

The British Middle Class and the ‘Dominance’ of Manufacturers: Halifax, c. 1830-1850¹

Toshihiko Iwama, Tokyo Metropolitan University

Manufacturers in the Northern English towns in the nineteenth century have been perceived as the dynamic and essential occupational group. This group was distinguished by owning property and managing capital, labour, and cultural and social resources. They were also a representation of the middle class and of leadership in urban public institutions in this century.² In 1852 Edward Akroyd, a giant worsted manufacturer in Halifax, wrote to Sir Charles Wood, MP from Halifax Borough:

‘the Cobden and Bright party are striving for power. Their Object is to form a middle class administration in contradiction to the aristocratic element...’³

This paper explores the relationship between the manufacturer and the middle class in Halifax in the first half of the nineteenth century by analysing the formation of power and the making of the middle-class ideology. Firstly, this paper will outline my research strategy and introduce the historical background of Halifax in the first half of the nineteenth century. Secondly, the nature of public institutions in Halifax in the 1830s will be examined. Thirdly this paper will explain the formation of ideology and power in Halifax in the 1840s and 1850s by the manufacturers. Lastly this study will clarify the points of this paper.

I

Manufacturers created their identity, ideology and power in local public institutions in the northern towns during the first half of the nineteenth century. Recent works, such as those of Bob Morris

¹ This paper is revised from the paper, ‘Rethinking the ‘dominance’ of manufacturers in the northern English town: the middle class in Halifax, c. 1830-1850’, at the new researchers’ session for the Economic History Society Annual Conference, University of Bristol, April 2000.

² Wolff and Seed (eds.), *Culture*; Howe, *Cotton*; Seed, ‘Middling’.

³ Hickleton MSS, A4/135, E. Akroyd to Sir Charles Wood, 1 March 1852.

and Stana Nenadic,⁴ reconsider the ‘dominance’ of the manufacturer in the British middle class in the nineteenth century by analysing the middle class occupations of and the nature of urban public institutions. As a result they confront the myth of the ‘dominance’ of the manufacturers in urban public institutions in the nineteenth century. While public institutions were important for regulating middle class activity and social relationships, were these institutions dominated by the manufacturer? How did the manufacturers on these institutions obtain that power? This study re-assesses the dominance of manufacturer in public institutions in a specific local community, Halifax. In order to analyse the nature of public institutions, to describe the social relationship and activity in these institutions and to examine the ideology of the middle class, this study uses both the direct evidence of original records and local newspapers, and a computer database, created from poll books, commercial directories, associational documents, and so on, totalling more than 50,000 items.⁵

In the eighteenth century, Halifax was one of the centres of the West Riding woollen and worsted industries.⁶ The process of industrialisation in Halifax from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century had been relatively gradual with the mechanisation of the worsted and woollen industries less advanced by the mid-nineteenth century than that of other leading textile sectors.⁷ Although, by the 1850s, Halifax had become one of the leading worsted and carpet industries centres in the West Riding, other textile industries like cotton and woollens, the machine-tool industry, distribution, and industrial and professional services became important economic sectors for Halifax too.

⁴ Morris, *Class*, esp. chap. 13; Nenadic, ‘Businessmen’, esp. pp.74-83.

⁵ See Appendix.

⁶ Hudson, *Genesis*, chap. 3.

⁷ Hudson, *Genesis*; Hargreaves, *Halifax*, chap. 4.

According to John Smail,⁸ the distinct culture of the middle class in Halifax emerged in the public sphere through a local élite composed of manufacturers, merchants and professionals in the second half of the eighteenth century. However the dominance of this local élite in the public sphere had been penetrated by manufacturers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Like Bradford,⁹ by the 1850s, Halifax also had giant manufacturers, in families like the Akroyds, worsted factory owners, and the Crossleys, carpet factory owners, who possessed considerable power to regulate the public sphere.¹⁰

II

The late 1820s and the early 1830s were a critical period in establishing the middle class presence in the public institutions of Halifax. First, Halifax township and part of Northowram and Southowram townships became a Parliamentary Borough, electing two MPs. Second, three important banks: the Halifax Joint Stock Banking Company, the Halifax & Huddersfield Union Banking Company, and the Halifax Commercial Banking Company were established. These banks encouraged financial links between the bank and the customers such as the manufacturer, the merchant, and the professional classes. Lastly, some important voluntary associations, the Halifax Mechanics' Institutes and the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society were established. Some friendly societies as well as permanent or temporary benefit societies had already become important public institutions in Halifax. For instance the Loyal Georgian Society, established in 1779, was not only one of the biggest local friendly societies in Halifax but also a local social club both for the elite and middling orders in the nineteenth century.

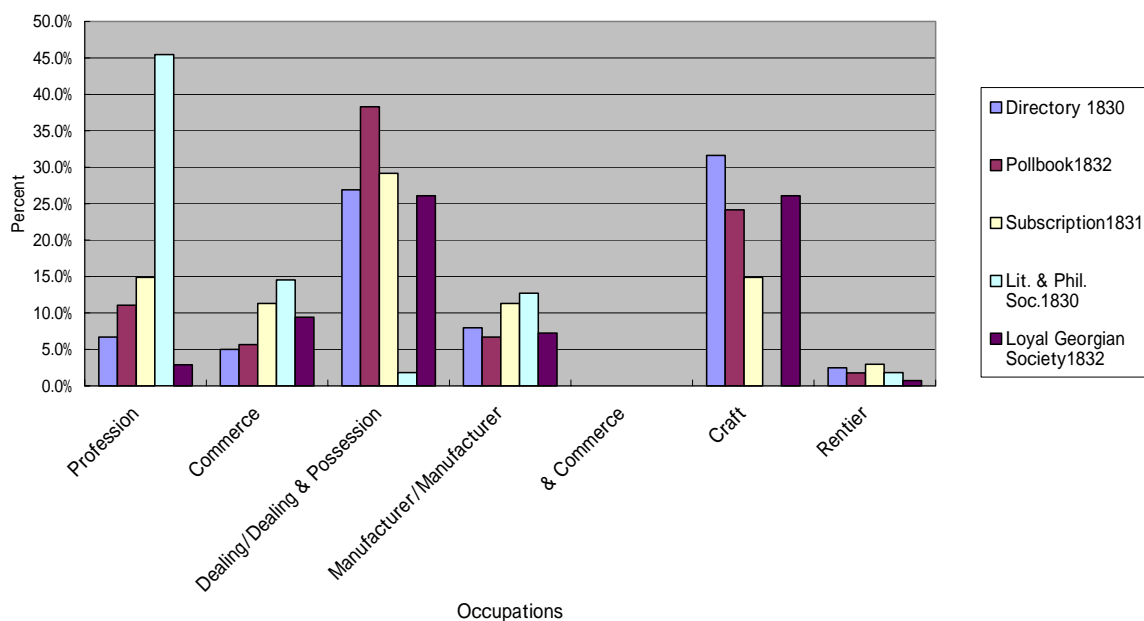
⁸ Smail, *Origins*, chap. 5 and 6.

⁹ Koditschek, *Class*.

¹⁰ Hargreaves, *Halifax*, chap. 4 and 5.

Figure 1 shows the percent of the selected occupational groups in the public institutions. For the total amount of this figure please look my handout. So, the craft group and the dealing and dealing & possession group formed the majority in the commercial directory and poll book. Although professionals, merchants and manufacturers dominated the membership of Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society, did these groups fail to get their power in other public institutions? Hereafter this study tries to evaluate the meanings of these figures.

Figure 1 Selected Occupational Groups in the Public Institutions in Halifax, 1830-1832¹¹



The Halifax political scene was influenced by party conflict and by radicalism. The Whig/Liberal group had a partnership with radical groups in Halifax before the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832, and then allied with the radical group from the 1835 election. The alliance between Whig/Liberal

¹¹ Round brackets show total number of the data. Directory 1830: the Commercial Directory in 1830 (1417); Poll book 1832: the Poll Book in 1832 related to the directory in 1830 (389); Subscription 1831: the Subscribers of the Board of Health in 1831 related to the directory in 1830 (168); Lit. & Phil. Soc. 1830: the Members of the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society in 1830

and radical groups contributed to their victory in the Halifax Borough elections in 1837 and 1841, although the radical candidate had been defeated in the 1835 Borough election. Furthermore, the Anti-Tory strategy of these groups, while fostering relationships between the middle class radicals and the Whig/Liberal group, masked their political differences, and contributed to the overcoming of Social Toryism. Some manufacturers performed crucial roles in this political context. For example, Jonathan Akroyd, a leading worsted manufacturer in Halifax, was a Methodist New Connection member and had been recognised as one of the principal Radical Dissenters.¹² He supported the Parliamentary Reform movement in 1832 and the Whig/Liberal candidate in the Halifax Borough elections in the 1830s and 1840s; but he was also a stubborn free-trader, and was militant in his hostility towards the collectivism of labouring people and the Factory Movement.¹³

Manufacturers, merchants and professionals were not able to control public institutions by the unity of their economic interests and strategies in Halifax in the 1830s. Accordingly the local financial system of three Halifax local banks, as Pat Hudson suggests,¹⁴ was based on kinship, and religious and political network. Associational life in Halifax was an alternative programme not only forging distinct identity and social relationships for the middle class but also stabilising the urban society. The Literary and Philosophical Society and the Mechanics' Institutes cultivated intellectual and neutral space for middling orders beyond party, sect and occupation in this local community. Mechanics' Institutes, for example, established mainly by craft groups in Halifax, were managed by the middle class after the early 1830s, when this institute tried to solve the problems of economic recession. The institutes rejected radical policies, such as the establishment of a political economy

(55); Loyal Georgian Society 1832: Members of the Loyal Georgian Society in 1832 (138).

¹² Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp. 93-107; idem., 'Methodism', p. 151.

¹³ Jowitt, 'Crossroads', pp. 20-25.

¹⁴ Hudson, *Genesis*, chap. 9; Ling Roth, *Genesis*, pp.18-37.

class in the 1830s.¹⁵ The annual report of this Institute in 1837 described:

‘The Directors have the greatest pleasure in seeing those advantages duly estimated and earnestly sought by the youth of town, whose intellectual and moral improvement they are happy to find men of all classes uniting to secure. And they regard it as not the least pleasing feature of the Institution and sign of times, that the friends of learning, laying aside all political distinction and sectarian views, can meet together on common ground principle, “Knowledge is power”’.¹⁶

These associations were supported and governed by a small local élite group, which included such individuals as the Tory banker, Christopher Rawson, a Tory merchant, John Waterhouse, the Whig banker, Rawdon Briggs, Jun., the Vicar, Charles Musgrave, and the Unitarian minister, William Turner. Some voluntary relief bodies like the Board of Health in Halifax depended on bankers, merchants, manufacturers and professionals too. This elite group in Halifax was not only a financial supporter but also a leading intellectual group consolidating the moral and order. Unquestionably, this distinct middle-class identity vis-à-vis other groups was forged in their hierarchical public institutions.¹⁷

III

Public institutions based on limited pluralism for the middle class were consistently challenged by radical groups in these institutions, and by the collectivism of labouring people from the 1830s. Were these limited associational activities enough to regulate urban society for all inhabitants? These frictions greatly expanded in the Halifax Borough Election of 1847, when there was serious division within the middle classes, and between the merger of the Whig/Liberal–Radical alliance,

¹⁵ W(est) Y(orkshire) A(rchive) S(ervice), C(alderdale) D(istrict) A(rchives), Halifax Mechanics Institute, Minute Book, HMI: 1, 1825-1839.

¹⁶ WYAS, CDA, HMI: 1.

¹⁷ Morris, *Class*, chap. 7, 10-13.

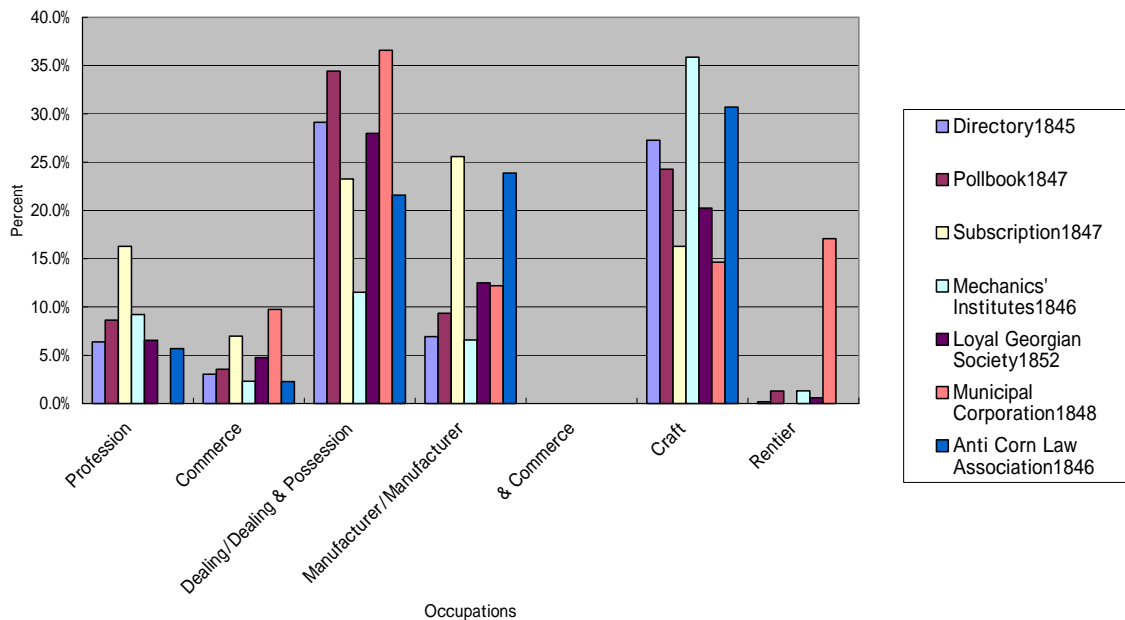
which had lasted since 1835, but which now collapsed. The Radical Dissenter group insisted on 'Voluntarism' in public institutions. The Chartists attacked middle-class liberalism and insisted on their alternative programme of governing public institutions by themselves.¹⁸ Although Radicals and Chartists made a tactical alliance for the election of 1847, both candidates were defeated by Tory and Whig/Liberal candidates. Nevertheless Radicals and Chartists had penetrated other public institutions such as Mechanics' Institute and the Halifax Municipal Borough Corporation incorporated in 1848. Subsequently they sought to maintain their power in these institutions.¹⁹ Figure 2 reflects these conflicts and movements. Councillors of Halifax Borough in 1848 include the dealers, innkeepers and crafts, which were supporting radicals or chartists. These occupational groups were still the majority in Halifax Borough election. The advocacy of 'free trade', which the middle class had espoused through the Anti-Corn Law Association in Halifax, was no longer a certain indicator of middle-class liberalism, because this radical group also supported liberal economic policy and sought power in current institutions.²⁰ Therefore the middle class needed to reconsider how their pluralism in public institutions could be maintained and how to legitimise themselves in public institutions.

¹⁸ Jowitt, 'Crossroads', pp.25-36.

¹⁹ Tiller, 'Chartism'.

²⁰ CDA, Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association, Minutes Book, 1839-1846, HAS/B:11/1.

Figure 2 Selected Occupational Groups in the Public Institutions in Halifax, 1845-1852²¹



The middle class affirmed their distinct identity through the development of moral and useful knowledge in the local community. They also legitimised themselves in the leadership and social unification of public institutions, and defined their local intellectual and physical space by their activity of institutions. ‘Liberalism’, ‘social improvement’ and ‘class harmony society’ were significant in the forging of their strategy of regulating middle class practices and relationships, and legitimising themselves in the social hierarchy.

Social improvement and a society of class harmony had become the object of a powerful crusade in

²¹ Round brackets show total number of the data. Directory 1845: the Commercial Directory in 1845 (2647); Poll book 1847: the Poll Book in 1847 related to the Directory in 1845 (845); Subscription 1847: the Subscribers of the Relief Fund of Unemployment related to the Directory in 1845 (43); Mechanics’ Institutes 1846: the Members of the Halifax Mechanics’ Institutes in 1846 related (173); Loyal Georgian Society 1852: the Members of the Loyal Georgian Society in 1852 (168); Municipal Corporation 1848: Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the Halifax Municipal Borough Corporation in 1848 (41).

Halifax by the 1850s. In contrast to the attitudes of Jonathan Akroyd towards labouring people two decades earlier, Edward Akroyd, Jonathan's son, an Anglican, and John, Francis and Joseph Crossley, Congregationalists, tried to create model villages in Halifax to encourage social harmony for all classes from the end of the 1840s. Unlike Saltaire, the famous factory village in Shipley,²² these plans did not dramatically modify the over-all urban physical environment. But the construction of these two model villages was enough to make the people in Halifax recognise that these giant manufacturers were committed to social improvement and the society of class harmony. Furthermore Edward Akroyd improved financial institutions for middling and labouring people by establishing the saving bank and the building society. Francis Crossley tried to create a public open space such as the 'People's Park' where the people of all classes gathered.²³ Unlike the instances in Leeds,²⁴ the manufacturers in Halifax provided strong leadership to the public park movement by donating the land to Municipal Borough. These activities intensified not only ideologies of social improvement and social harmony but also consciousness of the leadership of these giant manufacturers in public institutions.

The aim of social improvement provoked conflicts between utilitarians and economists about whether urban improvement was necessary, while the aldermen and councillors of Halifax Municipal Borough Corporation managed its limited budget.²⁵ In the Report to the General Board of Health ... on Halifax, 1851, William Ranger suggested,²⁶

'the tax ...is necessarily uncertain and indirect, and, it may be, levied on those who are the

²² Reynolds, *Paternalist*.

²³ Green, *Religion*, chap. 1; Hargreaves, *Halifax*, chap. 5.

²⁴ Branston, 'Development'.

²⁵ WYAS, CDA, Halifax Borough Minutes, HXM: 3, 1848 and passim.

²⁶ William Ranger, *Report to the General Board of Health, on a Preliminary Inquiry as to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Town of Halifax in the Country of York*, 1851, p.52.

creators of no nuisance. I have, however ..., that although its visible results may not appear to affect the wealthy, its final effects are experienced more or less by all classes of the community.'

Liberalism and a consciousness of social development in Victorian Halifax reduced the gap between utilitarians and economists and provided a common intellectual base to discuss social policy. The principle of Free Trade was also a source of economic consensus for both utilitarians and economists in Halifax. In the Halifax Borough election of 1852, 'Liberalism' was a dominant position for the middle class. Two Whig/Liberal candidates defeated the Tory candidate and the Chartist candidate. One Whig/Liberal candidate in particular, Francis Crossley, a giant carpet manufacturer, was a powerful actor bridging Radical and Whig/Liberal. At the Liberal Festival in February 1853, Edward Akroyd, the chairman, declared 'we are all united together like an arch; our interests are identical, and no class ought, or will upraise its interests at the expense of another'.²⁷

Consciousness of social harmony for all classes was not only an important ideology to stabilise and legitimise this hierarchical society but also the essential indicator distinguishing the middle-class radicals from labouring radicals, who were active in various labouring organisations and supported collectivism. The Halifax radical group from the 1830s to the 1850s was not dominated by a single united culture and strategy. Henry Martin, Congregationalist, publisher of the Radical newspapers in Halifax between the 1830s and 1840s, not only supported the Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association but also campaigned for 'Voluntarism' on the Halifax Borough election in 1847 and accepted the strategic partnership between Radical Dissenter and Chartist.²⁸ Although he was also committed opening the Mechanics' Institute to Radicals, he rejected labouring class collectivism for education

²⁷ *Halifax Courier*, 5 February 1853.

²⁸ *Halifax Reformer*, Aug. 1847- June 1848.

and asserted the cause of class harmony in public institutions, when radical labouring group tried to convert the Mechanics' Institute into an organisation for the working classes in the 1850s.²⁹ The manufacturers succeeded in controlling the management both ideologically and financially, when the new building of Mechanics' Institutes opened in 1857. As the giant subscribers, Crossleys and other manufacturers defeated the education project of labouring class at Mechanics' Institutes. In short the middle-class radical was tied into a plurality of hierarchical public institutions.

The representation of 'the middle class' as the principal actor in public institutions in Halifax was invented, defined and intensified by manufacturers' activities in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Manufacturers were not majority in the middling rank of Halifax in the first half of the nineteenth century. Merchants, professionals and bankers were still important in supporting the hierarchical financial structure and maintaining the intellectual environment. However the manufacturers such as the Akroyd and Crossley were the biggest financial supporters for public institutions in Halifax by the 1850s. What is important is that manufacturers exemplified the ideologies such as social harmony for all classes, social improvement and liberalism. They confronted popular movements like the Factory Movement, the Anti-Poor Law Movement, and Chartism, and by attacking these movements stabilised their ideologies and institutions. The manufacturers' activities were not limited in each public institution but related these institutions by their strong ideology and social relationship.

IV

In conclusion, while middle-class ideologies became the essential strategy for public institutions, these institutions in Halifax in the second quarter of the nineteenth century possessed the power to regulate middle class activity and relationships. Their ideologies consolidated the middle-class

²⁹ WYAS, CDA, Halifax Mechanics Institute, Minute Book, HMI: 2 and 3, 1847-1859.

belief and duty in public institutions. The representation of the 'middle class' in Halifax formalised the distinction between themselves and others by their ideologies. In the 1850s, by developing middle class ideologies the 'manufacturer' in Halifax was able to intensify their leadership in these public institutions.

Foot Note References

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Appendix : the Brief List of the Halifax Database³⁰

Poll books for Halifax Borough (1832, 1835, 1837, 1841, 1847 and 1852)

Commercial directories for Halifax (1845 and 1850) and for Halifax in Yorkshire or West Yorkshire Directories (1822, 1830, 1837 and 1853) and for Halifax in National Directories (1781, 1784, 1790, 1805 and 1814)

Local administration documents in Halifax, c. 1780-c.1850

Political and religious documents in Halifax, c. 1820-c.1850

Associations' documents in Halifax, c.1780-1850 (especially from c. 1830)

Two Halifax banks' Shareholder List, 1829-1843

³⁰ Currently, this database is made by Access 2000 on Windows 2000 in Japanese. For further information, Toshihiko Iwama, Lecturer in Economic History, Faculty of Economics, Tokyo Metropolitan University, 1-1 Minami-Ohsawa, Hachioji, Tokyo, 192-0397, Japan. E-mail t_iwama@bcomp.metro-u.ac.jp