt by the leading members of the party to be the backbone of the movement. Trevor said that whilst as yet they had no candidates they should "go home and draw the blinds" at election times and concentrate on building up the labour movement.

It was nineteen years however before the new Labour Party succeeded in finding and running a candidate. This late introduction of a candidate was due to the reluctance of the unions, particularly

the big textile unions, in Oldham to interfere in politics and co-operate with the Labour Party. The Labour Party relied on trade union funds. Naturally every member of a trade union was not a socialist[1] and there was a reluctance to use union funds to support a political cause to which they were opposed, or a candidate who came from another union. This was not a problem peculiar to Oldham. At the Trade Union Congress of September 1899 a resolution calling for a special conference to make plans for labour representation was carried by a majority of only 546,000 to 434,000. When the conference met, the affiliated organisations paid only ten shillings per thousand members.[2]

At the inaugural meeting of the Labour Party Robert Blatchford was asked to become a candidate but was unable to accept because he was already a candidate for Bradford. The July 1892 election came too soon after the formation of the party for serious attempts to find a Labour candidate to be made.

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1. vide, p.180.
2. Henry Pelling, A Short History of the Labour Party, Macmillan 1961, p.7-8.

In 1895 and 1899 tentative steps were taken to find a candidate, but they came to nothing. The exclusion of the press from all the meetings of the Labour Party and the lack of records before 1905 make it difficult to conclude why no candidates were introduced, but there is little doubt that the basic reason was lack of money. At a meeting of the Labour Party on 28th June 1895 at the Central Labour Club[1] it was decided by a majority of seventeen not to introduce a candidate. The reason given was the difficulty of raising sufficient money from local members for election purposes. It was decided, however, to enforce the fourth clause forbidding members to vote for any other candidate. At a meeting on 24th June 1899[2] at the Socialist Hall, it was again decided not to introduce a candidate although two names were suggested, George N. Barass, Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and J.R. Clynes, Secretary of the Oldham Gas Workers Union and the Trades Council. Again there is little doubt that it was shortage of money which led to the decision. On this occasion it was

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 29th June 1895

2. Oldham Daily Standard 26th June 1899
   Oldham Evening Chronicle 26th June 1899

decided not to enforce the fourth clause though it was expected that the Labour Party would do its best to influence the electors and candidates. In 1900 the Labour Party could not hope to stand against the two giants, Emmott and Churchill.

In September 1903 however serious steps to bring forward a Labour candidate were taken with the establishment of a Labour Representation Committee consisting of delegates from both the trade unions and the Labour Party. It is significant that of the eight members of the Finance Committee of the Representation Committee, at least six were trade union representatives.[1]

At last the Labour Party and the trade unions had come together. The Committee was formed to further the candidature of Thomas Ashton chosen in the spring of 1903. Ashton was not a socialist but a Liberal and an active member of the Liberal Club, writing frequently under the heading "Labour Notes" in the Liberal Chronicle. It is perhaps for this reason that the unions agreed to support him. This is certainly the reason why the Liberals

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1. Minutes of the Labour Representation Executive Committee 1903-1908. This is the local party Committee. The Minutes are stored at the Trades and Labour Council Office, Oldham.

agreed not to oppose his election. In October 1905 however Ashton fell ill and retired from the candidature. The Liberals refused to support another Labour candidate and went ahead with their search for a Liberal candidate. A jingle originating from a Conservative pen at that time ran as follows:

"The keen Labour party of Oldham,
Did just what the Radicals told 'em,
They canvassed and worked
And no effort they shirked,
But they found that slim Emmott had sold 'em."[1]

Great difficulty was experienced in finding a new candidate. At a meeting of the Trades Council on 14th November 1905,[2] Clynes reviewing the events connected with Ashton's retirement, said that after he announced his intention of retiring, the Trades Council interviewed the Executive Committee of the Cotton Operatives' Association pointing out that it was usual for parliamentary candidates to be relieved of union work to allow them to continue their political activities. The spinners refused to co-operate and Ashton's resignation was reluctantly

1. Oldham Daily Standard 25th November 1905
2. Ibid 15th November, 1905.

accepted by the Labour Representation Committee. Clynes went on to urge that a candidate be brought forward, a Lancashire man, with a knowledge of the cotton trade, who would have the support of union funds and the Labour Party organisation. A meeting was arranged of representatives of all interested organisations for 21st December. The notice announcing the meeting[1] stated that it was intended to give all those interested, the opportunity of putting forward their candidates but warned that those who did must be prepared to shoulder the financial responsibility. Negotiations went on during the month between Ashton's resignation and the meeting on the 21st December but without success. The nearest the Labour Party got to a replacement was in Councillor George Dew, proposed by the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners Union. His name was withdrawn however since the Union's Executive at Manchester would not give its approval.[2]

Having failed to acquire parliamentary representation, the Labour Party lowered its sights to the Council. In a report to the Trades

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 22nd December 1905
2. Oldham Daily Standard 30th November, 11th December, 1905

Council on 21st December 1905, Clynes said that in answer to circulars sent out some time previously fifty seven union branches had expressed themselves willing to support Labour candidates at local elections, only four were opposed.[1] The first candidate fought the local elections of November 1905 but the party met with no success until 1910.

In 1907 the search for a candidate began again. At a meeting of the Labour Party at the Weavers' Association office on 22nd October 1907,[2] James Bell informed the meeting that the Executive Council of the United Textile Workers Association, an association founded in 1886 for parliamentary purposes, was prepared to find and finance a candidate. On 25th October[3] James Crinion, the President of the Card and Blowing Room Association was announced at a public dinner in Manchester. But nothing further was heard of him. It was suggested by the Standard[4] that he was rejected by the Labour Party because his views were not sufficiently socialist. By 15th December, 1907,[5]

1. Oldham Daily Standard 22nd December 1905
2. Ibid 22nd October 1907
3. Ibid 28th October 1907
4. Ibid 9th March 1911
5. Ibid 23rd December 1907

the name of H. Russell Smart, a leading socialist of his day who had contested Liverpool in 1895, was being confidently predicted. He too quickly dropped back into obscurity. There can be little doubt that in his case the unions once again refused to dabble in politics on behalf of a socialist and a stranger.

A third attempt was made in October 1909. At a special conference of the Labour Party at the Oddfellows Hall, Robson Street, on 26th October,[1] James P. Whitehead of the Steelsmelters Union, Newburn-on-Tyne, was announced as a prospective candidate. He was introduced to the meeting by James Bell who said that as one of the strongest trade union centres in Lancashire, Oldham ought to have direct Labour representation. Whitehead declared himself to be a trade unionist and a socialist and repeated Bell's theme, claiming that nine-tenths of the electors of Oldham were "hewers of wood and drawers of water". Once again, however, union hostility and reluctance can be seen. The Executive Council of the United Textile Workers' Association declined an invitation to attend the

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 27th October 1909

meeting. The Standard[1] predicted quite confidently that Whitehead would be withdrawn and claimed that the Labour Party had already been told by Ashton that Whitehead had not a chance of success. It put its finger precisely on the problem in Oldham when it wrote that there were a handful of socialists who had domineered the selection but then found themselves powerless against the unions.

By the end of the year Whitehead had been withdrawn. This was announced at a Labour Party meeting on 30th December,[2] a meeting which clearly illustrates the lack of unanimity amongst the labour forces of Oldham. Most of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of Bell's conduct. Some time earlier he had attended a Liberal meeting, sitting prominently amongst the platform party. A resolution was moved by Isaac Crabtree, the Labour Party agent after 1915, that the Labour Party delegates regretted the action of the textile leaders who by their actions and attitudes, particularly Bell's appearance at a Liberal meeting, had crippled the forces of the Labour Party which had been formed to fight the Liberals and the

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 28th October 1907
2. Oldham Daily Standard, Oldham Evening Chronicle 1st January 1910

Conservatives. Bell replied that if the Labour Party persisted in putting forward socialists they would not find such a man amongst the trade unions and must not expect their support, since they were not prepared to go so far. He appealed for unity, in particular a Labour Party with all the unions in the district attached, a party that would be a party indeed not in name only.

The Standard[1] wrote in March 1911 that Oldham was not a happy hunting ground for socialist candidates. They came with bright hopes but went away disgusted at the weakness of the organisation.

1. Oldham Daily Standard 4th March 1911

c. The 1911 Election

Emmott's elevation to the peerage was announced on 24th October 1911.[1] It was at the by-election which resulted that the Labour Party managed to bring a candidate successfully to the poll. But even on this occasion the chance was almost lost because of a misunderstanding between the candidate, William Cornforth Robinson, and the Oldham Labour Party which was aggravated, either wittingly or unwittingly by the press.

Negotiations were begun by the Secretary of the Labour Party, Eli Bottomley, with Robinson in February 1911. Robinson came from Heywood, he was Vice-President of the United Textile Workers' Association, Secretary of the Beamers, Twisters, Drawers Amalgamation, had served for many years on the Executive of the National Labour Party and in that year, 1911, he had presided at the Labour Party Conference at Leicester. With this background he had an evident appeal to both the unions, particularly so since he denied being an extreme socialist, and to the Labour Party itself. On the 25th February an announcement appeared in the Chronicle[2] to the effect that Robinson would definitely

1. Oldham Daily Standard, Oldham Chronicle 24th October 1911

2. Oldham Chronicle 25th February 1911

be the Labour candidate for Oldham at the next election. The Labour Party denied that this was the case since the negotiations had been known to only a few members of the Executive and, so far as the rank and file of the party was concerned, there had been no invitation. On the 2nd March 1911[1] a meeting of the Executive Committee was held to explain the situation. Eli Bottomley gave an account of conversations he had had with two prospective candidates, Robinson and A.S. Walkden, General Secretary of the Railway Clerks Association. The meeting then went on to discuss the leakage of the incorrect information to the press. Everyone denied responsibility, and, because of poor attendance the matter was postponed. The whole matter was brought to Robinson's attention, particularly the Labour Party's denial, and in a letter[2] dated 5th March Robinson gave his explanation, that he had been approached by Bottomley and had given his conditional assent. He went on to withdraw his candidature. The Standard[3] made much of this declaring that: "All along the party has

1. Minutes of the Oldham and District Labour Party under date quoted.
2. Oldham Chronicle 6th March 1911
3. Oldham Daily Standard 7th March 1911

been plodding through a wilderness of futility, adding mistake to mistake and blunder to blunder." Throughout March and April 1911 the Labour Party's Executive tried in vain to discover how the press had got hold of the information and to persuade Robinson to come to Oldham so that the matter could be fully explained. It was not until 17th May 1911[1] that Robinson came to Oldham and was formally invited to stand as a candidate at the next election. Robinson did not finally accept until 3rd August. Samuel Frith, the Labour Party Chairman, assured the press[2] that nothing short of death would stop Robinson's candidature and that the unions had guaranteed to help with the expenses.

The news of Emmott's elevation found the Liberals unprepared with a replacement. They tried first to win the services of Harold Whiston, a member of a firm of silk finishers from Macclesfield.[3] He was unable to accept however because of his connections with the Liberals of Macclesfield.[4] The choice that was finally made was the worst possible,

1. Minutes of the Oldham and District Labour Party, under date quoted, Oldham Trades and Labour Council.
2. Oldham Daily Standard 30th September 1911
3. Oldham Chronicle 25th October 1911
4. Oldham Evening Chronicle 26th October 1911

the Honourable A. Lyulph Stanley, the son of E. Lyulph Stanley who had been Oldham's member of parliament 1880-1885, and himself the heir to a peerage. The Conservatives continued with Bartley Denniss as their candidate for the vacant seat.

None of the parties issued comprehensive surveys of their political beliefs and the election was fought mainly over the Liberal Insurance Bill. On this occasion it was the turn of the Liberals to be on the defensive. Their position had been weakened at the outset by Emmott's elevation after so many years of Liberal criticism of the House of Lords. They found it difficult to put forward any reasoned defence and contented themselves with simply declaring that he deserved the honour. The Insurance Bill naturally aroused much interest in Oldham and came in for a great deal of criticism. The Liberals also had to defend their claim to be the "progressive" party and constantly warned that the introduction of the Labour candidate would only serve to divide the "progressive" vote. Speaking at a Liberal meeting on the 9th of November,[1] J.M. Robertson, the Under Secretary of the Board

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 10th November 1911

of Trade, said that the Labour candidate did not have a chance of success and would serve only to let in the Conservative candidate. He claimed that the differences between the Liberal and Labour parties were not very great, indeed less than many of the differences, within the Labour Party, and that the two parties had worked well together for many years. The Labour Party rejected the accusation that they were splitting the progressive vote and replied that they had policies which could only be achieved by the Labour Party. On the contrary, the Liberals were splitting the vote. The Conservatives fought the election over three main issues, religion, condemning disestablishment and the Liberal educational policy, home rule and the Insurance Bill, with a constant background of tariff reform.

In the summer of 1911 Lloyd George introduced the National Insurance Bill providing sickness and unemployment benefit on a contributory basis, fourpence from the employee, three pence from the employer and two pence from the state, thus giving rise to the expression, "Ninepence for fourpence." This measure was not universally acceptable for many people felt that they were not getting sufficient return for their contributions particularly since many workers were already quite

satisfied with benefits provided by Friendly Societies and trade unions. An example of this problem can be seen in a question asked by a worker, John Mayall, at a lunch-time meeting addressed by Stanley outside Platt's factory on 31st October.[1] He put the case of a man who received ten shillings a week from his trade union, ten shillings from his Friendly Society and who, according to the Bill, could receive no more than twenty three shillings in benefits. This would give the worker only three shillings per week for his fourpence contribution in addition to Friendly Society and trade union contributions. Stanley tried to explain that the Friendly Societies and trade unions were included in the Bill as "approved societies", and that members would not have to pay fourpence a week in addition to their other contributions. The questioner was not convinced and he left the meeting shouting, "Barefaced robbery". Stanley dealt with this matter further at a meeting on the 2nd of November,[2] speaking at length about the misapprehensions about the Friendly Societies. He pointed out that the fourpence contribution would go towards reducing the contribution to the Friendly

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 31st October 1911
2. Ibid 3rd November 1911

Societies and that, whereas Friendly Societies were supported out of the contributors' own pockets, they were now getting additional support from employer and the state.

Stanley was at pains to point out that the Bill would probably have flaws when it was put into operation but maintained that it was only by putting it into operation that the flaws could be seen and rectified.[1] He further stressed that it was not a philanthropic measure but a business measure. It was not designed to give something for nothing but to make the state, the employer and the employee into partners making possible benefits which the worker would draw as a right.[2]

Denniss condemned the Insurance Bill because it had been rushed into law without sufficient consideration. He also maintained that the threepence contribution made by the employer, amounting to £375,000 per annum in Lancashire, would increase the price of commodities. At a meeting at the Theatre Royal on the 2nd of November,[3] Denniss pointed out a contradiction in Liberal policy

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1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 30th October 1911
2. Ibid 31st October 1911
3. Oldham Daily Standard 3rd November 1911

which had objected to the imposition of a trifling tax on foreign goods to give British goods fair play, yet imposed a contribution on the employers which would be a much greater burden. This burden would be carried by the consumer. He favoured insurance but felt that Friendly Societies could administer this better than the state. Later on the 6th November at Chadderton,[1] Denniss said that the profit margins in cotton spinning were narrow, only 5%. The insurance contribution would play havoc under such conditions. It was because of arguments like this that the Liberals referred to Denniss as the, "Champion of the Cotton Masters".

Moving away from the Insurance Bill, Denniss concentrated his attacks on home rule and the Liberal's attack on religion. Home rule was defended by Stanley by pointing out that self-government for Canada and South Africa had been a success.[2] Denniss replied that self-government for the colonies had served to consolidate the Empire whilst self-government for Ireland would have the opposite effect. This Great Britain could

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 7th November 1911
2. Oldham Evening Chronicle 28th October 1911

not afford at a time when other nations were consolidating their positions.[1] Speaking to the "religious people of Shaw" on the 1st of November,[1] Denniss referred to the government's proposals to disestablish and disendow the Welsh Church. There was now no House of Lords to stand in the way and the Church of England would soon follow the Church of Wales. He claimed that whilst disestablishment would not harm the church, the state would lose the religious education which it offered. He attacked Stanley for remaining "ominously silent" on this issue.[2] Stanley made only the slightest references to religious questions.

The Labour campaign understandably did not receive a great deal of publicity in the pages of the Chronicle and the Standard. The main concern of the Labour Party was to justify itself in the face of the Liberal criticism of vote splitting. Speaking at a mass meeting in support of Robinson at Greenacres Co-operative Hall on the 6th of November,[3] John Webster urged the electors not to be "bamboozled" by the Liberal cry of splitting the vote. The only true fighting party, he said,

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 2nd November 1911
2. Ibid 8th November 1911
3. Oldham Evening Chronicle 7th November 1911

was the Labour Party which was the driving force behind the progressive legislation of the government. J.R. Clynes said that Robinson had been brought forward, not to do mischief, but as a deliberate attempt to win the seat with the support of 20,000 trade unionists. He pointed out that when Ashton had been brought forward in 1904 the Liberals had admitted his right to stand. Robinson[1] maintained that no one could represent the working class who did not completely understand them and pointed out that the alternative to a trade union secretary was a peer and a barrister.

The brief reports of Robinson's speeches in the local press give an outline of his policies. He attacked the government, saying that he had "no confidence in a government of monopolists, capitalists and employers." The Insurance Bill he considered to be good in principle but felt that it should not be contributory. He supported home rule, the Shops Bill which introduced the principle of a legal weekly half holiday and the Coal Mines Act of 1911 which consolidated and amended the law relating to coal mines. Free trade he supported since the consumer always paid taxes and protection made little difference to unemployment. He wanted to see the Osborne decision reversed. His only pronouncements on foreign affairs was

1. Oldham Chronicle 4th November 1911

an appeal for peace. He stressed the need for a fair sharing of wealth and the nationalisation of the railways.

The Liberal fear that the introduction of a Labour candidate would split the vote and let in a Conservative, proved to be well founded. Denniss headed the poll with 12,255 votes and gained the seat vacated by Emmott. Stanley came second with 10,623 votes and Robinson a respectable third with 7,448 votes. There can be little doubt that Robinson's 7,000 votes came mainly from the erstwhile Liberal electors. At the close of the poll Stanley declared that at least 6,000 Labour votes had come from the Liberals whilst only 1,000 came from the Conservatives.[1]

The Labour Party was well pleased with the result of this, the first election that they had contested. Robinson[2] pointed out that unlike the Liberal and Conservative parties they had small party funds with which to finance the election and he promised that he would return and contest Oldham again.

Scarcely had the election closed, however, than the inter-party wrangling broke out again. Bell proposing a vote of thanks to Robinson hinted that "certain textile interests" had failed to give the support which was expected. During

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1. Oldham Daily Standard 14th November 1911

2. Ibid 14th November 1911

the election the Labour Party issued the Oldham Labour Herald in which a list of the unions supporting Robinson was given. The Chronicle[1] pointed out the significant omission of the Spinners Association and the Cardroom Association. On the 23rd November[2] the Executive Committee of the Labour Party passed a resolution regretting the conduct of certain local trade union officials in failing to assist the candidate. Because of the seriousness of the resolution a decision was deferred to another meeting on the following day. The resolution was carried unanimously and was sent to the erring unions.

1. Oldham Evening Chronicle 9th November 1911
2. Minutes of the Oldham and District Labour Party under date quoted.

CONCLUSION

"In mean estate live moderate, till grown
In wealth and multitude, factious they grow"
(Milton - Paradise Lost - Book II 1.351)

Out of this survey of Oldham politics in the nineteenth century now concluded, three points of interest emerge, the remarkable virility of political life in the borough, the importance of local issues in shaping the course of events and the part played by outstanding personalities.

In the absence of modern means of mass entertainment, a factor which accounts for much current apathy in politics, it is perhaps understandable that politics in the nineteenth century should have aroused interests and passions foreign to the modern scene. Political meetings were always well attended and on many occasions had about them the atmosphere of a music hall. Emmott writing in January 1913 wrote that: "There is a love of fair play among the people of Oldham which gives every candidate a chance of showing what he is made of." Speakers were generally given a good reception, heckling was good natured. Violence was rare but was not unknown especially during the early years of the period when special constables were kept busy and on at least two occasions the Riot Act was read and the military

called in.

Local issues dominated Oldham politics. On occasions, such as in 1886 over the home rule question and in 1910 over the budget and reform of the House of Lords, an election result was determined by wider national issues, but these occasions were rare, so rare as to occasion comment. More usually it was local economic issues, religious prejudices, superior party organisation or party splits which influenced elections. Indeed as Sir Ivor Jennings[1] points out, it was not until the advent of the internal combustion engine and broadcasting, that British opinion could be truly called homogeneous and politics became national. This too makes an interesting comparison with present day politics with local issues playing only a marginal role in party politics.

The people of Oldham showed a remarkable degree of fidelity to those representatives who captured their affections. Indeed the political

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1. Sir Ivor Jennings, Party Politics, Vol.I, p.23.

life of Oldham may be said to revolve around such names as John Fielden, member for Oldham for fifteen years; John Morgan Cobbett, intimately connected with the borough for forty two years and its member of parliament for a total of eighteen years; John Platt, member of parliament for only seven years but through his business connections a very powerful force in Oldham; John Tomlinson Hibbert, member of parliament for twenty four years and Alfred Emmott, member of parliament for twelve years. No doubt Robert Ascroft, had he lived, would also have become one of Oldham's senior statesmen. On occasions though, Oldham could react violently against its heroes, almost as if the borough deliberately set out to prove its independence. It was certainly not a borough which could be taken for granted. In 1847, for example, Fielden was summarily dismissed when it was felt that he was beginning to regard Oldham as his personal borough and in 1895, Hibbert was toppled from his pedestal.

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