

ADULT EDUCATION IN NORTH
LANCASHIRE IN THE SECOND
QUARTER OF THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY

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Michael I. Watson

ABSTRACT

This study describes and analyses educational self-help in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It relates different kinds of adult education to local culture and to the socio-economic structure of local communities. It seeks to explain the popularity of educational self-help in this period and distinguishes between formal and informal kinds of adult education.

The area consists of the hundreds of Blackburn, Amounderness and Lonsdale. Furness is excluded from this study because it was a remote rural area. It is argued that adult education was concentrated in towns : particular attention has therefore been given to Lancaster, Preston, Burnley, Blackburn, Darwen and Accrington.

A wide range of printed primary sources has been used. The most important were newspapers, periodicals, parliamentary papers, directories, and Victorian biographies. Few relevant manuscripts have survived. Extensive use has been made of secondary sources.

This study is divided into ten chapters. The first is a brief Introduction. The second examines the socio-economic structure of North Lancashire. Chapter Three is an analysis of educational self-help and includes a description of mutual improvement societies. The next two chapters deal with mechanics' institutes. Chapter Six examines literary and philosophical societies, scientific

societies, and phrenological societies. Chapter Seven discusses the educational significance of public houses and newspaper reading rooms. The role of the churches in the provision of adult education is analysed in the next chapter. Chapter Nine describes the decline of adult education and educational self-help after 1850 and is followed by a short Conclusion.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Historians of education have often been primarily concerned to describe and analyse the development of formal, institutional educational provision and the roles of national and local government as providers of education. This approach is most clearly seen in general histories of education such as H.C. Barnard's A Short History of English Education (1947). It can also be traced in more recent and specialized works such as J. Hurt's Education in Evolution (1972). Although this book is comprehensively subtitled Church, State, Society and Popular Education 1800-1870, Hurt's main interest is the role of the state in the provision of elementary schools.¹ In 1984 P. Gardner could still claim that 'the history of elementary education remains one of the most desolate areas of modern scholarship.' This historian criticized

the maintenance of an orientation which looks overwhelmingly to the study of institutions and of official policy. The central focus continues to be the progressive expansion and refinement of formal educational provision for the working class, through the combined - and generally laudible, efforts of Church and State.²

A related problem is an excessive emphasis on the education of children. The major part of H.C. Barnard's book is devoted to this subject.³ It is also significant that when this scholar discusses adult education he concentrates on mechanics' institutes - the most formal sources. In 1962 T. Kelly criticized this approach to adult education.

The term 'adult education', though variously defined, in current usage nearly always implies a measure of formal instruction, a relationship of teacher and taught. Such instruction, however, is only one of the means by which adults are educated ... In earlier times the most important instruments of adult education were the pulpit and the press; and even today the public library, the cinema, the radio, and television are more potent influences than the classroom. 4

A similar view is taken by J.F.C. Harrison. His account of adult education in Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51 begins with the observation that,

Formal schooling was not the only means to the creation of a literate society, in which a regard for knowledge and print was the hallmark of respectability. It was Gibbon who observed that every man who rises above the common level has received two educations : the first from other people, the second and more important, from himself. The Victorians took this greatly to heart. 5

It is important to note that T. Kelly and J.F.C. Harrison were both deeply involved in adult education in the nineteen-fifties.

Scholars have too often tended to interpret education in a restricted manner. Although there is considerable room for debate about the precise boundaries between formal and informal education, between education itself and the socialization process, it is difficult to deny that historians of education have tended to exaggerate the importance of institutions and the passivity of learners. As P. Gardner has remarked, 'the concept of "education" is narrowed to a known and agreed facility, to a neutral process that is simply 'done' to people both for their individual benefit and for the good of society as a whole.' 6

The approach so strongly criticized by P. Gardner seems to be essentially 'Whiggish'; it is primarily concerned with educational agencies which have survived or evolved rather than with those which were essentially peculiar to a past age. H. Silver has perceptively observed that

only those phenomena which serve to explain what has survived in institutional form have been seen as worthy of attention. Only those structures, events, ideas, campaigns, successes, failures, in Victorian society that have meaning in twentieth century terms have been admitted to the definition of the history of education. 7

It is doubtful whether even the historical writings of Thomas Macaulay approach the extremes of Whiggishness described by H. Silver.

How can the prevalence of the 'Whig View of Education' be accounted for? It is perhaps not without significance that most historians are employed by formal educational institutions which depend on grants provided by central government and local authorities. The nature of departments of education may be another factor; many are primarily concerned with the training of teachers, and scholars such as L. Cremin have criticized them for a pre-occupation with schooling rather than education.⁸ The nature and availability of the evidence also contributes to the 'Whig View of Education.' Many historians of education have attempted to describe national developments and have depended heavily on evidence provided by parliamentary committees, civil servants, and school inspectors. Although these sources are extremely valuable, they tend

to be hostile to informal sources of education.⁹ Local studies can provide the foundations for a more balanced view. Some scholars seem to have avoided informal sources of education because of what appeared to be a lack of suitable evidence.¹⁰ The main problem is not so much a lack of evidence as its scattered nature. Early Victorian newspapers contain many brief references to, say, mutual improvement societies, but few detailed descriptions of them. Historians of education are also faced with a need to define their subject and narrow definitions of education are often felt to be more useful than broad ones. K. Charlton has claimed that, 'If the category history of education is to have any distinguishing power at all, if it is not to be drained of all meaning, there have to be limits to its use,'¹¹ and H. Silver fears 'the emergence of an amorphous history which fails to locate discrete educational institutions in a clear relationship with other processes, and also fails to establish acceptable and understandable definitions of the wider educational territories.'¹² These genuine difficulties may be at least partially resolved by considering what it is to be educated, rather than the process of education itself. A man who is 'well-read', has a disciplined mind, and is reasonably articulate, is usually said to be 'well-educated'; the means by which he gained his knowledge and skills is at best a secondary consideration. A graduate is not necessarily more educated than an autodidact. It seems to follow that education consists of far more than mere schooling.

Although the importance of formal educational institutions has to be accepted, the present study attempts to redress the balance in favour of informal education. Both the subject and the period are significant. Despite its comparative neglect by historians and educationists, adult education is the only part of the British educational 'system' (modern or Victorian) where individuals can obtain educations in their own way, at their own pace, and (to a considerable extent) in institutions of their choice. It must also be recognized that adult education was relatively much more important in the early Victorian period than it is in the late twentieth century. The provision of schools in the second quarter of the nineteenth century left much to be desired and many young people did not receive any formal schooling; there was consequently plenty of demand for adult education. There were also many different varieties of adult education in the early Victorian period. There were formal bodies such as mechanics' institutions and literary and philosophical societies, as well as such informal sources as phrenological societies, newsrooms, and even public houses. It is hoped to show that informal sources were at least as important as the institutions which have been the chief beneficiaries of modern scholarship.

Opportunities for adult education expanded rapidly during the first half of the nineteenth century and this expansion seems to be particularly marked from the eighteen-twenties onwards. Improved opportunities coincided with increased popular demand; the two were in fact

intimately related. Scholars have been divided about the effects of the Industrial Revolution on elementary education but it is likely that literacy levels were rising by the second quarter of the nineteenth century.¹³ This provided an essential foundation for more advanced educational activity. Industrialization and urbanization created social problems such as overcrowding and social dislocation; the inhabitants of the growing towns began to seek new forms of recreation and the mutual improvement society became an attractive alternative to the beershop. As the French Revolution became an increasingly distant memory, the upper and middle classes lost much of their traditional fear of 'education for the masses'; they came to feel that an industrializing society needed an educated and skilled workforce. At the same time, institutions of adult education provided local elites with agencies of social control and religious instruction. The availability of books and newspapers increased dramatically in this period and their prices fell. The number of 'respectable' books published in the seventeen-nineties was, on average, 372 per annum; 2,500 were published in 1853.¹⁴ Improved communications broadened intellectual horizons and enabled people to travel considerable distances to mechanics' institutes and other bodies; they provided means of escape from what Karl Marx called 'the idiocy of rural life.' Perhaps the most important factor was rising popular aspirations. Economic, political, and cultural ambitions were stimulated by economic growth and the termination of the French Wars. Mutual improvement

societies were one manifestation of this; trade unions and friendly societies were others.

The evidence from North Lancashire has suggested that adult educational activity increased rapidly throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth-fifties and -sixties this expansion faltered and the nature of adult education began to change. Three factors were of particular importance. As the provision of elementary schools increased, illiteracy and innumeracy declined in importance and demand for remedial adult education fell. Growing state involvement in adult education undermined the activities of independent institutions and weakened most forms of informal adult education. Rising popular affluence facilitated other forms of recreation and eroded the cultural foundations of educational self-help. The second quarter of the nineteenth century provides the historian with the opportunity, perhaps the only opportunity, to examine truly independent sources of adult education which played a significant role in the life of a large proportion of the population.

The main aim of this study is to describe and analyse the various institutions, organizations, and societies, which were sources of adult education in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and to relate their development to the social and economic structure of the area. National studies of educational developments often devote too little attention to socio-economic factors and neglect the extent of regional varia-

tions. It is hoped to show, in particular, that the vitality of adult education in North Lancashire owed much to the existence of a middling class. Another aim of this study is to question many of the concepts which modern scholars have imposed too early on nineteenth century education. It will be argued that concepts such as 'social control', 'social legitimization', 'hegemony' and 'class struggle' must be used with great caution when analysing adult education in North Lancashire. A related aim is to challenge the 'evolutionary' view of education. Informal adult education of the kind that existed in early Victorian Lancashire was not a primitive predecessor of modern institutional education but rather the manifestation of a lively culture of self-help which crossed class boundaries and encouraged social cohesion. It is also hoped to shed light on the educational 'networks' which existed in this period. Monographs on mechanics' institutes and literary and philosophical societies often present a distorted view of adult education in this period. The 'average' autodidact made use of a wide range of organizations and institutions which were sometimes rivals but were more often complementary. The relationships which existed between these bodies and their users are best examined by detailed study of local areas such as North Lancashire.

NOTES

1. Education in Evolution, p. 9 and passim.
2. The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England : The People's Education (1984), p. 1.
3. H.C. Barnard devoted 248 pages to the history of English education between 1760 and 1902; adult education was discussed on three of these.
4. A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool, 1962), p. vii.
5. Early Victorian Britain (1979 edition, first published 1971), p. 166.
6. Lost Elementary Schools, p. 1.
7. 'Aspects of Neglect : The Strange Case of Victorian Popular Education', Oxford Review of Education 3, No. 1 (1977), p. 62.
8. Public Education (New York, 1976), p. 82.
9. Cf. Gardner, Lost Elementary Schools, p. 5.
10. C.J. Radcliffe, 'Mutual Improvement Societies in the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1835-1900', Journal of Educational Administration and History, 18, No. 2 (1986), p. 2.
11. 'The Benefit of the Rear-View Mirror : History of Education in the Professional Education of Teachers', in Trends in the Study and Teaching of the History of Education, edited by R. Lowe (History of Education Society Occasional Publication No. 7; 1983), p. 6.
12. Education as History (1983), p. 8.
13. M.J. Sanderson, 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', Past and Present, 56 (1972); T.W. Laqueur, 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', Past and Present, 64 (1974).
14. D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom : A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography (1982 edition, first published 1981), p. 116.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
STRUCTURE OF NORTH LANCASHIRESection One : Geographical Outline:

The establishment and development of mechanics' institutes, mutual improvement societies, newsrooms, and other agencies of adult education cannot be adequately analysed in isolation from their local contexts. North Lancashire is a significant area for study yet has received less attention from historians than the more populous, industrialized, and politically radical south-eastern corner of the county.¹ The area is quite large - almost one thousand square miles, and in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was economically very diversified. North-east Lancashire contained a number of expanding textile towns which had much in common with the towns of south-east Lancashire. Some of these such as Accrington and Nelson were effectively created by the Industrial Revolution (Nelson was named after a local public house)², while others such as Blackburn and Burnley were well-established market towns, but all experienced unprecedented growth rates. Some of the coastal towns, Blackpool and Morcambe for example, also owed their existence to nineteenth-century expansion. Lancaster and Preston were inevitably affected by industrial growth but remained administrative, professional and, to some extent, social centres.

The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the construction of roads, canals and railways, and improved communications gave a powerful stimulus to the growth of adult education. ³ Many parts of North Lancashire were still very isolated in 1850, however; traditional rural life continued in the Furness and Fylde penninsulas, and in the foothills of the Pennines, although handloom weaving was an important source of income in these areas and there was a steady flow of people from the farms to the towns. ⁴

This study however is primarily concerned with developments in the towns of North Lancashire and therefore the economic and social structures of Preston, Lancaster, Accrington, Blackburn, Burnley and Darwen will be examined in some detail. The main reason for this concentration on the towns concerns the availability of evidence; far more has been preserved about urban mechanics' institutes than rural ones, for example, although occasional snatches of evidence come to us of such bodies as the Crawshaw Booth Mechanics' Institute which attracted 600 people to its first soiree in 1852. ⁵ It is also likely that educational activity was concentrated in the towns.

Section Two : A Comparative Study of Six Towns:

(a) Size and Population:

Although the largest of these towns were substantial settlements by contemporary British standards, all were relatively small and compact. J.D. Marshall has described how the towns of Lancashire 'grew intensively rather than

extensively.' ⁶ A study of Edward Baines' 1824 map of Blackburn suggests that few of the town's inhabitants lived more than 200 yards away from open countryside; even in 1850 towns like Blackburn and Preston were only about a mile across. ⁷ As late as 1839 the Blackburn Standard was able to describe Accrington as a 'quiet and beautiful little village' although it had a population of almost 8,000. ⁸

It was not easy to define the boundaries of these towns and their expansion between 1821 and 1851 led to the absorption of formerly separate villages. Table One simply gives the populations of townships although the populations of Old and New Accrington have been combined and the inhabitants of Lancaster Castle (a gaol) have been ignored.

TABLE ONE

The Growth of Six Townships Between 1821 and 1851

Town	Population in 1821	Population in 1851	Percentage Increase
Preston	24,575	68,537	182
Blackburn	21,940	46,536	113
Lancaster	10,144	14,378	42
Darwen	6,711	11,702	74
Burnley	6,378	14,706	131
Accrington	5,370	10,374	93

Source : Census of Great Britain, 1851, Population

Tables : North Western Division, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, LXXXVI, pp. 46-58

(b) The Physical Environment:

Although scholars are divided about many of the social consequences of industrialization there is a clear consensus that conditions in early Victorian industrial towns were appalling. J. and B. Hammond were among the early historians of the Industrial Revolution who described urban life. They described the filth, disease, inadequate water supplies, slums, overcrowding, and open sewers that characterized the new towns and concluded that 'they were not so much towns as barracks : not the refuge of a civilization but the barracks of an industry.'⁹ Although modern historians are more wary of the 'sweeping condemnations' which are a common feature in works such as The Town Labourer and The Bleak Age, they are in broad agreement with the conclusions reached by the Hammonds. J. Lovell considers that few scholars would 'dissent from the view that the general standard of housing for working people in the industrial revolution was appallingly bad.'¹⁰ The social and educational implications of these conditions, and the extent to which urban squalour was worse than rural squalour, are less well established.¹¹

In many respects the six towns resembled large villages or collections of small ones; P. Joyce has pointed out that 'until late into the century the factory town retained rather more of the village than it acquired of the city.'¹² As noted above, most townsmen lived in close proximity to open countryside and this must have at least partially compensated for the squalour and disorder which

characterized so much urban accommodation. J.D. Marshall has argued that dampness and coldness were more important than airlessness, overcrowding, and filth, and rural immigrants would have been very familiar with the former.¹³ Although most townsmen lived near to open countryside, however, few had access to it. Urbanization and industrialization led to the enclosure of common land and town moors disappeared. Some historians have argued that urban class struggles had a 'territorial dimension' in the second quarter of the nineteenth century; A. Delves and E. Yeo have claimed that local élites made a conscious attempt to deny space to working people.¹⁴ In 1833 the Committee on Public Walks asked one of Blackburn's M.P.s: 'Is there any place to which the children of the humbler classes may resort for any game or exercise, any of those games they have been used to on holidays?' 'None whatever', was Joseph Fielden's reply.¹⁵ In 1844 Preston was the only town in Lancashire which possessed a public park.¹⁶ Opportunities for leisure and recreation declined in this period. R.J. Morris has observed that 'by the 1840s only chapel and public house filled the gloomy gap between bearbaiting and the maypole on one hand and association football on the other.'¹⁷ A man who had an aptitude for educational self-improvement would not find himself tempted by many other forms of recreation.

Most Lancashire towns had few public buildings in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, although Lancaster and Preston were better-endowed than the towns of north-east Lancashire. Employers and their employees

continued to live in the same districts so huge undifferentiated slums of the kind that existed in Manchester and Salford were rare in North Lancashire. ¹⁸ Even so, much of the available accommodation was unhealthy, overcrowded, and squalid. In 1840 the Medical Officer of the Colne District of the Burnley Union described the housing in his locality:

Animal and vegetable substances in a state of decomposition, in nearly all the back streets of the town, mixed with ashes and night-soil. No scavengers; filth collected and kept for manure ... Greater part of the houses of the poor built back-to-back in rows. Cellar, in almost all cases, let off to a different family. No thorough draught or ceiling to the ground-floor apartment. No attention paid to ventilation. Many of the windows not made to open; neither at the same time, sufficient regard to warmth ... Want of cleanliness both in persons and dwellings of poorer classes. Pigs, donkeys, and fowls commonly kept in the same room with the family ¹⁹

Conditions in the county town were little better; they were described in a report by Dr. Edward De Vitre.

The want of proper ventilation almost throughout the houses occupied by the poor, is an evil which has engaged much of my attention In the best of such dwellings it is seldom that more than one pane of glass in a small sash-window is made to open, and in houses of a still worse class not that The ground floors of a very large proportion of cottage property in Lancaster are placed several feet below the surface of the ground, many of them very damp, and of course increasing the difficulty of thorough ventilation. ²⁰

Poverty encouraged overcrowding in the six towns. The available evidence is summarized in Table Two; unfortunately reliable information about the average size of houses does not seem to exist. Although chronic overcrowding was probably not the norm it is unlikely that most people enjoyed much privacy when at home. The problem of over-

crowding was compounded by the need to conserve fuel and candles. Comparatively few families would have been able to keep all their rooms heated and lit for long periods.²¹

TABLE TWO

Overcrowding in Six Townships in 1851

Town	Population in 1851	Number of Inhabited Houses	Occupants Per House
Preston	68,537	11,197	6.12
Blackburn	46,536	7,919	5.88
Lancaster	14,378	2,582	5.57
Darwen	11,702	2,134	5.48
Burnley	14,706	2,596	5.66
Accrington	10,374	1,957	5.30

Source : Census of Great Britain, 1851, Population Tables : North Western Division, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, LXXXVI, pp. 46-58.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, most of the population of North Lancashire lived in abysmal accommodation. Although poor housing did not actually facilitate adult education, it encouraged it in two ways. Inadequate housing caused many people to seek pleasure and fulfilment outside the home. Many were content with the pleasures provided by ale-houses; Blackburn had 462 drink outlets by 1862.²² Others turned to political movements, friendly societies, and educational self-help. Poor accommodation, together with poverty and harsh working

conditions, may also have encouraged some people to seek 'release' in study. This may help to explain the popularity enjoyed by poetry in this period.

(c) Trade and Industry:

The cotton industry dominated the economic life of all the towns except Lancaster and the exception was only a partial one.²³ In 1861 34 per cent of Blackburn's total population and 30 per cent of Preston's were employed by 'King Cotton.'²⁴ It must be remembered that as most cotton workers were in their teens or twenties, well over 50 per cent of the populations of these towns must have had some experience of life in the mill.²⁵ A major coal-field lay underneath much of north-east Lancashire and mining was an important source of employment in Blackburn, Burnley, Accrington and Darwen.²⁶ Demand for coal was greatly stimulated by the use of steam power in the textile factories, the growing population, and the increasing use of coal-gas to light houses and streets.²⁷ Coal mining had serious environmental consequences and led to a further deterioration in the housing stock. In 1836 Edward Baines described conditions in Burnley : 'Owing to the extensive excavations for coals made under the town ... there are many good houses to be seen with a rent down the front, and where the roofs and flooring have separated from the walls.'²⁸ Houses and factories were often built of stone in this period and quarrying was an important industry in Blackburn, Accrington and Lancaster. Burnley, Blackburn and Lancaster had engineering industries and Burnley also

had several iron foundries. Darwen had a paper works and calico printing was a source of employment in Burnley and Accrington. There were furniture industries in Burnley and Lancaster.²⁹

Preston and Lancaster were important trading centres. Preston had been North Lancashire's chief market since the Middle Ages. There were numerous shopkeepers and tradesmen in the town and these catered for local people, gentry families, and traders from other areas.³⁰ The port of Preston was of considerable local importance in the second quarter of the nineteenth century but it was subordinate to that of the county town. Edward Baines considered that it had 'become a creek of the port of Lancaster.'³¹ The last-named trading centre was situated at Glasson Dock at the mouth of the River Lune. In 1834 610 vessels docked at Glasson; most of these were coasters. Lancaster had few local rivals. It was the most important market in Lonsdale and it served southern Westmoreland and part of the West Riding. Its shopkeepers and traders served the needs of a huge, predominantly agricultural, area.³²

(d) Politics and Industrial Relations:

Further attention will be given to this subject, but a few general remarks might be made at this stage. Industrial relations tended to be best in areas with well-established industries such as Blackburn and some industrial villages.³³ Towns which were slow to industrialize like Darwen and Burnley tended to have small firms and insecure employers who were reluctant to co-operate

with trade unions. ³⁴ Preston, on the other hand, does not fit this pattern. Although Preston's cotton industry was as well-established as Blackburn's, her textile employers seem to have sought a crudely dominant rather than paternalistic relationship with their 'hands' and this led to poor industrial relations. ³⁵

Parliamentary elections in Lancaster and Preston were dominated by the power and influence of the gentry. All Preston's M.P.s between 1832 and 1867 were drawn from this class. ³⁶ Blackburn's parliamentary representation alternated between Conservative and Liberal cotton masters; Blackburn's two constituencies elected seventeen M.P.s between 1832 and 1859 - thirteen were representatives of the textile interest. ³⁷ The parliamentary electors of Accrington, Burnley, and Darwen voted for county M.P.s. ³⁸

Most of the inhabitants of the six towns were unable to vote so their political allegiances are difficult to ascertain. Many were undoubtedly committed to the Tory and Liberal parties, as P. Joyce has shown, ³⁹ while most of those who were not, were either politically apathetic or supporters of the Charter. Chartist activity in a town ought therefore to give a clear indication of the extent of popular dissatisfaction with the established parties. There was considerable support for the Chartist movement in Burnley and Darwen. P. Joyce considers that the former 'was among the most radical towns in the county' ⁴⁰ and the Chartist - inspired strike of August 1842 brought the latter to a standstill. The Blackburn Standard reported

that, 'In Darwen ... all the mills and shops are closed, and appearances indicate the aspect of a country involved in a civil war.'⁴¹ The situation in Preston was more confused. J.E. King has claimed that a strong Chartist movement existed in the town, but the work of D.S. Gadian has suggested that it had an uphill struggle against a branch of the Anti-Corn Law League which had considerable working-class support.⁴² Chartists had even less success in Blackburn. At a meeting in 1839 William Beesley, an Accrington Chartist, described how the workingmen of Blackburn licked their masters' shoes,⁴³ and D.S. Gadian has referred to 'the exceptional weakness of the Chartist movement in Blackburn.'⁴⁴

There is considerable scholarly disagreement regarding the relationship between educational self-help and popular political activity. H. Perkin believes that the cult of self-improvement weakened popular militancy,⁴⁵ whereas D. Vincent has argued that educational activity was a pre-condition of political organisation.⁴⁶ The evidence from North Lancashire suggests that neither approach was entirely satisfactory. Although working people were politically and industrially much more militant in some towns than others, adult education seems to have been widely distributed. Educational self-help occurred independently of political or trade union activity although many autodidacts were involved in a wide range of popular organizations.

(e) Occupational Structure:

Although there is much source material which provides evidence about the occupational structure of nineteenth century towns it is not easy to come to firm conclusions. Many of the terms used by census enumerators and the compilers of trade directories are imprecise and wide differences of status, income, and skill existed within most trades and professions.

M. Anderson's work on Preston seems to be a good starting point for any study of the occupational structure of the towns of North Lancashire. He analysed one district of Preston in much detail and the occupational structure revealed by his research is shown in Chart One. Preston clearly had a highly differentiated population in the mid-nineteenth century; it is important to note that artisans were almost as numerous as factory workers. Although M. Anderson considers that Preston's occupational structure 'was very similar to that of the urban areas of the county as a whole,'⁴⁷ it is useful to compare his work on Preston with D.S. Gadian's more sketchy study of Blackburn. D.S. Gadian's conclusions are summarized in Chart Two.

Although Preston was more of a professional centre than Blackburn, and was the home of fewer handloom weavers, the occupational structures of the two towns were similar in many respects. A study of local trade directories and Census materials suggests that the occupational structures of the other four towns of North Lancashire were not unlike those of Blackburn and Preston although there were minor differences.

CHART ONE

The Occupational Structure of the Adult Male Population of
One Preston District in 1851

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- A. Professional and Managerial (2%)
- B. Clerical (4%)
- C. Trade (11%)
- D. Higher Factory (13%)
- E. Artisans (20%)
- F. Lower Factory (13%)
- G. Labourers/Itinerant Traders (18%)
- H. Hand-loom Weavers (5%)
- I. Unclassified (10%)
- J. Not Employed (4%)

Source : Michael Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge, 1971), p. 26.

CHART TWO

The Occupational Structure of Blackburn in 1841

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- A. Professional/White Collar (4½%)
- B. Trade/Retail/Wholesale (9½%)
- C. Building Industry, Metal Trades, General Workshop/Industry (23%)
- D. Textiles (50%)
- E. Mining, Labouring, Miscellaneous (13%)

Source : D.S. Gadian, 'A Comparative Study of Popular Movements in North-West Industrial Towns, 1830-1850', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976), Appendix One.

Lancaster had a substantial professional class and many artisans in traditional trades, while Darwen, Accrington, and Burnley seem to have been slightly more proletarian than the other towns. Coal miners were numerous in Accrington and Burnley. ⁴⁸

It is important to recognize that the occupational groups mentioned above were far from homogeneous. There were, for example, wide differences of income and status within and between crafts. Some tailors were as impoverished as handloom weavers while engineers and engravers were relatively prosperous. In much the same way, master builders were usually far more affluent than their journeyman apprentices. ⁴⁹ The social and political significance of these differences remains less clear.

Section Three : The Class Structure of North Lancashire:

Class analysis permeates much recent work on the history of education. The approach adopted by many scholars is largely determined by the class models they use. ⁵⁰ Historians who are committed to conflict models of class relations tend to emphasize the social control functions of educational institutions while those who are not committed to this approach are free to develop different views. One source of confusion seems to be the belief that a single class model can be applied to all parts of Britain at a given time. There is strong evidence that a five class system existed in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and this may have important implications for the class structures of other areas.

The most familiar model of social class was developed by Adam Smith and David Ricardo. It divides society into three broad categories : the upper class or aristocracy; the middle class or bourgeoisie; and the lower or working class. R.J. Morris has argued that this 'is the natural way to think about class in an industrial society.'⁵¹ Although its categories are rather crude it is a useful starting point for the class analysis of North Lancashire.

It is clear that Lancashire had a substantial landed class in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and this class may have enjoyed more influence in largely rural North Lancashire than in rapidly industrializing South Lancashire. In 1865 J.L. Sanford and M. Townsend analysed the density of aristocratic seats in the counties of England; with one seat per 101,000 acres, Lancashire was the tenth most densely settled county in England.⁵² At the time of the 1873 New Domesday Survey Lancashire possessed few estates of the greater gentry; it had twelve whereas Rutland had eighteen and Shropshire had thirty-one.⁵³ Lancashire had a large squirearchy, however; fourteen per cent of the county's area (excluding waste) was occupied by estates of 1,000 to 3,000 acres.⁵⁴

The members of landed families tended to marry within their own class. A. Howe has observed that, 'Traditional landed gentry within Lancashire ... remained relatively impervious to entrepreneurial blood ... The Lancashire and Cheshire gentry remained firmly disdainful of "cottontots"'⁵⁵ A few aristocrats became entre-

preneurs - the Earl of Derby, for instance, established a cotton factory in Preston - ⁵⁶ but most seem to have been primarily concerned with their estates. Comparatively few members of Lancashire's landed aristocracy seem to have been interested in the provision of opportunities for adult education; the exceptions were usually minor gentry such as the Fieldens of Blackburn.

The upper class can be easily, if crudely, defined in terms of the possession of land; the middle class cannot be defined so easily. N. McCord has written of the 'nineteenth century myth of the middle class' ⁵⁷ and has argued that,

It is difficult to imagine a viable equivalent for the middle class of 1832 of E.P. Thompson's gallant attempt to provide us with a 'made' working class by that time. Apart from the bewildering variety of elements which have to be considered for inclusion in such a grouping, ranging perhaps from the banker and manufacturer through the teacher, doctor, lawyer, tenant farmer, to the small shop or beerhouse keeper - and it is difficult enough to see any bond of coherence here - it is not possible to find in these years occasions which can be pointed to with any confidence to illustrate a sufficiently representative middle class acting in a reasonably united and purposive way. ⁵⁸

Some of the people mentioned by N. McCord are more obviously middle class than others. Substantial entrepreneurs were at the core of Lancashire's middle class in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In addition to the ubiquitous cotton masters, these included coal mine owners, brewers, paper manufacturers, engineers, some newspaper proprietors, and bankers. It also seems reasonable to regard substantial tradesmen and members of established

professions as middle class. H. Perkin has argued that there were two middle classes in the second quarter of the nineteenth century : an entrepreneurial middle class and a professional middle class.⁵⁹ It is possible that a self-conscious professional class emerged in cities and some large towns but the professional men of North Lancashire were too thinly distributed to constitute a discrete class. In 1851 Oldham's bourgeoisie consisted of 400 major employers, 98 substantial tradesmen, 68 professional men, and their immediate families.⁶⁰ A study of local directories suggests that the situations in Blackburn and Burnley were broadly similar although Preston may have had a relatively larger professional elite.

Small shopkeepers, clerks, and members of marginal professions were separated from the middle class by what J. Foster has called 'a definite break in social continuity.'⁶¹ They were separated by economic and cultural differences. Scholars such as G. Crossick and G.S. Checkland have argued that a lower middle class appeared in the Victorian period. This approach is beset by problems of definition. G.S. Checkland's lower middle class is essentially a petty bourgeoisie of small manufacturers and traders;⁶² G. Crossick's is somewhat broader and also includes minor professional people and clerical workers.⁶³ It should also be noted that G. Crossick seems to have reservations about whether these somewhat disparate groups actually constituted a class, and R.Q. Grey prefers the term 'middle strata.'⁶⁴

It is unlikely that a lower middle class existed in Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century; small shopkeepers, clerks and teachers were not sufficiently numerous to constitute a separate class and it is difficult to distinguish them economically or culturally from the more affluent and educated artisans. It is much more likely that a 'middling' class existed which embraced artisans as well as the lower middle class strata mentioned by G.S. Checkland and G. Crossick. According to G. Crossick, the 'central lower middle class' earned between £150 and £300 per annum in the late Victorian period.⁶⁵ This seems reasonable although a large proportion, perhaps most members of the lower middle class, probably earned no more than the lower figure in the eighteen-seventies. In Liverpool in 1871 office managers in the cotton brokerage trade earned between £150 and £120 per annum and some stock ledger clerks in the eighteen-fifties earned as little as £68.⁶⁶ The retail trade included indisputably middle class shop owners and lower working class street traders, but most adult male shop workers earned about as much as Lancashire's less successful clerks. In the late Victorian period, qualified assistants earned up to about £90 per annum.⁶⁷ The incomes of teachers varied in size and security but few could be regarded as genuinely affluent. In 1833 the Master of Blackburn Grammar School received an annual salary of £100.⁶⁸ Most teachers were less fortunate. In 1834 a member of the General Committee of the National Society informed the Select Committee on the State of Education that 'the average of the salaries of

the schoolmasters sent out from the central school may vary from £50 to £100, and the mistresses from £35 to £70; a man and his wife about £100 to £120.' ⁶⁹ Four years later James Kay, an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner based in Manchester, expressed the view that free accommodation and a salary of £35 per annum was adequate for schoolmasters employed in workhouses. ⁷⁰

These 'lower middle class' salaries are very similar to the incomes of skilled workers in Lancashire in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1849 highly - skilled hand-mule spinners earned, on average, 40s per week, and in the calico-printing industry engravers could earn between 30s and £3 per week in 1835. ⁷¹ It is also important to note that office and shop workers had to spend more money on clothes than skilled working men and were often reluctant to allow their wives to work. It is sometimes claimed that these 'lower middle class' employees enjoyed greater job security than skilled working men and had more opportunities for upward social mobility. ⁷² There is some truth in these assertions but the importance of these factors can be exaggerated. Clerks had more reason to fear unemployment than, say, skilled mechanics, and while many artisans could hope to become small masters or publicans, promotion prospects in offices and shops could be very limited. Some clerical and shop workers had successful careers, it is true, but most of these come from middle class backgrounds and had good connections. ⁷³

Working conditions in offices, shops, and workshops differed greatly but it is by no means clear that conditions in workshops were less pleasant or more unhealthy than other working environments.⁷⁴ Clerks and shopworkers also lacked the partial autonomy at work which is usually associated with middle-class occupations. Shop assistants were often required to live on the premises with their employers.⁷⁵ E. Flower, writing in 1843, described how many assistants in Liverpool were only allowed out on Sundays.⁷⁶ They were usually required to obey petty rules, breaches of which were punishable by fines, and it was not uncommon for assistants to be dismissed when they married.⁷⁷ Shopworkers and clerks may have identified with their employers and superiors to a marginally greater extent than skilled craftsmen did with small masters but this is far from obvious. In 1871 B.G. Orchard claimed that,

There is no cordiality between large sections of Liverpool's clerks and their employers. There is scarcely a pretence of friendliness. The continual complaint of employers is, 'These men's hearts are not in their work, they do as little as they can for their money.' It is retorted by the accused, with inexorable logic, 'Why should we care for masters who grind our bones to make their bread?'⁷⁸

Clerks, shopworkers and artisans lived in similar homes and frequently intermarried. They had similar family backgrounds, had similar levels of education, and spoke with the same accents.⁷⁹ It may be that white collar workers were more concerned with 'respectability' and domestic life than were artisans, but the differences between these groups were hardly profound and artisans seem

to have enjoyed at least as much social status as clerks.⁸⁰ In short, any attempt to distinguish between 'working class' artisans and 'lower middle class' clerks, shopkeepers or teachers is both arbitrary and artificial. Contemporaries often regarded artisans as members of the same social class as these other groups and this view has received some support from modern historians. J.F.C. Harrison has argued that 'no hard and fast line can be drawn between the labour aristocracy and the lower middle class'⁸¹ and E. Hobsbawm has claimed that 'labour aristocrats knew that they occupied a firm and accepted position just below the employers, but very far above the rest.'⁸² It is reasonable to conclude that a middling class existed in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. R.S. Neale's research suggests that a similar class existed at this time in Bath.⁸³ In this study it is intended to argue that this middling class constituted the backbone of most forms of adult education in North Lancashire from the eighteen-twenties to the eighteen-fifties.

The evidence from North Lancashire suggests that a working class was beginning to form in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, but that such a class was not well-established before the late Victorian period. It is possible that a working class had emerged in other parts of Lancashire by 1850. J. Foster has argued that Oldham society was polarized between a working class and 'the bourgeoisie' but this situation may have been exceptional.⁸⁴ R.J. Morris has observed that Oldham 'lay like

some cotton-spinning Cuba, plotting revolution, but receiving little welcome when its delegates ventured into the wider society of Britain.' ⁸⁵

In the eighteen-thirties and - forties the three main groups of workers in North Lancashire were textile factory operatives, hand-loom weavers, and colliers. ⁸⁶ The members of these groups lived in the same areas and dwelt in similar houses; they intermarried, had broadly similar interests, and were largely illiterate. Wages varied considerably from trade to trade but in the eighteen-twenties and - thirties factory weavers and warpers usually earned between eight and thirteen shillings per week. ⁸⁷ In 1844 most of Oldham's colliers were earning about fifteen shillings per week. ⁸⁸ Handloom weavers, colliers, and factory operatives probably felt that they had more in common with each other than they had with clerks or agricultural labourers. This class consciousness seldom led to unified class action, however; these workers were fundamentally divided. According to H.A. Turner, co-operation between spinners and weavers was 'virtually non-existent' even in combined mills, and their repeated failure to act together, even when they were on strike at the same time and in the same location, is hardly evidence of strong class consciousness. ⁸⁹ Colliers were perhaps more homogeneous than textile factory workers but one of their chief characteristics was a fierce localism which greatly hindered all efforts to form effective mining trade unions in Lancashire. ⁹⁰ Handloom weavers were far more numerous than factory operatives in North Lancashire until

at least the eighteen-forties. They were largely domestic workers and their economic and political interests were very different from those of factory workers. Handloom weavers longed to see the collapse of the factory system while factory operatives had a vested interest in its expansion. ⁹¹

E.P. Thompson has claimed that 'the working class was, in 1832, the most significant feature in British political life.' ⁹² It is unlikely that the working class was the most significant feature in the political or cultural life of North Lancashire at this time. R. Glen has studied the working population of the Stockport district in this period and has concluded that it is 'inappropriate to talk, in any meaningful way, about a single, unified working class.' ⁹³ The working population of North Lancashire seems to have resembled that of Stockport far more closely than that of Oldham.

R.S. Neale has claimed that a lower working class existed in the first half of the nineteenth century which comprised agricultural labourers, domestic servants, the urban poor, and all working-class women. ⁹⁴ It is arguable that an impoverished and demoralized lower working class existed in Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Immigrant groups such as the Irish were certainly alienated from the mainstream of working class life and the social position of working class women left much to be desired. It is perhaps more appropriate to claim that a status division existed within the working

class, a division which separated those who were in comparatively steady employment from those who were not. ⁹⁵

The working class of North Lancashire was unable to make a major contribution to adult education in the second quarter of the nineteenth century although many of its members attended lectures and classes and made use of libraries and newsrooms. Working class people were more likely to be recipients of adult education than active members of societies and institutes.

Section Four : The Characteristics of the Middling Class:

Historians who are sympathetic to the idea of a middling class usually claim that it had a very important political role in early Victorian Britain. R.S. Neale's middling class is far removed from the passive lower middle class described by some historians; it is rather, 'the central, most unstable, and most significant political class in England in the period from 1800 to the 1840s.' ⁹⁶

D. Fraser claims that a middling class existed in some early Victorian cities :

The many gradations between the embryonic proletariat and the large-scale capitalist exemplified the character of Victorian cities and their politics. These middling ranks of urban society contained some elements of cohesion by virtue of the nexus of economics, and it was sometimes the links that bound apparently diverse groups together which struck contemporaries, rather than the gulf in wealth between them. ⁹⁷

J.F.C. Harrison is also impressed by the political importance of the English middling class in this period.

Time and time again the historian is impressed by the frequency with which the same men turn up as the leaders, especially at the local level, of successive reform movements. It is also clear that a majority of them belonged to that group of the 'middling classes,' composed of better-off artisans, small tradesmen and shopmen, who formed the backbone of most radical causes. 98

The middling class was of profound political importance in the second quarter of the nineteenth century; it was also of very great cultural and educational importance. Reform movements and institutions of adult education both depended on the leadership and support of members of the middling class. Most of the institutions, bodies, and societies examined in this study were essentially the products of middling class effort and initiative. Joseph Livesey was an almost archetypal member of the middling class. He worked as a handloom weaver in Walton-le-Dale when a youth before moving to Preston where he set up business as a cheese-monger. He was self-educated, a Baptist, a teetotaler and a radical. His contributions to adult education in Preston include six reading rooms, the foundation of a mechanics' institute, and the establishment and editorship of the Preston Guardian, North Lancashire's leading newspaper.⁹⁹ Henry Baker of Blackburn was a tailor and the proprietor of a 'democratic newsroom' in Fleming Square. He was an autodidact and a radical; according to W.A. Abram he only washed and shaved 'on the natal days of Thomas Paine and Robert Owen.'¹⁰⁰ W.A. Abram was the son of a Congregationalist minister; he was apprenticed to a Blackburn printer and stationer and worked in the printer's depart-

ment of the Preston Guardian before he became Librarian of the Blackburn Free Library in 1860 at the age of twenty-five. He was the founder of the Blackburn Literary Club, and a major local historian; he was also a popular lecturer and taught many classes of young men. ¹⁰¹ Thomas Turner Wilkinson was the son of a small farmer and his first job was book-keeper at Mellor Brook Mill. He educated himself, became Assistant Master of Burnley Grammar School, and in 1842, at the early age of twenty-seven, was elected Chairman of the Directors of the Burnley Mechanics' Institute. ¹⁰²

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the middling class of North Lancashire included many men of this kind. Perhaps they can be defined in terms of their attitudes more easily than in terms of their affluence or occupations. They were independent, non-deferential believers in self-help; most valued respectability - although there were a few exceptions such as Harry Baker. Most were at least partially self-educated and a majority tended to be dissenters or secularists. Their class did not survive for much more than thirty years but while it existed it made an invaluable contribution to adult education in North Lancashire.

Section Five : The Limits of Class Analysis:

While some scholars are deeply committed to particular class models, others are profoundly sceptical about the value of detailed class analysis. P.N. Furbank claims that classes are subjective constructions which are of little use even as heuristic devices.

We have to forget any idea that 'classes' really exist. They are not that sort of thing, but rather fictions or imaginary frames that people project upon others, and these will differ of necessity according to who is doing the projecting and why; moreover the same people will construct these frames differently in different contexts and under the pressure of different circumstances. It follows that the idea that 'classes' can be defined by economic or material criteria, or indeed defined by criteria at all, is a mistake. 103

Although G. Best is prepared to use the terminology of class he clearly has serious reservations about class analysis. He claims that mid-Victorians thought and behaved 'as if their social structure was ... like that we commonly ascribe to the eighteenth century, of multiple gradations or ranks in a pyramidal order, with as many opportunities for "class consciousness" both upwards and downwards.' G. Best makes three further points. He argues that class antagonisms were often less strong than 'vertical connections' within society, claims that the division between the respectable and the non-respectable within any class was sharper than any class division, and points out that class antagonism did not prevent people from rising and falling in society and adopting the attitudes of the strata into which they rose or fell. 104

It is not difficult to extend G. Best's argument. Political allegiances usually cut across class divisions, 105 and both the Chartist movement and the Anti-Corn Law League depended on 'class collaboration.' Conversely, there was strong 'working-class' opposition to Chartism and 'middle-class' opposition to the League. Strong sectional divisions existed within classes; handloom

weavers and factory operatives were unable to co-operate effectively as C. Calhoun has shown.¹⁰⁶ Factory workers were themselves divided. R. Glen has concluded that 'the general pattern was one of sectional "labour consciousness" and little more.'¹⁰⁷ It is also important to note that beliefs, attitudes and values united members of different classes. T.R. Tholfsen has shown how ideologies transcended class boundaries,¹⁰⁸ and T.W. Laqueur has argued that, 'The great divisions in early nineteenth century society were not between the middle and the working classes but between the idle and the non-idle classes, between the rough and the respectable, between the religious and the non-religious.'¹⁰⁹ Mill-owners and weavers contrasted themselves as hard-working wealth-producers with idle and parasitic rent-collecting aristocrats, and the temperance and teetotal movements did not distinguish between the follies of the rich and the vices of the poor.¹¹⁰

P.T. Phillips and P. Joyce have argued that sectarian divisions were almost as important as political ones in the cotton towns of Lancashire.¹¹¹ H. Perkin has claimed that religious antagonisms were stronger than class divisions in Glossop.¹¹² This strong sectarian feeling had a profound influence on the development of adult education in North Lancashire; religious rivalry was one of the chief factors behind the spread of church institutes and Sunday schools.

Perhaps the most serious division within early Victorian society was that between men and women. Female

participation in adult education was certainly very limited. Although it may not be appropriate to regard conflict between the sexes as a form of class conflict, this struggle was at least as real and as important as that between, say, the 'middle class' and the 'working class.' ¹¹³ An overseer in a cotton mill had more in common with a clerk than he had with his wife. It is difficult to disagree with R.S. Neale's view that the work of feminist historians such as B. Taylor 'contributes to a subtle dissolution of all existing class models of social structure.' ¹¹⁴

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century there was a high degree of adult educational activity and educational self-help in North Lancashire. This was in large measure the result of a combination or confluence of social and economic factors. Population growth and improved communications meant a large market existed for adult education and there were few alternative sources of recreation and personal fulfilment to distract potential scholars. There was also plenty of scope for co-operation between members of different social strata; there were no rigid class divisions in North Lancashire and the middling class united most of the area's autodidacts and many of its most enthusiastic teachers. These social and economic factors cannot themselves provide an adequate explanation of the culture of educational self-help which is the subject of this study, however; they were intimately associated with native cultural traditions and new movements which will be described in subsequent chapters.

NOTES

1. For major studies of the towns of south-east Lancashire see J. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (1974); N. Kirk, The Growth of Working - Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England (1985); C. Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle (Oxford, 1982); D.S. Gadian, 'A Comparative Study of Popular Movements in North-West Industrial Towns, 1830-50' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Lancaster University, 1976).
2. G.V. Wilson, Tales of the Nelson Inn (Nelson, 1966).
3. For a brief survey of transport improvements see J.J. Bagley, A History of Lancashire (1976 edition, first published 1956), pp. 88-90.
4. M. Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge, 1971), Chapter 7.
5. Burnley Advertiser, 1 May 1852. Crawshaw Booth is a rural district to the east of Burnley.
6. Lancashire (Newton Abbot, 1974), p. 69.
7. History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster 2 Vols. (Liverpool, 1824).
8. 15 February 1839.
9. The Town Labourer (1978 edition, first published 1917), p. 27. See also The Bleak Age (1947 edition, first published 1934), pp. 52-74.
10. Introduction to The Town Labourer, p. xx; see also M.I. Thomis, The Town Labourer and the Industrial Revolution (1974), pp. 48-66.
11. Introduction to The Town Labourer, pp. xxii-xxiii; J.F.C. Harrison, Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51 (1979 edition, first published 1971), pp. 88-89; J. Burnett, A Social History of Housing 1815-1970 (1978), pp. 30-93.
12. Work Society and Politics (1982 edition, first published 1980), p. 118.
13. Lancashire, pp. 67, 69.
14. A. Delves, 'Popular Recreation and Social Conflict in Derby, 1800-1850', and E. Yeo, 'Culture and Constraint in Working - Class Movements, 1830-1855', in Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure edited by S. and E. Yeo (Brighton, 1981).

15. Hammond, The Bleak Age, p. 81.
16. R.D. Altick, The English Common Reader (Chicago, 1957), p. 88.
17. Class and Class Consciousness in the Industrial Revolution, 1780-1850 (1979), p. 53; see also J. Walvin, Leisure and Society 1830-1950 (1978), pp. 2-17.
18. Marshall, Lancashire, p. 69; for conditions in Salford the best source is undoubtedly F. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (1969 Panther edition; first English edition 1892).
19. Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population, Local Reports, House of Lords Sessional Papers, 1842, XXVII, pp. 265-266.
20. Ibid., p. 343.
21. For a useful general survey see Burnett, Social History of Housing, pp. 54-93.
22. M. Bayley, Lancashire Homes and What Ails Them (1862), p. 31.
23. For the cotton industry in this period see D.A. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry and the World Market, 1815-1896 (Oxford, 1979). S.D. Chapman, The Cotton Industry in the Industrial Revolution (1972) is a useful introductory study.
24. Kirk, Growth of Working - Class Reformism, p. 33.
25. Gadian, 'Comparative Study of Popular Movements', pp. 90-92.
26. E. Baines, History of the County Palatine and Duchy of Lancaster, 4 Volumes (1836), Vol. 3, pp. 251, 287, 324, 332.
27. W. Bennett, The History of Burnley, 4 Volumes, (Burnley, 1948), Vol. 3, p. 192.
28. History of the County Palatine, Vol. 3, p. 251.
29. Ibid., passim.
30. P.T. Phillips, The Sectarian Spirit : Sectarianism, Society, and Politics in Victorian Cotton Towns (Toronto, 1982), pp. 37-39.
31. History of the County Palatine, Vol. 4, p. 361.
32. Ibid., pp. 550-551.
33. Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, p. 68.

34. Ibid., pp. 68, 72-73.
35. H.I. Dutton and J.E. King, 'The Limits of Paternalism: the Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-54', Social History, 7, No. 1 (1982).
36. A. Howe, The Cotton Masters, 1830-1860 (Oxford, 1984), p. 116.
37. Ibid., p. 111.
38. Ibid., p. 100.
39. Work, Society and Politics, pp. 268-303.
40. Ibid., p. 68.
41. 17 August 1842.
42. Richard Marsden and the Preston Chartists, 1837-1848 (Lancaster, 1981); 'Comparative Study of Popular Movements', p. 96.
43. Northern Star, 13 July 1839.
44. 'Comparative Study of Popular Movements', p. 201; see also p. 188.
45. The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (1972 edition, first published 1969), p. 290.
46. Bread, Knowledge and Freedom : A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography (1982 edition, first published 1981), p. 195.
47. Family Structure, p. 25.
48. Baines, History, Directory and Gazetteer, passim; Slater's Royal National Classified Commercial Directory and Topography of the County of Lancaster (London and Manchester, 1851), passim; Census of Great Britain : 1851; Tables on Ages, Civil Condition, Occupations etc, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-3, LXXXVIII, pp. 630-653.
49. Useful studies of the living standards of artisans during the Industrial Revolution include J.L. Hammond and B. Hammond, The Skilled Labourer (1979 edition; first published 1919); E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1968 edition, first published 1963); and I. Prothero, Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London : John Gast and his Times (Baton Rouge, 1979). The poverty and destitution of tailors in this period is described in Charles Kingsley's Alton Locke : Tailor and Poet (first published 1850).

50. It is perhaps useful to outline three distinct class - based approaches to education. Marxist scholars are usually committed to two - class models of social structure and emphasize the importance of class conflict in the Industrial Revolution period. J. Foster claims that Oldham's bourgeoisie supported and funded educational institutions in order to maintain their local social and political hegemony; see Class Struggle, pp. 215-216. A similar approach is adopted by C.E. Ward, 'Education as Social Control : Sunday Schools in Oldham c. 1780-1850' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, Lancaster University, 1975). A rather different approach is adopted by E.P. Thompson. This scholar argues that the English working class developed its own educational institutions in the first half of the nineteenth century; Making of the English Working Class, pp. 416-417. See also T.W. Laqueur, Religion and Respectability : Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture (Yale, 1976), passim. Although H. Perkin is not a Marxist, he agrees with J. Foster and E.P. Thompson that education should be interpreted in terms of conflict or competition between different classes. He claims, however, that the main conflict occurred between the middle and upper classes and their respective ideals; Origins of Modern English Society, pp. 291-302. It will be argued that the growth of adult education in North Lancashire owed little to class conflict.
51. Class and Class Consciousness p. 32.
52. F.M.L. Thompson, English handed Society in the Nineteenth Century (1963), p. 30.
53. Ibid., p. 114.
54. Ibid., p. 115.
55. The Cotton Masters p. 77.
56. Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, p. 74.
57. 'Some Difficulties of Parliamentary Reform', Historical Journal, 10, Part 4 (1967), p. 380.
58. Ibid., p. 377.
59. Origins of Modern English Society, pp. 252-270.
60. Foster, Class Struggle, p. 163.
61. Ibid., p. 163.
62. The Rise of Industrial Society in England, 1815-1885 (1964), pp. 301-304.
63. The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914 (1977), p. 12.

64. 'Religion, Culture and Social Class in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Edinburgh', in Crossick, Lower Middle Class, p. 134.
65. Ibid., p. 34.
66. G. Anderson, Victorian Clerks (Manchester, 1976), p. 20-21.
67. W.B. Whitaker, Victorian and Edwardian Shopkeepers (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 18.
68. S.C. on the State of Education, Abstract of Answers and Returns, PP, 1835, XLI, p. 423.
69. Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, PP, 1834, IX, p. 143; evidence of William Cotton.
70. S.C. on the Education of the Poorer Classes in England and Wales, Report, PP, 1837-1838, VII, p. 20.
71. Kirk, Growth of Working-Class Reformism, p. 95; Gadian, 'Comparative Study of Popular Movements', p. 351.
72. Crossick, Lower Middle Class, pp. 21-22; G. Anderson, Victorian Clerks, pp. 21-27.
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CHAPTER THREE

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE SELF-HELP IN
NORTH LANCASHIRE IN THE SECOND QUARTER OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURYSection One : Introduction:

This chapter will describe and analyse the ways in which members of the upper working and middling classes educated themselves; the solitary efforts of individuals and the establishment of mutual improvement societies will be examined. Both of these subjects have been neglected by historians. C.J. Radcliffe has claimed that, 'The history of the mutual improvement society remains to be written'.¹ The educational efforts of autodidacts have received some attention from scholars but much of the available evidence is still scattered in a plethora of biographies and autobiographies.² It is arguable that educational self-help is, and has always been, more important than institutional provision in the form of schools and colleges.³ If educational self-help is of great value in the late twentieth century, it was of far greater significance in the early Victorian period. Then the alternatives were frequently self-help or no help.

Many nineteenth century writers did more than recommend educational self-help as the only means by which a working man might gain knowledge; they argued that it was the finest type of education. Sir Walter Scott, for instance, claimed that, 'The best part of every man's

education is that which he gives to himself.' ⁴ Samuel Smiles was even more explicit in his approval:

That which is put into us by others is always far less ours than that which we acquire by our own diligent and persevering effort. Knowledge conquered by labour becomes a possession - a property entirely our own This kind of self-culture also calls forth power and cultivates strength. ⁵

Although the importance of this kind of individual self-help cannot easily be measured, its significance cannot be denied. There is no doubt that the experience of this form of self-help almost certainly had a major influence on the psychology and values of the autodidacts who dominated most aspects of middling class culture and politics in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It is hardly a coincidence that most autodidacts were themselves deeply committed to the creed of self-help.

Attempts to distinguish between individual self-help and mutual self-help are somewhat artificial; William Wordsworth pointed out that, 'these two things, contradictory though they may seem, must go together - manly dependence and manly independence, manly reliance and manly self-reliance.' ⁶ Mutual improvement societies were the most important educational manifestation of collective self-help. Numerous writers and scholars have testified to their significance. In 1849 Samuel Smiles considered that 'the extension of ... mutual improvement societies ... affords fair evidence of an increasing desire for better literary culture among the working classes.' ⁷ Two years earlier R. Kemp Philp had made ambitious claims on their behalf:

It is when the student sits in solitude, or when a few earnest men assemble together unostentatiously to instruct and improve each other, that the seed is sown of which we see the fruits in the more exciting demonstrations of public feeling. Mutual instruction classes, therefore, exercise a greater sway over the public weal than may at first appear; and in proportion as they multiply will the maturity and rectitude of the general mind be manifested upon all great occasions. 8

More recently, J.F.C. Harrison has argued that;

If one of the fundamental aims of adult education was to enable people to come to terms more effectively with the problems of living in an industrial community, and if such adult education was best pursued in a small democratic group, then the mutual improvement societies must be accounted at least as successful as some longer-lived and more pretentious adult educational institutions. 9

C.J. Radcliffe goes even further and claims that it is not 'too fanciful to see mutual improvement societies as providing a continuum linking early 19th century radicalism, Chartism and the nascent Labour Party, whilst serving as a significant factor in the making of that potent, if unpredictable, force in British politics, the Nonconformist conscience'. 10

Mutual improvement societies were highly ephemeral and unstable; compared with them, mechanics' institutions epitomized permanence and stability. It is impossible to know how many mutual improvement societies existed at a given time or how widely distributed they were, but it is likely that by 1850 at least one existed in each village and urban community in North Lancashire. According to J.P. Hemming, 'It was in Lancashire that mutual improvement classes proved most popular.' 11 As early as 1838 J.P. Kay identified 86 'evening schools for mutual instruction' within the borough of Manchester alone. 12

In his study of working-class autodidacts, R.K. Webb has referred to 'the exertions of isolated individuals, reports of whose exploits in self-education have survived to amaze a less devoted age.'¹³ What motivated these men and women? Few autodidacts appear to have been motivated primarily by a desire for upward occupational mobility. Most distinguished between the 'knowledge' which could be obtained from books, and 'skills' which were of some vocational value.¹⁴ Such an approach made good sense in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. David Vincent, who has made a close study of working-class autobiographies, has claimed that,

Beyond a basic literacy and numeracy there was little abstract knowledge which an artisan could usefully gain outside the practise of his trade, and once qualified, the worker at the factory bench would find that the discipline, noise and monotony of the industrial process would make it very difficult to make any contact with what he would consider to be 'knowledge'. At a practical level, the experience of industrialization was driving apart rather than uniting the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of bread. ¹⁵

M.J. Sanderson has argued that even literacy and numeracy were of limited economic value; 'It is somewhat of an illusion to think that [the] great advance of industrialization created a commensurate increase in demand for clerical labour and hence for the literate man'.¹⁶

The enthusiasm with which autodidacts pursued knowledge may have owed something to the utter inadequacy of formal educational provision. M.J. Sanderson claims that literacy declined in Lancashire as a result of industrialization and population growth. He calculates

that there was nineteen per cent literacy in Rochdale and Wigan by the eighteen-thirties.¹⁷ This may be an underestimate but conditions were undoubtedly dire in Over-Darwen. In 1835 it was claimed that 'the inhabitants of this chapelry chiefly consist of hand-loom weavers, whose children receive no daily instruction but what is given them at home by their parents.'¹⁸ Such a situation presented many intelligent men with stark alternatives - they could remain ignorant, or they could do whatever was necessary to educate themselves.

Many people regarded educational self-help as an enjoyable form of recreation. There were few alternatives given 'the cultural aridity of the new industrial towns.'¹⁹ R.D. Altick has pointed out that, 'Until well past mid-century ... the man who was not content with aimless loafing or with grosser amusements had little alternative but to spend his Sunday leisure with a book or paper.'²⁰ Such men were increasingly numerous as the temperance and teetotal movements swept through Lancashire in the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-forties. Samuel Smiles took the view that, 'as the habit of temperance extends, not only the inclination but the necessity for reading extends with it, as a means of filling up the intervals of leisure which the working people have.'²¹

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century the upper working and middling classes contained many individuals with first-rate minds who felt trapped by physical hardship and cultural poverty. The young Rowland

Detroisier, for instance, was an example of a man 'famished for learning'.²² Books provided such men with food for their intellects and imaginations. Thomas Cooper, the Chartist poet, claimed that 'The happiest days of all I had in early years were spent alone and with books'.²³ His somewhat obsessive reading caused him to have a nervous breakdown and allegedly ensured that he paid no attention to young women before he was twenty-four.²⁴

Study could be seen as a comparatively inexpensive form of recreation. The price of books fell dramatically in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.²⁵ G.L. Craik, with only slight exaggeration, was able to remark in 1830 that: 'A book is emphatically the poor man's luxury; for it is of all luxuries that which can be obtained at the least cost.'²⁶ Seven years later Charles Baker claimed that, 'The formation of a library is no difficult matter in these days of cheap publications.'²⁷

Educational self-help had two closely-related attractions. Firstly, the mind of the autodidact was far less constrained than his body; intellectual life provided his one great area of personal freedom. According to D. Vincent, 'The readers had within their grasp more freedom of action than in any other sphere of their existence, with the possible exception of their family life...'²⁸ Secondly, study, discussion and contemplation were not greatly affected by the constantly changing material circumstances of the autodidact. G.L. Craik considered that, 'The scholar has sources of enjoyment within himself, of

which no severity of fortune can altogether deprive him ... If his body be in want, his mind has stores of riches'.²⁹ These sentiments were echoed by the shoemaker John Younger: 'I began ... to regard my own mind as the only wealth of property I should ever possess in this world, and therefore I determined to take care of its health, whatever might be the servitude to which the attached body might be subjected.'³⁰

Self-education was also seen by many autodidacts as the key to greater personal and political freedom. George Holyoake claimed that, 'Intellectual bondage is worse than physical, because the physical chain is riveted by others, the mental by ourselves. The ignorant man is at the mercy of educated opinion.'³¹ Thomas Cooper urged working men to produce their own distinctive literature. 'Your own prose, your own poetry ... would put you all more fully in possession of each other's thoughts and thus give you a higher respect for each other, and a clearer perception of what you can do when united'.³² On a somewhat more practical level, autodidacts, because of their learning, assumed positions of power and responsibility within their communities, trade unions, political parties, and friendly societies. D. Vincent has argued that, 'The skills possessed by a self-educated working man were indispensable to almost any working class organization'.³³

Educational self-help, perhaps somewhat ironically, also had major social attractions. Loneliness was a serious and growing problem in the nineteenth century.³⁴

One cause was clearly demographic. In 1851 70 per cent of Preston's adult population had been born outside the town's boundaries and 28 per cent of boys aged fifteen to nineteen were not living with their parents.³⁵ The slow formation of factory communities could only partially compensate for this social dislocation.³⁶ Another factor was the growth of intellectual uncertainty; this was particularly evident in the spheres of religion and politics. By 1829 John Stuart Mill could claim that, 'In our age and country every person with any mental power at all, who both thinks for himself and has a conscience, must feel himself, to a very great degree, alone'.³⁷ Mutual self-help provided opportunities for deep and lasting friendships between thoughtful and sensitive individuals. Such friendships were strengthened by a sense of shared hardships and privations as readers.³⁸ In much the same way, mutual improvement societies became refuges; places of warmth and conviviality which compared favourably with the 'starkness and brutality, endemic among unswept streets, lit only by the gas jets of the public house and the gin palace'.³⁹

Educational self-help had innumerable personal attractions for tens of thousands of committed individuals. The philosophy of self-help was not a product of the early-Victorian period; many of the values associated with it were admired by Protestants in the late sixteenth century. The social changes associated with the Industrial Revolution increased the attractions of self-help, however, and the creed was systematized and popularized during the second third of the nineteenth century. The chief works

were G.L. Craik's Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties (1830-1831), and Samuel Smiles' Self-Help (1859).⁴⁰

The central principle of this philosophy is the idea that working people could not better their condition if they relied on patronage; they had to be self-reliant.⁴¹ A necessary corollary was the view that apparently unfavourable circumstances such as poverty and ignorance were by no means insuperable obstacles to personal and collective improvement. Henry Brougham believed that,

there is no class of the community so entirely occupied with labour as not to have an hour or two every other day at least, to bestow upon the pleasure and improvement to be derived from reading - or so poor as not to have the means of contributing something towards purchasing this gratification, the enjoyment of which, beside the present amusement, is the surest way both to raise our character and better our condition.⁴²

A similar view was held by C.L. Craik:

many of those impediments, which, in ordinary cases, altogether prevent the pursuit of knowledge, are impediments only to the indolent or unambitious, who make, in truth, their poverty or their low station bear the blame which ought properly to be laid upon their own irresolution or indifference.⁴³

Such an ideology presupposed that a capacity for work, or effort, was considerably more important than innate intellectual differences. Samuel Smiles believed that, 'In the pursuit of even the highest branches of human inquiry the commoner qualities are found the most useful - such as common sense, attention, application, and perseverance'.⁴⁴

W.E. Houghton has argued that 'Except for "God", the most popular word in the Victorian vocabulary must have

been "Work".⁴⁵ Effort and work had an almost mystical significance for the apostles of educational self-help. Samuel Smiles claimed that work was the greatest source of pleasure in life.⁴⁶

Nothing that is of real worth can be achieved without courageous working. Man owes his growth chiefly to that active striving of the will, that encounter with difficulty, which we call effort; and it is astonishing to find how often results apparently impracticable are thus made possible.⁴⁷

This obsession with work may owe something to Benjamin Franklin's precept: 'Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions'.⁴⁸

The advocates of self-help seem to have disliked schools, colleges and private tutors almost as much as they disliked wealthy patrons. Samuel Smiles claimed that, 'Even the best institutions can give a man no active help. Perhaps the most they can do is to leave him free to develop himself and improve his individual condition'.⁴⁹ G.L. Craik was another who believed that teachers were often superfluous:

A good elementary book upon any subject is itself a teacher which, to a person of ordinary intelligence, ought almost to render any other unnecessary. In the present age, especially, when such works abound, persons so circumstanced as not to be able easily to obtain the lessons of a living master, will find comparatively but little difficulty in teaching themselves any of the common branches of education...⁵⁰

The creed of self-help was far more than a guide to upward social mobility. Its advocates sincerely believed in the value of rationality, education, and 'character'.⁵¹

The pursuit of knowledge and the development of the intellect was an end in itself.⁵² In 1845 Samuel Smiles informed the members of a Leeds mutual improvement society that, 'the idea has ... seized hold of the public mind, that every human being should have the means and the opportunity of education - and of exercising freely all the powers, faculties, and affections of his god - like nature.'⁵³ A similar view was held by Timothy Claxton. After he had listed several practical advantages of self - education, he concluded:

what more should a mechanic need know, as a motive for cultivating his mind according to his circumstances, than the mere pleasure, the just pride, the self-approving happiness of such a cultivation? It is enough for him to consider that in proportion as he educates himself, he ceases to be an animal only, and becomes indeed a man. 54

The philosophy of self-help, as originally formulated, was primarily concerned with the intellectual and moral improvement of the working population as a whole. This point was made by Samuel Smiles in 1845:

The education of the working classes is to be regarded, at its highest aspect, not as a means of raising up a few clever and talented men into a higher rank of life, but of elevating and improving the whole class - of raising the entire condition of the working man. The grand object aimed at should be to make the great mass of the people virtuous, intelligent, well-informed, and well-conducted; and to open up to them new sources of pleasure and happiness. 55

The point which needs to be made is that this view of self-help was debased in the third quarter of the nineteenth century; mid-Victorian self-help became increasingly materialistic and as a result was almost totally concerned with upward personal mobility.⁵⁶

Self-help is often regarded as the creed of the successful, self-satisfied sections of Victorian society; it is seen as a middle-class ideology which was imposed on the working population. Such views ignore the antiquity of the philosophy of self-help and the extent to which its values and precepts were accepted by intelligent members of the working and middling classes.⁵⁷ Members of these classes were forced, of necessity, to be educationally self-reliant, but the incredible proliferation of mutual improvement societies (many in towns which had one or more mechanics' institutions) suggests that this self-reliance was also attractive and satisfying.

The advocates of self-help argued that working men could educate themselves in spite of the difficulties they faced. The available evidence suggests that autodidacts not merely endured their hardships but that they gloried in them. The Victorians, as a general rule, were fascinated by feats of endurance and educational exertions were no exception.⁵⁸ D. Vincent has claimed that, 'there was a tendency, especially amongst those who wrote poetry, to take a perverse pleasure in the loneliness of reading and writing, and in the hostility they often encountered in their family or workplace'.⁵⁹ Unfavourable personal circumstances were regarded as obstacles to be overcome. Impoverished autodidacts were not content with the major task of mastering basic skills such as reading and writing; many devised almost ludicrously ambitious study programmes for themselves. Such a programme was described by Thomas Cooper:

I thought it possible that by the time I reached the age of twenty-four I might be able to master the elements of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and French; might get well through Euclid, and through a course of Algebra; might commit the entire "Paradise Lost", and seven of the best plays of Shakespeare, to memory; and might read a large and solid course of history, and of religious evidences; and be well acquainted with the current literature of the day. I failed considerably, but I sped on joyfully while health and strength lasted. 60

Some autodidacts, Thomas Cooper for instance, clearly regretted their lack of formal education. 'Oh! that I had been trained to music - or painting - or law - or medicine - or any profession in which mind is needed; or that I had been regularly educated, so that I might have reached a University!' ⁶¹ Although this regret was real, however, it was not strong enough to cause autodidacts to grasp at whatever educational patronage was offered by their social superiors. Members of the upper working and middling classes attended, taught in, and financially supported their own day and Sunday schools. ⁶² if they disliked the local mechanics' institution they set up an organization of their own. When William Farish and his friends set up a mutual improvement society in Carlisle their motives were as much sartorial as educational or political.

The Mechanics' Institution, although well-managed and liberally supported, had failed somewhat in its mission, mainly . . . through the reluctance of the weaver in his clogs and fustian jacket to meet in the same room with the better clad, and possibly better mannered, shop assistants and clerks of the city. 63

It is clear that the creed of self-help was not imposed on working men by their social superiors. It is hard to disagree with J.F.C. Harrison's claim that, 'The

educational experience of the social philosophy of self-help found willing acceptance on the part of many intelligent working men, for it harmonized with an older and indigenous minority tradition'.⁶⁴ Samuel Smiles was not an agent of bourgeois cultural hegemony; he merely popularized 'the dominant social philosophy of the age'.⁶⁵

Section Two : Individual Self-Help in North Lancashire:

Little is known of most of Lancashire's autodidacts in the period 1825-1850. Most of the people that have left some evidence of their struggle to obtain educations by themselves were, by definition, exceptional individuals. Those whose attainments were more modest - the vast majority - have become hidden from history.

Six autodidacts and their lives will be examined. The collective experience of the members of this sample seems to have embraced most aspects of upper working and middling class life, and many aspects of their quests for knowledge and self-expression must have been very familiar to other less ambitious scholars. All of these men achieved positions of responsibility or a certain amount of fame within their local communities; this adds to their historical significance and suggests that their ideas and values were not considered entirely strange and eccentric by their friends, workmates, and neighbours.

The most striking feature of the lives of most nineteenth century autodidacts is an almost heroic struggle against social, economic, and educational disadvantages.

William Billington's father was an illiterate navvy who died when his son was seven. For several years William and his numerous brothers and sisters were supported by an impoverished mother who was a handloom weaver.⁶⁶ Thomas Turner Wilkinson was the son of an illiterate small farmer who felt that education made boys unfit for work.⁶⁷ Little is known of the early life of Joseph Hodgson other than the facts that he was a hand-loom weaver and 'appears to have had no better opportunities for self-culture than others of his class'.⁶⁸ Joseph Livesey was orphaned at the age of seven and for the next nine years had to labour at a hand-loom in a dark, damp cellar.⁶⁹ John Baron was more fortunate than any of the above in that he was able to attend a Church of England school in Grimshaw Park. His personal circumstances were less than ideal, however; he was the son of a hand-loom weaver and when he first went to school was, in his own words, a 'half-naked savage from the moors'.⁷⁰

The Lancashire autodidacts were all great readers; they educated themselves at home and, to a lesser extent, at their places of work. Most would have been able to identify with the young Samuel Bamford:

When I first plunged, as it were, into the blessed habit of reading, faculties which had hitherto given but small intimation of existence, suddenly sprung into vigorous action. My mind was ever desiring more of the silent but exciting conversation with books, and of whatever was conveyed to it from that source, small was the portion that did not remain. ⁷¹

Joseph Livesey provided a full description of his early scholastic labours in his autobiography:

Anxious for information, and having no companions from whom I could learn anything, I longed for books but had no means with which to procure them ... if I could succeed in borrowing one, I would devour it like a hungry man would his first meal The day seemed too short for my love of reading, and as often as I could, I remained to read after uncle and grandfather had retired to bed; but I was allowed no candle, and for hours I have read by the glare of the few embers left in the fire-grate, with my head close to the bars. 72

Although Joseph Livesey may appear to epitomize educational self-help, the activities he describes took place twenty years before The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties was first published. Joseph Livesey does not seem to have been bitter about his early privations; like the later advocates of self-help, he felt that it was good to struggle against adversity. As early as 1831 he wrote:

I remember with greater pride my early studies and my midnight toils in the cellar at Walton, than I should any honour which the greatest monarch could have conferred upon me. It is generally acknowledged that wealth and ease are unfavourable to mental improvement; and I can say to you from experience, in this respect, that your employments afford opportunities for thinking which you can never sufficiently prize. 73

Most of the self-taught men of North Lancashire seem to have owned considerable personal libraries. Although Joseph Hodgson worked as a hand-loom weaver for most of his life, he 'contrived to amass a library of the choicest works, particularly in theology, amounting to nearly eight hundred volumes; and what is more remarkable, he read and appreciated what he purchased'.⁷⁴ George Hull claimed that when he died in 1856 his books were 'removed on a large lorry, and they made ... two full loads'.⁷⁵ It is hardly surprising that Joseph Hodgson was made the first

librarian of the Blackburn Mechanics's Institution. ⁷⁶

William Crossley, a spinner, was another local bibliophile.

One of his friends, W. Harral Johnson, described their first meeting in the mid eighteen-fifties

Upon a first interview I was much struck with the solidity [sic] of Crossley's mind, and when I subsequently visited his house and inspected his library I found as choice a collection of standard works as it was possible for any political student to collect and the books he studied were as true an index to his mind as his countenance was to his affections. ⁷⁷

All the Lancashire autodidacts were well-educated men by any reasonable standard. By the age of twenty-six William Billington 'had not only read and re-read Shelley, Byron, Keats, and Burns through, until he could recite hundreds of lines of each of them, but was well-versed in the older poets, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, and Pope; and in the later works of Scott, Coleridge and Wordsworth'. ⁷⁸ One of Billington's friends was John Baron, a fellow-weaver. Baron was 'a voracious reader of books', and 'his range of reading must have been extensive'. He could recite the whole of Byron's 'Childe Harold' from memory'. ⁷⁹ For most of the eighteen-forties and fifties, T.T. Wilkinson 'was almost continuously a teacher of book-keeping and the higher branches of mathematics' at the Burnley Mechanics' Institution. He also taught geology, geography, history and many other subjects'. T.T. Wilkinson was eventually elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. ⁸⁰ Some self-taught men had more specialized interests. William Crossley was primarily interested in politics and economics. His

reading included the works of Carlyle, Comte, and Hobbes, and 'he was saturated with John Stuart Mill's ideas at a time when Mill was known only to the Reviewers and Economists.'⁸¹ Joseph Hodgson's interests were rather more conservative; he 'was fond of the works of the old English divines, such as Barrow, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, Usher, Leighton, Jeremy Taylor, & C, and ... had frequent interviews and lengthened conversations and discussions with the late vicar (Dr. Whittaker) ...'⁸²

Reading and writing were often closely associated and at least five of the six autodidacts were published authors. John Baron was the writer of numerous poetic broadsheets and was the co-author of a volume of poetry at the age of twenty-four.⁸³ William Billington was the author of two substantial books of poetry and dozens of newspaper articles.⁸⁴ Joseph Livesey was a prolific writer; he edited several journals, established the Preston Guardian, and wrote the autobiography which has already been cited.⁸⁵ The most prolific writer among the six autodidacts was undoubtedly T.T. Wilkinson; this remarkable scholar was the author or co-author of at least thirty-five books and pamphlets.⁸⁶ Joseph Hodgson never wrote a book but he 'was a most voluminous writer'; according to George Hull he 'published almost everything he wrote as soon as it was written, in single sheet or broadsides, which he labelled with the price, depositing the whole edition in the crown of his big box hat, and hawked them wherever he went'.⁸⁷ He was apparently editing a collection of his poems at the time of his death.⁸⁸

Very little has been recorded about the self-images of the Lancashire autodidacts. William Billington wrote an autobiographical sketch in 1862 in which he attributed his interest in poetry to an almost mystical experience he had when a boy:

One day, after having been standing for hours in the swamp, knee-deep, pulling rushes, I made my way towards a sunny bank The emotion I had ever felt in the presence of beautiful objects, in the lone retreats of Nature's sweetest solitudes, rose in my soul to such a height of ecstasy that I gave way to a feeling of consanguinity between my spirit and that of the scene around me - the bright sun, the blue heavens, and the green earth - and then, and there, I resolved to speak my thought to others, that they might become partakers of my joy. I would go to the town, and work, and win a livelihood and learning, so that I might speak with higher emphasis and purer praise. 89

William Billington's early sense of his poetic mission never left him. A few months before his death he claimed that, 'The Bard is Nature's priest and needs must preach, and peal her glorious gospel in the world's dull ear.'⁹⁰ Towards the end of his life Billington was widely regarded as a bitter man but this may have owed more to his declining health and desertion by his young wife than to his lack of worldly success.⁹¹ William Crossley seems to have lacked social ambition. According to his obituary in the Blackburn Times, he was 'intellectually and physically a fine example of a man of the people;' ⁹² he was also content to remain among the people. W. Harral Johnson paid him a significant tribute : 'William Crossley was the only man I knew with abilities of the highest class who was content to remain with his own order. Ambition, the pardonable sin of genius, lay dormant in his mind.'⁹³

Joseph Livesey and T.T. Wilkinson enjoyed a considerable degree of material success but devoted their lives to bettering the lot of those less fortunate than themselves. They never forgot their early struggles and privations. Joseph Livesey claimed that it was in his damp cellar that he 'learned to feel for the poor, to acquire the first lessons of humanity ...' ⁹⁴

D. Vincent has claimed that, 'the range of beliefs and activities which became associated with the pursuit of knowledge set in motion a permanent crisis of personal relations between the readers and those with whom they lived and worked'. He alleges that at the core of the problem was the readers' 'antagonism to patterns of alcoholic consumption which were embedded in many aspects of social exchange in the community'. ⁹⁵ Although a certain antagonism could exist between readers and less educated working people, this should not be over-exaggerated. There was a close association between drink and Secularism and William Crossley, the Secretary of the Blackburn Powerloom Weavers' Association, 'had close drink connections'. ⁹⁶ William Billington was, successively, a publican and a beer-house keeper, and in his later years 'his convivial nature sought the readiest escape from present misery to the detriment of his literary talent'. ⁹⁷

The relationship between readers and non-readers was more frequently characterized by misunderstandings than by animosity. This appears to have been recognized by George Holyoake:

At Accrington a friend, recounting his initiation into self-thinking - into proving all things, and then holding fast to his proofs - said he was regarded with great curiosity in the town where he resided, and one day some young woman came peering through the shop window where he was employed, to scrutinise into his actual bodily appearance; and finding it human, exclaimed with the unsophistication of the Sunday School - 'Why, he is a gradely felly!' i.e., a proper man - really human like other people. 98

The Lancashire autodidacts expected a lot from themselves; perhaps some of them expected too much from their less talented acquaintances. William Billington claimed that,

The true poet is never duly appraised or understood by his contemporaries. He may be loved for amiable qualities, prized for his virtues, and praised for his talents, but the world refuses still to let him pass for his full worth till time shall have purged his thoughts of their mortality and thus purified and hallowed his memory. 99

The evidence from North Lancashire lends little support to the view that 'a permanent crisis of personal relations' disrupted the family life of the average autodidact. William Billington seems to have enjoyed good relationships with his mother and first wife even though both were illiterate. John Baron was even more fortunate; 'His domestic relations with his family seemed to be of the happiest, and strife - except the strife as we know it when associated with the winning of bread, was unknown between himself and his wife.' ¹⁰⁰ Billington and Baron appear to have received support and encouragement from members of their families. The former had an uncle, Robert Bolton, 'whose lips had been touched by the fire of poesy; a man who was much and deeply read, although he had had no systematic education'. ¹⁰¹ John Baron had two sons, John

Thomas and William, and a nephew, Joseph Baron, who became significant local poets.¹⁰² John Baron's youngest son died at an early age but it is interesting to note that he was named Shelley.¹⁰³ The families of some autodidacts were nurseries of talent rather than centres of discord.

All the self-taught men described in this section were able to achieve prestige and influence within their local communities; some won positions of real responsibility. Thomas Turner Wilkinson became Chairman of the Directors of the Burnley Mechanics' Institution in 1842, at the age of twenty-seven, and was frequently re-appointed to that office. He was later elected a town councillor and died an alderman.¹⁰⁴ William Crossley was Secretary of the Blackburn Power-Loom Weavers' Association from 1859 to 1867. At the time of his death in 1875 he was a member of the Blackburn School Board, the Secretary of the Blackburn Philanthropic Burial Society, and a town councillor.¹⁰⁵ Joseph Livesey was the founder and, for many years, the leader, of the teetotal movement in Lancashire; he also initiated the process which led to the formation of the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge.¹⁰⁶ Joseph Hodgson died in 1856; according to George Hull he left behind 'such a reputation as a Rhyming Reformer, as would have done credit to many a more gifted Poet'.¹⁰⁷ William Billington's influence was more than literary; 'his judicious counsel and advice to his fellow-operatives in cases of dispute with employers have averted many a strike and consequent disasters'.¹⁰⁸ When he died the Blackburn Times asserted that, 'The large circle of our readers will

learn with regret, and many with a feeling of genuine sorrow, of the death of Mr. William Billington, so widely known as "The Blackburn Poet".¹⁰⁹ John Baron was probably the poorest of the six autodidacts but he enjoyed a powerful position within the Grimshaw Park community where he was born. According to Henry Yates,

... in the immediate neighbourhood in which he spent his life up to middle age, he was looked upon more as an oracle than as one of themselves. His opinion in the district where he lived most of his years was sought upon any and every conceivable subject. He was the general amanuensis and custodian of the village secrets, whether it was a love affair or the making of a will. He had often been the means of tracing out the whereabouts of truant sons who had been killed in battle as soldiers, or emigrated ... many have occasion to bless his name for the good he has done in approaching the War Office authorities, by letter and influential petition in securing [sic] both pensions and gratuities to both soldier and soldier's widow. 110

The evidence from North Lancashire suggests that educational self-help was primarily a solitary and domestic activity. D. Vincent has argued that this was the pattern in most parts of Britain:

In most cases, the first steps in self-improvement were taken in the home, using literature already in the family's possession, and whilst in later life the readers would probably become involved in organizations which used some type of purpose built room ... the mainstay of their activity would remain private reading in the home. 111

Although the importance of the reader's home cannot be denied, educational self-help was a difficult business and many autodidacts would have made little progress without the help, guidance, and encouragement of other men who shared their aims and aspirations. Innumerable scholarly friendships have left no trace in the historical records

but a good deal can be discovered about the more formal activities of mutual improvement societies.

Section Three : Mutual Improvement Societies:

Mutual improvement societies defy easy definition; one of their most striking features is their great diversity. They could have scores of members or a mere handful; they could meet in the houses of working men or have the use of suites of rooms. Some were associated with Christian denominations while others were socialist or 'infidel'. A few had highly specialized aims of a musical or scientific nature while many concentrated on mastering basic skills. Some were indistinguishable from mechanics' institutions while others were the classes of mechanics' institutions. Many lasted for a few months only; a few survived for decades.

Despite this variety, most mutual improvement societies shared some common features. Like mechanics' institutes, their primary appeal was to young men in their late teens and early twenties.¹¹² C.J. Radcliffe considers that, 'Membership of mutual improvement societies was predominantly lower class';¹¹³ this is perhaps an over-statement but it appears that members of the middle class were far more likely to join mechanics' institutes and literary and philosophical societies. Some working men, like William Farish and his friends, seem to have felt uncomfortable among the people who attended mechanics' institutes.

Mutual improvement societies were usually democratic bodies. R. Kemp Philp argued that, 'Within the class, all distinctions of rank should be unknown. Knowledge is a shrine before which pride must not stand'.¹¹⁴ According to J.F.C. Harrison, the societies were 'the most truly indigenous of all the early attempts at working-class adult education'.¹¹⁵ Members seem to have been wary of patronage and low overheads usually meant that such help was unnecessary. Mutual improvement societies tried to be responsive to the needs of their members and gave working people opportunities to teach as well as to be taught.¹¹⁶

Perhaps the most striking feature of mutual improvement societies is the enthusiasm of their members. At a time when Thomas Coates could find 'no evidence ... of [any] spirit of proselytism in favour of mechanics' institutions' among artisans',¹¹⁷ mutual improvement societies seemed to be appearing in every village. According to James Hole, 'large numbers' of societies, 'established for the work of self-improvement, were formed solely by those who required instruction, unaided by anyone who could assist them in the choice of studies, of books, or of lectures'. Hole added, sourly but revealingly, 'No one can estimate the amount of time and energy wasted in such abortive attempts to reap the fruits of knowledge without sowing the seed. The working man needs guidance, both how and what to learn'.¹¹⁸

Although it is likely that mutual improvement societies, of one kind or another, go back into history,

their great popularity in the second quarter of the nineteenth century deserves explanation. In 1847 it was claimed that, 'every little village and town now has its society, and the earnest and thoughtful spirit in which they are worked is sure to produce a good effect'.¹¹⁹ The immediate antecedents of the early Victorian societies were the Methodist classes, which were established by John Wesley, and political societies which began to appear in the seventeen-nineties.¹²⁰ The members of Methodist societies were divided into classes for the purposes of Bible-study and discussions about ethical and spiritual matters.¹²¹ In the closing years of the eighteenth century corresponding societies appeared in many northern towns. The members of these societies read and talked at regular weekly meetings.¹²² The years after Waterloo witnessed the appearance of Hampden Clubs and Political Protestant Unions. Samuel Bamford described the educational activities of Hampden Clubs in his Passages in the Life of a Radical.¹²³ Political Protestant Unions were modelled on Methodist societies. Each union was divided into classes. A class had about twelve members who met each week at one of their houses to read and discuss politics. Blackburn had a Female Political Union in 1818 and by 1822 the Great Northern Political Union had branches in Blackburn and Preston.¹²⁴

The Methodist and Radical self-help traditions partially coalesced in the early Victorian period and the members of mutual improvement societies were probably encouraged by the success of the mechanics' institute move-

ment.¹²⁵ The political excitement associated with Chartism, the Corn Laws, the Poor Law, the factory system and other events and issues seems to have given working men a powerful incentive to join discussion societies. The Accrington Discussion Class was established in 1853. Its historian observed that, 'The Preston strike of 1853 aroused a great deal of excitement among the working classes in this locality, and discussions on national and local topics were the order of the day'.¹²⁶ Mutual improvement societies were also encouraged by religious controversies. The second quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the repeal of the Test Acts, Catholic Emancipation, the rise of the Oxford Movement, the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, and a series of geological discoveries which cast doubt on the veracity of Genesis.¹²⁷

The mutual improvement societies of North Lancashire varied greatly in size. The largest was probably the discussion class of the Darwen mechanics' Institution. In January 1840 this had about 90 members; the total membership of the parent body at this time was about 150.¹²⁸ It is impossible to know the size of the smallest mutual improvement society at this time although in 1852 the Over-Darwen Secular Society had four members.¹²⁹ It is probable that neither of these organizations was of optimum size; the former was somewhat unwieldy and the latter was too small to be described as typical. More standard societies included the Blackburn Secular Society which had fifty members in 1852,¹³⁰ and the Lower Chapel Young Men's

Mutual Improvement Society (Darwen) which had eighteen in 1851.¹³¹ In addition to their formal memberships, some societies received support from a wider group of sympathizers; the first annual tea party of the Lower Chapel Society was attended by 200 people.¹³² The members of the mutual improvement societies were overwhelmingly male.¹³³ Little is known about their social backgrounds although it is likely that most were members of the upper working or middling classes. The Blackburn Mutual Instruction Association began as a grammar class and its first members may have been barely literate. As the class expanded it moved to a former hay-loft over some stables in Ainsworth-Street.¹³⁴ Although the room was large it was seldom visited by members of the town's social élite. George Holyoake was appalled by the facilities when he lectured in Blackburn in 1851:

neither ladies nor the middle classes could be expected to attend an unhealthy room, from which my own health suffered much as the audience became aware. It was a place into which I would not (it being immoral in a sanitary sense) invite a crowd of persons under any avoidable circumstances.¹³⁵

Despite the evidence from Blackburn, it is likely that a few mutual improvement societies enjoyed considerable middle class support. It is unlikely that the members of the Preston Mutual Improvement Choral Society, for instance, would have been willing to meet in a hay-loft!¹³⁶

The accommodation available then to mutual improvement societies varied immensely. The Ainsworth-Street hay-loft was shared by two organizations, the Blackburn Mutual

Instruction Association and the Blackburn Secular Society.¹³⁷ A socialist mutual improvement society met in a room that had once been the printing office of the Preston Observer.¹³⁸ The Over-Darwen Secular Society did not have a room of its own in 1852; its meetings were presumably held at members' houses.¹³⁹ The Accrington Discussion Class held its early debates in the kitchen of a public house and the Witton Mutual Improvement Class met at a school.¹⁴⁰ Mutual improvement societies which were associated with churches or chapels seem to have had access to the premises owned or leased by their parent bodies. These societies or classes closely resembled Church institutes.

Some mutual improvement societies were informal self-help groups while others were highly organized. When the Burnley Society for Promoting Mutual Instruction was established in the eighteen-thirties, 'A number of strict rules was drawn up, and a list of fines for absence, being late, leaving soon, not speaking in turn, was enforced. Each week a subject for debate was propounded, each member being bound under a fine to take his turn'.¹⁴¹ The Accrington Discussion Class was a much less formal body; even its finances were poorly administered. According to R. Pickersgill there was a collection at the end of each meeting 'to meet the deficit occasioned by the session's activities, the balance invariably being on the wrong side'.¹⁴²

Whereas libraries were essential features within mechanics' institutes, they seem to have been of almost

peripheral importance to the members of mutual improvement societies. A year after its formation the Lower Chapel Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society possessed only 90 books; in the same year the Darwen Mechanics' Institute had 1,700 books in its library.¹⁴³ Several factors account for this apparent neglect of library facilities. As mutual improvement societies had very limited funds, and were usually very reluctant to accept patronage, they were unable to compete effectively with the well-stocked libraries of mechanics' institutes and reading rooms. It is also arguable that the members of mutual improvement societies did not need good general libraries. Many of their members undoubtedly had large personal libraries or access to the libraries of other organizations, and a small group of friends could easily exchange works. Members who were barely literate or numerate had little use for expensive libraries, and many of the more educated members seem to have concentrated on discussions which demanded quick wits and a knowledge of current affairs rather than deep learning.

Any serious attempt to describe the activities of mutual improvement societies must acknowledge the extreme diversity of the societies and their aims. It is highly likely that the activities of the Blackburn Secular Society were very different from those of a Swedenborgian organization such as Accrington's New Jerusalem Church Mutual Improvement Society. Some societies met in public houses and were led by landlords, while others were closely associated with the temperance and teetotal movements.

In the eighteen-thirties there were teetotal 'academies' in Preston. About twenty men would rent a cottage; one room would be used for meetings, the other would be devoted to lessons. 144

Much less is known about the classes and societies which concentrated on literacy and numeracy than about those which were primarily concerned with discussions and more advanced studies; it is unfortunately unclear whether societies of the latter type were more numerous, or merely more newsworthy and better organized. 145 It is not always possible to draw a sharp line between the two. As the Blackburn Mutual Instruction Association grew in size, its range of activities also expanded. These were described by William Billington:

Our Institution progressed rapidly, and very soon numbered within the circle of its classes grammar, logic, rhetoric, oratory, history, geography, chemistry, medical botany, phrenology, & C., in addition to the ordinary classes of reading, writing, and arithmetic. We had no paid teachers, but conducted our studies on the principle of mutual improvement. 146

Some mutual improvement societies provided regular lectures and discussions. The Lower Chapel Society arranged nine lectures during its first year of existence. They are listed in Table Three and reveal the importance of the society's religious links. The Darwen Mechanics' Institution's Discussion Class attempted to provide a weekly debate. These disputes sometimes lasted for several weeks and those given during the society's first year are listed in Table Four. Very few of the subjects required orators to have more than reasonable general educations.

TABLE THREE

Lectures Given to the Members of the Lower Chapel Mutual Improvement Society Between February 1850 and January 1851.

1. The State of the World when Christianity was Introduced.
2. The Life of Mahomet.
3. The Best Food for Man.
4. Fashion and its Results.
5. Education and its Results.
6. The Philosophy of Man.
7. The Doings of Church Establishments.
8. The Present State of Britain.
9. The Moral, Political and Social Education of the People.

Source : Preston Chronicle, 15 February 1851.

TABLE FOUR

Subjects Debated by the Members of the Darwen Mechanics' Institute's Discussion Class Between January 1840 and December 1840.

1. The advantages likely to accrue in the civilization of the world from the extent of the British Empire.
2. Whether too much confidence or too much diffidence is the more likely to retard a young man's learning.
3. Whether there be more pleasure in the pursuit or in the attainment of an object.
4. Whether the city or the village is the best nursery for youth.
5. Which inflicts the greatest evil on society, an illiterate quack doctor, an unprincipled attorney, or a dissipated divine?
6. What are the means best calculated for producing the greatest amount of social good?
7. Which animal is the most useful to man, the horse or the cow?
8. Is it better to abstain from stimulating drinks or to use them moderately?
9. Which is the more baneful to society, cowardice or prejudice?
10. Which is the more useful to man, the manufacture of the animal or the vegetable fibre?
11. Which is the most useful to man, the animal, vegetable or mineral kingdom?
12. Which of the four elements - air, fire, water or earth is the more destructive to man?

13. Which is the greatest evil in society, the spendthrift or the miser?
14. Which of the five senses is capable of affording the greatest amount of pleasure?
15. Which of the passions, viz. hope, fear, joy, grief, anger, pity, desire or love has the greatest influence on the human mind?
16. Whither does [sic] the fear of want or the hope of gain excite a man to more industry?
17. Credulity and Incredulity [Which is the greater evil?].
18. Whether the love of money will excite a man to more industry than fame?
19. Are early marriages recommendable?
20. Should the reading of novels be excluded [From the mechanics' institution].
21. Whether youth or old age is the more happier [sic] period of life.

Source: Darwen Public Library, Minutes of the Proceedings in Connection with the Discussion Class of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution, Q431, pp. 50-73.

It is significant that the Darwen Mechanics' Institution refused to permit discussions concerning controversial religious or political topics; this ban was resented by most of the class members. 147

The activities of Preston's socialist mutual instruction class seem to have resembled those of the Darwen class although the discussions of the former were not censored. The members were accused of propounding 'blasphemous doctrines under the pretence of discussing socialism'. 148 In defence of his society, James Drummond claimed that,

after all the discussions, parties are allowed to raise objections or to ask questions, which liberty is not allowed in any other place ... All that they want is to arrive at the truth, in every science that affects man, and especially in the present sectarian arrangements, where poverty, vice, crime, and misery are so plentifully found, they want to arrive at a true knowledge of the causes, and what would be a remedy. Their remedy is home colonization 149

It is possible that the apparent radicalism of many mutual improvement societies was largely a reaction against the conservatism and intellectual caution of other educational institutions. These societies gave intelligent young men opportunities to argue with each other and their notoriety was probably one of their chief attractions. 150

Discussions could provide an incentive for the writing of papers and essays. The young Thomas Cooper helped to establish a 'debating club'.

I never attempted to speak without preparation, but invariably read my essays. This weekly essay-writing was an employment which absorbed a good deal of my thought, and was a good induction into the writing of prose, and into a mode of expressing one's thoughts. 151

In April 1840 the members of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution's Discussion Class were invited to write essays for a £2 prize. The proposed subject was, 'Mental Indolence; Its Causes, Consequences, and Cure', and it was to be no longer than 'half a quire of ordinary foolscap paper'. ¹⁵²

In addition to these educational activities, mutual improvement societies provided opportunities for recreation. The best documented recreational activities are tea parties. In 1851 the Blackburn Mutual Instruction Association held a public tea party on Easter Monday. There were songs, recitations, and dancing, and a Mr. Hall amused those present with some 'mesmeric tricks'. ¹⁵³ Accrington's New Jerusalem Church Mutual Improvement Society may have been a more serious body; at a tea party in 1841 the Reverend J. Bayley treated the members to a lecture on 'Coal and Coal Mines'. ¹⁵⁴

Mutual improvement societies were, in general, respected by members of all social classes; they exemplified the spread of self-help and the 'march of mind'. Some mutual improvement societies were much more highly regarded than others, however, and generalizations about these societies, whether by Victorian writers or modern historians, must be treated with the greatest care. According to J.P. Hemming, 'the discussion society at Darwen [Mechanics' Institution] ... was considered a paramount feature by a large proportion of the male operatives of the district'. ¹⁵⁵ The Over-Darwen Secular

Society was held in somewhat lower esteem by local people; even the Reasoner had to concede that it had 'no public credit, unless discredit in religious opinion may be called credit'. ¹⁵⁶

The mutual improvement society 'movement' appears to have peaked around 1850; ¹⁵⁷ the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a slow decline in the number of such societies. C.J. Radcliffe has pointed out that the movement was also 'increasingly captured by the Nonconformist churches'. ¹⁵⁸ The decline of the politically orientated societies was perhaps inevitable after the collapse of Chartism; ¹⁵⁹ the wider movement seems to have lost much of its momentum as formal educational provision increased in quality and quantity. ¹⁶⁰

Section Four : Conclusion:

Educational self-help has been greatly neglected by historians. C.J. Radcliffe considers that scholars have tended to ignore mutual improvement societies for largely political reasons.

Those of the right appear uninterested in what was essentially a working-class activity, whilst whig commentators chronicling 'advances' in education, do not see such establishments as representing 'progress'. Furthermore, perhaps, to left-wing historians, the social ambitions and rugged individualism of many of their students appear as class treachery. ¹⁶¹

'Left-wing' historians are not alone in accusing autodidacts of 'class treachery'; a similar stance is adopted by some non-Marxist scholars. Although Professor

H. Perkin appears reluctant to use such terms as 'class treachery', he regards self-help as the 'Achilles heel' of popular radicalism. He states that by accepting a 'puritanical, self-improving attitude to themselves', working people became 'exposed to the entrepreneurial ideal of the self-made man, the capitalist version of the puritan pilgrim'. 162

It is certainly the case that autodidacts regarded the education of the working classes as a precondition of their social and political progress. This view was held by Samuel Bamford:

Mildly and persuasively as a mother entreating, would reason lead us to self-examination, self-control, and self-amendment, as the basis for all public reform Instead of wishing to create sudden changes, and to overthrow institutions, it were better that ignorance alone, the fruitful mother of arrogance and hard-heartedness, were pulled down. The masses should be elevated 163

Roland Detrouisier, for his part, was more explicit on this subject: 'A vicious and ignorant people cannot be redeemed from political thralldom; they do not understand in what enlightened freedom consists'. 164 None of the six autodidacts examined in Section Two were extreme radicals although William Crossley and William Billington were committed secularists. John Baron was a member of a Conservative Club in 1868 and wrote 'tributary verses to the excellencies of leading Conservatives'. 165

It is reasonable to argue that working men had little free time in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and that time devoted to the writing of poetry or

theological speculation was time lost to overt political activity.¹⁶⁶ It may also be that intelligent and educated working men had good reasons for being sceptical about the value of 'mass action' on the streets.¹⁶⁷ More fundamentally, the autodidacts of North Lancashire do not seem to have felt that their social superiors were their class enemies; the concept of class conflict was probably alien to them. William Billington frequently criticized the British aristocracy and local mill-owners in his poems but his radicalism owed more to Thomas Paine and Percy Shelley than to Karl Marx.¹⁶⁸

Although autodidacts could not fail to notice the social differences which divided the people of North Lancashire, they were also aware of a residual 'common culture' which had a unifying effect.¹⁶⁹ Many villages appear to have resembled 'organic communities'; an interesting fictional example is John Ackworth's *Beckside*.¹⁷⁰ The Industrial Revolution eroded this culture but had not destroyed it by 1850; rapid social mobility meant that many employers had decidedly proletarian roots.¹⁷¹ Certain values were shared by members of all social classes and few were prized more highly than a commitment to self-help. Although the creed of self-help owed much to the work of G.L. Craik and Samuel Smiles, the people of Lancashire were not 'converted' by the arguments of such men. Long before their books were written there was an indigenous tradition of self-help which was an aspect of what P. Joyce has called, 'the fabled, blunt, self-reliance of the North'.¹⁷² Self-help

was probably an effective survival strategy in a harsh environment. A.E. Dobbs felt that this tradition was very old; he claimed that 'strenuous, self-reliant qualities, persisting through every change of circumstance, distinguish the areas to the North and East which had been replenished by a strong admixture of Germanic and Scandinavian stocks'.¹⁷³ Self-Help might not have been written if Samuel Smiles had not been exposed to what he referred to as 'that determined sturdy character, which has made the North of England the hive of the world's industry'.¹⁷⁴

The concept of 'inner-direction' may shed valuable light on the importance and educational significance of self-help in early Victorian Lancashire.¹⁷⁵ According to D. Riesman, inner-directed individuals are particularly common in protestant societies which are expanding both economically and demographically.¹⁷⁶ In societies of this kind, young people are encouraged to adopt aims and values which do not change easily and are a great source of personal stability. D. Riesman claims that the adolescent is given a 'psychological gyroscope' which enables him to maintain 'a delicate balance between the demands upon him of his life goal and the buffetings of his external environment'.¹⁷⁷ Inner-directed individuals are consequently partially immune to peer-group pressures and are able to overcome difficulties; 'the inner-directed person's character is such that he feels comfortable in an environment which is demanding and which he struggles to master'.¹⁷⁸ Early Victorian Lancashire seems to have

possessed many of the characteristics of an inner-directed society and its leading autodidacts were almost classic examples of inner-direction.

Autodidacts are not merely interesting illustrations of self-help; they constituted an essential link between the educated middle class and the working population. It may be plausibly argued that self-taught working men and educated members of the middle class had more in common with each other than either group had with members of its own class.¹⁷⁹ It is certainly the case that autodidacts were steeped in what may be regarded as *élite* culture; D. Vincent has pointed out that 'they were strongly tempted by the notion that there existed a single body of classical literature, made up of the works of men of genius of all ages, which embodied the eternal literary and spiritual values'.¹⁸⁰ The men discussed in Section Two were as well-educated as most local middle-class intellectuals and frequently met their social superiors. In the early eighteen-fifties, William Crossley could often be found at a newsman's shop in Fleming Square; he was described as one of 'the inner circle of the Blackburn philosopher's school'. The 'philosopher' was Henry Baker, a former tailor, and his regular guests included members of the town's elite.¹⁸¹ In the eighteen-sixties William Billington was a prominent member of the Blackburn Literary Club.¹⁸²

In his Constitution of Church and State (1830) S.T. Coleridge claimed that there was a need for an educated

class or 'Clerisy', which would be responsible for 'general cultivation'. Its members would be drawn from all existing classes and their chief duties would be,

to preserve the stores and guard the treasures of past civilization, and thus to bind the present with the past; to perfect and add to the same, and thus to connect the present with the future; but especially to diffuse through the whole community, and to every native entitled to its laws and rights, that quantity and quality of knowledge which was indispensable both for the understanding of those rights, and for the performance of the duties correspondent. 183

It is possible that the self-educated men of North Lancashire regarded themselves as members of a local Clerisy - albeit an unendowed one. They certainly felt that they were responsible for the diffusion of knowledge within their communities.

The self-taught working men of North Lancashire were more than simply members of a local Clerisy or educated remnant, however; their interests and values were not entirely alien to other working people. Although social classes are often regarded as cultural phenomena, it is often impossible to distinguish between the 'cultures' of different classes. Matthew Arnold, for instance, argued that members of the middle and upper working classes shared a 'philistine' culture.¹⁸⁴ In 1932 F.R. Leavis claimed that, 'Class of the kind that can justify talk about "class culture" has long been extinct. (And, it might be added, when there was such "class culture" it was much more than merely of the class)'.¹⁸⁵

J.C. Wilsher has stated that in Blackburn, literary culture 'was important for working men (and not just for

those aspiring to middle-class status...). Literature meant something to them...'.¹⁸⁶ Although most working people did not read the works of Shakespeare or Milton, the poetry of local writers was immensely popular. William Billington was able to sell fourteen thousand copies of one of his poems.¹⁸⁷ There is also no evidence that any of the North Lancashire autodidacts were particularly bitter about their poor houses or their relationships with relatives, neighbours, or workmates. This suggests that autodidacts were not widely regarded as weird eccentrics; they received considerable encouragement and support from working people and enjoyed influence and support within their communities. This helps to explain why men like William Crossley had little desire to rise in society. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a recognisable, if somewhat attenuated, 'common culture' existed in the towns of North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁸

NOTES

1. 'Mutual Improvement Societies in the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1835-1900', Journal of Educational Administration and History, 18, No. 2 (July, 1986), p. 1.
2. Significant secondary works include R.K. Webb, The British Working-Class Reader, 1770-1848 (1955), and D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom : A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography (1982 edition, first published 1981).
3. See for example I. Illich, Deschooling Society (1973 edition, first published 1971), passim.
4. Quoted by Samuel Smiles Self-Help (1866 edition, first published 1859), p. 266.
5. Ibid., p. 266.
6. Ibid., p. 32.
7. Select Committee on Public Libraries, Parliamentary Papers 1849, XVII, p. 127.
8. 'Mutual Improvement Classes : their Formation', The People's Journal, 4 (1848), p. 29 (Appendix).
9. Learning and Living, 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement (1961), pp. 50-51.
10. 'Mutual Improvement Societies', p. 12.
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34. W.E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870 (Yale, 1957), p. 77.
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38. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, pp. 126-128.
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41. Smiles, Self-Help, p. 13.
42. Practical Observations, p. 1.
43. Pursuit of Knowledge, Vol. 1, p. 53.
44. Self-Help, p. 88; see also p. 90.
45. Victorian Frame of Mind, p. 242.
46. Self-Help, p. 91.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
48. Autobiography (1948 edition), p. 75. Thomas Carlyle was particularly obsessive about work; 'there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work ... Work ... is in communication with Nature; the real desire to get Work done will itself lead one more and more to truth, to Nature's appointments and regulations, which are truth ... The latest Gospel in this world is, know thy work and do it'; quoted by Altick, Victorian People, pp. 168-169.
49. Self-Help, p. 13.
50. Pursuit of Knowledge, Vol. 1, pp. 87-88. According to Samuel Smiles, 'Too much guidance and restraint hinder the formation of habits of self-help. They are like bladders tied under the arms of one who has not taught himself to swim'; Self-Help, p. 273.
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52. 'The mind is so made by its Creator as to be gratified by learning. It has a strong native appetite for knowledge, as its genial and nourishing food. Every new idea is a sort of feast to it'; Claxton, Hints to Mechanics, p. 86. John Stuart Mill was a firm believer in the necessity of educating the working population: 'The prospect of the future depends on the degree to which they can be made rational beings'; quoted by J. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (1974), p. 203.

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73. Ibid., p. xxxix; this passage originally appeared in the Moral Reformer, July 1831.
74. Blackburn Standard, 16 February 1856.

75. Poets and Poetry, p. 25.
76. Ibid., p. 18; P.H. Whittle, Blackburn As It Is (Blackburn, 1852), p. 167.
77. Blackburn Times, 20 February 1875.
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80. Ibid, 13 February 1875.
81. Ibid, 20 February 1875.
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84. William Billington's chief works were Sheen and Shade (Blackburn, 1861), and Lancashire Songs, with other Poems and Sketches (Blackburn, 1883).
85. Life and Teachings, passim.
86. Blackburn Times, 13 February 1875.
87. Poets and Poetry, p. 18.
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89. Northern Daily Telegraph, 4 April 1925.
90. Lancashire Songs, 'Proem'.
91. For a modern account of Billington's Life see my 'William Billington : Cotton Operative, Teacher and Poet', Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 134 (1985).
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93. Ibid, 20 February 1875.
94. Life and Teachings, p. 5.
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104. Ibid. 13 February 1875.
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130. Ibid.
131. Census of Great Britain, 1851, Education, England and Wales, PP 1852-53, XC, p. 245.
132. Preston Chronicle, 15 February 1851.
133. Census of G.B., Education, PP 1852-53, XC, p. 245; Blackburn Standard, 2 January 1850.
134. Northern Daily Telegraph, 4 April 1925.
135. Preston Chronicle, 4 October 1851.
136. Ibid, 15 February 1851.
137. Reasoner, 27 October 1852.
138. Preston Chronicle, 18 March 1843.
139. Reasoner, 27 October 1852.
140. Pickersgill, Accrington Discussion Class; Blackburn Standard 2 January 1850.
141. J.W. Kneeshaw, Burnley in the Nineteenth Century (Burnley, 1897), p. 113.

142. Accrington Discussion Class.
143. Census of G.B., Education, PP 1852-53, XC, p. 245.
144. M. Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851 (Manchester, 1957), p. 126.
145. C.J. Radcliffe believes that mutual improvement societies were primarily concerned with reducing working-class illiteracy; see 'Mutual Improvement Societies', p. 2.
146. Northern Daily Telegraph, 4 April 1925.
147. Darwen P.L., Minute Book, Q.431, pp. 28-29.
148. Preston Chronicle, 18 March 1843.
149. Ibid., 1 April 1843.
150. The Accrington Discussion class may have owed some of its popularity to the hostility of local clergymen and teachers. 'The prejudice against the "Atheists" lingered for a long number of years, and oft times [sic], when the meetings were being held at the Bay Horse, some of the members ... were wont to hide in the doorways in the vicinity until an opportunity was espied for slipping in unseen by the people who attended St. James' Church. School teachers were known to solemnly warn the scholars in their charge that on no account must they venture to attend any of the meetings or have anything whatever to do with the "Atheists", and to always bear in mind the dire consequences that would ensue if these warnings were disregarded'; Pickersgill, Accrington Discussion Class. The radicalism of North Lancashire's mutual improvement societies must not be over-exaggerated; they seem to have been more conservative than those of Staffordshire. See R.A. Lowe, 'Mutual Improvement in the Potteries', North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies 12 (1972), p. 80.
151. Life, p. 47.
152. Darwen P.L. Minute Book, Q431, pp 6-7.
153. Preston Chronicle, 26 April 1851.
154. Blackburn Standard, 6 October 1841.
155. 'Mechanics' Institute Movement', p. 495.
156. 27 October 1852.
157. Radcliffe, 'Mutual Improvement Societies', p. 1.
158. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

159. Ibid., p. 9.
160. This is suggested by the work of J.C. Wilsher, 'Popular Literary Culture in a Nineteenth Century Cotton Town : A Social Study of the Blackburn Poets' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, Lancaster University, 1970), pp. 35-36.
161. 'Mutual Improvement Societies', p. 2.
162. The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880 (1972 edition, first published 1969), p. 290; see also Tholfsen, Working-Class Radicalism, passim.
163. Passages, pp. 200-201.
164. Quoted by Williams, Roland Detroisier, p. 19.
165. Abram, Blackburn Characters, p. 334.
166. On the other hand, these activities could have had considerable political significance.
167. For an account of 'mass action' see Foster, Class Struggle, pp. 140-149; for William Billington's account of the Blackburn Plug Riots see Blackburn Standard, 15 September 1883.
168. For a brief account of his politics see Blackburn Times, 19 November 1887.
169. For an analysis of this term see F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture and Environment : The Training of Critical Awareness (1933), pp. 87-98; for an account of weaving villages in this period see C. Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle (Oxford, 1982), passim.
170. Clog Shop Chronicles (1896) and Beckside Lights (1897); 'John Ackworth' was the pseudonym of the Reverend Frederick Smith.
171. P. Gaskell, The Manufacturing Population of England (1833), p. 55.
172. Work, Society and Politics, p. 137.
173. Education and Social Movements, 1700-1850 (1919), pp. 49-50. Some historians argue that there were few continuities between 'traditional' British society and the society which emerged in the Industrial Revolution period. According to H. Cunningham, 'This essentially whiggish habit of thinking is thoroughly disabling, and the outcome is a failure to examine difficult questions about the context of popular culture', Leisure in the Industrial Revolution C.1780 - C.1880 (1980), p. 10.

174. Autobiography, p. 151. For an interesting account of nineteenth century perceptions of northern people and their values see, C. Dellheim, 'Imagining England: Victorian Views of the North', Northern History, 22 (1986).
175. A definition of this term is provided by D. Riesman, The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (Yale, 1950), p. 15: 'the source of direction for the individual is "inner" in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed towards generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals'.
176. Ibid, pp. 14-15, 41-43.
177. Ibid., pp. 16.
178. Ibid., pp. 67-69, 45.
179. Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy : An Essay in Social and Political Criticism (1938 edition, first published 1869), pp. 92-94.
180. Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, p. 192.
181. Blackburn Times, 20 February 1875; for an account of Baker's life see Abram, Blackburn Characters, pp. 45-56.
182. Abram, Blackburn Characters, pp. 229-231.
183. Quoted by R. Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (1961 edition, first published 1958), p. 68.
184. Culture and Anarchy, pp. 82-83, 88.
185. 'Under Which King, Benzonian?', Scrutiny, 1, No. 3 (1932), p. 212.
186. 'Popular Literary Culture', p. 35.
187. Blackburn Times, 31 March 1900.
188. Wilsher, 'Popular Literary Culture', pp. 36-37.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORIGINS OF THE MECHANICS'
INSTITUTES OF NORTH LANCASHIRE ¹Section One : Introduction:

Mechanics' institutes were probably the most prominent manifestations of institutionalized adult education in Britain in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Their development is often well-documented and they have consequently received a great deal of scholarly attention. It is therefore possible to relate the evidence from North Lancashire to the conclusions reached by historians who have examined the growth of mechanics' institutes in other areas. It is difficult to do this when examining more informal and neglected sources of adult education such as mutual improvement societies and public houses.

Although mechanics' institutes have received a great deal of attention from historians there is little agreement about their intended or actual functions. Many scholars have argued that class conflict was largely responsible for the establishment of educational institutions in nineteenth century Britain. A corollary of this view is the idea that these institutions were primarily intended to be agencies of social control. According to R. Johnson,

the early Victorian obsession with the education of the poor is best understood as a concern about authority, about power, about the assertion (or the re-assertion?) of control. This concern was expressed in an enormously ambitious attempt to determine, through the capture of educational means, the patterns of thought, sentiment and behaviour of the working class. 2

Several scholars have relied heavily on a similar concept of social control when describing the origins of mechanics' institutes. S. Shapin and B. Barnes have examined a number of institutes, most notably those of Edinburgh and North Staffordshire, and have argued that their chief function was the preservation of the social dominance and cultural hegemony of local élites.³

I. Inkster has studied the mechanics' institutes of Derby and Sheffield and has agreed with S. Shapin and B. Barnes that their functions were ultimately political. He argues that they were the creation of 'peripheral' professional groups which used them to strengthen and 'legitimize' their position within provincial society. These 'marginal men' were often politically radical and were united by an interest in science. He claims that the Sheffield Mechanics' Institute 'represented essentially a platform for the activities of members of the local scientific community'.⁴

It will be argued in this study that the establishment of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire cannot be adequately explained in terms of social control or social legitimization. These institutes enjoyed the genuine support of members and patrons of different class backgrounds, and this support was given for intellectual, religious, social and philanthropic reasons. The existence of a substantial middling class committed to the values of educational self-help was a more potent factor than the fears of local élites or the social concerns of marginal men.

Section Two : The Aims of the Founders:

The stated aims of the founders of mechanics' institutes present problems of interpretation. It is probable that some of their less altruistic opinions were rarely stated and the historical record is far from perfect. A close examination of their words reveals, however, that many of the promoters of mechanics' institutes appear to have been motivated by, among other things, a genuine enthusiasm for learning and education. There is clear evidence for this in a number of speeches given at the inaugural meeting of the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge. In the speech he made in which he proposed the formation of the Institution, Moses Holden, a self-educated amateur scientist, claimed that,

general knowledge will be diffused to entertain and enlarge the mind; and when this is accomplished it is lifted above the petty trifles of the day and has enjoyment in itself, nor can it be easily duped by sophistry, bigotry or error, for it is in the pursuit of truth and these fall before that. 5

Holden's optimism about what the Institution could achieve was shared by Edward Martin who seconded the motion and argued that the poor had as great a right to knowledge as the wealthy:

The peer and the peasant, the prince and the beggar are blessed with mind. Here there is perfect equality, and all have a right to cultivate their understandings. If there are pleasures of a superior nature, arising from the pursuit of science ... the poor man ought to have a chance of enjoying them as well as the rich. 6

These sentiments were echoed by Joseph Livesey, a former handloom weaver, autodidact, and first Treasurer of the

Preston Institution. He believed that the establishment of a mechanics' institution would lead to working men's minds becoming 'stored with such knowledge as would afford rational enjoyment; and habits of drunkenness and dissipation would be prevented, by the interesting employment which the books and the lectures would afford to the mechanic during his leisure hours'.⁷ These speeches, and many more in a similar vein, may have been intended to give mechanics' institutes credibility in the eyes of working people. The mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire did attempt to introduce the working classes to scientific and literary culture, however, and it seems at least equally likely that these are the statements of men who derived considerable personal satisfaction from study and wished to make opportunities for learning available to others; men who, moreover, were excited by the 'march of mind' and had an idealistic, or naive, belief in the transforming power of reason and education. This was, after all, a major theme in the literature of the period. One year previously an article on the Library of Useful Knowledge had appeared in the Westminster Review which claimed that

To gain wisdom and knowledge has ever been among the primary duties of man ... It is our duty to raise ourselves as far as we can beyond the four-legged beasts of creation and it is our duty to aid [others] in the same pursuits, in as far as we can aid them and they cannot aid themselves man, without knowledge and without education, is but an animal... 8

Another stated aim of the founders of these institutes was the provision of training, or technical instruction, for working men. The Blackburn Mechanics' Institution was

intended 'to interest the operative in the principles of his trade or employment, and to teach him to understand them, that he may acquire a greater degree of skill in his business and secure more domestic comfort and rational enjoyment'.⁹ The official aims of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution were almost identical:

The object of the Institution is to interest the operative in the principles of his trade or employment and in other departments of useful knowledge; that he may be enabled to understand those fundamental principles which are the key to the various branches of our arts and manufactures, and whilst acquiring a greater degree of skill in the practice of his business, may secure to his family and himself the means of more comfort and rational enjoyment. 10

Claims of this kind were often made in speeches and articles¹¹, but there is little evidence that any mechanics' institute made a serious attempt to instruct working people in their crafts in this period.¹² The practical difficulties which discouraged instruction of this kind may have been unforeseen when the Preston Institution was formed in 1828, but this was presumably not the case in 1839 and 1844 when the Darwen and Blackburn institutions were established. The most plausible explanation is that the founders of mechanics' institutes believed that the prospect of technical instruction would both appeal to working men and attract the support of manufacturers. In order to win the patronage of factory owners they had to claim that their institutes would train working people and thereby help to satisfy the manpower needs of local industries and increase the likelihood of further technical improvements. One of the earliest supporters of

the Preston Institution used arguments of this kind in a letter to the Preston Chronicle. He also drew attention to the great truth that, 'In commercial towns the best arguments are those founded on profit and loss; arguments which creating a sympathy between the pocket and the reasoning faculties, render these favourable to impartial investigation' ¹³ It would be wrong to exaggerate the extent to which employers were keen to enhance the technological skills of their workforces, however; many employers appear to have been ignorant of the machinery they owned ¹⁴ and the manufacturers of Blackburn were initially indifferent to the proposal for the Great Exhibition. In 1850 the Blackburn Standard remarked that, 'the grand suggestion of his Royal Highness, Prince Albert, for the holding of the exhibition in question, has awakened the least possible consideration, and it may be said no enthusiasm in this district whatever'. ¹⁵ It may be that the founders of mechanics' institutes were so determined to avoid any suggestions of frivolity that they were prepared to make use of any serious 'utilitarian' arguments - even implausible ones.

Perhaps the most controversial of the stated aims of the promoters of mechanics' institutes was their desire to reduce social instability and what they regarded as the immorality of the working classes. The latter problem certainly concerned the Provisional Committee which was responsible for the establishment of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution:

If at any time Christian men are found zealously endeavouring to withdraw their neighbours from vanity and riot, and to restrain the young from the haunts of folly, passion and vice; such a time is surely, an appropriate one for every patriotic citizen, and every friend of science, to describe the high and healthy pleasures that may be experienced by a cultivated mind, and to provide restorative and preventative asylums to which the working man of reformed character may repair, and in which the young may be so charmed as to have no sense of leisure to attend to the unprofitable and ruinous. 16

The promoters of the Lancaster Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library had similar aims. The advertisement which led to the establishment of the Library announced that the institution was 'for the use of mechanics and apprentices, for a means of affording them useful instruction and of improving the moral habits of the working classes'. 17

Some historians have regarded statements of this kind as evidence that mechanics' institutes were intended to impose 'bourgeois' values and notions of respectability on the proletariat or, at least, on the labour aristocracy. 18

Attention has also been drawn to remarks, less common than is sometimes implied, which suggest that one of the intended functions of mechanics' institutes was the reduction of political unrest. The following rather bland comments, written by a supporter of the Preston Institution, are not atypical:

... had the French people been pursuing the delights of science, or in other words, studying nature, they would not so readily have cast off the acknowledgement of nature's God. Nor can we suppose that such atrociousness, or measures so sanguinary, would at the time of the Revolution have marked their proceedings had they been deep in the study of letters. 19

Statements of this kind cannot be understood in isolation from their local social contexts. Many conservatives felt that mechanics' institutes were at least potentially subversive.²⁰ In 1842 the Tory Blackburn Standard was frank about its general attitude; 'We cannot say that we ever very much admired the schools of Mechanics' Institution philosophy; as we have generally found that their object was more frequently to inculcate political rabidity of the most violent and dangerous kind'.²¹ The supporters of mechanics' institutes had to make emphatic declarations that they posed no threat to the social fabric. An early lecturer at the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, for example, declared that, 'if he thought these institutions would end in bringing men in society to one uniform level, he should regard them as fraught with the worst of mischief'.²²

It is also important to recognize that in the second quarter of the nineteenth century there was growing concern within Lancashire's middle and middling classes about the effects of industrialization and urban growth on popular morality and on the structure of the working-class family.²³ A year before the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution appeared the Blackburn Standard claimed that there was,

with regard to the general licentiousness of the community, the most appalling evidence. Drunkenness, cursing, blasphemy of the most odious kind, promiscuous intercourse of the sexes at an age that we are shocked to mention, and in a manner the most disgusting and unrestrained, swell the black catalogue of human depravity. 24

Over twenty years later Accrington was compared with the American frontier.²⁵ These vivid descriptions may be somewhat exaggerated but they have received support from the work of modern historians. R.D. Altick has written of the early nineteenth century that, 'If there was ever a time when the English masses approached a state of downright bestiality, it was then'.²⁶ The number of drink outlets increased dramatically in the eighteen-thirties and drunkenness became an increasingly obvious feature of town life.²⁷ Crime rates also appeared to rise alarmingly and criminal activity seemed to be closely linked to drunkenness and ignorance. In his 1849 annual report on crime in North Lancashire, the Revd. John Clay, Chaplain to the Preston House of Correction, stated that of 1,949 persons committed to the prison during the year, 1,312 were unable to list the months of the year and 1,173 could not name the Sovereign.²⁸ J.P. Kay claimed that the bonds between parents and their children were being loosened, and N. Smelser has shown in his work how the traditional family economy was disrupted.²⁹ It is hardly surprising that the middle and middling classes did not view such developments with equanimity.

Although local élites sought to remedy this alarming situation, and saw in mechanics' institutes a partial solution, they were motivated by far more than a crude desire to preserve and extend their social hegemony. There is little doubt that much of their concern was genuine and philanthropic.³⁰ It is not enough to claim that,

They talked of and sought remedies for the crime which made them fear for their property, the drinking which made their workers unfit for productive labour, the supposed promiscuity and debauchery which destabilized the family unit and which therefore made the worker more socially volatile, the decline in Church attendance which withdrew the work-force from a suitable source of moral values and homiletic, the insolence which, when displayed in the High Street, made a mockery of the social hierarchy. 31

Joseph Livesey was one such leader of the Teetotal Movement in the eighteen-thirties. His origins were very humble and most of his followers were working or middling class. He was hardly a social revolutionary, but he was clearly concerned about the effects of drink on the lives of working men and their families.³² His support for the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge cannot simply be understood in terms of a respectable cheese-monger's desire to impose 'bourgeois values' on the labour aristocracy. The Darwen Mechanics' Institution owed its existence to the work of two clergymen, H. Dunderdale and S.T. Porter, who became its first Chairman and Secretary.³³ Little is known of their opinions, but it is highly probable that they deplored promiscuity and irreligion for moral and spiritual as well as social and political reasons.³⁴ It is also important to note that most of the working and middling class members of their institutes were probably in at least partial agreement with them. Most labour leaders and artisans in the mid-nineteenth century seem to have valued self-help and 'sound personal habits', and their respectability originated largely within their own classes.³⁵

Section Three : The Membership of the Institutes:

Relatively little is known about the early membership of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire but, unlike institutes in some parts of Britain, all seem to have received considerable support from the growing community of 'labour aristocrats'. Darwen Mechanics' Institute', for example, numbered 128 'mechanics' among its 170 members in 1840.³⁶ Committees appear to have been dominated by members of the middling class rather than by the representatives of local elites. The twenty-four members of the Preston Institution's committee included two 'gentlemen', a cotton manufacturer, a surgeon, an attorney, a coaldealer, a draper, an engraver, two tailors, a gardener, a shopkeeper, a cheesemonger, a plumber, two joiners, an overlooker, a twist-maker, five mechanics and a sedan carrier.³⁷ A similar list does not exist for the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution but a study of census enumerators' schedules and trade directories has made it possible to identify with a high degree of probability the occupations of eleven of the original twelve directors.³⁸ Two of these were teachers, seven were shopkeepers, one was a joiner, and one owned a warehouse. Although these lists must be used with caution, it seems clear that the two most important institutes in North Lancashire were not under the direct control of the local manufacturing and landed élites. They also appear to undermine I. Inkster's view that the institutes were created by and for peripheral professional groups.³⁹ It would not be unjust to say that professional men occupied a peripheral position on the

committees of the institutes. I. Inkster places particular emphasis on the importance of men in scientific or semi-scientific occupations but only one of the thirty-five men listed above seems to fall into this category.

The original initiative for a mechanics' institution in Burnley came from 'a few poor men in town' and the inaugural meeting was attended by 'a few tradesmen of slightly better position'.⁴⁰ It is significant that it was the efforts of these working and middling class pioneers which eventually won the support of wealthy and influential patrons such as Col. Charles Townley and Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth; the Burnley Mechanics' Institution was certainly not created by members of local élites for the working population.⁴¹ Although none of the original directors of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution appears to have been working class in 1844, it is likely that at least some of them had working-class origins. William Eccles, the Chairman at the Institution's first annual meeting, was a wealthy cotton manufacturer in 1845, but had begun his career as a piecer.⁴² The first Librarian of the Institution was a former hand-loom weaver and some of its lecturers were working men.⁴³ Little is known of the early history of the Accrington Mechanics' Institution. It was founded in 1845 and was originally a newsroom and library located in a room over a shop. It received the support of local notables such as Benjamin Hargreaves, 'the friend of the poor', but most of its members seem to have belonged to the working and middling classes. In 1851 it merged with a Swedenborgian mutual improvement society

which had a similar social composition and its membership rose to 249.⁴⁴ The Lancaster Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library was probably the least proletarian of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire. Little seems to have been recorded about its early membership but most of its promoters seem to have been middle or middling class.⁴⁵

According to J.P. Hemming, 'The institutes in the textile regions relied on an entente between the lower middle and upper working classes'.⁴⁶ The evidence from North Lancashire lends some support to this view but it seems more appropriate to say that the institutes in this area were established by and for members of the local middling class. Neither view is easily compatible with interpretations which emphasize social control or the social legitimization needs of marginal professional and scientific men. It is arguable, of course, that the middling class was itself an *élite* of sorts, and it cannot be denied that the working classes, as defined in the previous chapter, gave these institutes very limited support.⁴⁷ The institutes received a good deal of support from the established middle class of North Lancashire but this was uneven and erratic, and its importance is therefore difficult to quantify. Members of the middle class were prominent at annual meetings and soirées, as were a few aristocratic patrons, and lavish balls were organized which raised money for the institutes,⁴⁸ but evidence of continuous middle-class involvement in the running of the institutes is less plentiful.

Middle-class control, in so far that it existed, does not seem to have been resented by the less prosperous members of institutes. There is, at least, very little evidence that resentment of this kind existed in North Lancashire. In January 1829 a member of the Preston Institution claimed that, 'The operatives have hailed its establishment as a treasury of knowledge and entertainment, the want of which they have long lamented; and the wealthy have exhibited the most cordial feelings and have contributed liberally towards its support'.⁴⁹ Ten years later the radical Blackburn Gazette praised the respectable citizens of Darwen for their support for the Darwen Mechanics' Institution:

to the honour of the place, all sects and parties have come forward in support of so laudible a project, in the spirit of kindness and goodwill; and the institution will be opened under auspices such as few towns, of five times the extent, have the honour to boast of. 50

The financial support of wealthy patrons was of great value to mechanics' institutes. J.P. Hemming has pointed out that 'economic survival was, undoubtedly, the running sore in the side of mechanics' institutes',⁵¹ and institutes which lacked middle-class patronage, like the Burnley Mechanics' Institution in the eighteen-thirties, were underfinanced and therefore led a precarious existence.⁵² It was difficult for such institutes to survive, let alone expand, without the support of the affluent. The middle classes had time and management skills which could be put at the service of institutes and many professional men were willing to teach classes and give lectures.⁵³ It is probably fair to say that the middle classes were expected

to help in these ways. W.B. Stephens has observed that, 'Many, not only the comfortably off, would no doubt have regarded the voluntary efforts of the publicly active as altruistic, praiseworthy, and benevolent in intent, if the fruit of enlightened paternalism'.⁵⁴ It is also possible that there was little enthusiasm among institute members for unrestrained popular control of executive committees. The background presence of a few local notables could be a steadying influence. Even the history of popular political movements seems to suggest that members of the working and middling classes preferred to be led by their social superiors.⁵⁵ Deference may have been well-developed in the Lancashire cotton towns long before the period analysed by P. Joyce.⁵⁶ It is likely that many members of local elites supported mechanics' institutes simply to 'set an example' to their employees and others. James Hole felt that this was the case and pointed out that it was common for working men to attend lectures and classes to encourage adolescents to do so.⁵⁷

Section Four : Lectures and Classes:

The range of subjects taught in mechanics' institutes and the nature of the books and periodicals available in their libraries are central to the arguments of those scholars who analyse the origins and development of institutes in terms of social control and social legitimization. I. Inkster appears to believe that mechanics' institutes were little more than discussion clubs or mutual improvement societies for professional men in scientific

or semi-scientific occupations and his thesis assumes or implies that the provision of scientific instruction and facilities for study were the key educational functions of the institutes. S. Shapin and B. Barnes also emphasize the importance of scientific instruction but regard it rather as an agency of social control. They interpret the inclusion and exclusion of other subjects from lecture programmes in a similar manner. The evidence from North Lancashire does not support either interpretation.

Only the Blackburn, Preston and Darwen mechanics' institutes provided full lecture programmes in their early years; the Lancaster, Burnley and Accrington institutes were originally mutual improvement societies or libraries. These lectures were usually reported in local newspapers and received some attention at annual meetings so it has been possible to reconstruct the early lecture programmes of the Blackburn, Preston and Darwen institutes. Table Five is an attempt to reconstruct these programmes; in each case the lectures given during an institute's first year of existence are listed. Darwen lacked a local newspaper in this period and its first annual report appears to be lost. Fortunately, Thomas Coates included the relevant information in his Report on the State of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions in England. The scientific and technological content of these lecture programmes is shown diagrammatically in Chart Three. For the purposes of this classification, phrenology, 'Lost Arts', and agriculture have not been included in either category while physiology

TABLE FIVE

The Early Lecture Programmes of Three Mechanics' Institutes

Blackburn M.I. (March 1844- March 1845)	Preston M.I. (October 1828- October 1829)	Darwen M.I. (March 1839- June 1840)
Opening Address (1)	Optics (2)	'Mechanical
Elocution (4)	Phrenology (8)	Science as
Ancient and Modern	Electricity (3)	Applied to the
Poetry (3)	Architecture	Useful
'Lost Arts' (1)	of the Ancient	Arts' (6)
China (2)	World (1)	Astronomy (3)
Geology (2)	'Spread of	Optics (3)
Domesticated	General	Human
Animals (1)	Information' (1)	Physiology (8)
Draining Land (1)	Elocution (6)	Hieroglyphics
Lancashire	_____	(2)
Dialect (1)	21	British
Shakespeare (1)	_____	Reptiles (1)
Galvanism, Electricity, and Pneumatics (3)		Chemistry (1)

 24

 Total 20

Sources: Blackburn Standard, Preston Chronicle; T. Coates, Report on the State of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions in England (1841), p. 60.

CHART THREE

The Scientific and Technological Content of the Early
Lecture Programmes of Three Mechanics' Institutes

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Sources: Blackburn Standard; Preston Chronicle; T. Coates,
Report on the State of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics'
Institutions in England (1841) p. 60.

and 'reptiles' have been included in the 'pure science' category.

The only reliable source of information about the contents of the Libraries of the institutes of North Lancashire is the 1824 Catalogue of the Lancaster Mechanics' and Apprentices Library.⁵⁸ Chart Four illustrates the subject distribution at the time when the Library opened in July. The Catalogue listed 163 separate works but did not divide them into classes. Although most of these could be easily classified a few presented difficulties. These were classified in accordance with the 1851 catalogue of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institute.⁵⁹ Most of these works were donated by local citizens; 86 works are listed as donations in the Lancaster Gazette.⁶⁰ Although some donors may have been motivated by a desire to get rid of old and unwanted tomes, it is clear that works of pure and applied science only constituted a small proportion of the contents of the Library in 1824. This does not contradict the impression given by the early lecture programmes of the Blackburn, Darwen and Preston Institutes.

The evidence from the four institutes discussed above lends very little support to I. Inkster's view that mechanics' institutes were established by and for local scientific communities. Science was little more than a peripheral subject at the Blackburn and Preston Institutes and at the Lancaster Library. It seems to have been more highly valued by the members of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution but two-thirds of these were said to be

CHART FOUR

The Contents of the Library of the
Lancaster Mechanics' Institute in July 1824

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- A. Religion and Morality (47 volumes)
- B. History (21)
- C. Geography (10)
- D. Literature (23)
- E. Mathematics (6)
- F. Pure Science (12)
- G. Applied Science (6)
- H. Art and Architecture (11)
- I. Others (27)

Source: Lancaster Public Library, Rules of the Lancaster
Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library (Lancaster, 1824).

'mechanics'. This comparative indifference to science can best be explained in terms of the social structure of the towns of North Lancashire. These communities were simply unable to support the significant scientific communities which are central to I. Inkster's arguments. According to an 1854 trade directory, Blackburn could boast of only 40 men in scientific or semi-scientific professions ten years after the foundation of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute.⁶¹ The population of the town in 1851 was 46,536. Scientific men were not a powerful social force in towns of this kind.

The somewhat peripheral position of science in the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire also poses problems for S. Shapin and B. Barnes.⁶² These scholars have tried to show 'how the founders of British mechanics' institutes thought a scientific education would aid in the social control of those artisans who were their dedicated targets'.⁶³ If the founders of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were primarily interested in social control they do not seem to have regarded scientific education as a particularly powerful weapon.

It must be admitted that most institutes exercised a ban on politics and controversial theology. The Constitution of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution stated that, 'Any person who shall introduce within the walls of the Institution, in any Essay, Lecture, Discussion, or in any other way whatsoever, either party politics, controversial theology, or infidel or immoral sentiments,

shall then by that act cease to be a member of the Institution...; ⁶⁴ This policy seems to have been taken very seriously. In December 1845 a member of the Committee claimed that this rule was 'rigidly enforced'. ⁶⁵ A young man was expelled in 1847 after he had libelled a local clergyman. ⁶⁶ The Darwen Mechanics' Institute adopted a similar policy: 'Care will be taken in forming the Library, to exclude Controversial Divinity, Party Politics, and all Works whatsoever which have an irreligious, immoral, or sceptical tendency. No discussions will be permitted which have such tendencies'. ⁶⁷ The Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge appears to have been even stricter. Its fourth Rule stated that, 'The Library shall consist of useful books on Arts and Sciences, Philosophy, History, Voyages, Travels, and General Literature; but no Novels, or Plays, nor any Deistical or Atheistical Works, nor any on Party Politics, or Polemical Divinity shall be admitted'. ⁶⁸ There is also some evidence that the members of these institutes were dissatisfied with the censorship of lectures, books and discussions. In 1841, the Committee of the Darwen Mechanics' Institute's Discussion Class claimed that,

the class has been more or less prosperous as the subjects discussed have been more or less interesting. It has often been very much embarrassed in consequence of the general Rule that excludes Religion and Politics from the Institution. [There is, among the members] a unanimous wish that they may be permitted to occupy any ground, and they have accordingly requested the Committee to solicit the Council and members of the Institution to abolish the restrictive law.

This clearly implies that censorship was imposed on the members from above although the Council of the Institution expressed their 'entire concurrence with the sentiments expressed'.⁶⁹

The executive bodies of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire therefore sought to encourage the study of science, history, and certain branches of 'polite literature' such as poetry, and tried to prevent or discourage the study (at least within their institutions) of theology and politics. The positions of popular literature and political economy are less clear but the people who directed the affairs of the institutes were less than enthusiastic about them. Policies of this kind can be explained without reference to theories of social control or social legitimization; certain subjects were attractive or unattractive to the promoters of mechanics' institutes for other reasons. As these men seldom accounted for their policies in any detail, it is necessary to examine the position and importance of some of these subjects in Victorian Britain.

Science:

It has been argued that science was felt to be a suitable subject of study for the masses because

the study of the natural world would point out laws, relationships, and the presence of design of which the worker would be unaware. And in being thus brought to perceive this rational organization of nature, he would perceive (metaphorically or directly) the rational organization of society also, in its harmonious relationship with the natural world. 70

A related claim is that the study of science was thought to encourage belief in God and an acceptance of certain moral principles. S. Shapin and B. Barnes quote the Rev. Thomas Chalmers:

There obtains a very close affinity between a taste for science, and a taste for sacredness ... The two resemble in this, that they make man a more reflective and a less sensual being, than before; and, altogether, impress a higher cast of respectability on all his habits, and on all his ways. 71

A third argument is that the study of 'value-neutral science' was intended to 'crowd out less desirable alternatives'.⁷² It is suggested that science was intended to distract working people from radical politics. This view appears to receive some support from the authors of popular scientific textbooks. Hugh Miller's The Old Red Sandstone is a good example of this. The author's

advice to young working men desirous of bettering their circumstances, and adding to the amount of their enjoyment is a very simple one [sic]. Do not seek happiness in what is misnamed pleasure; seek it rather in what is termed study. Keep your consciences clear, your curiosity fresh, and embrace every opportunity of cultivating your minds. You will gain nothing by attending Chartist meetings. The fellows who speak nonsense with fluency at these assemblies, and deem their nonsense eloquence, are totally unable to help either you or themselves; or, if they do succeed in helping themselves, it will be at your expense. Leave them to harangue unheeded, and set yourselves to occupy your leisure hours in making yourselves wiser men. 73

Nevertheless the use of scientific laws in pursuit of social control can be challenged. Many radicals were enthusiastic about science and felt that the spread of scientific ideas was a force for progress and social change. Joseph Priestley believed that, 'the English

hierarchy (if there be anything unsound in its constitution) has ... reason to tremble even at an air pump or an electrical machine'.⁷⁴ Thomas Paine argued that 'It would be advantageous to the state of learning to abolish the dead languages, and to make learning consist, as it originally did, in scientific knowledge'.⁷⁵ He also claimed that he preferred the study of science to devotion to work and to carnal pleasures:

The mere man of pleasure is miserable in old age, and the mere drudge in business is but little better; whereas natural philosophy, mathematics and mechanical sciences, are a continual source of tranquil pleasure, and, in spite of the gloomy dogma of priests and of superstition, the study of these things is the study of the true theology [of Deism].⁷⁶

Nineteenth century radicals for their part were also enthusiastic about science; Rowland Detroisier was a science lecturer and the first President of a radical mechanics' institute formed in Manchester in 1829.⁷⁷

Robert Owen established 'Halls of Science' in many parts of Britain.

Many of the attempts to justify the teaching of science in mechanics' institutes imply that 'respectable' citizens had reservations about it. It was widely felt that the teaching of science might well undermine Christianity and encourage the spread of secularism. Conservative churchmen and Thomas Paine were in agreement on this matter and the controversies which surrounded the publication of Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830-33), Robert Chambers' Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844), and Charles Darwin's Origin of Species

(1859), undoubtedly strengthened this view.⁷⁸ It may be argued that until about the eighteen-thirties, if no later, science was seen, through the medium of natural theology, as a bulwark of Christianity; the relationship between natural and revealed religion was at best an ambiguous one, however, as the former had a tendency to exclude the latter. Henry Brougham's view of natural theology had alarming implications for traditional Christianity:

It is a vain and ignorant thing to suppose that Natural Theology is not necessary to the support of Revelation. The latter may be untrue, though the former be admitted ... But Revelation cannot be true if Natural Religion is false, and cannot be demonstrated strictly by any evidence without proving or assuming the latter. 79

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, scientific education cannot be seen as a major support of Christianity or middle-class morality and its rather peripheral position on the lecture programmes and in the libraries of mechanics' institutes may reflect this. There may have been a tenuous link between the teaching of physiology and middle-class attempts to discourage promiscuity amongst the labouring population but it is hard to see lectures on mechanics and phrenology as instruments of social control.

If social control cannot provide an adequate explanation for the study of science, other reasons must be found. Henry Brougham argued in his extremely influential Practical Observations Upon the Education of the People (1825) that scientific instruction would enable working men to make valuable discoveries and innovations and the

industries of North Lancashire had greatly benefited from the application of science to art.⁸⁰ The Accrington Mutual Improvement Society was hardly the creation of local élite groups, yet the instruction it organized and provided was largely scientific. Chemistry and geology were particularly important for the local calico printing and dying industries.⁸¹ It would be wrong to exaggerate the value of scientific lectures for local industries but the view that all intelligent working men should have some knowledge of science was probably accepted in much the same way as the idea that all young people in the nineteen-eighties should be 'computer literate'.⁸² It is also likely that the relative success of scientific instruction in the earliest mechanics' institutions encouraged the promoters of Lancashire's institutes to believe that they too had to devote considerable time and resources to teaching of this kind.⁸³ D. Hinton has suggested that the sciences were popular subjects for lectures because dramatic visual aids could be employed.⁸⁴ It certainly seems probable that lectures which incorporated 'an exhibition of the optical illusions of the magic lantern, grand phantasmagoria, etc.' would draw larger crowds than those on 'Ancient and Modern Philosophers'.⁸⁵

It is also important to appreciate that many people were attracted to science before mechanics' institutes had been established, and that these institutes sought, in part, to cater for a demand which already existed. Natural history was particularly popular.⁸⁶ According to James Cash, writing in 1873, 'Nothing could be more remarkable

than the way in which a love for plants was developed among the operatives of Lancashire towards the close of the last, and during the first half of the present century'.⁸⁷ A similar view was expressed in the Morning Chronicle: 'The science of plants is indeed a passion with the Manchester weaver. It is as common here as pigeon-fancying in Spital-fields'.⁸⁸ Some of the promoters of mechanics' institutes were keen amateur scientists. The Reverend Jonathan Bayley of Accrington was the founder and driving force behind a large mutual improvement society which eventually merged with and greatly strengthened the Accrington Mechanics' Institute. He provided scientific lectures to both bodies and his love of science was undoubtedly genuine. On one occasion a circus parade was marching through the streets of Accrington. When an elephant died Jonathan Bayley pushed his way through the crowds and removed one of the creature's eyes with his pocket-knife in order to examine it.⁸⁹

The reasons for the popularity of natural history, geology, and related subjects are many but there is no reason to include social control or social legitimization in any analysis. These sciences were developing rapidly, required little special equipment, were pursued in pleasant surroundings, and satisfied a love of collecting which characterized Victorian England.⁹⁰ Natural history may have brought members of different social classes together but this was not the result of a conscious attempt by members of the middle-class to impose 'bourgeois values' on the working population. The fact is that by Victorian

standards, natural history was an 'unusually classless pursuit'. E.P. Thompson, the author of Notebook of a Naturalist, went so far as to claim that, 'There is a kind of Freemasonry in the study of natural history'.⁹¹

Popular Literature:

The total exclusion of novels and plays from the library of the Preston Institution was perhaps an extreme measure but the supporters of mechanics' institutes were often most unenthusiastic about works of fiction. This attitude can either be seen as an attempt to impose middle class tastes and values on the masses or as an instance of the 'intellectual austerity' of men who wanted to 'demonstrate the seriousness of their enterprise in the face of potential criticism'.⁹² The latter seems to be the more valid interpretation.

'Respectable' novels were a powerful social force in Victorian England. D. Daiches has argued that,

The nineteenth century was the great age of the English novel. This was partly because this essentially middle-class form of literary art was bound to flourish increasingly as the middle classes rose in power and importance and partly because the novel was the vehicle best equipped to present a picture of life lived in a given society against a stable background of social and moral values by people encountered by readers, and this was the kind of picture of life the middle-class reader wanted to read about.⁹³

The exclusion of such literature from the libraries of mechanics' institutes cannot be regarded as an instance of social control. Most educated Chartists were critical of the conservative social message carried by most works of

fiction and presumably approved of such censorship.⁹⁴

It cannot be denied that popular fiction which was written for the working classes often did little to buttress bourgeois morality. In 1834 an article in Blackwood's Magazine stated: 'It is not generally known to our readers out of the metropolis, what immense manufactories of infidelity and exciting sensuality there exist, and to what extent they are diffused in the cheapest form throughout the great towns of the Empire'.⁹⁵ This view was not restricted to the middle classes; one autodidact claimed that his fellow workers read 'the obscure trash raked up from the pest holes that are unfortunately to be found in every town'.⁹⁶ There is some evidence that mechanics' institute officials had little regard for novels. Joseph Hodgson, the first Librarian of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute, had a personal library of about eight hundred volumes; most of these seem to have been old works of theology.⁹⁷ William Billington was one of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute's first lecturers. A good deal is known of his reading habits but there is no evidence that he never read a novel.⁹⁸ Such men were exceptions but the promoters of mechanics' institutes probably hoped that by excluding popular literature from their libraries they would encourage their members to imitate the reading habits of their employees.

It must also be remembered that violent, pornographic, and sensational literature became increasingly available in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. 'Penny

dreadfuls' and penny periodicals appeared in the eighteenth-thirties and became much more numerous in the subsequent decade.⁹⁹ The founders of mechanics' institutes were undoubtedly hostile to literature of this kind and it is possible to interpret this as part of a wider middle class assertion of moral and cultural hegemony. It is perhaps easier to recognize that institute librarians could justify censorship on literary and educational as well as political grounds. There is strong evidence that bad literature tends to 'crowd out' the good and it is difficult to disagree with R. Hoggart that, 'There is no virtue in the habit of reading for itself; however unexceptionable its subjects and presentation may be, it can become .. an addiction ... separated from the reality of life'.¹⁰⁰

A serious interest in good literature, and a contempt for bad, was and is confined to a small section of each social class. The most enthusiastic supporters of mechanics' institutions were members of these sections. The policies they advocated or accepted may be criticized on many grounds but they made real educational sense to intelligent and informed members of all social classes in the early nineteenth century.

Politics and Political Economy:

'Party politics' were officially excluded from the major institutes of North Lancashire even though, in the case of Darwen at least, this led to considerable friction. Political economy was excluded in practice if not in principle. If mechanics' institutes were intended to be

places where working people would learn middle-class economics and politics,¹⁰¹ it is somewhat paradoxical that these subjects should be effectively excluded. Some scholars argue that the effective imposition of social control inevitably involves concessions¹⁰² but it is difficult to believe that the exclusion of these subjects was merely a cynical attempt to increase their efficacy as agencies of social control.¹⁰³ The discussion of party politics and political economy would have divided middle-class supporters and alienated working-and middling-class ones.¹⁰⁴ Trade unions usually refused to allow political debates at their meetings and lecturers in political economy could not have avoided discussions of the Corn Laws.¹⁰⁵ Political divisions bedevilled the provision of schooling throughout the nineteenth century and it is hardly surprising that the founders of mechanics' institutes sought to establish places where people of different backgrounds and allegiances could meet together and socialize.¹⁰⁶ An interesting comparison can be made between the censorship employed by librarians and the editorial policies of contemporary improvement journals such as Chamber's Edinburgh Journal and the Saturday Magazine. Editors and librarians both seem to have been more interested in economic viability than in ideology.¹⁰⁷

While politics was primarily excluded to avoid controversy, additional reasons can be found for the exclusion of political economy. If science lectures were popular because they provided opportunities for dramatic experiments, political economy may have been unpopular

because it was boring. Few of the members of mechanics' institutes were well-educated and many of the controversies which preoccupied the classical economists must have seemed incomprehensible to them. The works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo among others were, and are, difficult to read, and attempts to popularize their works were often patronizing.¹⁰⁸ It could be added that the discussion of abstruse economic concepts is hardly a popular pastime today.

It is also possible to argue that the founders of mechanics' institutes knew that instruction in political economy was, at best, a weak and ambiguous instrument of social control. It would have been difficult to confine instruction to the works of the classical economists as the second quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the growth of an alternative political economy. Any attempt to study the works of Adam Smith while excluding those of Robert Owen would have led to unnecessary and damaging controversies.¹⁰⁹ It is also important to realize that much of what the classical economists wrote had uncomfortable implications for the middle classes. Adam Smith was far from being an uncritical admirer of merchants and manufacturers; in The Wealth of Nations, he pointed out that manufacturers had 'generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public and ... accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it'.¹¹⁰

Our merchants and master-manufacturers complain much of the bad effects of high wages in raising the price, and thereby lessening the sale of their

goods both at home and abroad. They say nothing concerning the bad effects of high profits. They are silent with regard to the pernicious effects of their own gains. They complain only of those of other people. 111

John Stuart Mill launched a devastating attack on economic inequalities in his Principles of Political Economy.

If ... the choice were to be made between communism with all its chances and the present state of society with all its sufferings and injustices; if the institution of private property necessarily carried with it as a consequence that the produce of labour should be apportioned as we now see it, almost in an inverse ratio to the labour ... if this or communism were the alternative, all the difficulties, great or small, of communism, would be but as dust in the balance. 112

It is clearly unwise to distinguish too sharply between classical and popular political economy; the subject was a double-edged sword.

Other political economists were more congenial to middle-class readers but their ideas could not easily be made palatable to the working and middling classes. The Rev. T.R. Malthus argued that working men should not marry 'when the actual price of labour joined to what they might have saved in their single state would not give them the prospect of being able to support a wife and five or six children without assistance'.¹¹³ As few working men could support seven others without help this was effectively a call for complete celibacy. David Ricardo asserted that 'the natural price of labour is that price which is necessary to enable the labourers ... to subsist and to perpetuate their race without either increase or diminution'.¹¹⁴

For the founders of mechanics' institutes, political economy was probably more trouble than it was worth; they were wise to exclude it.

Religion and Morality:

The mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were undoubtedly intended to strengthen and uphold Christianity and Christian (or 'middle-class') morality. The Treasurer of the Preston Institution argued that, 'If we brighten the intellect, without at the same time strengthening the moral feelings ... we are only capacitating individuals for greater mischief, and increasing their facilities for the commission of vice'.¹¹⁵ Some scholars go further, however, and claim that these worthy goals merely masked the real function of these institutes - the preservation and extension of middle-class hegemony. According to S. Shapin and B. Barnes, 'The decline of the authority of religion was a practical problem because in the absence of a stable source of moral values, the worker might be swept away by any number of transient social and political movements'.¹¹⁶ This view is not entirely invalid but it can be criticized on a number of grounds.

'Controversial divinity',¹¹⁷ like 'party politics', was excluded from the institutes of North Lancashire; no lectures were devoted to moral or religious instruction, and the library of the Preston Institution, which possessed a Koran, was not allowed to accept the gift of a Bible.¹¹⁸ All this is difficult to explain if moral and religious instruction was a central rather than a minor function of

the institutes. It can be argued that the promoters of mechanics' institutes realized that instruction in these areas would be counter-productive and were content to exclude what they regarded as undesirable lecturers, books, and discussions. This is possible, but more plausible explanations are available.

Support for mechanics' institutes was limited and, as was stated in the previous section, their promoters understandably wished to avoid controversy. The discussion of secularism and the reading of pornographic works would have cost the institutes valuable middle-and middling-class support; more tolerant organizations would presumably have not appealed to such people as the two clergymen who directed the affairs of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution.¹¹⁹ Two points must also be remembered. Firstly, Christianity was a potent social force in early Victorian England and for many people Christianity and Christian morality were valuable ends in themselves. To some extent the promoters of mechanics' institutes may have internally or sub-consciously rationalized their vested interest in social stability but this is hardly a sufficient explanation. Secondly, the religious and moral values of the members of the middling class who formed the great bulk of the memberships of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were broadly similar to those of the middle-class founders. These people probably found some of the books in institute libraries vaguely edifying but their lives were not transformed by them. In sharp contrast, the irreligious and arguably 'immoral' members of the lower

working class who genuinely seemed to threaten the social and political stability of the towns of North Lancashire, had little contact with the mechanics' institutes and were not encouraged to join them. In short, the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire had religious and moral functions but they tended to preach, in rather muted tones, to the converted.

The lecture programmes and library contents of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire lend little support to the theories of I. Inkster, S. Shapin and B. Barnes. To a large extent they simply responded to popular demand; as E. Royle has pointed out, 'What the working class leaders really wanted - as shown by what they set out to provide for themselves - was very similar to what the mechanics' institutes were providing'.¹²⁰ Although these categories are not mutually exclusive, the institutes were intended to be centres for working- and middling-class self-help rather than scientific clubs for professional men or agencies of bourgeois social control. This is clear from the nature and role of their libraries; the founders of mechanics' institutes seem to have felt that the arrangement of lectures and classes was less important than the provision of library facilities. In an address to the members of Blackburn Mechanics' Institution, the first Secretary explained that, 'All that those engaged in conducting the society could do was to place a treasury of knowledge at the disposal of the members, leaving them to preserve and extend the benefits placed within their reach'.¹²¹ The Lancaster, Accrington, and Burnley

mechanics' institutes began as libraries. All these institute libraries seem to have contained a wide range of literature and the importance attached to them militated against the view that they sought to blinker their members.¹²² C. Russell has claimed that it is almost impossible to regard institute libraries as effective agencies of social control. 'What working man, left to himself with an assortment of uplifting books (often cast off by their previous owners) would become sufficiently spellbound as to abandon forever his revolutionary conspiracies, his Saturday night carousels, or even his pint?'¹²³ It may be argued that although the theories of social legitimization and social control associated with I. Inkster, S. Shapin and B. Barnes are clearly defective, they may still be of value if modified. Although none of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were created by local scientific communities, and although small tradesmen were more numerous than professional men, it must be admitted that men of 'marginal' social status were prominent among their founders. It is also likely that these men were motivated, in part, by the hope that involvement in institutes would strengthen or 'legitimize' their position within local society. It must be emphasized, however, that other motives were at least equally prominent. I. Inkster's theories seem to be more applicable to large institutes located in cities with substantial scientific communities although his emphasis on the radicalism of the founders of mechanics' institutes seems to be of some relevance for the institutes of North Lancashire.

The concept of social control, when applied to education can take many forms : it can be applied to genuinely philanthropic attempts to encourage rational behaviour and appreciation of the arts and sciences as well as the overt and conscious efforts of social and economic élites to preserve their social hegemony. ¹²⁴ Historians often fail to differentiate between the different forms the concept can take, however, and this often leads to confusion. According to F.M.L. Thompson, the term 'social control'

is generally used to denote the imposition of opinions and habits by one class upon another; but it is not very clear whether this is a matter of the intentions of policy-makers, moralizers, and organizers of social agencies regardless of the practical efficacy of their efforts ... whether a desire to legitimate authority, and ensure that the desired behaviour is subsequently willingly given without fear of sanctions, is a necessary ingredient of social control; whether the unintended results of economic, political, and legal systems ... are part of the concept; and whether the line at which socialization ends and social control begins can be at all firmly drawn. ¹²⁵

Social control can be said to operate when all the relevant historical actors are unaware of it and even when it is totally unsuccessful or counter-productive. S. Shapin and B. Barnes concede that mechanics' institutes 'failed to modify the consciousness of the working [or middling?] classes to any significant degree'. ¹²⁶ The concept also suggests that the working and middling classes were the passive recipients of bourgeois values; it 'allows little for the possibility that the working classes themselves generated their own values and attitudes suited to the requirements of life in industrial society, and

imposed their own forms on middle-class institutions'.¹²⁷
 In short the value of social control as an analytical tool is extremely limited; as the concept is 'extremely complex, if not downright confused',¹²⁸ its frequent, and often careless use by historians is perhaps to be deplored.

Section Five : A Multi-Causal Approach to the Origins of Mechanics' Institutes:

There are strong indications that all classes were educationally deprived in Lancashire's expanding industrial towns in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and many members of the middle and middling classes were undoubtedly self-conscious about their lack of education.¹²⁹ They presumably hoped to remedy this by attending lectures but were reluctant to draw attention to their ignorance. This may help to explain why the members of the institutes were predominantly middling class while the institutes were often supposed to cater primarily for the needs of the working or 'labouring' classes.¹³⁰

It is sometimes suggested that mechanics' institutes were intended to 'tame' the working classes by bringing them into contact with their 'betters'.¹³¹ There may well be some truth in this view. In an editorial which dealt with the educational needs of working people the conservative Blackburn Standard commented:

We believe it is a fact beyond dispute, that very few of the thousands of persons employed in the factories of this county are personally known to the owners. This evil lies at the bottom, and is the prolific source of many of the evils which hang around the manufacturing system. All improvement must commence at this point. ¹³²

It is important to remember, however, that the industrial towns of this period were marked by 'a great poverty of social life at all levels'.¹³³ Unlike the working classes, who at least had their public houses, the middle class and a large section of the middling class had few places where they could socialize. A mechanics' institute provided at least a partial solution to this problem; a problem which was rather more pressing than the social legitimization needs of 'marginal men'.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the major employers of Lancashire regarded themselves 'as the creators and custodians of urban civilization'.¹³⁴ It is likely that many felt that it was their duty to provide educational opportunities for the working population. There is strong evidence that the Industrial Revolution caused literacy rates in Lancashire to fall¹³⁵ and it is likely that middle-class support for mechanics' institutes was, in part, an attempt to compensate or atone for some of the negative effects of industrialization. These were frequently described in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and few would have been ignorant of them.¹³⁶ Some members of the middle-class openly admitted that they owed their employees a debt.

We ought ... to do everything in our power to soothe the wants of the most useful members in society [sic], for by their exertions we are enabled to advance our fortunes and families; and in what ways can we do it more effectually than by providing them with food for the mind, which will ultimately do them good in all relationships in society... 137

It would be wrong to exaggerate the significance of

genuinely altruistic philanthropy but its importance cannot be denied.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Liberal and radical members of all social classes regarded the 'diffusion of useful knowledge' as a prerequisite of social and political reforms and mechanics' institutes were established, in part, to promote such reforms.¹³⁸ At the Darwen Mechanics' Institution's 1850 soir e, William Eccles, the Chairman, claimed that

there was nothing of such great importance in the present day as the education of the mass of the people. It was impossible for the inhabitants of any country to be fit for the privileges which every man ought to have unless he was educated - unless he had opinion; nay, unless he had principle. 139

A similar view was expressed by W. Westall at The Blackburn Mechanics' Institution's 1855 soir e: 'Not only would the working classes be benefited by the spread of education, but they would compel those above them to carry into effect social and sanitary reforms'.¹⁴⁰ It seems to have been widely believed that the education of the labouring population would facilitate the introduction of reforms and measures which would, in turn, improve the lives of their social superiors. It was also widely, if somewhat nebulously, believed that the establishment of mechanics' institutes would lead to improved industrial efficiency and technological innovations. These developments could also be expected to benefit all social classes.

Local pride has long been associated with Lancashire. In the nineteenth century civic pride was especially strong

in this area and there was fierce competition between towns. ¹⁴¹ The historian of the cotton masters has described how, 'the town acted as an arena above class, an object for local patriotism and the expression of local freedom'. ¹⁴² There is evidence that local pride at least encouraged the inhabitants of the towns and villages of North Lancashire to establish mechanics' institutes. In 1828 one of Preston's citizens felt that,

It is a matter of regret that whilst towns of comparative insignificance and feeble resources at this moment boast of institutions whose object is to afford scientific instruction to the lower ranks connected with trade and manufacture, there should not have arisen a permanent one in Preston. ¹⁴³

It appears that considerations of this kind motivated Robert Ascroft, the Secretary of the Preston Institution, ¹⁴⁴ and it is probable that civic pride had similar effects elsewhere. An Address to the Public, published by the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution in April 1844, is revealing:

The Directors would ... call the attention of the Public to the fact proved by the last Parliamentary returns, that Blackburn with its teeming population, is at the present time behind every other town in England in intelligence, for it appears that out of every 100 men only 39 can write their own name; and out of 100 women only 11 are able to do so! - while in London 89 men and 76 women out of every 100 are able to read and write. ¹⁴⁵

While it is impossible to accurately measure the relative importance of each of the factors outlined above, it is clear that all were significant. Only a multi-causal approach can provide an adequate explanation of the origins of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire.

Section Six : Conclusion:

The mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were the products of their local communities. They owed their existence primarily to the class structure of North Lancashire and to a widespread interest in the value of education which crossed all class boundaries. Most of the promoters were members of the middling class who were able and willing to collaborate with members of the working and middle classes. All were united by a belief in the intrinsic merit and civilizing power of education, and of reading fine literature in particular. The motives of the promoters of these institutes are seldom well-documented but many were undoubtedly altruistic men who felt obliged to devote their money and talents to worthy causes. Some probably felt that they could enhance their personal status by becoming an officer of a mechanics' institution. Small institutes like the Burnley one closely resembled mutual improvement societies; their survival depended on the collective self-help of their members.

It must also be recognized that mechanics' institutes were thick on the ground by 1850; the institutes discussed in this chapter are only the largest and best documented examples. Smaller institutes appeared and disappeared in towns and villages such as Fleetwood, Bacup, Clitheroe, Colne, Padiham, Crawshaw Booth, Rawtenstall, Hoddlesden, Ulverston, and Haslingden. Some of these were very small; the Hoddlesden Mechanics' Institute had only twenty-eight members in 1851.¹⁴⁶ It is highly probable that a

commitment to educational self-help and class collaboration were even more visible at the meetings of these institutes than at those of the larger bodies which have tended to attract the attention of historians.

NOTES

1. For an early draft of this chapter see M.I. Watson, 'The Origins of the Mechanics' Institutes of North Lancashire', Journal of Educational History and Administration, 19, No. 2 (July, 1987).
2. 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England', Past and Present, 49 (1970), p. 119. See also Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century, edited by P. McCann (1977), and B. Simon, The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870 (1974; first published 1960). B. Simon does not appear to use the term 'social control' but the concept is latent in his work. B. Davies, Social Control and Education (1976), and Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain edited by A.P. Donajkowski (1977), are useful introductions to the concept of social control.
3. S. Shapin and B. Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control: Interpreting Mechanics' Institutes', Social Studies of Science 7 (1977), pp. 31-74; S. Shapin, 'The Pottery Philosophical Society, 1819-1835: An Examination of the Cultural Uses of Provincial Science', Science Studies 2 (1972), pp. 311-336.
4. 'Science and the Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850: The Case of Sheffield', Annals of Science, 31 (1975); 'The Social Context of an Educational Movement: A Revisionist Approach to the English Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850', Oxford Review of Education, 2, No. 3 (1976); cf. A. Thackray, 'Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: the Manchester Model', American Historical Review, 79 (1974).
5. Preston Chronicle, 11 October 1828.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.; for further information about Joseph Livesey see The Life and Teachings of Joseph Livesey, edited and introduced by John Pearce (1885).
8. 'Library of Useful Knowledge', 7 (April, 1827), p. 271.
9. The Report of the Board of Management of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution (Blackburn, 1844), p. 6.
10. The Report of the Provisional Committee Appointed to Establish a Mechanics' Institution in the Township of Over-Darwen (Darwen, 1839), p. 8.
11. For a comparatively early article on the need for technical instruction see 'Library of Useful Knowledge'.

12. Thomas Coates, Report of the State of Literary, Scientific, and Mechanics' Institutions in England (1841), p. 26; J.W. Hudson, The History of Adult Education (1851), pp. 55-57; W.N. 'Mechanics' Institutions', Westminster Review, 41 (1844), p. 419.
13. 30 August 1828.
14. J.P. Hemming, 'The Mechanics' Institute Movement in the Textile Districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Leeds University, 1974), p. 285.
15. 23 January 1850.
16. Report of the Provisional Committee, pp. 3-4.
17. Lancaster Gazette, 17 December 1823.
18. Shapin and Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control', pp. 38-39.
19. Preston Chronicle, 8 November 1828.
20. 'High Church Opinions on Popular Education', Edinburgh Review, 42 (1825).
21. 20 July 1842.
22. Preston Chronicle, 9 May 1829.
23. N.J. Smelser, Social Change in the Industrial Revolution (1959), pp. 279-86. This concern is clearly apparent in J.P. Kay, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes (Manchester 1969; first published 1832); and W. Cooke Taylor, Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (1842).
24. 8 March 1843.
25. E. Stones, 'The Growth of Technical Education in Nineteenth Century Accrington', The Vocational Aspect of Education, 9, No. 18 (1957), p. 26.
26. The English Common Reader (Chicago, 1957), p. 94.
27. See for example Joseph Livesey's evidence to the Select Committee into Drunkenness, PP, 1834, VIII, pp. 89-96; see also B. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians (1971), pp. 69, 81-82.
28. Blackburn Standard, 20 February 1850.
29. Kay, Moral and Physical Condition, p. 64; Smelser, Social Change, pp. 180-224; see also Blackburn Standard, 13 March 1844.

30. W.B. Stephens, Adult Education and Society in an Industrial Town : Warrington 1800-1900 (Exeter, 1980), p. 47; T.R. Tholfsen, Working-Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England (1976), p. 27; A.D. Garner and E.W. Jenkins, 'The English Mechanics' Institutes: the Case of Leeds, 1824-42', History of Education, 13, No. 2 (1984), p. 152.
31. Shapin and Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control', p. 38.
32. Pearce, Life and Teachings, passim.
33. Report of the Provisional Committee, pp. 3-4.
34. The Reverend Henry Dunderdale taught English, Greek, and Latin to pupils at his house; see Blackburn Standard, 14 June 1837.
35. N. Kirk, The Growth of Working-Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England (1985), pp. 135-142; R. Grey, The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain, c. 1850-1914 (1981), pp. 37-38.
36. Coates, Report, p. 19. After a year's existence the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution had 200 pupils in its classes and less than three months after its establishment the Preston Institution had no fewer than 670 members; see Blackburn Standard, 14 May 1845, and Preston Chronicle, 3 January 1829.
37. T.R. Jolly, The Origin and Work of the Institute (Preston, 1917), p. 23.
38. They are listed in the Report of the Board of Management, p. 3.
39. 'Science and the Mechanics' Institutes', pp. 467-473; 'Social Context of an Educational Movement', pp. 284-297.
40. Burnley Express and Burnley News, 1 December 1934; see also M. Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851 (Manchester, 1957), p. 60.
41. Burnley Express, 1 December 1934.
42. Blackburn Standard, 14 May 1845.
43. For an account of Joseph Hodgson's life see George Hull, The Poets and Poetry of Blackburn (Blackburn, 1902), pp. 17-26; Blackburn Times, 10 September 1887.
44. E. Stones, 'Technical Education', pp. 27-28, and 'The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Bayley of Accrington : A Nineteenth Century Educationalist', Transactions of the

44. (Cont'd)

- Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, 70 (1960), p. 23; Charles Williams, A Jubilee Memorial of the Accrington Mechanics' Institution (Accrington, 1895), pp. 10-14; R.S. Crossley, Accrington Captains of Industry (Accrington, 1930), pp. 49-53; Preston Chronicle, 10 May 1851.
45. Lancaster Gazette, 17 December 1823; 28 February, 6 March 1824.
46. 'Mechanics' Institute Movement', p. 91.
47. See for example, Blackburn Standard, 23 January 1850. Most mechanics' institutes had few working class members. 'Nearly all the reports ... speak of the deeply-rooted ignorance of the value and application of knowledge, and of the consequent difficulty to obtain members from the lowest class of operatives; the subscribers to such institutes are chiefly found to consist of small masters, superior artisans and mechanics, manufacturers, clerks, persons engaged in the domestic trades, shopkeepers, and the more intelligent apprentices'; Charles Baker, 'Mechanics' Institutes and Libraries', in Central Society of Education, First Publication (1837) p. 242.
48. The Blackburn Mechanics' Institutes' first annual ball raised £100; tickets for ladies and gentlemen were 5s. and 7s 6d respectively. See Blackburn Standard, 2 April 1845.
49. Preston Chronicle, 3 January 1829.
50. 20 March 1849.
51. 'Mechanics' Institute Movement', p. 139.
52. Burnley Express, 1 December 1934.
53. 'Mechanics' Institute Movement', p. 553.
54. Adult Education, p. 52.
55. C. Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle (Oxford, 1982), p. 75.
56. Work, Society and Politics (1982 edition, first published 1980), *passim*.
57. An Essay on the History and Management of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions (1853), p. 19.
58. (Lancaster, 1824).
59. (Lancaster, 1851).

60. 3 January, 28 January, 10 April, 8 May, 29 May, 26 June, 3 July, 10 July 1824. For a detailed study of the libraries of mechanics' institutes see D.A. Hinton, 'Popular Science in England, 1820-1870' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Bath, 1979), pp. 221-265.
61. Mannex and Co., History, Topography and Directory of Mid-Lancashire (Preston, 1854), pp. 306-333.
62. In 'Science, Nature and Control', p. 48, these scholars claim that, 'In the early curricula of most of the institutes for which we have evidence, the natural sciences predominated'.
63. Ibid, p. 32.
64. Report of the Board of Management, p. 6.
65. Blackburn Standard, 24 December 1845; but see Hinton, 'Popular Science', p. 223.
66. Blackburn Standard, 5 January 1848.
67. Report of the Provisional Committee, p. 6.
68. Preston Chronicle, 11 October 1828.
69. Darwen Public Library, Minutes of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution, 'Annual Reports', 1841, Q431, pp. 28-29.
70. Shapin and Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control', p. 36.
71. Ibid., p. 36.
72. Ibid., p. 56.
73. Quoted by L. Barber, The Heyday of Natural History (1980) p. 35.
74. Quoted by Thackray, 'Natural Knowledge', p. 688.
75. The Age of Reason (1910 edition, first published 1793), p. 19.
76. Ibid., p. 56.
77. G. Williams, Rowland Detroisier : A Working-Class Infidel 1800-1834 (York, 1965; Borthwick Paper 28).
78. For a useful introduction to the relationship between science and religion in the nineteenth century see C.C. Gillispie, Genesis and Geology (Harvard, 1951), passim.

79. A Discourse of Natural Theology Showing the Nature of the Evidence and the Advantages of the Study (1835), pp. 204-205.
80. P. 10. See also 'Library of Useful Knowledge', passim; Tylecote, Mechanics' Institutes, p. 53; Preston Chronicle, 6 September 1828; Lancaster Gazette, 3 January 1824.
81. Stones, 'Technical Education', p. 27.
82. Although most educated early Victorians probably believed that the 'diffusion' of scientific knowledge facilitated technological innovation and economic growth, modern historians are less sure about the actual importance of science. The traditional view, which can be traced to the work of Arnold Toynbee, regarded science as an irrelevance, but this was challenged in 1969 by Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution, edited by A.E. Musson and E. Robinson. Other studies include Science, Technology and Economic Growth in the Eighteenth Century, edited by A.E. Musson (1972), and D.S. Landes, The Unbound Prometheus (Cambridge, 1969).
83. T. Kelly, George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education (Liverpool, 1957), p. 227; E. Royle, 'Mechanics' Institutes and the Working Classes, 1840-1860', Historical Journal, 14, No. 2 (1971), p. 308.
84. 'Popular Science', pp. 144-150.
85. Preston Chronicle, 31 October 1829, 1 April 1843.
86. D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography (1982 edition, first published 1981), pp. 172-174; J.F.C. Harrison, Learning and Living, 1790-1960 (1961), p. 49; C. Aspin, Lancashire: the First Industrial Society (Helmshore, 1969), pp. 117-120; Barber, Heyday of Natural History, passim; D.E. Allen, The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History (1976), pp. 159-160; J.P. Kay-Shuttleworth, Scarsdale: Or, Life on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Border, Thirty Years Ago 3 Vols (1860), II, pp. 259-66; Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life (1970 edition, first published 1848), pp. 75-79.
87. Where There's a Will, There's a Way! Or Science in the Cottage (1873), p. 10.
88. Quoted by Hinton, 'Popular Science', p. 372.
89. Stones, 'Jonathan Bayley', pp. 23, 24.
90. Hinton, 'Popular Science', pp. 374-376; Barber, Heyday of Natural History, p. 35.

91. Barber, *ibid*, pp. 35, 37.
92. Altick, English Common Reader, pp. 193-194; Hinton, 'Popular Science', p. 223.
93. D. Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature 2 Vols. (1960), Vol 2, p. 1049.
94. M. Vicinus, The Industrial Muse (1974), p. 144.
95. Quoted by L. James, Fiction for the Working Man (1973 edition, first published 1963) p. 26.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 6; cf. M. Dalziel, Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago (1957), pp. 173-182. M. Dalziel argues that Victorian popular fiction, whatever its defects, was at least superior to that of the mid-twentieth century.
97. Blackburn Standard, 16 February 1856.
98. Watson, 'William Billington', *passim*.
99. James, Fiction for the Working Man, pp. 14-50; Dalziel, Popular Fiction, pp. 4-12 and *passim*.
100. The Uses of Literacy (1958 edition, first published 1957), p. 332; see also Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (1939), *passim*.
101. Shapin and Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control', pp. 51-54; Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism, p. 47.
102. This Gramscian approach is adopted by P. Joyce, Work Society and Politics, p. xvi and *passim*; cf. H. Entwistle, Antonio Gramsci : Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics (1979), p. 13.
103. Shapin and Barnes, 'Science Nature and Control', pp. 55-56.
104. Kelly, George Birkbeck, p. 226; Coates, Report, pp. 24-25; Hole, Essay, pp. 65-66.
105. For the avoidance of politics by trade unions see Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, pp. 311-312; for the Corn Laws see N. McCord, The Anti-Corn Law League (1968 edition, first published 1958).
106. Tylecote, Mechanics' Institutes, p. 278; Burnley Express, 1 December 1934.
107. Hinton, 'Popular Science', pp. 270-271.
108. The Lancaster Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library possessed a copy of Jane Marcet's Conversations on Political Economy (1816) in 1824. Discussions between a governess and a young lady were unlikely to enthrall many working men.

109. Hole, Essay, pp. 65-66.
110. Quoted by C. Gide and C. Rist, A History of Economic Doctrines (1948 edition; first published in France in 1909), p. 83.
111. Ibid., p. 84.
112. Ibid., p. 358.
113. Ibid., p. 149, note 1.
114. Ibid., p. 172.
115. Preston Chronicle, 5 September 1829; see also Blackburn Standard, 14 May 1845.
116. Shapin and Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control', p. 40.
117. For an explanation of a closely-related term see Blackburn Public Library, 'Minutes of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution', 3374.2, 15 April 1844 : 'The words Controversial Theology they mean [sic] any direct attack upon any particular act or doctrine of the Christian religion, or promulgation of any such or any other particular sect or doctrine'.
118. Preston Chronicle, 10 October 1829.
119. The first librarian of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution was a teetotaler and a devout Methodist; see Hull, Poets and Poetry, p. 18.
120. 'Mechanics' Institutes and the Working Classes', pp. 315-316.
121. Blackburn Standard, 12 June 1844; see also Preston Chronicle, 10 October 1829; W.N. 'Mechanics' Institutes', pp. 433-435.
122. Stephens, Adult Education, pp. 58-59.
123. Science and Social Change 1700-1900 (1983), p. 167.
124. Stephens, Adult Education, pp. 46-47.
125. 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', The Economic History Review (Second Series), 2, 34 (May, 1981), p. 190.
126. 'Science, Nature and Control', p. 60.
127. Thompson, 'Social Control', p. 189.
128. Stephens, Adult Education, p. 46.
129. Ibid., p. 14.

130. The original 'objects' of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution were 'to encourage the acquisition of general knowledge and the study of literature and science by all classes of the community by means of a circulating library, museum, reading rooms, classes for mutual instruction, public lectures, discussions' Blackburn P.L., Minutes of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution, B374.2, 27th March 1844. Greater emphasis was later placed on the needs of the 'operative classes'.
131. Shapin and Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control', pp. 56-57.
132. 29 March 1843.
133. J.F.C. Harrison, Learning and Living, p. 38.
134. Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, p. 168.
135. M.J. Sanderson, 'Social Change and Elementary Education in Industrial Lancashire, 1780-1840', Northern History 3 (1968); 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', Past and Present, 56 (1972).
136. Smelser, Social Change, p. 279. Contemporary accounts of industrialization include John Fielden, The Curse of the Factory System (1836), and Charles Wing, The Evils of the Factory System (1837).
137. Preston Chronicle, 6 September 1828.
138. J.F.C. Harrison, Learning and Living, p. 91; Stephens, Adult Education, p. 47; Hole, Essay, p. 12.
139. Blackburn Standard, 23 January 1850.
140. Ibid., 17 January 1855.
141. This elusive subject is a recurring theme in A. Briggs, Victorian Cities (1963).
142. A. Howe, The Cotton Masters 1830-1860 (Oxford, 1984), p. 160.
143. Preston Chronicle, 30 August 1828.
144. Preston Chronicle, 11 October 1828.
145. A copy is preserved in the 'Minutes' of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution; Blackburn P.L., B374.2.
146. Hudson, History of Adult Education, pp. 226-227.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHANGING ROLES OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES
OF NORTH LANCASHIRE WITHIN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIESSection One : Introduction:

The mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were probably not the most prolific sources of adult education within their communities. In this respect Sunday schools and mutual improvement societies may have been of greater significance than mechanics' institutes. Mechanics' institutes nevertheless enjoyed a much more central position within their communities than these smaller institutions and they had a wider range of social functions. Despite numerous complaints about declining memberships, popular apathy, and rising debts, mechanics' institutes came to symbolize adult education in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

It must be emphasized that the development and changing social roles of these institutes cannot be adequately analysed in isolation from their local communities and the economic and social structure of North Lancashire. These institutes were the products of their communities and sought to satisfy the social and educational needs of the people of North Lancashire. They provided facilities and opportunities which were rare in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and stimulated a wide range of other forms of adult education - forms which would ultimately compete with the mechanics' institutes and contribute to their decline.

Section Two : The Members of the Institutes:

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century the mechanics' institutes of Britain were only able to enrol a very small proportion of the inhabitants of their towns and villages. This was always a serious cause of concern for contemporary observers such as Thomas Coates.¹ The crucial point, however, concerns the social backgrounds of institute members rather than their numbers. The available evidence suggests that the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were able to recruit a very high proportion of the middling class men who lived in their communities.

Graph One illustrates the changing membership levels of the Burnley, Darwen, and Preston Institutes. It is clear that the membership figures of these institutes varied considerably from year to year. The membership of the Darwen Institute hovered around 150 although it dropped dramatically in 1842 and 1846. On both occasions rising unemployment was the main cause of the decline although inadequate accommodation was probably a contributory factor. The situation was described by the Committee in 1844:

In the year ending July 1843, there was much commercial depression, and people have no heart to feed the mind when the body is in a state of want. This circumstance acted very prejudicially on the Institution at that time, the debts were overwhelming and the people indifferent. 2

The rapid rise in the membership of the Burnley Institution which began in 1843 and lasted until 1846 owed much to improving trade and the acquisition of more suitable rooms.

The subsequent decline in membership was the result of rising unemployment and sectarian squabbles. Religious divisions caused two denominational institutes - the Burnley Church of England Literary Institution and the Wesleyan Literary Institution - to secede from the Mechanics' Institution in 1848 and 1849 respectively. ³

Contemporary observers and modern historians are agreed that only a small minority of institute members were 'working class'. The 1840 Report of the West Riding Union of Mechanics' Institutes referred to, 'the fact, now universally acknowledged, that the members of the Mechanics' Institutes are, nineteen-twentieths of them, not of the class of mechanics, but are connected with the higher branches of handicraft trades, or are clerks in offices, and in many instances, young men connected with liberal professions'. ⁴ More recently, C. Russell has written, 'The one thing on which all writers agree is that, by and large, the mechanics' institutes were a colossal failure in the sense that the constituency commonly assigned to them remained largely untouched once the initial flush of enthusiasm had faded'. ⁵

The evidence suggests that only a minority of the members of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were factory operatives or unskilled labourers. At the sixth annual soirée of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution, James Pilkington, M.P. for Blackburn, lamented the small number of operatives present although the information given to the 1849 Select Committee on Public Libraries described

the members of the Darwen Institution as 'operatives'.⁶ There is also some confusion regarding the proportion of the members who could be described as 'skilled working men'. The Reverend J.O. Picton spoke after James Pilkington and gave his opinion 'that mechanics' institutions were called by an erroneous name, although he was not aware of a more appropriate term. It had been universally acknowledged that mechanics' institutions had signally failed from accomplishing the objects they were originally intended to consummate.'⁷ On the other hand, Thomas Coates divided the members of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution into a large majority of 'mechanics' and a small minority of 'others'.⁸

The central problem is therefore the loose terminology used by contemporaries. A study of the institutes' different categories of membership can, however, throw some light on the social backgrounds of their members. In 1839 the Provisional Committee responsible for establishing the Darwen Mechanics' Institution proposed that their Institution should have two classes of membership: 'honorary' subscribers who were to pay 10s 6d. per annum, and 'ordinary' subscribers who were to pay 6s.⁹ Provision may also have been made for a small number of life members. Thomas Coates received a copy of the first annual report (1840) and appears to have described the 'ordinary' members as 'mechanics' and the 'honorary' (and 'life'?) members as 'others'.¹⁰ Too much should not be read into this writer's terminology but the assumption can be made that the ordinary members were significantly less affluent than

the honorary ones. Graph Two illustrates the relative proportions of ordinary and honorary members. Although the number of honorary members was less subject to major fluctuations than the number of ordinary ones, the ratio between the two seems to have changed little over the period under examination. In 1840 20 per cent of the members were honorary and in 1851 20.1 per cent of the members fell into this category. This does not suggest that mechanics' institutes became increasingly 'middle-class' in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

The evidence given by J.B. Langley, a former Secretary of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution, to the Select Committee on Public Libraries facilitates some tentative comparisons between the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire. The members of the Blackburn Institution, like those of the Darwen one, were described as 'operatives'; the members of the Burnley and Lancaster Institutions were said to be 'tradesmen'; and the Preston Institution was said to have attracted 'all classes'.¹¹ It is probably safe to conclude that the members of all five institutes, with the possible exception of Preston, were predominantly middling class. Each probably had a small number of operative members and these were presumably drawn from the most affluent and highly-skilled factory workers. Middling-class members - skilled craftsmen, tradesmen, and clerks - were more numerous and constituted a majority at all the institutes. Each institute also had a small but very significant group of middle - and upper - class members; this was probably particularly important at Preston.

The members of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were overwhelmingly male. Female members were probably even less numerous than male unskilled working-class ones. Table Six shows the extent to which these institutes were male bastions. Some mechanics' institutes actively discouraged women from becoming members; the Burnley Institute forbade women to do so until 1846.¹² Some members probably regarded their institutes as male clubs and wished them to remain that way. Others may have felt that female members would distract young scholars from their intellectual labours. It must also be remembered that resources were limited and some institutes probably had difficulty arranging separate classes for men and women. Many women were also poorly equipped to take advantage of the opportunities provided by mechanics' institutes. Most were illiterate and probably felt that education was not their concern.

TABLE SIX

The Memberships of Six Mechanics' Institutes in 1851

Institute	Male Membership	Female Membership	Total Membership
Accrington	-	-	249
Blackburn	320	24	344
Burnley	308	3	311
Darwen	184	10	194
Lancaster	218	2	220
Preston	599	21	620

Source: Census of Great Britain, 1851, Education England and Wales, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, XC, pp. 244-245; Preston Chronicle, 10 May 1851.

If the members of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were predominantly middling-class and overwhelmingly male it is clear that these members must have constituted a considerable proportion of the middling-class males within their communities. Perhaps 20 per cent of the urban population of North Lancashire could be described as 'middling-class'.¹³ It follows that a city like Lancaster, with a total population of 14,378, had about 700 adult male inhabitants who were members of the 'middling class'. If three-quarters of the members of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institute were middling class, these members must have constituted some 23 per cent of the local middling-class. Although these figures must be used with caution it is clear that the middling class of North Lancashire gave strong support to local mechanics' institutes. It is likely that this class was also greatly influenced by the activities and facilities provided by these institutes.

Section Three : Buildings and Facilities:

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century the towns of North Lancashire had few public buildings and there was little space available for educational activities. Lecturers had to give talks and demonstrations in theatres and public houses. There was no public library in Accrington until 1899.¹⁴ Mechanics' institutes were a partial solution to this problem. They provided libraries, museums, and reading rooms, and space for lectures and meetings. Institute buildings became focal points within their communities. Their grand facades reflected local

pride and symbolized the rising status of adult education and educational self-help.

As a general rule, mechanics' institutes began their existences in poor, inadequate and improvised accommodation. Those which were chronically unstable for financial or other reasons remained in rooms of this kind while others were eventually able to obtain better accommodation. All the main institutes of North Lancashire fall into the latter category. The Lancaster Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library led an itinerant existence for 32 years. Its first home was a room in Mary Street but it was soon removed to the Infants' Schoolroom. In 1831 it was relocated in 'more commodious premises' in Penny Street. This accommodation proved unsatisfactory when the committee decided to provide regular classes and the library was removed to a house in Sun Street in 1844. Nine years later, after a newsroom had been established, the Institute 'took refuge in more eligible premises' in Penny Street. This too proved unsatisfactory and in 1856 a house was eventually bought at the top of Market Street. ¹⁵

The Preston Institution for the diffusion of Knowledge had a comparatively stable existence. In 1828 'suitable rooms' were rented in Cannon Street. ¹⁶ These premises are depicted in Illustration One. The increasing popularity of the Institution's lectures led to overcrowding, however, and in 1843 the Committee decided to construct a more commodious building. Subscriptions were invited and a bazaar was organized to raise funds. The foundation stone

was laid in June 1846 and it was opened three years later.¹⁷ The new building is shown in Illustration Two. J.W. Hudson said that it was 'one of the chief ornaments of the town' and James Pilkington, M.P. for Blackburn, called it a 'beautiful erection'.¹⁸ It was undoubtedly the most impressive institute building in North Lancashire. The site had an area of 1,544 square yards and the building cost over £6,000.¹⁹

The Burnley Mechanics' Institution was founded in 1834 and began its existence as a library in a room in a house. This apparently proved too small and it 'wandered for a time in the wilderness in search of premises to accommodate its constantly increasing size'. In 1842 it was 'comfortably established' in Chancery Street but the provision of classes necessitated a move to a house in St. James' Street.²⁰ In February 1845 the Committee pointed out that 'the classes are attended to overflowing, and ultimately the directors will be compelled to enter into arrangements for a larger building and more suitable accommodations'.²¹ A Provisional Committee was established to arrange for the construction of an institute building and £4,600 seems to have been raised. Unfortunately this project collapsed because of disagreements about the site and other matters and the money had to be returned to the subscribers.²² Conditions in St. James' Street became increasingly inadequate although the use of St. James' Schoolroom and Keighley Green Chapel helped to reduce overcrowding. In 1851 the foundation stone of an institute building was eventually laid and the improved accommodation became available in 1855.²³

ILLUSTRATION ONE

The Cannon Street Building of the Preston Institution for
the Diffusion of Knowledge.

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Source: T.R. Jolly, The Origin and Work of the Institute
(Preston, 1917), p. 20.

ILLUSTRATION TWO

The Avenham Building of the Preston Institution for the
Diffusion of Knowledge.

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LEGAL ISSUES



Source: T.R. Jolly, The Origin and Work of the Institute
(Preston, 1917), p. 28.

During the early years of its existence, the Darwen Mechanics' Institution was spread over several sites. A private house accommodated the library and classes while the Trinity Church Schoolroom was used for lectures. ²⁴ In 1841 the Committee complained that the accommodation was inadequate although it was announced that an additional room had been obtained for a writing class. ²⁵ Six years later the Committee complained that inadequate rooms were having an adverse effect on membership and claimed that they were arranging to use a 'fine suite of rooms over the New Market Place'. ²⁶ A year later the new rooms were in use and there had been an influx of new members. ²⁷

The Blackburn Mechanics' Institute's first home was a house in Market Street Lane. In May 1844 the following advertisement appeared in the Blackburn Standard:

The Board of Management take this opportunity of informing the public, that the whole suite of rooms now occupied by the Mechanics' Institution, have undergone a thorough repair; that every possible effort has been made to render them comfortable and elegant; and seats appropriated for ladies have specially received the attentions of the Directors. ²⁸

If the rooms were 'comfortable and elegant', they were hardly spacious and its location left much to be desired. In 1855 the Blackburn Standard remarked that, 'Everyone who recollects its former habitat in Market-Street Lane, with its dingy apartments and repulsive approaches, will agree with us that it is a matter of astonishment that it should have so long survived even in its then comparatively useless condition'. ²⁹ At the Institution's sixth annual soirée (1849) James Pilkington feared that they never

could attain any great degree of prosperity so long as they remained couped up in their present tenement. If the Institution was to be prosperous, they must have premises which would allow of that prosperity'.³⁰ In November 1850 a newsroom was opened.³¹ Five years later W.H. Hornby, one of the vice-presidents, allowed the Blackburn Institution to use his 'mansion' in King Street for 'an almost nominal rental'. This gesture,

placed at the disposal of the committee facilities for class instruction, for newsroom and library accommodation, and for the general purposes of the Institution such as it never possessed before, and a very rapid increase in the number of members ensued immediately upon its removal to the present very eligible premises. ³²

The accommodation 'enjoyed by the Accrington Mechanics' Institution was entirely inadequate. In 1851 its 249 members, seven classes, and its considerable library had to be satisfied with three rooms over a shop in Blackburn Road which were 'hot and unhealthy and unsuitable'.³³ Eight years later better premises were obtained within the Peel Institution - Accrington's chief public building.³⁴

Throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century libraries were the central features of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire. Any challenge from lectures, classes and new forms of entertainment such as soirées and excursions was more than countered as libraries grew and increasingly provided newspapers and light reading. The slow but steady growth of some of these institute libraries is shown in Graph Three.

The available evidence about the contents of these libraries suggests that many of their volumes, perhaps most, were donations. After one year's existence, the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge had 1,506 volumes in its library; 1,140 of these were gifts or bequests, the rest were purchases.³⁵ The situation does not seem to have been very different by 1851. According to the Institution's twenty-third annual report, the library had acquired 563 books during the previous year of which 380 were donations.³⁶ Although the nature of such donations was criticized by Samuel Smiles and others,³⁷ this source of books could hardly be ignored by impoverished institutes (which were also reluctant to offend their patrons). The 1849 Select Committee on Public Libraries observed that, 'Donation has been the source of the principal libraries which have ever or anywhere been formed'. The Committee was informed that almost half the British Museum's volumes were presents or bequests.³⁸

The contents of the libraries of the Burnley Mechanics' Institute in 1844 and the Lancaster Mechanics' Institute in 1851 are summarized in Charts Five and Six respectively. It appears that both libraries were extremely useful as sources of information and entertainment. It is possible to compare the contents of the library of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institute in 1851 with its contents in 1824. A comparison of Charts Four and Six suggests that the relative importance of History, Science and Literature increased while that of Religion, Morals and Philosophy declined. Neither of these institute libraries

remotely resembled the library of the Dulborough Mechanics' Institute which was described by Charles Dickens in his Uncommercial Traveller; this had 'shelves for three thousand books and containing upwards of one hundred and seventy'.³⁹ The Burnley and Lancaster libraries were, by the standards of the time, little short of excellent. It must also be noted that by 1851 the building of the Preston Institution contained two libraries. In addition to the Institution Library which contained about 5,000 volumes, the building also accommodated Dr. Shepherd's Library, which was well-endowed and had 400 readers.⁴⁰

The provision of newspapers and popular periodicals, often in separate newsrooms, was the most important change in the structure and content of institute libraries which occurred in the eighteen-forties. By 1851 the six major institutes of North Lancashire all had newsrooms. The Blackburn Mechanics' Institute gained one in 1850; according to the Blackburn Standard,

An important addition has been recently made to the advantages presented by this Institution, in the appropriation in the principal part of the lecture-room [sic] as a news-room and reading room. About one half of the room has been partitioned off, and fitted up in a style which, for comfort and convenience, will bear a comparison with similar establishments in any part of the kingdom. 41

Newsrooms were primarily established to increase the popularity of mechanics' institutions. The most explicit statement to this effect is probably to be found in the 1851 Report of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution:

TABLE SEVEN

The Contents of the Library of the Burnley
Mechanics' Institute in 1844.

(a) Philosophy, Rhetoric and Logic	20 vols.
(b) Mathematics	20 "
(c) Metaphysics	10 "
(d) Morals	8 "
(e) Theology	5 "
(f) Natural Philosophy	50 "
(g) Useful Arts	44 "
(h) Fine Arts	15 "
(i) Natural History	35 "
(j) Application of Natural History	11 "
(k) Encyclopaedias and Scientific Dictionaries	27 "
(l) History	41 "
(m) Scientific Memoirs, Journals and Magazines	100 "
(n) Voyages and Travels	72 "
(o) Ancient and Modern History	86 "
(p) Biography	100 "
(q) National Records	51 "
(r) Pamphlets	7 "
(s) Poetry	32 "
(t) Romances, Novels, Tales	74 "
(u) Literary Journals and Magazines	81 "
(v) 'Miscellaneous' and 'Addenda'	134 "
TOTAL	1023 vols.

Source: Burnley Public Library, Catalogue of the Library of the Burnley Mechanics' Institution (Burnley, 1844).

CHART FIVE

The Contents of the Library of the Burnley
Mechanics Institute in 1844.

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- A. Religion, Morals and Philosophy (43 volumes;
sections a, c, d and e of Table Four).
- B. History and Biography (227; l,o,p).
- C. Geography (72; n).
- D. Literature (187; s,t,u).
- E. Mathematics (20; b).
- F. Pure Science (212; f,i,k,m).
- G. Applied Science (55; g,j).
- H. Fine Art (15; h).
- I. Others (192; q,r,v).

Source: Burnley Public Library, Catalogue of the Library
of the Burnley Mechanics' Institution (Burnley, 1844).

TABLE EIGHT

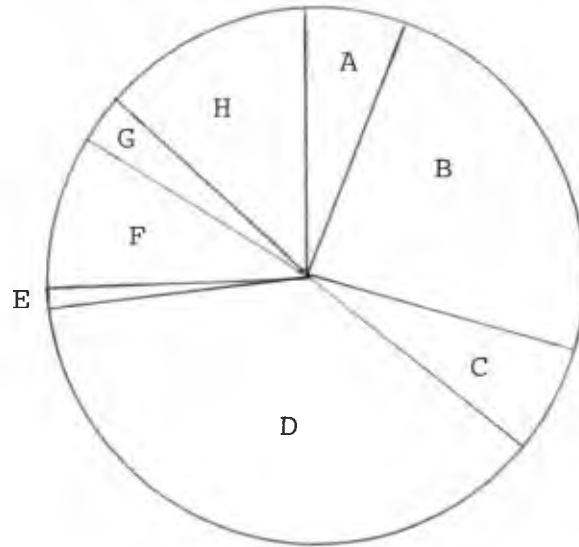
The Contents of the Library of the Lancaster Mechanics'
Institute in 1851

(a) Theology, Morality, and Metaphysics	141 Vols.
(b) Natural Philosophy, Medicine, Chemistry and Astronomy	147 "
(c) Mathematics	27 "
(d) Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias	100 "
(e) Natural History, Botany, Agriculture, and Gardening	82 "
(f) History and Biography	535 "
(g) Chronology, Antiquity and Topography	25 "
(h) Geography, Statistics, Voyages and Travels	146 "
(i) Law of Nature (Political Economy) and Nations	75 "
(j) Language, Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Criticism and Reviews	158 "
(k) Essays and Letters	153 "
(l) Useful and Fine Arts	69 "
(m) Poetry	58 "
(n) Novels, Romances and Dramatic Works	118 "
(o) Latin and Greek Classics	9 "
(p) Journals and Magazines	565 "
TOTAL	2,408 Vols

Source: Lancaster Public Library, The Catalogue of the
Library of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institution (Lancaster,
1851).

CHART SIX

The Contents of the Library of the
Lancaster Mechanics' Institute in 1851.



- A. Religion, Morals and Philosophy (141 volumes; section a of Table Five).
- B. History and Biography (560, f, g).
- C. Geography (146; h).
- D. Literature (903; k, m, n, o, p).
- E. Mathematics (27; c).
- F. Pure and Applied Science (229; b, e).
- G. Useful and Fine Arts (69; l).
- H. Others (333, d, j).

Source: Lancaster Public Library, The Catalogue of the Library of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institution (Lancaster, 1851).

The experience of mechanics' institutions generally has demonstrated not only the utility, but also the necessity of appending reading rooms ... Indeed, in a majority of instances, such an appendage has proved one of the main sources of prosperity of our institutions, inasmuch as it has attracted the support of a large number of individuals to whom the classes for instruction are unnecessary, and who are not possessed of sufficient leisure to avail themselves to any material extent of the advantages presented by our libraries. 42

In addition, newsrooms were established to ween potential members away from alternative sources of recreation and instruction. In 1849 Joseph Bell, a member of the Committee of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institution, claimed that a major 'advantage of the Institution was the newspapers. Formerly a working man could only see them by going to the tap-room and beer-house; but here that privilege might be obtained without the necessarily debasing accompaniments of intoxicating drinks'.⁴³ The educational value of newspapers will be discussed in Chapter Seven. Unfortunately, newsrooms were not entirely unmixed blessings. Since working- and middling-class men had very little spare time, the reading of newspapers must have distracted some poor scholars from more demanding intellectual activities. It is also likely that the concession of newsrooms stimulated popular demands for other forms of entertainment.⁴⁴ The Darwen Institution's news-room was initially uneconomic and the Blackburn Institution's news-room required so much space that several classes had to close.⁴⁵ Such was the price of continued popularity.

Only two of the six main mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire appear to have established museums - Preston and Darwen, and comparatively little is known of these. In both cases, museums were established soon after the institutes were founded. It is likely that both museums owed their existence to the enthusiasm of a few individuals. The initial Prospectus of the Darwen Mechanics' Institute stated that, 'Presents of books, philosophical instruments and curiosities of nature or art, will be most acceptable, and thankfully received, and the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge seems to have had a museum by December 1828.⁴⁶ The museums also grew quickly. The Preston Institution had 800 natural history specimens in October 1829⁴⁷ and by 1840 the museum was extensive despite its poor accommodation. A visitor claimed that he was

extremely grieved on going into the Institution Room ... a few days ago to perceive that some specimens of different articles that had been presented to the Museum were lying on the table, there being no room to place them in the cases; and to erect fresh cases in the present room is next to an impossibility, it being now inconveniently crowded. 48

Most of these specimens were donated by members. Thomas Coates, writing in 1841, said that he found at the Preston Institution 'a large, and I was told, complete collection of insects, made by a working man of the town during his walks'.⁴⁹ Detailed museum catalogues do not seem to have been preserved although the most important donations were sometimes listed in annual reports. Table Nine suggests that the Darwen Mechanics' Institution's museum was

undoubtedly of interest to occasional visitors, and a useful outlet for the energies of local collectors. Museums may also have encouraged institute members to take an interest in natural history. In 1848 the Committee of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institution was given a case of geological specimens. This donation apparently led to the formation of a geological class.⁵⁰

Some contemporary observers seem to have felt that museums were unnecessary burdens.⁵¹ It is likely that their educational value declined as their contents became increasingly familiar and occupied an ever-growing portion of the available space. In 1851 J.W. Hudson described the Preston Institution's museum in the following words: 'The museum and collection of philosophical apparatus has been comparatively useless, occupying space which might have been more advantageously used by clubs or classes'.⁵² Mechanics' institutes lacked the resources and expertise to establish truly useful and viable museums,⁵³ although it must be added that many of the municipal museums which were established in the second half of the nineteenth century left much to be desired.

Section Four : Modes of Instruction:

Lectures were a major form of instruction at the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire until the early eighteen-forties; after this they seem to have declined in significance. The Darwen Mechanics' Institution had an average attendance of 300 at the lectures it organized during its first year of existence (1839-40) and the

TABLE NINE

Articles Donated to the Museum of the Darwen Mechanics'
Institute Between June 1841 and June 1842.

1. Chinese Umbrell [sic; umbrella?].
2. Box of Insects.
3. Collection of 'British and Foreign Curiosities'.
4. Electric Machine ' and other apparatus'.
5. 25 Botanical Specimens.
6. Fossils.
7. Over 120 'British Salt and Freshwater Shells'.
8. A Turtle Shell.
9. 'Some Fine Shells'.
10. Arrow and Fish Spear.
11. 'Some Curious and Costly Specimens of Needlework'.
12. Sample of Indian Corn.
13. A Few American Fossils.

Source: Darwen Public Library, Mechanics' Institution
Annual Reports, 1842, Q 431, pp. 53-54.

Lancaster Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library did not begin to provide lectures and classes on a regular basis until 1841.⁵⁴ By 1845, however, the Council of the Darwen Mechanics' Institution was lamenting poor attendance at lectures:

The Council regard this as the worst feature of the institution and while attempting to investigate its cause, cannot help expressing their belief that it arises principally from the preponderance of a love for excitement and novelty over that of a desire for information and knowledge: a state of mind which they regard as most unsound, unhealthy and dangerous. 55

The Blackburn Mechanics' Institution responded to this trend in 1849 by establishing a committee 'for the purpose of entering into arrangements for giving a course of cheap and popular lectures and musical entertainments during the ensuing winter evenings'.⁵⁶ The Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge was less flexible and was rewarded with meagre attendances at its 1851 lectures. At its annual meeting, William Ainsworth, the Chairman, was less than magnanimous in attributing 'this lack of members not to the lectures, but to the want of taste on the part of the members'.⁵⁷

Lectures were often uneconomic,⁵⁸ and organizing them could be a frustrating and thankless task. On the other hand, they were seen as a prestigious form of instruction and raised the 'profile' of an institution within its local community. Lectures seem to have been particularly attractive to the educated and affluent. They had 'overtones of cultured respectability' and gave middle-class institute members opportunities to meet and

socialize.⁵⁹ Those who arranged lecture programmes do not seem to have paid much heed to the needs of the poor (and poorly-educated) and the lecture notes which have survived suggest that listeners were expected to be reasonably well-educated.⁶⁰ It should be noted that this was not necessarily rooted in a desire to exclude working people. According to Lord Brougham, 'a speaker who thinks to lower his composition in order to accommodate himself to the habits and taste of his audience, when addressing the multitude, will find that he commits a grievous mistake'.⁶¹ It is likely that most lectures were simply too passive to satisfy working men; after a hard day's manual labour they sought diversion and stimulation rather than polite oratory.

Most institutes seem to have obtained the services of both paid (professional) lecturers and gratuitous ones. In addition to being cheap, gratuitous lectures were in conformity with the ideals of most of the promoters of mechanics' institutes. According to the report read at the third annual tea party of the Burnley Mechanics' Institution.

It would be well if gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood would come forward and give gratuitous lectures in conformity with the original intentions of Mechanics' Institutions; they would encourage native talent, engender laudable emulation, and excite a greater desire for literary research. In society man lives not for himself alone. ⁶²

On the other hand, gratuitous lecturers could be of poor quality and were often unreliable. In 1843 the Darwen Mechanics' Institution was heavily in debt and decided to

rely entirely on gratuitous lectures: 'Application was made to several Reverend Gentlemen in the neighbourhood and others, whom the Council thought likely to give gratuitous lectures to the members and friends of the Institution but in every case we failed to accomplish our purpose'.⁶³

Early Victorian commentators were divided over the subject of gratuitous lecturers. The point needs to be made however that the advocates of paid teachers were often strong supporters of educational self-help. Charles Baker was a severe critic of monitors and gratuitous lecturers yet he felt that the chief function of teachers was merely to assist students to develop basic skills.

What remains after this must be self-acquired, - from books, from reflection, from experiment, from intercourse with minds of a similar character and engaged in similar pursuits. The difficulty of proceeding in a course of studies beyond this point becomes gradually less. Every advanced student here strikes out a path for himself, and what have been used as aids become impediments in his further progress.⁶⁴

It is probably inappropriate to regard mechanics' institutes and mutual improvement societies as rival sources of adult education. Autodidacts were able to acquire basic skills in the former and continued their studies in the latter.

The 'quality' of lecturers varied immensely. In November 1849 William Richardson gave a series of lectures on 'Electricity, Galvanism, Electro-Magnetism, and Pneumatics' at Blackburn's Theatre Royal. Tickets for the course of lectures cost between 3s. and 9d. although the members of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution were

admitted free of charge. ⁶⁵ The Blackburn Standard was most impressed:

the house was crowded in every part, with a most respectable and attentive audience. In fact it was impossible to accommodate the number of persons who were anxious to be present, and though the portion at the back of the boxes was removed to afford some of those who attended a chance of seeing and hearing the lecturer, many were obliged to leave, unable to find even standing room. Mr. Richardson's style of writing is too well-known in this town to need much observation. To a thorough and minute acquaintance with his subject, he joins a most amusing, original, and instructive style of delivery; and forces, if we may use the word, more information into a sentence than most persons could pick up by a day's reading. He is, besides, a suggestive describer of what he knows, throwing out as he goes numberless thoughts bearing upon his facts, and leaving them for after consideration, to those who are able or willing to accept more than they bargain for, and to turn it to account. 66

William Richardson's lectures seem to have been amusing, entertaining and (perhaps) stimulating, rather than genuinely instructive. Style of delivery was clearly of immense importance to a professional lecturer. His alleged ability to put 'more information into a sentence than most, persons could pick up by a day's reading' probably made his lectures attractive to institute members who had little time for private study. It is also clear that he gave considerable attention to the wider implications of his subject. William Richardson's lectures were certainly popular and do not give strong support to the view that scientific lectures were in decline by 1850. Not all lecturers were successful however; the members of the Preston Institution seem to have witnessed an early example of incompetence in 1829. A critical letter appeared in the Preston Chronicle:

I trust I may be pardoned if I presume to question the propriety of the worthy gentlemen who compose the Committee of the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge, longer tolerating the absurd practice of permitting every unfledged lecturer, who possesses vanity sufficient to desire it, to exhibit before the members of that institution ... I cannot conceive anything more despicable than an insolent, hapless creature, without sense or information, without a consciousness of any other qualification for his office than his assurance, puffed up with pride and conceit, recommending theories of which he is ignorant, censuring systems he cannot comprehend, and satisfied to be himself laughed at, in order to render a noble institution ridiculous and contemptible. 67

As the 'quality' of lecturers cannot be accurately measured, and as accounts exist of only a small proportion, it is difficult to compare the lectures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with those of the mid-nineteenth century. The available evidence suggests that as the number of lecturers increased, as a result of rising demand for their services, their 'quality' declined. The 1840 Report of the West Riding Union of Mechanics' Institutions referred to 'the extreme paucity of competent lecturers' ⁶⁸ and nine years later J.B. Langley claimed that, 'In some places lectures have been overdone. Lecturing now having become so profitable, a great many persons have engaged in it who are quite unable to please an audience'. ⁶⁹

So far as lectures are concerned, most historians have been primarily interested in their subjects and the most widely held view has been that the scientific content of lecture programmes declined progressively during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. ⁷⁰ The evidence from North Lancashire is at variance with this view. The

TABLE TEN

Lectures given at the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge Between October 1850 and October 1851.

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 1. | Electricity | (1 lecture). |
| 2. | Electro-biology (5; there were also 2 Electro-biological 'Entertainments'). | |
| 3. | Electricity and Magnetism | (3). |
| 4. | Theory of Light | (1). |
| 5. | 'Friendly Societies, their Purpose, Prospects and Utility' | (1). |
| 6. | Instinct | (1). |
| 7. | Biology | (2). |
| 8. | Education | (1). |
| 9. | Music | (1). |
| 10. | Norman Conquest | (1). |
| 11. | Art | (1). |

Source: Preston Chronicle, 23 November 1850; 18 January, 25 January, 1 February, 15 February, 1 March, 8 March, 15 March, 22 March, 14 June 1851.

Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge was undoubtedly the most important mechanics' institute in the area; it is therefore useful to compare its 1851 lecture programme (see Table Ten) with its 1829 one (see Table Five). Thirteen of the eighteen lectures delivered between October 1850 and October 1851 were clearly scientific in nature whereas only five of the twenty-one lectures delivered in the Institution's first year fell into this category. It is important to note, however, that attendance at lectures in 1829 seems to have been much better than attendance twenty-two years later. The executive committee's commitment to scientific instruction seems to have increased during the second quarter of the nineteenth century while that of the members as a whole waned considerably. The Institution's 1850 annual report was forced to conclude that 'scientific lectures are not amongst the "felt wants" of the public', ⁷¹ and a year later the executive committee abandoned its futile attempts. 'No arrangement has been made for the delivery of lectures during the winter owing to the meagre attendances at those given last season'. ⁷² The committee presumably preferred to abandon lectures altogether than to experiment with different subjects.

Classes tended to receive less publicity than lectures and were seldom given more than a brief mention in annual reports. They have also been neglected by modern historians. ⁷³ It is probably fair to say that classes were generally felt to be of less importance than lectures although this must not be exaggerated; according to the

1851 annual report of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution, 'several classes are now in abeyance; but it is hoped that arrangements may be made during the present year for increasing the utility of this department, which is the one that bears most emphatically on the interests and welfare of the working classes - the classes most immediately concerned in the prosperity of such institutions'. ⁷⁴

With the exception of the Lancaster Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library, each of the chief mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire established classes during its first year of existence. The members of these classes were mostly 'youths from 14 to 18 years of age'; ⁷⁵ many were no doubt concerned to 'top up' the educations they had received at home or in Sunday schools. These scholars appear to have been generally well-behaved and attentive. According to W. Walsh, teacher of English and Arithmetic at the Darwen Mechanics' Institution, 'The conduct of my pupils, so far as it has fallen under my notice, is unimpeachable: they have always observed the rules of the Institution, and paid proper attention to the instruction of their teacher'. As a knowledge of English or arithmetic did not necessarily lead to promotion or career advancement in the eighteen-forties, many of these students must have possessed a high degree of self-motivation; they must have recognized both the intrinsic and extrinsic value of education. Some probably valued education because it represented a sacrifice of time, money and effort. Scholars of different abilities were taught together. W.

Walsh went on to describe the organization of the classes:

The members of the English Grammar Class, owing to the different periods of their existence, are arrived at different stages of advancement; some of them study Entymology and Syntax; and all of them have made an improvement in Spelling that is worth the time and pains taken to acquire it. The members of the Ciphering Class are of various qualifications: some of them are learning different parts of Arithmetic, some mensuration and geometry; and others algebra. The progress made by the members of the class is highly satisfactory ... 76

Some observers were extremely critical of institute classes. J.W. Hudson claimed that, 'The system of instruction pursued, appears to have been based on the rule of teaching the largest number with the least possible trouble'.⁷⁷ Thomas Hogg, the author of Suggestions for the Improvement of Mechanics' Institutions was even more scathing:

Each class is to a great extent isolated from each other There is no regular course of study through which a student is either required or expected to pass. To working men, the classes often present few if any advantages, except the acquirement of elementary knowledge; and those really desirous of obtaining in the Mechanics' Institution a knowledge of the principles of their trades, seldom find that knowledge there. 78

The popularity of institute classes suggests that these criticisms were excessively harsh but it is clear that class attendances were uncomfortably erratic. According to Edwin Kenyon, teacher of Arithmetic and Writing at the Darwen Mechanics' Institution, actual attendance was usually about half the class membership.⁷⁹ Class closure seems to have been a common occurrence.

The Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge was the first of the major institutes of North Lancashire to provide classes; its first annual report (1829) claimed that classes in Chemistry and English Grammar/Composition were already in existence and that an Architectural class was ready to begin.⁸⁰ In 1840-41 the Darwen Mechanics' Institution had two Writing and Arithmetic classes (with 65 pupils), an English Grammar class (19), a Mathematical and Ornamental Writing class (9), a Drawing class (6), and a Discussion class; a Geography class had been established at the end of 1840 (with 18 students) but had collapsed.⁸¹ By 1849-50 there was a Female Writing class (with an average attendance of 19), a Male Writing class (26), a Male Arithmetic class (28), a Male Grammar class (8), a Reading class (25), a Geography class (10), a Singing class (13), a Mechanics' class (9) and a Chess class (16); there also appears to have been a fairly autonomous Discussion class.⁸² The classes of the Burnley Mechanics' Institution were not dissimilar; in 1844-5 the Institute had a Reading class (50 pupils), Arithmetical and Mathematical classes (60), a Writing class (40), a Geography and Grammar class (38), a Mechanical Drawing class (12) and a Chemistry class (12).⁸³ The nature of the classes organized by the Accrington Mechanics' Institution is not entirely clear but this rather humble institute seems to have concentrated on basic subjects. According to its first annual report (1851) there were seven classes 'which included reading, writing, grammar, and c., and were attended by 130 members'.⁸⁴ Little had changed by 1856:

The curriculum was modest, not extending beyond Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and Grammar. But this knowledge was pursued under difficulties. The pupils were taught in the attics of 18, Blackburn Road, and in a room on the first floor. It was no easy task [for one teacher] to superintend the work that was being done in the three rooms at one and the same time. 85

It seems clear from the evidence available that mechanics' institute classes increased in importance during the second quarter of the nineteenth century and were primarily concerned with furthering elementary education. Opportunities for formal schooling were very limited in the towns of North Lancashire and institute classes performed a valuable service to their communities by allowing young people to 'top up' the basic educations they had received elsewhere. In 1851 Accrington had a total population of 10,374; perhaps a thousand of these were aged between fourteen and eighteen. If 130 people attended the classes of the Accrington Mechanics' Institute it is likely that a tenth of this age group were class members in 1851.

The elementary nature of mechanics' institute classes should not be exaggerated. There may have been some scope for progression - it is reasonable to suppose that the Darwen Mechanics' Institute's Grammar and Mathematical classes were more advanced than its more popular Writing and Arithmetic ones; and the provision of geography, mechanics and science classes must have catered for the needs of those who had already mastered elementary subjects. The late appearance of Singing classes was presumably an aspect of the growing importance of entertainment within mechanics' institutes.

Although the members of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were overwhelmingly male it appears that women were encouraged to attend lectures and classes. Women were not evenly distributed among all the activities, however; separate 'female writing classes' were established and it is likely that women were more numerous at lectures on 'domestic economy' and 'physiology' than at those on mechanics and geology. Most male institute members probably wanted their wives and daughters to gain educations which would help them to fulfil their domestic roles. This attitude is clearly revealed in a letter written by the Committee of the Operative Cotton Spinners and Self-Acting Minders of Blackburn:

The mechanics' institutions, and similar other literary and religious societies for the promotion of knowledge, are now beginning to prove of some value to the working classes ... The female portion of the community who are employed in our cotton manufactories have been for a long period comparatively destitute of knowledge or information on any subject - they have been conversant with almost nothing save the sudden whirl of the shuttle and the eternal rattle of the loom - not even the common duties requisite for the proper management of domestic household economy have they been able to fulfil; but the time has now arrived when the gloom of ignorance must be dispelled from their minds - when the enlightening influences of education shall enable the working women of our land to prove themselves invaluable ornaments to society - when they shall become useful and intelligent daughters, loving wives, and affectionate mothers. 86

The female ignorance described in this passage seems to at least partially explain the low level of female participation in the various activities of mechanics' institutes. This ignorance was a source of extreme frustration to many autodidacts; both William Billington's wives were totally

illiterate.⁸⁷ Such men were probably encouraged to see women participating in any educational activities even if the books they read and the lectures they attended tended to be intellectually undemanding. There is also considerable evidence of a growing fear that women were becoming increasingly incapable of fulfilling their traditional domestic duties. Frederick Engels claimed that,

It is self-evident that a girl who has worked in a mill from her ninth year is in no position to understand domestic work, whence it follows that female operatives prove wholly inexperienced and unfit as housekeepers. They cannot knit or sew, cook or wash, are unacquainted with the most ordinary duties of a housekeeper, and when they have young children to take care of, have not the slightest idea how to set about it. 88

It is hardly surprising that working men who wanted time for study were dissatisfied with women of this kind.

Section Five : Relations with other Kinds of Adult Education:

Relations between the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire and other kinds of adult education were generally amicable. All were manifestations of the same common culture of educational self-help and it was common for autodidacts to make use of different institutions. Mechanics' institutes owed a great deal to the earlier work of Sunday schools;⁸⁹ successful institutes could not have been established in communities which were overwhelmingly illiterate. In much the same way, mechanics' institutes supported the work of mutual improvement societies. The members of mutual improvement societies needed access to

libraries yet could not afford to establish libraries of their own. They therefore made use of institute libraries. Some mutual improvement societies may have been conscious imitations of mechanics' institutes.

Tensions within mechanics' institutes occasionally led to the establishment of new institutions. Relations between 'parent' institutes and such bodies were usually less cordial than those between mechanics' institutes and genuinely independent rivals. In 1847 a young member of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution was expelled 'for writing and publishing an obscene libel upon a respectable clergyman of the town and even further outraging common decency by reciting it before a number of boys in the Elocution class and distributing copies among the juvenile members of the Institution'. This 'factory operative' then proceeded to establish a 'rival institution' and was joined by 'a few kindred spirits'.⁹⁰ The details are somewhat obscure but this may be a reference to the establishment of a mutual improvement society by William Billington.

If the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute provoked secularists to secede, the Burnley Mechanics' Institute seems to have been too tolerant. It permitted prominent secularists to give lectures and allowed a Roman Catholic to become its President.⁹¹ Churchmen and nonconformist members were infuriated and established rival institutes in 1848 and 1849.⁹²

In 1840 the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge had to come to terms with a secession which led

to the formation of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Society.⁹³ The ostensible cause of this disruption was a disagreement over the Institution's location and facilities, but the founders of the 'Lit. and Phil' seem to have included many of the Institution's more affluent members. They may have felt that Preston needed an educational institute which was more exclusive.

Although such developments often led to friction and recrimination, most kinds of adult education shared the basic aims of mechanics' institutes. To some extent, mechanics institutes provided a model which was imitated by other bodies; Church institutes were denominational versions of mechanics' institutes while the literary and philosophical societies in the area were essentially mechanics' institutes which demanded high subscriptions. The individual facilities of mechanics' institutes were also imitated by more specialized bodies. Institute discussion classes may have encouraged many mutual improvement societies to adopt highly formal rules and procedures. By stimulating other kinds of adult education the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire made a major contribution to educational self-help within their communities - they also encouraged the growth of rivals which would ultimately undermine their own activities.

Section Six : Mechanics' Institutes and 'Rational Recreation':⁹⁴

By the middle of the nineteenth century the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were beginning to provide a

wide range of entertainments and activities of other kinds which were educational in a broad sense. The need for provision of this kind was recognized by Thomas Coates in 1841:

Assuming (as we must do) that Mechanics' Institutes cannot succeed, excepting in most rare circumstances, as places of mere instruction, it may be worthy of inquiry whether it is not expedient that they should afford to the workman many of the advantages which club houses now give to the more opulent classes. 95

James Hole was sympathetic to this view. He claimed that, 'Minerva, with a stern aspect, should never be the emblem of a people's institute; rather let us take radiant Apollo, who bears his harp as companion to his philosophy'. 96

The promoters of 'rational recreation' within mechanics' institutes had several closely related aims. The most important of these was the diffusion of knowledge through entertainment. The clearest example of this was probably the provision of newspapers. Excursions could have a similar function. In 1850 T.B. Addison of the Preston Institution hoped that many members would be able to visit the Great Exhibition,

and to acquire the knowledge of the arts and sciences to be obtained by that visit, - I trust that they will continue similar excursions for greater purposes - for the further advancement of themselves in knowledge, for the still greater benefit of themselves and of their families, and for the improvement ... of the condition of themselves and all those who are of their own class. 97

It was also argued that opportunities for rational recreation would draw working men from rival institutions and baser pleasures'. Public houses provided newspapers

and mutual improvement societies could arrange music and dancing for their members. Mechanics' institutes responded with newsrooms, tea parties and seaside excursions. It was also felt that some forms of recreation had a generally civilizing effect. Music societies were encouraged for this reason. The Burnley Mechanics' Institution had a band, the members of which were mostly factory operatives,⁹⁸ and in 1850 a Philharmonic Society was established at the Preston Institution.

The object of the society is to improve the musical taste of the town, to encourage native talent, and to discountenance musical societies holding meetings at public houses ... the proceeds of the concerts, which the society intends to give occasionally, will be devoted towards the formation of a musical library. 99

Mechanics' institutes were also obliged to provide entertainments for their more affluent members and supporters. Institute balls and soirées gave such people opportunities to dance and socialize. They were also a valuable source of finance; it was claimed in 1848 that balls provided a quarter of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute's annual income.¹⁰⁰ Such events were not always held in high regard by less fortunate members of the local community, however; the Darwen Mechanics' Institute's fourth annual soirée was disturbed when stones were thrown through the windows by 'a few disorderly blackguards' outside'.¹⁰¹

Balls, soirées and tea parties also enabled women to make a valuable contribution to the life of their local mechanics' institution. At the fourth annual soirée (1850)

of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution, Mr. Lewis, a Committee member, made a significant comment:

if he might be allowed to say what he considered the turning point in the success of the institution, he would date it from the time when the ladies first took an interest in it (Loud cheers). This was, he believed, their fourth annual soir ee, and every year their success had been more marked. The support of the ladies ... was doubly valuable because they derived little, or comparatively little, from the institution (Hear, hear). 102

Although the governing bodies of mechanics' institutes valued the assistance of women (and probably sought to reduce female hostility to mechanics' institutes) the role of women was felt to be primarily supportive. They were expected to raise money, organize social events, and encourage the self-improvement of their husbands and sons. 103

By the early eighteen-fifties all the major mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were providing opportunities for rational recreation. This policy was both a response to, and a symptom of, declining popular interest in educational self-help. Although it initially strengthened mechanics' institutes it ultimately contributed to their decline by encouraging people to seek pleasure and fulfilment in pursuits which were essentially non-intellectual.

Section Seven : Conclusion:

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century the aims and functions of mechanics' institutes became increasingly unclear. 'What is the object of our mechanics' institutes?' asked G. Linnaeus Banks in 1851.

'Bring together any number of men representing the various interests afloat in society, place them before the tribunal of human judgment and interrogate them as it regards [sic] the object of mechanics' institutions and a pretty medley of estimates will be the result'.¹⁰⁴ The reasons for this uncertainty are not hard to find : membership figures were erratic or stagnating, lectures tended to be unpopular, debts could be substantial and working-class support was minimal. The collapse of the Haslingden Mechanics' Institute in 1851 was a powerful warning against complacency and probably stimulated the search for new ideas.¹⁰⁵

Despite these problems and uncertainties the executive committees of the main mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire remained committed to the belief that their main function was to encourage the diffusion of knowledge and the values of educational self-help within their communities. They continued to provide sound instruction and good libraries for members of the working and middling classes. It is true that in the eighteen-forties entertainments increased in importance but these remained occasional and largely peripheral activities; a few days each year may have been devoted to concerts, soirées and excursions but libraries were open on most days and classes ran throughout the year.

Mechanics' institutes undoubtedly made a positive contribution to the life of their communities. They educated people and encouraged the establishment of other varieties

of adult education. They also had a broadly civilizing influence in towns which were expanding and often appeared to be socially unstable. Mechanics' institutes had a symbolic importance within their communities; their buildings were the physical embodiments of adult education for most people. Institutes raised the profile of adult education within their towns and enhanced its social status. They encouraged much that was good in local culture - music societies are perhaps the best example of this. ¹⁰⁶ By bringing people together they helped to unify communities. They became focal points of civic pride and encouraged interest in local problems such as the need for sanitary reforms. ¹⁰⁷

The mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire may have appealed mainly to members of the middling class throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century but they were by no means exclusive clubs for the upwardly mobile. They certainly tried to attract members of the working classes. In 1850 James German, the President of the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge, addressed his members when their new building was officially opened. He said that if more effort had been devoted

to the missionarizing of the people, a greater number would have been anxious to become members of the Institution ... if each individual member of the Mechanics' Institution would take upon himself the responsibility to bring one additional member to the Institution, particularly one from the ranks of the working classes, I think that would at least save one from a course of conduct which must necessarily, in the end, lead to ruin - (Hear, hear). ¹⁰⁸

The language may be patronizing to modern ears but the remarks appear to have been sincerely meant. In 1851 an attempt to raise the subscriptions (and the social exclusivity) of the Institution was soundly defeated.¹⁰⁹ The institutes appear to have been middling class by default; the more educated members of the middle class had their literary and philosophical societies and those members of the upper working class who sought instruction had Church institutes, lyceums, and Sunday schools. A similar situation seems to have existed in Leeds.¹¹⁰

Although the men who directed the affairs of the institutes of North Lancashire emphasized the importance of scientific instruction throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century they were not primarily concerned with social control or the social legitimization of marginal men.¹¹¹ If they tried to use scientific lectures as a means of social control they were spectacularly unsuccessful. Attendance at such lectures was frequently derisory. Whereas skilled social controllers would have responded by providing lectures on more popular subjects, the managers of the Preston Institution simply eliminated lectures altogether (after insulting their members).¹¹² There is little evidence that institute members lost interest in science because they become more affluent. Popular interest in science may have waned in the eighteen-forties but it seems odd that institute managers took so long to respond. It is likely that they were more committed to educational improvement than most of their members and that they regarded scientific instruction as an inherently

useful branch of learning. It is also significant that some scientific lectures (and many pseudo-scientific ones) could attract large crowds; managers may have failed to distinguish between popular sciences such as mesmerism (or 'electro-biology') and rather less entertaining ones such as optics.

The executive committees of most mechanics' institutes were mainly concerned with 'bread and butter issues'. R. Cooter has pointed out that,

What concerned institute managers first and foremost ... was not which technique to use in the acculturation of workers but, more basically, how to attract and/or retain members and keep the institutes alive without seriously compromising ideological directives. It was this fundamental problem of survival that lay behind the flow of revisionist rhetoric on the most appropriate methods of instruction and subjects of study 113

Managers could not afford to make many unpopular decisions. It is also clear that each mechanics' institute depended on the support of a small 'core' of committed members. The unity of this group had to be preserved; divisions could lead to the establishment of rival institutes or to total collapse.

The mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were not primarily agencies of social control or social legitimization but even if they had been either or both of these in the eighteen-twenties, external pressures would have forced them to make major compromises by the eighteen-fifties. Scientific lectures tended to be uneconomic as well as unpopular; ¹¹⁴ in a report read at the Burnley

Mechanics' Institution's third annual tea party (1843), the directors claimed that 'so little interest' was taken in a course of Chemistry lectures 'that a serious pecuniary loss was sustained, a fact which will tend to make them cautious in their future engagement of scientific lecturers'. ¹¹⁵

Mechanics' institutes continued to provide scientific lectures, of course, but it is difficult to believe that these were primarily intended to buttress religion or encourage belief in a 'value neutral' scientific order. By 1850 most popular scientific lectures had little theoretical or homiletic content and prudent lecturers concentrated on the provision of dramatic experiments or displays of mesmeric power.

The managers of mechanics' institutes could not have established exclusive clubs for the socially aspiring if they had wished it. Most members of all social classes were not greatly interested in intellectual improvement and there was fierce competition for the educationally ambitious; the mechanics' institutes were caught between the Scylla of the literary and philosophical societies and the Charybdis of the Church institutes and mutual improvement societies. Members were often difficult to acquire and unsuccessful institutes collapsed - as the Haslingden one did in 1851. In order to be viable, mechanics' institutes had to appeal to a wide section of society - the middling and upper working classes, and their failure to attract many members of the latter was a major source of concern and regret. ¹¹⁶

The mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire were not isolated bodies. Each was an integral part of its local community. Institutes were established in response to local needs and their characteristics were largely determined by local conditions. Perhaps the most striking feature of the mechanics' institutes of North Lancashire during the second quarter of the nineteenth century was their diversity. Although historians tend to generalize about mechanics' institutes, it is clear that in many respects their differences were greater than their similarities. In 1851 the members of the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge had the benefit of a purpose-built 'Grecian building' in a 'delightful situation' while the Accrington Institution had the use of three crowded rooms over a shop.¹¹⁷ It is also possible that the limited facilities of the Accrington Institution aroused the envy of the members of much smaller bodies such as the Huddlesden Mechanics' Institute.¹¹⁸

NOTES

1. Report of the State of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions in England (1841), pp. 20-21.
2. Darwen Public Library, Mechanics' Institute Annual Reports, 1844, Q 431, p. 72; see also 1847, pp. 108, 110.
3. Blackburn Standard, 17 January 1849; 20 March 1850.
4. Quoted by Coates, Report, p. 23.
5. Science and Social Change, 1700-1900 (1983), p. 156. According to G.M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age (Oxford, 1960; first published 1936), p. 60, mechanics' institutes became 'play-centres for serious clerks'.
6. Blackburn Standard, 23 January 1850; Select Committee on Public Libraries, Parliamentary Papers, 1849, XVII, p. 311.
7. Blackburn Standard, 23 January 1850.
8. Report, p. 19.
9. Report of the Provisional Committee Appointed to Establish a Mechanics' Institution in the Township of Over-Darwen (Darwen, 1839), p. 7.
10. Report, p. 19.
11. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, pp. 311, 313, 314.
12. Blackburn Standard, 11 March 1846.
13. This estimate is based on an analysis of the evidence provided by M. Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge, 1971), and D.S. Gadian, 'A Comparative Study of Popular Movements in North-West Industrial Towns' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Lancaster, 1976).
14. A. Woods, 'The Mechanics' Institutes of North-East Lancashire, 1851-89: A Comparative Study', The Vocational Aspect of Education, 29, No. 72 (Spring, 1977), p. 39.
15. Lancaster Guardian, 12 September 1857.
16. T.R. Jolly, The Origin and Work of the Institute (Preston, 1917), p. 25.
17. Ibid., p. 29.

18. Hudson, The History of Adult Education (1851), p. 157; Blackburn Standard, 18 April 1849.
19. Jolly, Origin and Work of the Institute, p. 29. For a detailed description of the new building see C. Hardwick, History of the Borough of Preston and its Environs (Preston, 1857), pp. 449-451.
20. Burnley Express and Burnley News, 1 December 1934.
21. Blackburn Standard, 5 February 1845.
22. Ibid., 18 June, 1 October 1845.
23. Burnley Express, 1 December 1934.
24. Report of the Provisional Committee, pp. 6-7.
25. Darwen P.L., Annual Reports, 1841, Q 431, p. 20.
26. Ibid., 1848, p. 108.
27. Ibid., 1849, p. 119.
28. 1 May 1844.
29. 13 June 1855.
30. Blackburn Standard, 18 April 1849.
31. Preston Chronicle, 16 November 1850.
32. Blackburn Standard, 13 June 1855.
33. C. Williams, A Jubilee Memorial of the Accrington Mechanics' Institution (Accrington, 1895), p. 14; Preston Chronicle, 10 May 1851.
34. Williams, Jubilee Memorial, p. 17.
35. Preston Chronicle, 10 October 1829.
36. Ibid., 11 October 1851.
37. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 127; see also the evidence of George Dawson on p. 79.
38. Ibid., pp. xi, 11.
39. Quoted by C.B. Oldham, W.A. Munford and S. Newell-Smith, English Libraries 1800-1850 (1958), p. 49.
40. Preston Chronicle, 11 October 1851; 30 November 1850.
41. Ibid., 16 November 1850.
42. Ibid., 26 April 1851.

43. A Report of the Proceedings of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends and Members of the Lancaster Mechanics' Institution (Lancaster, 1849), p. 10.
44. J.P. Hemming, 'The Mechanics' Institute Movement in the Textile Districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century' (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Leeds, 1974), p. 61; see also pp. 503-512.
45. Darwen P.L., Annual Reports, 1842, Q 431, p. 50; Preston Chronicle, 26 April 1851.
46. Report of the Provisional Committee, p. 6; Preston Chronicle, 3 January 1829.
47. Preston Chronicle, 10 October 1829.
48. Ibid., 26 September 1840.
49. Report, p. 12.
50. Report of the Proceedings, p. 7.
51. W.H.J. Traice, Hand-book of Mechanics' Institutions (1863), p. 28; for a more sympathetic view see B.F. Duppa, A Manual for Mechanics' Institutions (1839), pp. 68-87.
52. History of Adult Education, p. 157.
53. M.D. Stephens and G.W. Roderick, 'British Artisan Scientific and Technical Education in the Early Nineteenth Century', Annals of Science 29, No. 1 (1972), p. 97.
54. Coates, Report, pp. 96-97; Lancaster Guardian, 12 September 1857.
55. Darwen P.L., Annual reports, 1845, Q 431, pp. 83-84.
56. Blackburn Standard, 10 October 1849.
57. Preston Chronicle, 11 October 1851.
58. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 155.
59. Hemming, 'Mechanics' Institute Movement', p. 425; see whole of Chapter 15.
60. Ibid., pp. 447-52; see also Blackburn Public Library, Three Lectures Delivered at the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution by the Rev. T.R. Dickinson, Vice-President in 1844, B734.2.
61. Quoted by Blackburn Gazette, 17 April 1839.
62. Blackburn Standard, 15 November 1843.

63. Darwen P.L., Annual Reports, 1843, Q 431, p. 64.
64. Mechanics' Institutes and Libraries', in Central Society of Education, First Publication (1837), pp. 245-248.
65. Blackburn Standard, 21 November 1849.
66. Ibid., 28 November 1849.
67. Preston Chronicle, 8 August 1829.
68. Quoted by Coates, Report, p. 22.
69. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 22.
70. See for example, C. Russell, Science and Social Change, 1700-1900 (1983), p. 159.
71. Preston Chronicle, 5 October 1850.
72. Ibid., 11 October 1851.
73. See however Hemming, 'Mechanics' Institute Movement', Chapters 8 and 9.
74. Preston Chronicle, 26 April 1851.
75. Blackburn Standard, 15 November 1843; refers specifically to the Burnley Mechanics' Institution.
76. Darwen P.L., Annual Reports, 1842, Q 431, pp. 49-50.
77. History of Adult Education, p. xi.
78. Quoted by James Hole, An Essay on the History and Management of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions (1853), p. 60.
79. Darwen P.L., Annual Reports, 1842, Q 431, p. 50.
80. Preston Chronicle, 10 October 1829.
81. Darwen P.L., Annual Reports, 1841, Q 431, pp. 24-27.
82. Ibid., 1850, pp. 137-139.
83. Blackburn Standard, 19 November 1845.
84. Preston Chronicle, 10 May 1851.
85. Williams, Jubilee Memorial, p. 14.
86. Blackburn Standard, 7 February 1849.
87. M.I. Watson, 'William Billington : Cotton Operative, Teacher and Poet', Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 134 (1985). Both women signed their marriage certificates with an 'X'.

88. The Condition of the Working Class in England (1969 edition; first British edition 1892), p. 175.
89. Hole, Essay, p. 6.
90. Two letters on this subject appeared in the Blackburn Standard, 5 January 1848.
91. Ibid., 5 February 1851.
92. Ibid., 17 January 1849; 20 March 1850.
93. Preston Chronicle, 7 November 1840.
94. For 'rational recreation' see P. Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England (1978), *passim*.
95. Report, p. 39; see also p. 40.
96. Essay, p. 76.
97. Preston Chronicle, 28 September 1850.
98. Ibid., 1 February 1851.
99. Ibid., 16 November; 7 December 1850.
100. Blackburn Standard, 16 February 1848.
101. Ibid., 26 January 1848.
102. Ibid., 10 April 1850.
103. Traice, Handbook of Mechanics' Institutions, pp. 18-19; Coates, Report, pp. 40-41.
104. People's and Howitt's Journal, 4 (1851), p. 130.
105. Preston Chronicle, 5 April 1851.
106. Hole, Essay, p. 12.
107. Ibid., p. 12.
108. Preston Chronicle, 28 September 1850.
109. Ibid., 11 October 1851.
110. A.D. Garner and E.W. Jenkins, 'The English Mechanics' Institutes : The Case of Leeds 1824-42', History of Education, 13, No. 2 (1984), p. 149.
111. For social legitimization and social control see I. Inkster, 'The Social Context of an Educational Movement : A Revisionist Approach to the English Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850', Oxford Review of Education 2, No. 3 (1976), and 'Science and the Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850 : the Case of

111. (Cont'd)

Sheffield, Annals of Science, 32 (1975); S. Shapin and B. Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control : Interpreting Mechanics' Institutes', Social Studies of Science, 7 (1977).

112. Preston Chronicle, 11 October 1851.

113. The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science (Cambridge, 1984), p. 147.

114. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 155.

115. Blackburn Standard, 15 November 1843.

116. Ibid., 23 January 1850; Coates, Report, p. 20.

117. Mannex and Co., History, Topography, and Directory of the Borough of Preston (Preston, 1851), p. 40; Williams, Jubilee Memorial, p. 14.

118. Hudson, History of Adult Education, p. 226.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL, SCIENTIFIC,
AND PHRENOLOGICAL SOCIETIES OF NORTH LANCASHIRESection One : Introduction:

A wide variety of educational societies existed in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Some of these, mutual improvement societies for instance, drew their members mainly from the middling - and upper working - classes. Other societies were more concerned with the educational needs of middle-class groups. These more exclusive societies can be divided into two broad categories: literary and philosophical societies and scientific (or pseudo - scientific) societies.

Strictly speaking, a 'philosophical' society was a primarily scientific body; 'natural philosophy' described most scientific pursuits until the mid-nineteenth century, and scientific equipment was usually called 'philosophical apparatus'. The term 'scientist' was not coined until the eighteen-thirties.¹ 'Literary' had a more ambiguous meaning. A 'literary society' could be concerned with polite literature such as poetry and essays, but the adjective could also refer to its activities. D. Orange has observed that, 'a 'Literary' society denoted a society of a certain character : a group, probably small in number, which received verbal and written communications and undertook to consider them with calmness and good humour'.² The early 'Lit. and Phils.' were scientific

literary societies and nineteenth century societies tended to live in the shadow of such prestigious, scholarly, and élitist bodies as the Birmingham Lunar Society (founded 1776) and the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society (1781).

Although literary and philosophical societies have received a good deal of attention from historians, scholars have tended to concentrate on the older, larger, and more scientific societies which were located in large towns and cities. Comparatively little is known of smaller bodies. The historiography of literary and philosophical societies resembles that of mechanics' institutes. By the mid-nineteenth century Britain's literary and philosophical societies seem to have fallen into two broad categories which are not always clearly distinguished by historians. In addition to the Birmingham and Manchester societies, the 'traditional' literary and philosophical societies included the Yorkshire society and those of Newcastle, Hull, Leeds, Liverpool and Sheffield.³ These were, or claimed to be, centres for the discovery and dissemination of mainly scientific knowledge. They were clearly defined by Abraham Hume:

The associations, that are known by the name of 'learned societies' ... consist of intellectual men, voluntarily united, for the purpose of promoting knowledge generally, or some particular branch of it. It is assumed in all of them, except the very humblest, that the members are already learned either in a greater or less degree; and one object of their union is to keep pace with the literary and scientific progress of their own time. 4

Their effectiveness as educational bodies was declining by the mid-nineteenth century. According to J.W. Hudson :

The Provincial Philosophical Societies of England have completed their career, they are the debris of an age passed away Many of these societies are now held together by little coffee parties which constitute the council meetings, while their outward signs of vitality are exhibited in an occasional course of lectures which can scarcely vie with the programmes of the humbler [mechanics'] institutes. 5

The writer was contemptuous of the extent to which they remained socially exclusive; 'they have continued aristocratic assemblies, philosophers by the length of their purses [sic], and worldly condition enabling them to comply with the forms and terms of membership'. 6

In the eighteen - thirties and - forties a second kind of literary and philosophical society emerged, and those established at Preston and Blackburn were representative of this group. They too were part of the wider movement which led to the formation of mechanics' institutions and, indeed, were not easily distinguished from more popular organizations. T. Kelly has described them accordingly:

Mechanics' institutions changed into literary and scientific institutions, mechanics' libraries and mutual improvement societies developed into mechanics' institutions; mechanics' institutions and literary and scientific institutions not infrequently declined into libraries or mutual improvement societies; and these changes of function were not always accompanied by a change of name. 7

In 1851 the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution had 194 members while the Manchester 'Lit. and Phil.' had 224 but the two bodies had little else in common. 8 The Preston Institution, and its Blackburn

counterpart, more closely resembled such bodies as the Rochdale and Lancaster Athenaeums.⁹ The term 'literary and philosophical society' linked the new bodies to the memory of the great eighteenth century institutions but the similarities between the two were almost as slight as those between the provincial Athenaeums and the London club of that name. The new literary and philosophical societies, like the mechanics' institutes, were effectively social clubs for the educated and socially aspiring which had impressive libraries (and sometimes museums) as their focal points.

Although the 'new' literary and philosophical societies have been neglected by historians, much of what has been written about the 'traditional' institutions has retained considerable relevance. Scholars have been divided over the relationship between the 'Lit. and Phils.' and the technological developments associated with the Industrial Revolution; some argue that the institutions made a major contribution to technological innovation (or at least tried to make such a contribution),¹⁰ while others claim that they were primarily concerned with 'polite' science.¹¹ A related area of controversy is the extent to which the literary and philosophical societies devoted their energies to the pursuit of scientific knowledge as opposed to its dissemination.

The social function of literary and philosophical societies has proved a more fundamental area of debate. Scholars such as M. Bergman regard science as the hegemonic

cultural product of Britain's ruling élite and argue that 'Lit. and Phils.' and similar scientific societies were joined by members of local élites who sought 'access to ruling class circles'.¹² An alternative view, associated with A. Thackray, I. Inkster and R. Cooter, is that the literary and philosophical societies were joined by 'marginal men' who sought social legitimization:

By locating themselves in Lit. and Phils. and similar places, the new professionals confirmed through the use of natural knowledge and the rhetoric of utility the legitimacy of bourgeois dominance. Thereby, reciprocally, over time [sic], these 'new men' - the self-styled 'thinking class' - also confirmed their own élitist identity and integration into the ruling class that was being remade. 13

Both these views presuppose that the memberships of literary and philosophical societies were comparatively homogeneous and that the institutions devoted themselves primarily to the study and dissemination of science.

The scattered nature of the available evidence makes it difficult to collect much information about the scientific societies which flourished in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. They have also been neglected by modern historians although W.B. Stephens has described and analysed the societies which existed in Warrington.¹⁴ These early Victorian scientific societies probably kept few records and seldom attracted the attention of local newspapers. Phrenological societies were of particular significance because their activities were comparatively well publicized. Phrenology remained a controversial and therefore newsworthy subject in this

period. There were also phrenological journals which described the activities of local societies. Phrenological societies were often small and rather ephemeral bodies but their study can throw light on the nature and work of other similar societies. ¹⁵

Phrenology was not treated as a serious subject of historical study until the early nineteen-seventies. It was formerly regarded as an obscure, outlandish, and largely irrelevant system of belief which was exploded by the onward march of science. ¹⁶ Recent scholarship has challenged this view and has drawn attention to the social, political, and epistemological implications of phrenology. S. Shapin has claimed that, 'British phrenology was a social reformist movement of the greatest significance', ¹⁷ and D. de Guistino has described in detail the phrenologists' educational and penal campaigns. ¹⁸ The cultural significance of phrenology has been analysed by several scholars. It is often claimed that the study of phrenology can illuminate other areas of study. R. Cooter has claimed that, 'Because phrenology is poised between the intellectual boundaries that have come to be erected between science and pseudo-science, nature and culture, science and society, it provides an incentive to expose and evaluate those boundaries'. ¹⁹

The main subject of historical debate is whether or not phrenologists were social 'outsiders' or 'marginal men' who used their new science to challenge the social position of local and landed élites. S. Shapin appears to regard

the phrenology controversy as an aspect of early Victorian class struggle. He has argued that Edinburgh's phrenologists consciously sought to weaken the intellectual standing of their city's powerful cultural *élite*: 'The initial function of phrenological ideas in the Edinburgh context was accomplished simply by displaying them in public opposition to the accepted canons of the academic *élite*. The phrenologists were saying "not A" to the insiders' "A"'.²⁰ This approach has received considerable support from R. Cooter's prosopographical survey of phrenologists and anti-phrenologists. This suggests that the former tended to be younger, less affluent, politically more radical, and religiously less orthodox than the latter.²¹ His work suggests that phrenologists were seldom members of local *élites* or 'insiders'. According to I. Inkster, 'most recent social history of British science attempts to locate scientific interests, activity and, to some extent, creativity, within fairly particular social contexts'.²² The work of S. Shapin and R. Cooter is clearly located within this tradition and implies that both support for phrenology, and the ideas of phrenologists regarding their science, were socially determined. This approach to phrenology and, by implication, to other areas of knowledge, is completely rejected by G.N. Cantor. This scholar claims that the form and content of the 'science' of phrenology were primarily determined by developments within phrenology and by the course of debates between the supporters and opponents of phrenology. He adds that many phrenologists were non-

outsiders. His central argument is that, 'Many important and challenging questions, particularly relating to "internal" aspects of science, cannot be answered in social terms'. ²³

There appears to be two schools of thought regarding the relationships which existed between the various scientific and educational societies of this period. Scholars such as R.H. Kargon, A.D. Garner, and E.W. Jenkins claim that in large towns and cities each society had specialized and complementary social and educational functions. According to R.H. Kargon there was by 1840,

a clear division of labour in the system of scientific organizations in Manchester. The Lit. and Phil. was charged with encouraging research, an enterprise best reserved to such an elite organization. The Royal Manchester Institution provided public lecture series on recent developments in the applications of science for its mainly upper middle class and professional membership. The Mechanics' Institution provided education in elementary science for the edification of clerks, artisans and mechanics. ²⁴

This view is implicitly rejected by S. Shapin who claims that different institutions were frequently in conflict and that this conflict often originated in the different social strata they drew on for membership. In his study of the Pottery Philosophical Society, he argued that,

Irrevocable decline set in when the Society's proceedings lost a measure of their cultural appeal to a rival institution - the Pottery Mechanics' Institute it is apparent that there was initial conflict between them and that social divisions corresponded to a split in the perceived cultural uses of science. ²⁵

S. Shapin uses similar arguments when describing the scientific societies of Edinburgh. ²⁶

Most historians appear to interpret the emergence, growth and eventual decline of scientific societies and 'Lit. and Phils.' in terms of the changing social needs of different social strata. The evidence from North Lancashire suggests that many other factors influenced the development of these institutions. Perhaps the most important of these was the fact that the study of science, and educational self-improvement in general, was widely felt to be of intrinsic value.

Section Two : Scientific Societies and Related Institutions:

It is probable that scientific societies existed in North Lancashire in the eighteenth century but most of these are lost to history. An early stimulus to the study of science was provided by the establishment of Doctor Shepherd's Library in Preston in 1757. This was well-endowed and nominally open to the public although readers had to obtain a written order from the mayor or one of the aldermen. It quickly became an important cultural centre for the gentlemen of Preston. By the mid-nineteenth century it had a large collection of works 'on theology, history, antiquities, voyages, biography, literature, philology, poetry, metaphysics and moral philosophy, law and politics, arts and sciences, natural philosophy, natural history, medicine, & c, & c'.²⁷ In January 1852 it had 5,700 volumes.²⁸

Preston appears to have had a literary and philosophical society as early as 1810 although this body

was short-lived.²⁹ In 1817 a public adult school was established; this was 'attended in the first year by fifty poor men and a few elder apprentices, but it was given up in the following year'. Unsuccessful attempts were made to found an Athenaeum in 1818 and 1819.³⁰ The Natural History Society was a more successful venture. It was established in 1825 and was still extant in 1841. Though of modest size it possessed an important library.³¹

The Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge appeared in 1828 and six years later the Preston Society of Arts was founded. This was 'patronized by many respectable and influential gentlemen' and had 80 members by 1836. It was principally concerned with the fine arts and organized a few public exhibitions.³² In 1838 the Preston Phrenological Society was formed and two years later the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution broke away from the Preston Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge. Graph Two shows how the membership of the parent body declined about this time. During the eighteen-forties the Literary and Philosophical Institution 'coalesced' with the Society of Arts and absorbed the Palatine Library, a private subscription library.³³ These mergers inevitably diluted any claim the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution could make about being an essentially scientific body. The Preston Phrenological Society became defunct in the early eighteen-forties. In 1851 J.W. Hudson suggested that the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution 'might advantageously be united with the Diffusion of Knowledge Society',³⁴ but his advice was

ignored and the two bodies continued to preserve their separate identities.

The situation in Blackburn was hardly less complex. A Linnaean Society was founded in 1822 'to promote the study of botany and natural history'.³⁵ This seems to have had about ten members who met at the house of one Benjamin Barton.³⁶ In January 1831 a 'Scientific Institution' was established which received the enthusiastic support of Benjamin Barton and the Rev. Dr. Whittaker, Vicar of Blackburn. No fewer than 123 members enrolled at the inaugural meeting and for a time the future prosperity of the society seemed to be assured. Unfortunately, religious and political squabbles caused it to disintegrate in 1836 and Benjamin Barton's subsequent death meant that no attempt was made to resuscitate it. It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of a few key individuals for such institutions: 'At his death ... the friends of scientific knowledge were thrown into despair, and did not even express a hope that the Institution would be revived'.³⁷ In 1838 the scientific mantle was passed to the Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society. This declined after 1840 and the Blackburn Literary and Philosophical Society was established in 1843. A year later the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution was founded and the 'Lit. and Phil.' ceased to provide public lectures.

It is clear that in towns like Preston and Blackburn a large number of scientific and semi-scientific societies existed and competed for the attention and support of

middle class citizens. Many of these people also gave their time and money to a host of less exclusive institutions - mutual improvement societies, lyceums, church institutes, and newsrooms. It is possible that human and material resources were spread too thinly. Many scientific societies and institutions were certainly unstable; the rise and fall of such bodies were familiar - almost commonplace-events by the eighteen-forties. Although these societies were rivals, relations between them seem to have been reasonably amicable. They often shared members and mergers frequently occurred. Scientific societies seem to have loosely resembled dissenting churches. They were frequently divided by personal and doctrinal differences but never ceased to respect each other and had broadly similar aims and goals. Educated people regarded these organizations as islands of education and 'culture' in a vast sea of ignorance; the need to diffuse knowledge overshadowed petty rivalries.

These somewhat ephemeral local societies and institutions are of considerable historical significance. They reveal, for instance, the existence of enduring scientific sub-cultures in Blackburn and Preston and it may be assumed that there were similar sub-cultures in the other towns of North Lancashire. They also suggest that the promoters and leaders of mechanics' institutes and literary and philosophical societies had served 'apprenticeships' in smaller and earlier institutions.

Section Three : Phrenology and Geology:

The Preston Phrenological Society and the Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society seem to have had much in common with each other and with comparable provincial societies. Phrenology seems to have attracted little attention in Lancashire before the late eighteen-twenties, but 1828 and 1829 witnessed the formation of societies in Liverpool and Manchester respectively.³⁸ The establishment of mechanics' institutes seems to have helped phrenologists to popularize their views and J.K. Spurzheim lectured in Lancashire in 1829 and 1830.³⁹ The advance of phrenology appears to have stagnated in the mid eighteen-thirties but the Warrington Phrenological Society was established in October 1837 and the Preston and Blackburn societies appeared in April and October 1838.⁴⁰ A small society was formed in Lancaster five years later but by this time the others were decaying or defunct.⁴¹

The membership lists of the Blackburn and Preston societies have not been preserved although some circumstantial evidence exists. A few months after its formation the Lancaster Phrenological Society had 44 members - five of whom were medical men -⁴² and it is likely that the numerical strengths of the Blackburn and Preston societies were of this order. In 1841 the Preston Phrenological Society was governed by a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Council of eleven members, and twenty-three people attended the 1839 annual dinner of the Blackburn Society.⁴³ The size of the societies is probably of less

significance than the social backgrounds of their members. S. Shapin and R. Cooter have argued that phrenology was particularly attractive to marginal men of uncertain social status (especially members of the medical profession) and that phrenological societies were therefore 'outsider groups'. R. Cooter has claimed that 'what by and large distinguishes those attracted to phrenology was their recently heightened sense of social worth being uncommensurate with their place and power in the social process'.⁴⁴ The term 'outsider group' should apply a fortiori to the Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society as R. Cooter claims that it drew its members from lower social strata than other phrenological societies.⁴⁵

The available evidence suggests that the members of the Blackburn and Preston societies were far from being the alienated and socially frustrated marginal men described by S. Shapin and R. Cooter. Within the social context of early Victorian Lancashire, both societies were highly respectable bodies. The most prominent members of the Blackburn Society were Thomas Clough, its first President, and Richard Cardwell, its first Secretary. Thomas Clough was a successful solicitor and advocate, and was the conductor of the Blackburn Choral Society. He was a Tory councillor from 1858-64 and in the late eighteen-seventies became Chairman of the Blackburn Board of Guardians.⁴⁶ Richard Cardwell was a member of one of Blackburn's most wealthy textile manufacturing families. His brother Edward became Principal of St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, and a nephew was raised to the peerage.⁴⁷ The patrons of the Society

included the town's Conservative and Liberal M.P.s.⁴⁸ Sir William Feilden, Bart., was an Oxford graduate, a wealthy cotton manufacturer, and Deputy Lieutenant for Lancashire. The Liberal William Turner was a former High Sheriff for Cheshire. Both M.P.s were Anglicans.⁴⁹ Four 'ordinary' members of the Society can be identified with certainty; they include a druggist, two surgeons, and the proprietor of the Blackburn Gazette.⁵⁰ It appears therefore that the Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society was dominated by a small group of educated, influential, moderately affluent men, who were themselves middle class but who could rely on upper class patronage. It is likely that most of the less prominent members of the Society were drawn from the middling and (possibly) upper working classes but these may have been more interested in geology than phrenology.

The Blackburn Gazette is an important source of information about the Blackburn society; unfortunately the Preston Phrenological Society received less press attention and little is known about it. The limited available evidence suggests that it was at least as 'respectable' as its Blackburn counterpart. When the Society was formally opened in July 1838 the Preston Chronicle reported that

there was a highly respectable attendance of ladies and gentlemen, among whom we observed many of the leading savans of the town From the present aspect of the institution, we are justified in anticipating, that it will become not only one of the most useful, but one of the most extensive and respectable societies in the town. 51

The Society does not appear to have been excessively exclusive; in May the hope had been expressed 'that the fair portion of the town who are attracted to scientific pursuits will join the society without delay'. On the other hand, ballots were held to elect new members. Little is known about the individual members of the Society although William Corless, its President, was a prominent local surgeon. ⁵²

The activities of the Blackburn and Preston societies closely resembled those of other phrenological societies. Both societies held weekly meetings for their members 'at which addresses have been delivered, papers have been read, and discussions have taken place upon various phrenological subjects'. ⁵³ Small museums were established which became repositories of phrenological busts and casts - the Blackburn Society also accepted geological specimens. ⁵⁴ Skulls and busts were examined at meetings and those of the violent and insane seem to have exercised a macabre fascination. In February 1839 it was reported that the Blackburn Society had recently received, 'A mask of Napoleon, busts of the murderers Bruely, Tanque, Heaton, and Fieshi, a cast of the murderer A. M'Kean's skull, and a bust of an idiot....' ⁵⁵ Such museums could be quite large; by December 1838 the Warrington Society had about 130 specimens. ⁵⁶

In addition to the activities organized by and for the members, public lectures were provided. The Blackburn Society arranged for A.J.D. D'Orsey, Master of the Glasgow

High School, to give two lectures on the 'Philosophy of Education' in the summer of 1839. D'Orsey appears to have advocated a non-denominational system of education and was bitterly attacked by the Tory Blackburn Standard:

... we must ask the Phrenological and Geological Society ... if it was for the purpose of delivering a political and polemic lecture, of maligning our national schools, of charging our episcopacy with ignorance and our parochial clergy with neglect of duty, that they hired this itinerant gentleman to disclaim before them. 57

It would be easy to conclude that the Society was essentially a band of anti-clerical radicals - almost archetypal social 'outsiders' - but this was clearly not the case. The Blackburn Standard's attack seems to have been less than accurate and may have been motivated, at least in part, by its fierce rivalry with the Liberal Blackburn Gazette.⁵⁸ It is significant that D'Orsey was ordained in 1847 and was Chaplain of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, from 1860 to 1864.⁵⁹ He, at least, was something of an 'insider'.

The Preston Phrenological Society organized a more ambitious, and less controversial, lecture programme for the winter of 1838-39. These were intended to be 'of a general nature, to which the public should be admitted free'; details of the programme are provided in Table Eleven. It is clear that the members of the Society were not simply concerned to persuade other people of the truth of phrenology. Although they were united by a common interest in phrenology, they were educated individuals who wished to encourage the diffusion of many kinds of know-

ledge within their community. According to the Secretary's first annual report, these lectures 'have raised the Society in public estimation, and have added greatly to its weight, character and influence'.⁶⁰

The Blackburn and Preston societies were short-lived; they were established in 1838, flourished for a couple of years, and then rapidly declined. The Phrenological Journal does not record their activities after 1840. The support they attracted between 1838 and 1840 is best analysed in terms of the popularity of geology and phrenology at this time and the absence or inadequacy of rival institutions. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century natural history 'was a national obsession', and geology was one of its most important branches.⁶¹ The reasons for geology's popularity have already been discussed but it must be emphasized that the inherent attractions of the subject were of greater significance than its social functions. Geology, like phrenology, was interesting because it was new, controversial, and rapidly changing; according to N.A. Rupke, 'geology was at the cutting edge of science'.⁶² It showed that the world was thousands of times older than most people had previously imagined, and uncovered the remains of prehistoric 'monsters' - the term 'dinosaur' was coined by Richard Owen, a Lancastrian, in 1842.⁶³ Geology provided opportunities for escaping from the towns, it encouraged walking and other forms of exercise, and fossil-hunting expeditions were ideal outlets for the collecting mania of the period.⁶⁴ Amateur geologists needed little

TABLE ELEVEN

Public Lectures Provided by the Preston
Phrenological Society between November 1838
and May 1839

1.	The Characteristics of Poetry and Prose	(1 lecture)
2.	National Prosperity, Considered in Relation to Intellectual Advancement	(2)
3.	The Study of History	(1)
4.	Happiness, its Constituents, Properties, and Philosophic Relations	(1)
5.	Digestion	(2)
6.	The Influence of Periods upon the Human Constitution	(2)
7.	Natural History	(2)
8.	Astronomy	(2)
9.	Classical Literature : its Uses and Abuses	(1)
10.	The Spread of Knowledge	(1)
11.	The Physical and Moral Effects of Machinery	(2)
12.	Physiology	(3)
13.	The Principles of Phrenology	(1)

Total - 21 lectures

Source: Preston Chronicle, 18 May 1839.

equipment so the science appealed to members of all social classes. Geology also had important commercial implications in a county rich in minerals.⁶⁵ By the eighteenth-thirties the science of geology had reached a stage of development which made it an ideal popular pastime. It was also sufficiently developed to appear coherent to educated men yet was not dominated by remote experts. Opportunities for study and exploration were further enhanced by developments in printing and the construction of the railways.⁶⁶

If geology was such an attractive science why was the Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society so short-lived? It may be that the keenest amateur geologists liked to work alone or became members of more prestigious or specialized bodies such as the Manchester Geological Society (also founded in 1838), but in the absence of detailed biographical information it is impossible to know. It is also possible that the local knowledge of the members was limited and soon exhausted. J. Morrell came to this conclusion at the end of his study of the much more ambitious Geological and Polytechnic Society of the West Riding of Yorkshire: 'for men of merely local knowledge the pursuit of local geology, like extractive mining, was subject to the law of diminishing returns [Members] simply ran out of data when they had described their own immediate locality'.⁶⁷ It is difficult to determine the year when the appeal of phrenology to the middle and middling classes peaked but it is likely that it fell in the late eighteen-thirties; T.M. Parssinen has claimed that

'in 1836 it was plausible for the lieutenants of the phrenology movement in Britain to predict that they would soon storm and capture the few remaining towers of doubt. All signs pointed toward ultimate victory'.⁶⁸ Perhaps the formation of the Phrenology Association in 1838 marked the apogee of phrenology's advance.⁶⁹ Four years later the movement was divided and the long decline had begun.⁷⁰

Although it is generally accepted that individuals were attracted to phrenology for a wide variety of reasons,⁷¹ most scholars are primarily concerned to analyse the popularity of phrenology in terms of the social and political functions it is alleged to have had for different social classes or strata. The middle classes were apparently attracted to phrenology because it simultaneously challenged *élite* culture and values and mediated bourgeois *élite* culture and values to the masses. The working classes and their leaders are said to have been enthusiastic about the new science because it seemed to have egalitarian, democratic, and reformist implications.⁷² There is undoubtedly some truth in each of these positions but other more basic explanations may be of greater value.

When phrenologists spoke in public they predictably emphasized the practical utilitarian advantages of the study of phrenology. They argued that the new science would be of value to the whole of society. It is likely that 'respectable' phrenologists wished to dissociate themselves from less reputable individuals who merely read

people's 'bumps' for money and gave personal advice. In the address he gave when the Preston Phrenological Society was formally established, the President outlined the value of phrenology to doctors, parents, and teachers, and concluded that, 'it is not too much to affirm, that it is of infinitely greater importance, and will be incomparably more beneficial to the true interests of society, than the discoveries of a Galileo, of a Newton, of a Harvey, or of a Davy'.⁷³ Although it is highly probable that William Corless and most of his auditors sincerely believed that the new science of phrenology had great social potential, the extent to which individuals joined societies for primarily philanthropic and altruistic reasons is less certain. The average society member was probably attracted to phrenology for reasons that were essentially personal and therefore received comparatively little publicity.

It is reasonable to assume that most people are, and have always been, interested in their personal characteristics and in the personalities of their friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Any art or science which can plausibly claim to provide a reliable objective guide to such things has generally been guaranteed a substantial following,⁷⁴ and the advocates of phrenology were able to tap the curiosity of their listeners and readers. R. Cooter has pointed out that, 'However compelling phrenology became to those anxious to solve the mysteries of human psychology, most people were initially attracted to it ... out of curiosity and with a view to being entertained'.⁷⁵ To some extent this curiosity had entirely honourable

foundations - it is easy to understand why parents wanted to discover the abilities and aptitudes of their children. ⁷⁶ Vulgar prurience was a less reputable source of curiosity and was understandably played down by respectable phrenologists. The faculty of amativeness was concerned with erotic attraction between the sexes and seems to have received a disproportionate amount of attention. ⁷⁷

If amateur phrenologists had been mainly concerned with real social issues such as educational and penal reform they would presumably have built up collections of skulls and casts which represented a wide range of abilities and character types. This would, in theory, have enabled them to identify the characters and aptitudes of schoolchildren and petty criminals. Most amateur phrenologists do not seem to have been greatly interested in studies of this kind. Their obsession with the mortal remains of the criminally insane savours more of morbid curiosity than an interest in reform - although such an interest may have been genuine. The macabre activities at phrenological meetings may also help to explain why the upper classes were not very well represented. Members of the upper classes may have been unwilling to join such societies even though they were personally convinced of the 'truth' of phrenology. They may have felt that brushing shoulders with their social inferiors at mechanics' institutes was a necessary evil but that fondling the skulls of mass murderers with them was simply too much.

Phrenology appears to have been particularly attractive to members of the medical professions.⁷⁸ The new science may have enabled doctors and druggists to legitimize their allegedly 'marginal' social positions, but it had more obvious advantages for such men. Phrenology rejected 'metaphysical' approaches to psychology and claimed that the brain was the seat of the mind; it also attempted to study the mind by means of numerous case studies rather than introspection. Phrenologists helped to weaken opposition to human dissection, pioneered the use of anaesthetics such as ether, and emphasized the importance of good food, fresh air, moderate exercise, and temperance.⁷⁹ Given that, 'Within the context of early nineteenth century thought, phrenology was scientifically credible and intellectually respectable',⁸⁰ it is hardly surprising that medical men were often favourably disposed towards the new science.

Although interest in phrenology was widespread, relatively few people were deeply committed to it. The rudiments of 'head-reading' were easily learnt⁸¹ and it is likely that the more abstruse aspects of phrenology (the relationship between the mind and the soul is an example) were of little interest to most members. The museums of skulls and casts established by phrenological societies were of some value but the items soon became familiar and neglected.⁸² These problems would perhaps have been of limited significance if the science of phrenology had developed and been associated with major discoveries. Unfortunately, phrenology was stagnating by 1840 when H.C.

Watson, the disillusioned editor of the Phrenological Journal, observed that:

Every other department of science is advancing so rapidly, that it tries the powers even of the leaders, and needs nearly the whole of their time to keep up with the progress each of his own particular branch. Do we thus advance in phrenology? It is to be feared that the only answer to this question must be given in the negative. 83

Two years later the movement was rocked by controversies over materialism, socialism, and mesmerism, and respectable citizens began to distance themselves from their former interest. 84

Although phrenology and geology were popular subjects in the late eighteen-thirties, it is possible that the Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society and the Preston Phrenological Society would not have been established if satisfactory scientific societies had existed in those towns which could have provided lecture courses in phrenology, geology, and other sciences. The collapse of the Blackburn Scientific Institution in 1836 left a cultural void which was not filled until the Blackburn Literary and Philosophical Society was founded seven years later. In 1838 a letter appeared in the Blackburn Gazette which asserted: 'It is a matter for congratulation, that in the small but increasing town of Blackburn, we have again an institution of a scientific character. It is a desideration which has for some time been wanting, and cannot fail to produce very strong beneficial results'. 85 Two years later the Council of the Blackburn Society implicitly attributed their success to the absence of effective competition; they felt,

confident that its existence will be neither useless nor ephemeral; but that, as the only scientific society in Blackburn, it is calculated to improve that taste for the higher pursuits which is so characteristic of the present age; and that this infant society is destined to extend its influence far beyond the circumscribed limits which as yet confine it. 86

The Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society probably survived until 1842. Its demise cleared the way for the formation of the Blackburn Literary and Philosophical Society in 1843 and the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution in 1844.

The situation in Preston is less clear but it seems that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge in the late eighteen-thirties. It is known that divisions within the Institution were largely responsible for the establishment of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution in 1840.⁸⁷ Similar tensions may have led to the formation of the Preston Phrenological Society two years earlier although the Society claimed that its origins lay in a lecture on education given by James Simpson.⁸⁸

A detailed study of the Blackburn Phrenological and Geological Society and the Preston Phrenological Society suggests that the rise and fall of scientific societies was an extremely complex process. This process defies easy analysis by any single theory. People become members of these societies for many reasons: some wanted to mix with their social superiors; others wished to learn useful skills; a few were fascinated by the specimens in the

societies' small museums. It is also clear that even ostensibly specialized scientific societies had broad educational aims; they sought to promote the diffusion of knowledge within the towns of North Lancashire. Many of the characteristics of these societies were shared by literary and philosophical societies.

Section Four : The Literary and Philosophical Societies of North Lancashire:

Most studies of 'Lit. and Phils.' are primarily concerned with the motives and social backgrounds of their members, and the subjects they studied or sought to 'diffuse' within their communities. It is generally accepted that such societies appealed mainly to the more 'respectable' sections of society. The Preston and Blackburn societies were founded in 1840 and 1843 respectively and most of their members were probably middle-and (to a lesser extent) middling-class. Membership lists have not survived but indirect evidence is plentiful. In 1849 J.B. Langley distinguished between the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge, which was supported by 'all classes', and the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution, the members of which were 'gentlemen'; ⁸⁹ two years later J.W. Hudson claimed that the former was intended for the 'operative classes' while the latter was for the 'higher classes'. ⁹⁰ In 1849 the basic rate of subscription to the Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge was 1s. 7 d. per quarter. Members of the 'Lit. and Phil.' had to pay 5s. 6d. per quarter for

their privileges.⁹¹ Even the terminology used by the two bodies is significant; the former was governed by a 'Council'; the latter had a 'Committee'.⁹² Information about the smaller Blackburn Literary and Philosophical Society is more limited although the Tory Blackburn Standard paid tribute to 'the high respectability and influence of the gentlemen who are its patrons'.⁹³ It seems clear that in Blackburn and Preston, as in Warrington, 'there was an undeclared policy of preserving the middle-class exclusiveness of the societies, and this does not seem to have been difficult'.⁹⁴

Literary and Philosophical Societies were able to attract the patronage of a substantial proportion of the middle-class males within their communities. They were therefore able to influence the development of local culture and to assist the diffusion of knowledge in their towns. In 1851 the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution had 194 members; 170 of these were male although female membership was encouraged by greatly reduced subscriptions.⁹⁵ Like mechanics' institutes, literary and philosophical societies were overwhelmingly male bodies.

Some scholars have argued that by the mid-nineteenth century 'Lit. and Phils.' were largely concerned with furthering the class interests of their predominantly middle-class members. This model only partly applies to the Blackburn and Preston societies. It is probable that members of the middle-and middling-classes joined these

societies for a variety of social and intellectual reasons. Towns such as Blackburn and Preston were hardly 'genteel' places and it is likely that literary and philosophical societies seemed to many to be havens of respectability. Although the social needs of 'marginal men' can be exaggerated, I. Inkster is probably right when he claims that the people who joined such bodies often sought 'a social identity and a feeling of belonging'.⁹⁶ Literary and philosophical societies brought the young and aspiring into contact with their social superiors and it is not hard to see why the ambitious joined them. The advantages associated with membership of societies of this kind may also have been more apparent to 'outsiders' than to 'insiders'.⁹⁷ R. Cooter has pointed out however that, 'There were more effective ways of seeking gentlemanly status than joining a Lit. and Phil.'. ⁹⁸

According to S. Shapin, 'Life in any new manufacturing town was a monotonous one A scientific society was, among other things, a way of filling a dangerous cultural void'.⁹⁹ Literary and Philosophical Societies provided valuable opportunities for entertainment, recreation, and instruction. Concerts and balls were occasionally provided and collections of objets d'art were assembled:

The museum [of the Preston Lit and Phil] is well filled with objects of art and nature, among which is a beautiful painting of the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan, by Howard, a basaltic column from the Giant's Causeway; an Apollo, presented by Mr. Birchall; a facsimile of the pardon granted by one of the popes to Lady Elizabeth Legh and her twelve children; the bust of William Taylor, Esq.... 100

Other interests were also catered for. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that,

The Winckley Club House forms a portion of the same structure or group as the Literary and Philosophical Institution. It consists of a spacious newsroom on the ground floor, two billiard rooms above, and offices for servants below There are between fifty and sixty town, and from fifteen to twenty county subscribers, chiefly of the upper classes. 101

Early Victorian Preston had relatively few fine buildings and the edifice which accommodated the 'Lit. and Phil.' must have been a source of pleasure and satisfaction to its members (see Illustration Three). Like the buildings of the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge, it was probably intended to symbolize the importance of adult education within the community.

The Literary and Philosophical Institution is a splendid range of buildings fronting Winckley Square and Cross Street, in the Tudor style of architecture, from a design of that eminent architect, the late Mr. J. Welch It contains a large newsroom, which is intersected in the centre by a range of piers and arches of polished stone, having elaborate caps and bases, and is 43 feet 6 inches, by 30 feet, and fifteen feet high. The billiard and chessrooms are 30 feet by 21 each, and 21 feet high The front windows are of plate glass, and the whole pile of building is not only an ornament to the town, but affords ample proofs of the taste and erudition of its inhabitants. 102

The intellectual functions of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution were no less important than the social ones. Its official function was certainly educational. J.W. Hudson claimed that 'the Preston Philosophical Institution was formed in 1840 with four objects: a scientific library - a laboratory for scientific apparatus - a museum of objects in natural history, and the

ILLUSTRATION THREE

The Premises of the Preston Literary and Philosophical
Institution.

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LEGAL ISSUES



Source: Charles Hardwick, History of the Borough of
Preston and its Environs (Preston, 1857), p. 450.

delivery by its members of essays and lectures'.¹⁰³ Over 200 lectures were provided during the eighteen-forties and by the early eighteen-fifties its members had direct access to a fine library in the Institution building and indirect access to a major London library.¹⁰⁴

Most of what has been written above about the attractions of Lit. and Phils. is uncontroversial; some scholars would go further, however, and claim that these societies served the political interests of the middle classes. This is less clear. Although the Blackburn and Preston 'Lit. and Phils.' effectively excluded the working classes they undoubtedly wished to attract upper class members. As early as 1841 the Tory Lord Stanley was the Patron of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution. Its officers included a clergyman of the Church of England, a barrister, four cotton manufacturers, a surveyor, an engineer, and a gentleman who kept the Seal of the County Palatine.¹⁰⁵ The leaders of the Blackburn Literary and Philosophical Society were impeccably respectable and received the unqualified praise of the Tory Blackburn Standard.¹⁰⁶ In 1843 the President was Joseph Feilden, a prominent member of one of the area's chief landed and textile manufacturing families; Richard Cardwell was Secretary; the Vice-Presidents were Henry Brock-Hollingshead, a member of an ancient gentry family, and J.F. Hindle of Woodfield Park, Mellor, who was to become Lancashire's next High Sheriff; the Treasurer was James Neville, a wealthy solicitor; and Dr. James Skaife, an eminent local surgeon, had the honour to be the

Curator. ¹⁰⁷ It is reasonable to conclude that the men who governed the Blackburn and Preston 'Lit. and Phils.' were drawn from the middle and upper classes, and that these bodies did not assume a central role in any struggle between these classes. They appear to have resembled the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society. 'One of the primary aims' of this institution, 'was to provide a forum in which as wide a cross-section of Liverpool's wealthier classes as possible could come together to discuss literary and scientific topics in pleasant and relaxing circumstances'. ¹⁰⁸

The content of the lecture programmes of the Blackburn and Preston 'Lit. and Phils.' supports this view. Several historians have argued or implied that literary and philosophical societies promoted 'natural knowledge' to assert 'the legitimacy of bourgeois dominance'. ¹⁰⁹ Although S. Shapin appears to claim that literary and philosophical societies were partly concerned with social control when they provided scientific instruction, ¹¹⁰ it is more common for scholars to argue that the middle-class members of literary and philosophical societies used science to strengthen their social and political position at the expense of traditional ruling and cultural élites. It is alleged that 'natural knowledge' was closely associated with the utilitarian, meritocratic, and moderately democratic values which were popular among the middle classes. A. Thackray refers to the ability of natural knowledge to function as 'a ratifier of a new world order', and adds that, 'The new Manchester élite had little

sympathy for honourable birth and hereditary wealth. The idea of a limited democracy of intellect and effort had greater appeal'. In support of his argument A. Thackray quotes Joseph Priestley's view that 'the English hierarchy (if there be anything unsound in its constitution) has reason to tremble even at an air pump or an electrical machine'. 111

Any attempt to analyse the literary and philosophical societies of North Lancashire from this perspective is fraught with difficulties. Perhaps the most obvious of these are the absence of an homogeneous middle class at this (or any other) time and the fact that science cut across any class lines that existed. I. Inkster acknowledges that, 'The occupational structure of [Sheffield's] growing amateur scientific community widened as time went on; membership did not imply a recognizably similar social status'. 112 S. Shapin is even more explicit: 'Science was not only the symbol which distinguished many progressive industrialists in Britain, it also distinguished them from the great majority of their local colleagues and associates who had no literate culture'. 113

Even if it could be plausibly argued that an identifiable middle-class did exist which was, collectively, more interested in 'natural knowledge' than the upper, middling, or working classes, it is by no means apparent that such a cultural difference was the inevitable product of class conflict. G.N. Cantor has observed that, 'An observed "coincidence" does not necessarily imply a causal relation-

ship, least of all a necessary causal link working in one particular direction'.¹¹⁴ It is at least equally reasonable to argue that science appealed to the relatively affluent members of the Lancashire literary and philosophical societies for largely practical reasons. Textile manufacturers had an obvious interest in machinery and medical men were naturally concerned about developments in chemistry and biology. It is also probable that such practical interests were internalized and encouraged genuine curiosity regarding other aspects of science.

Most studies of literary and philosophical societies have devoted too much attention to the role of science within those societies and to its wider social and political functions. Literary and philosophical societies were concerned with other forms of knowledge and science may have been a secondary, or even peripheral, interest in many. This view receives some support from the lecture programmes of the Blackburn and Preston 'Lit. and Phils.' J.W. Hudson claimed that of the 190 lectures provided by the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution between 1840 and 1847 only 80 dealt with aspects of physical science.¹¹⁵ All the lectures delivered in 1851 seem to have been literary or political in nature.¹¹⁶ The Blackburn Literary and Philosophical Society provided eleven public lectures before the local mechanics' institute was established: six were on Chemistry, one was entitled 'Diamond', and four dealt with Italian literature. The last four seem to have been considerably more popular than the first six.¹¹⁷

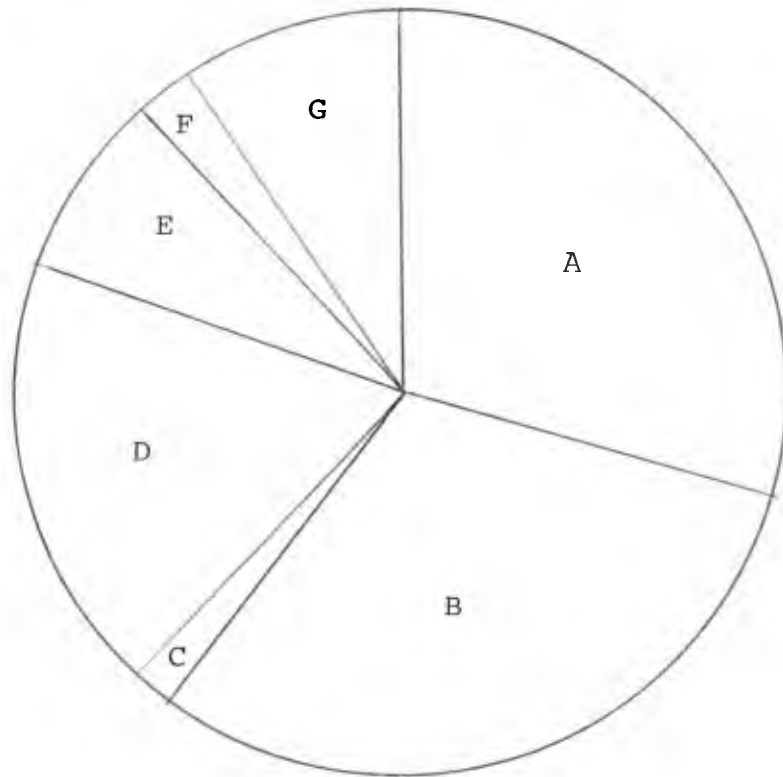
The central feature of any literary and philosophical society was its library; they resembled mechanics' institutes in this respect. The Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution was founded in 1840; within three years its library contained 2,172 volumes.¹¹⁸ A period of slow expansion seems to have followed; the library had 3,000 volumes in 1847 and 3485 in 1851.¹¹⁹ The contents of the library in 1843 are illustrated in Chart Seven. It is clear that scientific texts were far outnumbered by works of literature. Only four volumes were devoted to mathematics. Religious works were also unpopular. It is likely that the Institution was determined to avoid religious conflicts and therefore censored all but the most uncontroversial religious works. The contents of the library were undoubtedly well-read. In 1847 it issued 8,640 volumes to the Institution's 236 members.¹²⁰

Scientific 'devotees' were probably not very numerous in the Blackburn and Preston societies and their relative significance may have declined with the passage of time. The scientific nature of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution must have been diluted when it merged with the Society of Arts and absorbed the Palatine Library. The exigencies of institutional survival were clearly the first concern of the Institution's managers.

The relationships which existed between the various scientific and literary societies of Blackburn and Preston are far from clear but they cannot be explained simply in terms of competition or conflict. There was certainly real

CHART SEVEN

The Contents of the Library of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Society in 1843.



- A - Literature (641 Volumes)
- B - History and Biography (667)
- C - Religion, Morality, and Philosophy (30)
- D - Geography and Travels (412)
- E - Pure and Applied Science; Mathematics (167)
- F - Useful and Fine Arts (53)
- G - Various (202)

Source: Harris Public Library, Preston; The Catalogue of the Books in the Library of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution (Preston, 1843). The volumes were listed in alphabetical order in the Catalogue; they were not categorized in any way.

competition between the societies in each town. This probably accounts for the fall in membership experienced by the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge in the late eighteen-thirties and for its stagnation in the late eighteen-forties. ¹²¹ On the other hand, relations seldom became genuinely embittered. At a public meeting in November 1840 the Rev. John Clay proposed the motion which led to the formation of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution. He

was very anxious to have it fully and distinctly understood, that the establishment of this society had not arisen from any feeling of opposition to the Cannon Street Institution. On the contrary, it was their earnest desire to co-operate with that institution; and one part of their arrangements was to admit to their lectures those of its members who belonged to the operative class, on the most favourable terms. ¹²²

During the previous year, John Clay had been Chairman of the Committee of the Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge. ¹²³

Although there were many autodidacts in the towns of North Lancashire only a small minority were able or willing to become active members of formal educational institutions. The allegiance of a few educated individuals could be of decisive importance for the fortunes of a small society. ¹²⁴ It seems clear that the formation of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution in 1840 led to the rapid decline of the local Society of Arts, and to its eventual merger with the larger body. Although there is only limited evidence of active co-operation between institutions, it is likely that the activities of the

Blackburn societies at least were often complementary. When the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution was established the Blackburn Literary and Philosophical Society ceased to provide lectures; it could have competed but decided instead to be a literary and scientific club for the more educated and affluent members of Blackburn's population. This decision may have owed something to the fact that Joseph Feilden was President of both bodies; its chief effects may have been to encourage members of the working- and middling-classes to join the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution and to ensure that the new body retained its initial interest in instruction and educational self-improvement. ¹²⁵

Section Five : Conclusion:

The 'Lit. and Phils.' and scientific societies of North Lancashire were not isolated bodies. They were formed in response to local social and educational needs and had broadly similar aims. They all drew strength from North Lancashire's culture of educational self-help and sought to strengthen that culture by assisting and encouraging the diffusion of knowledge within the area.

These societies appealed mainly to members of the middle-and middling-classes. It is likely that few members of these classes were entirely unaffected by their activities. If the societies of Preston and Blackburn are in any way representative, it is likely that literary and philosophical societies were, in general, larger, more exclusive, and less committed to science than the others.

The scientific societies appear to have been willing to allow artisans and operatives to become members although few appear to have joined. It is possible that these societies were too small to afford the luxury of social exclusiveness but different sentiments may have been more important. The promoters may have tried to emulate such democratic bodies as the Warrington Natural History Society:

The Institution ... adopts the principles of universal suffrage, annual parliaments, vote by ballot, and - we may almost say - no property qualification in its government The annual subscription is so exceedingly small [five shillings] that no lover of Nature need be prevented from joining the Society on account of the ruinous effect of the periodical fee. We therefore hope to find persons of all classes, from the wealthy squire to the industrious artisan, meeting here under one common standard, and with one common aim - the improvement of each and every grade of society. 126

It must be emphasized that the literary and philosophical societies were not excessively exclusive. They were effectively social clubs for educated respectable citizens and drew their members from the middling, middle, and upper classes. Apart from their 'respectability', the members had little in common either socially or economically; bank clerks, mill owners, and members of the landed gentry made use of the same facilities. On the other hand, all members were at least moderately educated and it is likely that they shared a desire for (and belief in) intellectual improvement. To this extent at least, the members had more in common with each other than with uneducated members of their own social classes. The members of 'Lit. and Phils.' and scientific societies shared some

of the characteristics of undergraduates at a modern university. In both cases, widely varying social backgrounds are less important than a shared common culture.

NOTES

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2. 'Rational Dissent and Provincial Science: William Turner and the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society' in Metropolis and Province, edited by I. Inkster and J. Morrell (1983), p. 212.
3. Useful studies of 'Lit. and Phils.' include R.E. Schofield, The Lunar Society of Birmingham: A Social History of Provincial Science and Industry in Eighteenth Century England (Oxford, 1963); R.H. Kargon, Science in Victorian Manchester: Enterprise and Expertise (Manchester, 1977); A. Thackray, 'Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Model', American Historical Review, 79 (1974); A.D. Orange, Philosophers and Provincials: The Yorkshire Philosophical Society from 1822 to 1844 (York, 1983); S. Middlebrook, The Advancement of Knowledge in Newcastle-upon-Tyne: The Literary and Philosophical Society as an Educational Pioneer (Newcastle, 1974); S. Shapin, 'The Pottery Philosophical Society, 1819-1835: an Examination of the Cultural Uses of Provincial Science', Science Studies, 2 (1972).
4. The Learned Societies and Printing Clubs of the United Kingdom (1847), p. 3.
5. The History of Adult Education (1851), p. 167.
6. Ibid., p. 167. It is possible that the growth of professional colleges contributed to the decline of literary and philosophical societies in large towns and cities.
7. George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education (Liverpool, 1957), p. 212.
8. Census of Great Britain, 1851; Education, England and Wales, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, XC, pp. 244-245. Under the guidance of men like John Dalton and James Joule the Manchester Lit. and Phil. 'was instrumental in establishing a scientific tradition in Manchester that can stand comparison with the best in the world'; see Artisan to Graduate, edited by D.S.L. Cardwell, (Manchester, 1974), pp. 6-8.
9. Hudson, History of Adult Education, p. 227; Lancaster Guardian, 13 January, 27 January 1849. For the Liverpool Athenaeum see G. Kitteringham, 'Science in Provincial Society: the Case of Liverpool in the Early Nineteenth Century', Annals of Science, 39 (1982), pp. 332-333.

10. For an explicit statement of this view see J.H. Plumb, England in the Eighteenth Century (1950), p. 167; see also C. Russell, Science and Social Change 1700-1900 (1983), pp. 103-113, and Shapin, 'Pottery Philosophical Society', pp. 324-326.
11. Kitteringham, 'Science in Provincial Society, pp. 334-338. For a more wide-ranging discussion see J. Burns, 'From Polite Learning to Useful Knowledge' History Today, 36 (April, 1986), passim.
12. Cited by Inkster, Metropolis, p. 17. See M. Bergman, 'Hegemony and the Amateur Tradition in British Science', Journal of Social History, 8, No. 2 (Winter, 1975), passim.
13. R. Cooter, The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science (Cambridge, 1984), p. 71.
14. Adult Education and Society in an Industrial Town : Warrington 1800-1900 (Exeter, 1980), pp. 24-45.
15. For studies of phrenology see Cooter, Cultural Meaning; D. de Guistino, Conquest of Mind (1975); T.M. Parssinen, 'Popular Science and Society : The Phrenology Movement in Early Victorian Britain', Journal of Social History 8, (Fall, 1974), and 'Mesmeric Performers', Victorian Studies, 21, No. 1 (Autumn, 1977). For phrenological societies and organizations in specific towns see S. Shapin, 'Phrenological Knowledge and the Social Structure of Early Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh', Annals of Science 22 (1975); I. Inkster, 'A Phase in Middle-Class Culture : Phrenology in Sheffield', Transactions of Hunter's Archaeological Society 19 (1978); R. Cooter, 'The Politics of the Brain, Phrenology in Birmingham', Bulletin of the Society for the Social History of Medicine 32 (June, 1983).
16. For an historiographical perspective see Cooter, Cultural Meaning, Chapter One.
17. 'Phrenological Knowledge', p. 231.
18. Conquest of Mind, passim.
19. Cultural Meaning, p. 8.
20. 'Phrenological Knowledge', p. 241.
21. Cultural Meaning, pp. 43-50.
22. Metropolis, p. 14.
23. 'A Critique of Shapin's Social Interpretation of the Edinburgh Phrenology Debate', Annals of Science 33, (1975), p. 255 and passim; see also 'Phrenology in Early Nineteenth Century Edinburgh', Annals of Science, 32 (1975).

24. Science in Victorian Manchester, p. 30; see also A.D. Garner and E.W. Jenkins, 'The English Mechanics' Institutes, The Case of Leeds, 1824-42', History of Education, 13, No. 2 (1984), p. 149.
25. 'Pottery Phrenological Society', pp. 329-30.
26. 'Phrenological Knowledge', passim.
27. J. Mannex and Co., History, Topography and Directory of the Borough of Preston (Preston, 1851), pp. 40-41; Hudson, History of Adult Education, p. 155.
28. Charles Hardwick, History of the Borough of Preston and its Environs (Preston, 1857), p. 449.
29. Ibid., p. 451.
30. Hudson, History of Adult Education, p. 155.
31. P. and H. Whittle, The Commercial Directory of Preston (Preston, 1841), p. 92.
32. Preston Chronicle, 30 November 1850; P. and H. Whittle, The History of the Borough of Preston 2 Volumes (Preston, 1837), Vol. 2, pp. 150, 169.
33. Hudson, History of Adult Education, p. 157. For the Palatine Library see Whittle, Commercial Directory, p. 93.
34. History of Adult Education, p. 157.
35. Edward Baines, History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster 2 Volumes (1824), Vol. 1, p. 507; P. Whittle, Blackburn As It Is (Blackburn, 1852), p. 152.
36. Blackburn Standard, 10 April 1850.
37. Whittle, Blackburn, p. 115; Blackburn Standard, 10 April 1850, Blackburn Gazette, 14 November 1838.
38. Hewett C. Watson, Statistics of Phrenology (1836), pp. 146-147, 153.
39. Ibid., p. 153.
40. The Phrenological Journal and Magazine of Moral Science Vol. 1 (1838), pp. 339-340; Whittle, Commercial Directory (p. 94); Blackburn Gazette, 24 October 1838.
41. Phrenological Journal, 6, No. 77 (1843), p. 414.
42. Ibid.
43. Whittle, Commercial Directory, p. 94; Blackburn Standard, 16 October 1839.

44. Cultural Meaning, p. 47.
45. Ibid., p. 90.
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48. Blackburn Gazette, 9 October 1839.
49. M. Stanton, Who's Who of British Members of Parliament 4 Volumes (1976), Vol. 1, p. 386.
50. Blackburn Gazette, 7 November, 28 November, 19 December 1838.
51. 21 July 1838.
52. Preston Chronicle, 26 May 1838.
53. Ibid., 18 May 1839; see also Blackburn Gazette, 9 October 1839.
54. Preston Chronicle, 26 May 1838; Blackburn Gazette, 9 October 1839.
55. Blackburn Gazette, 20 February 1839.
56. Phrenological Journal, 12, No. 59 (1839), pp. 185-186.
57. 31 July 1839.
58. Compare Blackburn Gazette, 7 August 1839.
59. F. Boase Modern English Biography, 6 Volumes (1965 edition, first published 1912), Vol. 5, p. 137.
60. Preston Chronicle, 18 May 1839.
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62. The Great Chain of History : William Buckland and the English School of Geology 1814-1849 (Oxford, 1983), p. vii. According to Allen, Naturalist in Britain, p. 72, 'Geology, of all branches of knowledge in this period, seemed to be advancing fastest and furthest towards the bedrock of ultimate, uncontestable truth'.
63. Allen, Naturalist in Britain, p. 71.
64. Ibid., p. 59; M.D. Stephens and G.W. Roderick, 'Middle-Class Non-Vocational Lecture and Debating Subjects in 19th Century England', British Journal of Educational Studies, 21 (1973), p. 193.

65. J. Morrell, 'Economic and Ornamental Geology : the Geological and Polytechnic Society of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1837-53', in Metropolis and Province, pp. 231-256.
66. Allen, Naturalist in Britain, pp. 95-99; 124-125.
67. 'Economic and Ornamental Geology', pp. 247-248.
68. 'Popular Science', p. 1.
69. For the formation of the Phrenological Association see Cooter, Cultural Meaning, pp. 90-94.
70. 'By the early 1840s the downfall of phrenology as an intellectual study was apparent almost everywhere', D. de Guistino, Conquest of Mind, p. 91.
71. See, for example, Cooter, Cultural Meaning, p. 51.
72. Cooter, 'Politics of the Brain', pp. 35-36.
73. Preston Chronicle, 28 July 1838; cf. Blackburn Gazette, 24 October 1838.
74. Astrology provides an obvious parallel; see K. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (1971), chapters ten, eleven and twelve.
75. Cultural Meaning, p. 173.
76. The present writer's maternal grandmother had her 'head read' in Ulverston about 1910; the ostensible aim of this examination was to discover the kind of work for which she was best suited.
77. H. and P. Cooper, Heads : or the Art of Phrenology (1983), pp. 8, 10.
78. According to D. de Guistino, Conquest of Mind, p. 42, 'for every surgeon who rejected phrenology there was one who condoned it'.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 44, 48, 62.
80. Parssinen, 'Popular Science', p. 78.
81. Shapin, 'Phrenological Knowledge', p. 239; but see Cantor 'Critique', pp. 254-255.
82. Phrenological Journal, 13, No. 65 (1840), pp. 388-389.
83. *Ibid.*, 13, No. 63 (1840), p. 98.
84. *Ibid.*, 16, No. 74 (1843), p. 94.
85. 15 November 1838.
86. Phrenological Journal, 14, No. 67 (1841), p. 194.

87. Hardwick, History of the Borough, p. 452.
88. Preston Chronicle, 28 July 1838.
89. Select Committee on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 314.
90. History of Adult Education, p. 156.
91. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 314.
92. Hudson, History of Adult Education, p. 156.
93. 22 February 1843.
94. Stephens, Adult Education, p. 38.
95. Census of Great Britain: Education, PP, 1852-53, XC, p. 245.
96. Metropolis, p. 41. In his discussion of 'Literary and Scientific Institutes', which he distinguishes from the older Literary and Philosophical Societies, C. Russell refers to the 'insistent desire for "clubbability", a recognition of social needs transcending the attractions of natural knowledge,' Science and Social Change, p. 177.
97. According to Abraham Hume, Learned Societies, p. 15, the member of a learned society benefits from his 'consciousness of being a Member, which is to a certain extent a recommendation; for his claims to the honour were duly stated, they were duly investigated by men competent to judge, and he was duly elected. The members of Learned Societies are, perhaps, too much in the habit of undervaluing the standing acquired in this way, just as many without the pale, especially non-graduates, are in the habit of overvaluing it'. See also Russell, Science and Social Change, pp. 175-176.
98. Cultural Meaning, p. 70.
99. 'Pottery Philosophical Society', pp. 314-315; according to James Burns, 'Polite Learning to Useful Knowledge', p. 24, most of what the members of Lit. and Phils. 'did, wrote and said may have been small enough beer; but it was sufficient to rescue the men of substance in the country at large from what Marx in a different context was to call "the idiocy of rural life".'
100. Mannex, History and Topography, p. 41.
101. Hardwick, History of the Borough, p. 453.
102. Mannex, History and Topography, p. 41.
103. Hudson, History of Adult Education, p. 157.
104. Hardwick, History of the Borough, p. 452.

105. Their names are listed in Whittle, Commercial Directory, p. 92; their occupations can be identified in the same work and in Whittle, History, and Mannex, History and Topography, passim.
106. See, for instance, 22 February 1843.
107. Blackburn Standard, 26 July 1843. For biographical information see Abram, History of Blackburn, passim, and Abram, Blackburn Characters, pp. 96-109.
108. Kitteringham, 'Science in Provincial Society', p. 336.
109. Cooter, Cultural Meaning, p. 71.
110. 'Pottery Philosophical Society', p. 331.
111. Thackray, 'Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context', pp. 686-688.
112. 'Science and the Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850: the Case of Sheffield', Annals of Science, 32 (1975), p. 447.
113. 'Pottery Philosophical Society', p. 336.
114. 'Critique', p. 249.
115. History of Adult Education, p. 157.
116. Preston Chronicle, 11 January, 8 May, 15 May, 26 April 1851.
117. Blackburn Standard, 19 July 1843; 1 May 1844.
118. Harris Public Library, Preston, The Catalogue of the Books in the Library of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution, (Preston, 1843), passim.
119. S.C. on Public Libraries, 1849, XVII, p. 314; Census of Great Britain, PP, 1852-3, XC, p. 245.
120. S.C. on Public Libraries, 1849, XVII, p. 314.
121. Preston Chronicle, 5 October 1850. 'Rival influences' seem to have been partly responsible for the demise of the Lit. and Phil. in 1868; see A. Hewitson, History of Preston, (Preston, 1883), p. 299.
122. Preston Chronicle, 28 November 1840.
123. Ibid., 10 October 1840.
124. Morrell, 'Economic and Ornamental Geology', p. 240.
125. Cf. Garner and Jenkins, 'English Mechanics' Institutes', p. 149.
126. The Naturalist, 4, No. 29 (February, 1839), p. 272.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONS OF NEWSROOMS AND PUBLIC
HOUSES IN NORTH LANCASHIRE DURING THE SECOND QUARTER
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURYSection One : Introduction:

The education or self-education of adults in nineteenth century Britain cannot be properly understood without a knowledge of the educational roles of public houses and newsrooms. The chief educational function of public houses and newsrooms was the provision of newspapers. These were prohibitively expensive in the early nineteenth century; very few readers bought their own copies.¹ Public houses and newsrooms could also provide a more varied selection. The educational value of newspapers improved steadily throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1859 Lord Palmerston drew attention to this progress:

If any man compares now a newspaper published in the last century with one of those wonderful sheets we read every day, the contrast is the most striking that the mind of man can imagine. The quantity of information, the talent for dissertation, the amount of news of every kind, which we now find in almost every newspaper we meet with, is really one of the most striking proofs of the progress which the human intellect has made in the days in which we live. 2

E.E. Kellett was greatly impressed by the development of newspapers in this period. He claimed that 'the years between 1830 and 1860 showed a greater advance than the whole previous century'.³

Although it is difficult to assess the extent to which editors and journalists regarded their papers as instruments of popular education, some undoubtedly possessed a sense of mission. In 1871 James Grant, the editor of the Morning Advertiser, claimed that,

The Press has before it one of the most glorious missions in which human agencies ever were employed. Its mission is to enlighten, to civilize, and to morally transform the world. These are the grand purposes which Providence has in view in relation to our race, and ... it is chiefly through the instrumentality of the Press that they are destined to be accomplished. 4

Views of this kind were held by many Victorian writers.

Thomas Carlyle wrote, 'Great is journalism; is not every able editor a ruler of the world, being a persuader of it?' 5 Alexander Andrews, an historian, called the Press a 'mighty Mind-Engine'. 6 He claimed that the provincial newspapers were 'the canal of information which irrigates the country, and makes knowledge fruitful in the land ...' 7 Similar views were held by radicals. The newspaper stamps were widely regarded as 'taxes on knowledge' and the editors of unstamped papers often regarded themselves as 'schoolmasters'. 8 The newspaper press was perhaps the most powerful agency of reform in early Victorian England. According to E.E. Kellett,

The immense, but cautious, reforming energy of the time conceived that here was the sure means of progress. Horrors might exist; grievances might abound; ignorance might kick against the wage-law and the substitution of machinery for handwork; the dark places of the earth might be full of cruelty; but the Press would let in light, and the pen, more potent than the tree of Moses, would cleanse the waters of corruption ... From Dickens and Reade downwards, all men seem to have felt that ventilation was the cure of every ill, and that the Press was the ventilating agent. 9

Many radicals advocated the diffusion of knowledge within society chiefly because such a 'diffusion' appeared to be a prerequisite of social, sanitary, and political reform. They supported elementary schools and condemned the 'taxes on knowledge' for broadly similar reasons.

The most obvious educational function of newspapers and periodicals was and is the dissemination of information and ideas. Around 1850 the average Lancashire newspaper consisted of four or eight large pages. Approximately 50 per cent of the newspaper consisted of advertisements. The remainder contained a long and closely-argued editorial column; foreign, national, and local news; information about the markets; a couple of poems; and reviews of books and journals. Short stories, speeches, and historical articles were occasionally included. Illustrations were rare and very small print was used. A man or woman who read such a newspaper each week could plausibly lay claim to at least a moderate degree of education; such a person would be familiar with current affairs and would be acquainted with the élite culture of the early Victorian period.

Newspapers also encouraged thought and discussion about the controversies of the day. J.F.C. Harrison has claimed that the Chartist Northern Star 'took the burning issues of the time into every gathering of working men, and made those issues matters of debate and discussion'.¹⁰ Most local newspapers debated religious, scientific and social matters in their columns and P. Hollis has described

in some detail how the unstamped papers developed theories of political economy which challenged those promoted in the stamped press. ¹¹ It is also important to note that these newspapers did not distort issues by trying to oversimplify them; they did not 'talk down' to their readers. According to Q.D. Leavis, 'the characteristic of the old journalism, whether designed for the governing class or the masses, was its assumption of a reader humane, rational, free from superstition and prejudice, and interested in the major activities of his age'. ¹² The recent work of L. Brown has given considerable support to this view. ¹³

The newspapers of Lancashire encouraged people to read and to improve their reading skills. They could not be read by men and women who were semi-literate, and as the quality of newspapers improved such people had powerful incentives to attend adult literacy classes of various kinds. James Grant believed that,

the very desire to read newspapers will contribute more than any other consideration, to make those who cannot now read, resort at once and vigorously to the adoption of those faculties which at present so largely abound, for acquiring at least such a knowledge of the English language as will enable them to read with ease. ¹⁴

The Lancashire newspapers also awakened interests and curiosities which required their readers to consult books and journals. Newspapers carried lengthy reviews which must have had this effect.

Newspapers encouraged other forms of educational self-help. They published the articles and poems of autodidacts and enhanced their status within the local community.

'Working-class poets did receive almost entirely laudatory reviews from local papers, who were proud of their self-educated men, and saw them as permanent residents on Parnassus'.¹⁵ Many autodidacts probably hoped that literary success would lead to employment as journalists. William Billington seems to have been a part-time journalist and his friend Thomas Stephenson became editor of the Preston Observer in 1869.¹⁶ In addition to encouraging individual self-help, newspapers promoted the establishment and expansion of educational institutions. Many mechanics' institutes would not have long survived without the moral support and favourable publicity they received from local newspapers.¹⁷

Circulation figures cannot be established with accuracy; newspapers exaggerated their readerships and understated the readerships of their rivals. It is clear, however, that the total circulation of newspapers increased dramatically in the early Victorian period, partly as a result of the reduction and later abolition of the newspaper taxes. The number of one penny stamps issued to the newspapers of Preston rose from 89,000 in 1837 to 371,000 in 1850.¹⁸ By 1860 Lancashire was served by 63 local newspapers.¹⁹ It is impossible to deny that newspapers were a major source of popular education by the mid-nineteenth century.

Section Two : Newsrooms:

The emergence and development of newsrooms was closely linked to the evolution of high-quality national and pro-

vincial newspapers and journals. Newsrooms were essential because the growth of the potential market for such publications was not accompanied by a significant reduction in their prices. Although a few newsrooms were attached to subscription libraries and gentlemen's clubs in the eighteenth century, early newspapers were too few, too élitist, and arguably too 'dry' to make newsrooms truly viable. This situation changed after 1815. The post-war political excitement led to an insatiable demand for news and comment, and new publications appeared - William Cobbett's Political Register was the best example - which tried to satisfy the popular appetite.²⁰ Political Protestant Unions formed in areas such as North Lancashire; these were essentially local clubs where radicals met for the reading of newspapers and the analysis of their contents.²¹ Although coffee houses were important repositories of newspapers and journals in many parts of Britain, such institutions seem to have been rare in the northern counties. Northerners apparently preferred to read in public houses.²² By the late eighteen-twenties most newspapers were almost certainly read in newsrooms of one form or another rather than private houses. In 1829 Gibbons Mearle, a journalist, estimated that thirty people read each paper.²³ More recently, D. Read has observed that 'newspapers were treated as valuable articles. Copies were regularly exchanged between friends and neighbours, and one copy might be seen by several families, perhaps a score or more of people'.²⁴ Some newspapers were not even aimed primarily at private readers; the Northern Star was

designed to be read aloud.²⁵

Although newsrooms were as varied as mechanics' institutes or mutual improvement societies, three broad categories may be identified: commercial newsrooms, mechanics' institute newsrooms, and political club newsrooms. A few friendly society lodges also provided newspapers for their members. Commercial newsrooms were intended to be profit-making organizations though many received financial assistance from benefactors. There was a 'General Reading Room' in Preston's Market Place in 1828. Members were admitted each Tuesday night and paid a subscription of 3s 3d per quarter.²⁶ Blackburn's Commercial Newsroom was a later and possibly more exclusive example. In 1842 its members had to pay an annual subscription of 25s.²⁷ This sum may be compared with the 22s annual subscription requested by the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institution in 1851.²⁸ Commercial newsrooms had to make themselves attractive to members of the middle and middling classes; those which were established to provide newspapers for working-class people faced serious difficulties. Joseph Livesey described his attempts to establish operative newsrooms in his autobiography.

I have at least six times fit up or helped to fit up small places for the operative classes, as reading rooms, some quite free and some at a low charge, and I confess with grief that in every instance I have been disappointed. It is true that men who labour hard are not in a condition after work for reading; but the numbers who attend the public houses and beershops show that their love of liquour is far stronger than their love of mental improvement²⁹

The newsrooms of mechanics' institutes were almost as important as their libraries; the former were popular and helped to maintain the economic viability of many institutions. The 1851 Report of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution acknowledged that,

the variety and excitement offered by the journalism and the serial literature of the day are much more likely to gain the attention, to assuage the cares, and to compensate for the fatigues of a large number of young men who are engaged in sedentary occupations than any more systematic course of study, pursued under the influence of solitude and seclusion. 30

The proliferation of mechanics' institute newsrooms may be regarded as a departure from the ambitions and ideals of institute founders; there was certainly opposition to the establishment of institute newsrooms in the eighteenth forties and -fifties.³¹ On the other hand, the construction of these newsrooms may be regarded as a positive development. It is likely that the average institute member learned more from the perusal of a local newspaper than from attendance at a typical lecture. It may also be significant that the educational bodies which were specifically intended to cater for the needs of working men seldom provided lectures; most lyceums were little more than newspaper reading rooms.³²

In 1851 Thomas Hogg, the Secretary of the Union of Mechanics' Institutions of Lancashire and Cheshire, gave evidence to the Select Committee on Newspaper Stamps. When he was asked if he thought that newspapers were 'a good source of information for the members of mechanics' institutions', he replied, 'For certain subjects they are.'

It is essential for a man now to keep up with the news of the day, and if he is given that at a mechanics' institution, I think it is a legitimate department'. He was then asked, 'what portion of the information contained in any particular paper would the mechanics' themselves direct their attention to more especially?' 'Chiefly, when Parliament is sitting, to the debates in the two Houses, and to events going on on [sic] the Continent and in other parts of the world', was his answer. ³³

Newsrooms were often attached to local political organizations. It is likely that many radical newsrooms were established but very little is known of them. J. Foster's research suggests that unstamped, i.e. illegal, newspapers achieved 'something near a monopoly' in Oldham. ³⁴ These papers may have been equally popular in North Lancashire yet no 'respectable' newsroom could have stocked them. It may also be noted that party organs such as the Tory Blackburn Standard had no interest in drawing attention to the popularity of their radical unstamped rivals. The activities of radical newsrooms are largely lost to history although occasional snatches of evidence come to us regarding these bodies. In 1839 the New Moral World made a brief reference to a lecture which was given at Preston's 'Radical Association News-Room' ³⁵ and in 1851 a trade directory referred to a 'Democratic News-Room' in Blackburn. ³⁶ This was probably part of Harold Baker's newspaper shop. ³⁷

Considerably more is known about the newsrooms which were attached to local Conservative and Liberal parties -

indeed, such newsrooms are one of the most visible evidences of party political activity in towns such as Blackburn in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.³⁸ The Blackburn Liberal Operative Reading Room was founded in 1837. By 1839 it subscribed to at least 22 newspapers and journals. These are listed in Table Twelve. It is clear that a wide range of tastes and interests was catered for. The Newsroom's second Annual Report claimed that, 'Previous to the establishment of this Room the labouring man was almost debarred political reading Such is the general spread of intelligence, that no town of any importance is now without its Operative Reading Room'.³⁹

Although political newsrooms provided a wide range of reading for their members, they also had clear party political functions. In 1839 John Bennett, the Vice-President of the Blackburn Operative Conservative Association, was most explicit:

It is the duty of every Operative Conservative ... to invite and encourage his poorer neighbour to become a member of our Association; to attend our reading room, and thereby learn to be content in that station of life to which providence has been pleased to call him ... 40

Political newsrooms were not primarily concerned with intellectual conversions; they sought instead to create social and psychological bonds between their members and the local political hierarchies. They also had genuine educational functions. The reading room of the Blackburn Operative Conservative Association possessed a library of 700 volumes in 1839; according to the Association's fourth

TABLE TWELVE

Newspapers and Journals received by Blackburn's Liberal
Operative Reading Room in January 1839.

1. Daily Sun.
2. Daily Courier.
3. Manchester Times.
4. Manchester Guardian.
5. Northern Star.
6. Liverpool Chronicle.
7. Liverpool Journal.
8. Myer's Price Current.
9. Monthly Chronicle.
10. Tait's Magazine.
11. Athenaeum.
12. Examiner.
13. Preston Observer.
14. Mark Lane Express.
15. Weekly True Sun.
16. Weekly Dispatch.
17. Dublin Weekly Register.
18. Blackburn Gazette.
19. Blackburn Standard.
20. Wilson's Tales of the Borders.
21. Mechanics' Magazine.
22. Chamber's Journal.

'In addition to this numerous list, the Committee have to acknowledge the receipt from different friends of various newspapers and periodicals, some from the most distant parts of the world'.

Source: Blackburn Gazette, 23 January 1839.

Annual Report this was 'a source of great good; for it is the medium by which is diffused a constant stream of sound and healthy principle and instructive knowledge.' ⁴¹

A few newsrooms were attached to the lodges of friendly societies. These presumably catered for the needs of society members. In 1851 Lancaster had an Amicable Society Subscription Library in Church Street and a Heart of Oak Newsroom in Market Street. ⁴²

The second quarter of the nineteenth century was, in North Lancashire at least, the golden age of newsrooms. For about thirty years newsrooms made, and were seen to make, a major contribution to adult education. They provided access to newspapers, journals, and books, in return for modest subscriptions, and encouraged social contacts between educated and enquiring members of different social classes. The eighteen-fifties and -sixties witnessed the repeal of the stamp and paper duties, and technological developments such as the introduction of new rotary presses. ⁴³ Newspapers were increasingly purchased by individuals and newsrooms declined in number and importance.

Section Three : Public Houses:

Although newsrooms have declined in importance since the eighteen-fifties they are still a familiar feature in public libraries. The educational functions of public houses have effectively collapsed and such institutions are consequently ignored by most historians of education. This

scholarly neglect may be contrasted with the considerable attention given to the social and political functions of public houses, and to 'pub' architecture.⁴⁴ A careful survey of the evidence from North Lancashire suggests that this neglect is wholly unjustified; the educational functions of public houses may have rivalled in importance those of mutual improvement societies.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century much domestic accommodation was profoundly unattractive; many houses were seriously overcrowded and therefore unsuitable locations for private study and intellectual discussions.⁴⁵ It is also significant that the most enthusiastic autodidacts tended to be young men in their late teens or early twenties who had to endure subordinate positions within their families.⁴⁶ They were therefore unable to demand the co-operation of others. Public houses provided opportunities for people to meet, socialize, read and debate in congenial surroundings.⁴⁷ Rooms could be rented for small sums and sensitive subjects could be discussed without supervision or fear of observation. Some historians have argued that local élites tried to restrict access to rooms, halls, and open spaces in this period.⁴⁸ If social control had a 'territorial dimension' it is hardly surprising that the public house acquired a central and secure position within popular culture. It is clear that public houses were widely used by trade unionists and political agitators. As late as 1896 26 of Blackburn's trade societies met in public houses,⁴⁹ and B. Harrison has pointed out that, 'Almost all nineteenth-century

reforming campaigns occasionally met in public houses'.⁵⁰ If the transmission of information about politics, economics, and current affairs is seen as an educational activity, it cannot be denied that public houses had important educational functions. It may be that many of the people who did not frequent public houses fell into political and intellectual apathy. B. Harrison has speculated that, 'The close link between the publican and working-class politics perhaps explains the relative political indifference of working men's wives'.⁵¹ Joseph Livesey lamented that many teetotalers took little interest in adult education.⁵²

The role of publicans was far from passive. According to P. Joyce, the drinkseller 'is in many respects best understood as a leader of street and neighbourhood opinion'.⁵³ It was not unusual for radicals to become publicans or beershop owners; William Crossley and William Billington became drink-sellers in Blackburn, and Benjamin Preston, the Yorkshire radical poet, kept an inn near Bingley.⁵⁴ It is hardly surprising that in the mid-nineteenth century public houses were considered 'centres of radical intrigue'.⁵⁵ Many publicans allowed socialists and secularists to rent rooms despite the dangers which this policy involved. In 1840 the Preston socialists were evicted from their room; the situation was described by one John Warbrick:

I have the pleasure of intimating that a little persecution is going on here: the landlord of our institution, who is a publican, informs us that the parsons have visited him, and very kindly told him that unless he ejects us from his premises, he will lose his licence; and more, they told him they would follow us wherever we went. 56

Drink-sellers who were interested in politics and education (or profits for that matter) often provided newspapers and small libraries. Newspapers were the chief attractions in many Manchester public-houses in the eighteen-forties; ⁵⁷ they were particularly popular on Sundays. John O'Neil, the Clitheroe weaver, autodidact and diarist, read the newspapers at the Castle Inn on most Saturday evenings. ⁵⁸ Burnley's Sun Inn had a newsroom; this was established in 1804 and was still a popular attraction in 1841: 'as it is conducted on truly liberal principles (the leading papers of both the great political parties of the state being admitted) it is still the most flourishing in that town'. ⁵⁹ Little is known about public house - based libraries in North Lancashire but it is likely that they were commonplace; they seem to have been particularly numerous in Nottingham. ⁶⁰

Lecturers were often invited to speak at public houses. In 1830 Benjamin Barton, the Blackburn teetotaler and amateur scientist, gave a lecture on pneumatics at Accrington's Red Lion Inn. His auditors were the members of the Accrington Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge. ⁶¹ Ten years later J. Watts, a socialist 'missionary' from Manchester, was lecturing on 'The Evils of Competition' at Burnley's New Market Tavern. ⁶² In 1851 Woodplumpton's Wheat Sheaf Inn witnessed a lecture on agriculture by one John Kershaw. ⁶³ Publicans also allowed exhibitions on their premises; these were no doubt good for trade. In 1845 an exhibition was organized at Blackburn's Montague Arms; it consisted of 'natural and scientific

curiosities collected in the town and neighbourhood'. An advertisement stated:

Should there be any surplus after paying all expenses of this Exhibition, it is intended to be devoted to still further and more extended arrangements for the intellectual advancement and rational enjoyment of the working classes of this town and neighbourhood ... WORKING MEN, PATRONIZE YOURSELVES! 64

Four years later a model of Jerusalem was displayed, perhaps somewhat incongruously, at Blackburn's New Inn.⁶⁵ It is likely that activities of this kind declined, or ceased to be based in public-houses, with the advent of mechanics' institutes, teetotal rooms, and friendly society halls.

Many public houses became the haunt of educated and self-taught men. Robert Lowery described the public houses of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the eighteen-thirties:

Every branch of knowledge had its public house where its disciples met. Each party in politics had their house of meeting - there was a house where the singers and musicians met - a house where the speculative and free-thinking met - a house where the literate met - a house where the artists and painters met - also one where those who were men of science met. 66

Martha Vicinus has pointed out that the 'literary lives' of working-class poets 'were led in pubs'.⁶⁷ Many autodidacts consciously imitated the life-style of John Burns and it may be significant that Tim Bobbin, the first great Lancashire dialect writer, spent much of his spare time in ale-houses.⁶⁸ It is hardly surprising that many pubs developed literary reputations. In the eighteen-forties Manchester's Sun Inn became known as 'Poet's

Corner' because John Critchley Prince and his friends met there.⁶⁹ Thirty years later William Billington ran a beerhouse in Blackburn which had the same name; poetry readings were part of the entertainment and instruction he provided. In the eighteen-seventies the Blackburn Literary Club sometimes met at the Nag's Head Tavern.⁷⁰ 'Poesy, Philosophy and Beer were a heady combination'.⁷¹

Formal public house debates were probably even more common than poetic recitations. B. Harrison believes that as late as the eighteen-seventies, 'the only type of public life known to working people was the public house debate'⁷² Regular debates were organized at Birmingham's Hope and Anchor Inn from the mid eighteenth-fifties to 1886.⁷³ The Accrington Discussion Class was established in 1853 and held its early meetings in the kitchen of the Cricketers' Arms. The landlord was member of the group and a Secularist.⁷⁴ William Billington attended debates at Blackburn's Spread Eagle Inn in the eighteen-sixties⁷⁵ and similar activities were arranged by him at 'Poet's Corner' until a few days before his death in 1884. The subjects debated at Poet's Corner were advertised in advance in the Blackburn Times; they included 'Protective Tariffs', 'Wordsworth v. Byron', 'Teetotalism', and 'Religion in Ireland'.⁷⁶ Although these debates were very popular, little is known about their effects. Participants presumably learned how to construct rational arguments and gained confidence in public speaking; it is likely that they also gained a questioning mentality, although B. Harrison claims that debates encouraged

respectability and a reverence for parliamentary procedure.⁷⁷

J. Vincent has argued that in the mid-nineteenth century the public house was the 'most universal unit in forming opinion'.⁷⁸ It is possible to trace a spectrum of public house-based educational activities which ranged from casual gossip about local events, through the reading of newspapers and books, and culminated in poetry readings and formal debates. G.V. Wilson has provided an account of life at the Old Lord Nelson Inn, Nelson, in the mid-nineteenth century:

In the evening neighbouring farmers, shopkeepers, and others met in the snug. It would hold a dozen comfortably but sometimes three times that number would cram themselves in. They met to discuss politics, business, or to talk over the events of the day and matters of the outside world ... Newspapers cost tenpence each and those who could read them aloud were in heavy demand The Oddfellows Club had a room upstairs of ample dimensions where the lodge was held. A room behind the inn, adjacent to some old cottages, housed the newly formed Nelson Band. 79

Public houses which had explicit educational functions may have been as numerous and as important as mutual improvement societies. Like mutual improvement societies, they were highly responsive to the educational needs of the people who made use of them and this undoubtedly helped to explain their popularity. The extent to which they united self-educated members of different social classes is less clear. In 1852 G.R. Porter expressed the view that 'no person, above the rank of a labouring man or artisan, would venture to go into a public house to purchase anything to drink'.⁸⁰ The evidence from North Lancashire suggests

that those public houses which had clear educational functions were exceptions to this rule; the members of the Blackburn Literary Club had very different social backgrounds yet even in the eighteen-seventies all could enjoy an evening's discussions and recitations at the Nag's Head.

Section Four : Conclusion:

The educational activities of newsrooms and public houses cannot be precisely evaluated. Some newsrooms were probably ignored by the writers of local directories and are now lost to history. The proportion of public houses which had explicit educational functions may never be known. It is clear that some newsrooms were better equipped than others and some public houses were major centres of educational activity while others simply provided a few newspapers for their customers.

In 1851 Isaac Slater's Royal National Classified Commercial Directory and Topography of the County of Lancaster listed eleven commercial, political and friendly society newsrooms in and around the towns of Blackburn, Burnley, Accrington, Lancaster, Preston and Darwen.⁸¹ In the same year Thomas Hogg claimed that the mechanics' institutes, Athenaeums, mutual improvement societies and 'Lit. and Phils.' of these towns and their surrounding villages contained a further nine newsrooms. Both figures may be underestimates.⁸² Six years later Charles Hardwick claimed that Preston possessed 'many newsrooms, class-rooms, and libraries, in connection with ... important manufacturing and other establishments'.⁸³

In 1862 Mary Bayly estimated that Blackburn had 462 drink outlets.⁸⁴ If only five per cent of these had overt educational functions, public houses must have been an extremely important source of adult education in mid-Victorian Blackburn.

In 1849 the Blackburn Mechanics' Institution had 170 members and 800 volumes in its library.⁸⁵ Attendance at its lectures and classes was at best erratic. Although the Mechanics' Institute was the most visible symbol of adult education in Blackburn, it is likely that it achieved considerably less than the town's public houses and news-rooms.⁸⁶ A similar situation presumably obtained in the other towns of North Lancashire. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that formal institutions of adult education were less important than their informal rivals.

NOTES

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2. Quoted in The Newspaper Press of the Present Day (Anonymous, 1860), p. 3; see also A.E. Dobbs, Education and Social Movements 1700-1850 (1919), p. 199.
3. 'The Press', in Early Victorian England, edited by G.M. Young, 2 Volumes (1934), Vol. 2, p. 14.
4. The Newspaper Press : Its Origin, Progress and Present Position, 2 Volumes (1871), Vol. 1, p. vi.
5. A. Andrews, The History of British Journalism, 2 Volumes (1859), Vol. 1, p. 5.
6. Ibid, Vol. 1, p. 5.
7. Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 282.
8. P. Hollis, The Pauper Press : A Study in Working-Class Radicalism (Oxford, 1970), passim.
9. 'The Press', p. 4.
10. Learning and Living, 1790-1960 : A Study of the English Adult Education Movement (1961), p. 101.
11. The Pauper Press, passim.
12. Fiction and the Reading Public (1939), pp. 180-181.
13. Victorian News and Newspapers (Oxford, 1985), pp. 30, 100.
14. The Newspaper Press, Vol. 2, pp. 455-456.
15. M. Vicinus, The Industrial Muse : A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature (1974), p. 164.
16. P.T. Phillips, The Sectarian Spirit : Sectarianism, Society, and Politics in Victorian Cotton Towns (Toronto, 1982), p. 177, note 52.
17. M. Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851 (Manchester, 1957), pp. 58-59.

18. Select Committee on Newspaper Stamps, Parliamentary Papers, 1851, XVII, pp. 552-553. In 1837 Preston had two newspapers, the Preston Chronicle and the Preston Pilot; by 1850 these had been joined by the Preston Guardian.
19. Newspaper Press of the Present Day, p. 87.
20. R.D. Altick, The English Common Reader, (Chicago, 1957), pp. 319-327. Cobbett founded his Political Register during the Napoleonic Wars; in 1816 he reduced its price to 2d. and its circulation soared.
21. E. Halévy, The Liberal Awakening 1815-1830 (1961 edition, first published 1923), p. 60; T. Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool, 1962), pp. 135-136; R.F. Wearmouth, Some Working-Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century (1948), pp. 32-49.
22. L. James, Fiction For the Working Man (1974 edition, first published 1963), p. 9.
23. Altick, English Common Reader, p. 330.
24. Press and People, pp. 201-202.
25. Brown, Victorian News, pp. 50-51.
26. Preston Chronicle, 22 March 1828.
27. Blackburn Standard, 16 November 1842.
28. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 314.
29. The Life and Teachings of Joseph Livesey, edited and introduced by J. Pearce (1885), p. 41.
30. Preston Chronicle, 26 April 1851.
31. J.P. Hemming, 'The Mechanics' Institute Movement in the Textile Districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century' (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Leeds University, 1974), p. 548.
32. Dobbs, Education and Social Movements, p. 197.
33. S.C. on Newspaper Stamps, PP, 1851, XVII, p. 172.
34. Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (1974), p. 147.
35. 16 February 1839.
36. I. Slater, Royal National Classified Commercial Directory and Topography of the County of Lancaster (Manchester and London, 1851), p. 27.

37. W.A. Abram, Blackburn Characters of a Past Generation (Blackburn, 1894), p. 48.
38. For local political parties in this period see William Paul, A History of the Origin and Progress of Operative Conservative Societies (1839 edition, first published 1838).
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41. Ibid, 13 November 1839.
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45. D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom : A Study of Nineteenth Century Working-Class Autobiography (1982 edition, first published 1981), pp. 120-123.
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49. P. Joyce, Work, Society and Politics (1982 edition, first published 1980), p. 292.
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51. Ibid., p. 53.
52. Pearce, Life and Teachings, p. 41.
53. Work Society and Politics, pp. 292-293.
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55. Girouard, Victorian Pubs, p. 15.
56. New Moral World, 1 February 1840.
57. R.K. Webb, The British Working-Class Reader, 1790-1848 (1955), p. 33.
58. A Lancashire Weaver's Journal, 1856-60, 1860-64, 1872-75, edited by M. Brigg (Published by the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1982) passim.
59. Blackburn Standard, 6 January 1841.
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61. Preston Chronicle, 2 January 1830.
62. New Moral World, 11 July 1840.
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67. Industrial Muse, p. 160.
68. Ibid., pp. 141-142, 189; J. and P. Bond, Tim Bobbin Lives : The Life and Times of a Lancashire Legend (Milnrow, 1986), passim.
69. R.A.D. Lithgow, The Life of John Critchley Prince (Manchester, 1880), pp. 125-133.
70. Abram, Blackburn Characters, pp. 229-231.
71. Vicinus, Industrial Muse, p. 160.
72. Drink and the Victorians, p. 322.
73. Harrison, 'Pubs', pp. 179-180.
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75. Blackburn Times, 22 October 1887.
76. Ibid., 2 July 1882, 27 August 1882, 2 June 1883, and 10 February 1883.
77. 'Pubs', p. 185.
78. Formation of the British Liberal Party, pp. 63-64.

79. Tales of the Nelson Inn, p. 11.
80. Quoted by B. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, p. 319.
81. Pp, 15, 27, 99, 143.
82. S.C. on Newspaper Stamps, PP, 1851, XVII, pp. 522-523.
83. History of the Borough of Preston and its Environs (Preston, 1857), p. 453.
84. Lancashire Homes and What Ails Them (1862), p. 31.
85. S.C. on Public Libraries, PP, 1849, XVII, p. 32.
86. It is significant that adult education was flourishing in Blackburn's public houses, newsrooms, and mutual improvement societies long before the Mechanics' Institute was founded.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CHURCH INSTITUTES AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS OF
NORTH LANCASHIRESection One : The Churches and Adult Education:

The Churches made a valuable contribution to adult education in Britain in the second quarter of the nineteenth century - albeit a contribution which has received only limited attention from historians of education. One reason for this neglect is the informal nature of much of the educational work of the churches; adult education was to a considerable degree almost a by-product of church life.

About 30 per cent of the population of Blackburn attended church services on Census Sunday in 1851. P. Joyce considers that virtually all the 'non-manual sector' of the population went to church together with about 15 per cent of the 'manual' sector; ¹ it is therefore reasonable to assume that most churchgoers were middling class. Regular attendance at a place of worship provided many opportunities for instruction. G.M. Young calculated that 'a young man brought up in a careful home might have heard, whether delivered or read aloud, a thousand sermons', ² and early Victorian sermons were often long and learned. J.F.C. Harrison has claimed that, 'it was from the pulpit, whether in church or camp meeting, that public opinion was largely educated' ³ and a similar view is held by T. Kelly. ⁴ J.F.C. Harrison has also emphasized the role of the churches and chapels as 'social educators, helping

to mould and unify the atomistic elements of nineteenth-century society into a series of small communities'.⁵

Acts of worship united people who belonged to very different social strata and church members imbued habits and values which were conducive to self-improvement.

According to T. Kelly,

The success of Methodism was significant for adult education in many ways, and first and foremost because of the great moral reformation which it brought about in those who came under its influence ... It brought an immediate improvement in their material condition, and opened up to the more intelligent amongst them the possibility of self-improvement. 6

The Book of Common Prayer introduced millions of people to fine prose; the chief Wesleyan hymn-book was a valuable anthology of poems and was prefaced by a useful essay on versification.⁷ The singing of hymns and membership of church and chapel choirs and orchestras encouraged interest in fine music. This is certainly suggested by the novels of John Ackworth.⁸

H.F. Mathews has pointed out that 'the democratic government of the Methodist Church encouraged the ordinary man to use his mental faculties ... From the very outset each society was dependent upon its own laymen for all its own concerns'.⁹ All Methodists were required to attend regular class meetings for the purpose of discussing problems and Bible-study. T. Kelly has called these classes 'a great training ground in the arts of democracy. Even the humblest and most illiterate might aspire to the position of class-leader, and many a working man rose from class-leader to local preacher, from local

preacher to itinerant minister'.¹⁰ Like-minded members would often form reading-circles to discuss religious and other matters in greater detail.¹¹ These classes and reading circles are recurrent features in 'working-class' autobiographies. J.F.C. Harrison has observed that,

It is not an accident that almost every self-educated working man in early and mid-Victorian England, when he came to write his memoirs, paid tribute to the beneficial influences of Methodism in his youth ... Methodism for them was almost a natural stage in their educational and moral development. ¹²

Bible-study, whether communal or individual, was itself an important educational activity. In 1922 G.M. Trevelyan claimed that, 'The close and enthusiastic study of the Bible educated the imagination more nobly than it is educated in our age of magazines, novelettes, and newspapers'.¹³ Similar claims could be made for other popular works such as Pilgrim's Progress and the Meditations of Thomas à Kempis.¹⁴

A slightly more formal educational activity was the distribution of religious tracts. The Religious Tract Society was founded in 1799 and several local societies were established in Lancashire in the eighteen-twenties and-thirties. The Preston Society began its existence in January 1827; by February 1828 it was supplying three thousand local families 'with the means of religious instruction' each week.¹⁵ Although Blackburn was smaller and less prosperous than Preston it too had an active tract society; this distributed 48,036 books and tracts in the year 1834-5.¹⁶ R.D. Altick has remarked that religious

tracts became 'a ubiquitous part of the social landscape'; they gave their recipients a 'psychological incentive' to read and 'offered a means by which the reading faculty, once learned, could be exercised and improved'.¹⁷

The very familiarity of these informal educational activities may partially account for their neglect by scholars. Attempts to assess their importance also face serious difficulties. Although their educational importance must be acknowledged it is difficult to compare them with other and more familiar forms of learning. To what extent did working people read their Bibles in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and how important was Bible study, as an educational activity, compared with, say, attendance at mechanics' institution lectures? Questions of this nature are not easily answered although oral history and the study of missionary diaries may provide some clues. Another problem is that many of these activities changed comparatively little over long periods. The Anglican services of 1850 resembled those of the sixteenth century; the Methodist class system was established by the Wesley brothers in the early eighteenth century and was thriving in the early Victorian period. In order to show how the churches' activity in the area of adult education increased in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, this chapter will concentrate on two of their most formal and best-recorded contributions - Sunday schools and church institutes.

Although the Victorian churches have received a great deal of scholarly attention, confusion and uncertainty appear to reign in many areas. H. McLeod has pointed out that, 'There seems to be almost complete disagreement among historians about the role and significance of religion in British working-class life during the nineteenth century'.¹⁸ There is general agreement that the second quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of expansion by most British denominations and that increased involvement in the provision of education was an important manifestation of this revival. The key question for this study concerns the motives of the churches; was their increased involvement in education an act of confident aggression or a defensive reaction to a secularizing and increasingly pluralistic society?

In 1832 the Church of England appeared to be in a state of terminal decline. Thomas Arnold asserted that, 'The Church as it now stands, no human power can save'.¹⁹ Its chief vices were Erastianism, latitudinarianism, and pluralism. Most bishops were extreme Tories and the Church itself was widely 'hated as the spiritual arm of an oppressive state'.²⁰ Over the next two decades the Church of England reformed itself, with some aid from Parliament, and by 1850 'evidence of new life was abundantly clear'. Parsons had become keen supporters of social reform and realized that they had a duty towards the working population. Parishes were formed in industrial areas and hundreds of new churches were constructed.²¹

The ecclesiastical history of Blackburn provides clear evidence of the dynamism of the Church of England in this period. When Dr John William Whittaker became vicar of Blackburn in 1821 the town's 21,940 inhabitants were served by two Anglican churches. His predecessor had seldom resided in Blackburn and 'had attracted much enmity because of his lack of sympathy with the working class'. Although the new vicar was conservative and autocratic he was the driving force behind an impressive church-building programme; St. Mary's was rebuilt in 1826, St. Paul's was consecrated three years later, All Saints gained its first incumbent in 1843, Trinity was opened for worship in 1846, and Christ Church was completed in 1859. Dr. Whittaker also encouraged the establishment of 'mission chapels' such as St. Michael's (1839), St. Clement's (1845), and St. Paul's (1846). Many of these churches and chapels had National or Sunday schools attached to them. As early as 1822 Dr. Whittaker had opened a Sunday school on the vicarial glebe near Bottomgate. ²²

Despite internal reforms and massive building programmes in towns such as Blackburn, the Church of England was not in a strong position by 1850. Incumbents and their congregations felt extremely vulnerable. The British state seemed increasingly indifferent to the needs of the Established Church. E. Norman has contrasted the popular image of the Victorian Church with the reality:

Today men look back to the golden days of Victorian Christianity as to a time of wonderful stability. To Victorian churchmen it seemed as if the Church was lurching from one crisis to another, in a painful adaptation to the hostile realities of a liberalizing political Constitution it seemed a bleak period. ²³

The very existence of the Church of England as 'the Established Church' was itself under threat. In 1844 the Anti-State Church Association was formed.²⁴ The revival of Roman Catholicism in the eighteen-forties, and the reestablishment of the Roman hierarchy in 1850, posed a threat of a different kind.²⁵ Irish immigration led to the growth of Catholic communities in Blackburn and the towns of West Lancashire.²⁶ Nonconformity was another growing and self-confident force in early Victorian Lancashire; it owed much of its strength to the allegiance of mill-owners, and fierce denominational rivalry was a characteristic of the cotton towns. According to P. Joyce, 'The opposition of Nonconformity and Evangelical Anglicanism reached a peak of ferocity in Lancashire perhaps unparalleled in any other part of England'.²⁷ Dr. Whittaker seems to have been implacably opposed to the growth of Nonconformity and Catholicism in Blackburn. He often attempted to buy Nonconformist chapels and complained that Dissenters had been in the habit of drinking the health of one of his predecessors.²⁸

By the mid-nineteenth century members of all denominations were becoming increasingly concerned about what appeared to be the slow but apparently inexorable secularization of British society. In his report on the Religious Census of 1851, Horace Mann described the spread of 'Secularism':

This is the creed which probably with most exactness indicates the faith which virtually, though not professedly, is entertained by the masses of our working population; by the skilled and unskilled labourer alike - by hosts of minor shopkeepers and Sunday traders - and by miserable denizens of courts and crowded alleys. 29

By about 1850 priests and ministers were becoming worried about the related problem of poor attendance and, more specifically, the churches' failure to reach large sections of the working population. When the Religious Census revealed that only 30 per cent of Blackburn's population attended church each Sunday it merely confirmed a fear that was already widely held.³⁰

The dangers of secularism and religious indifference would themselves have justified a considerable expansion of the educational work of the churches. They coincided with the growth of the denominationalism or sectarianism which was to become one of the key features of mid-Victorian Britain. The churches saw that there was an almost desperate need to establish institutions which would attach people of all ages to the parent denominations, give them Christian educations, and isolate them from other organizations and worldly temptations.³¹ The sense of urgency felt by the churches probably reached its peak in the years which followed the formation of the Lancashire Public Schools Association in 1847;³² the growing threat of a secular system of education was perhaps the most important single factor which led to the establishment of church institutes.

Section Two : Church Institutes:

These bodies have received very little attention from modern historians. J.F.C. Harrison's Learning and Living, 1790-1960 (1961) contains only a few brief references to them. T. Kelly's History of Adult Education in Great

Britain (1962) contains a chapter entitled 'The Age of Mechanics' Institutes', but Church of England, Nonconformist, and temperance institutes are dealt with in a single sentence. It is therefore difficult to compare the church institutes of Lancashire with similar bodies in other areas.

It is not clear when North Lancashire acquired its first church institutes but none appears to have been established before about 1840. Many institutes were established in the eighteen-forties and fifties, however, and their appearance coincided with a period of church-building and evangelical activity by local clergymen.³³ These developments seem to have owed much to the work of the Pastoral Aid Society, the Free Pew Movement, and Prince Lee, Bishop of Manchester.³⁴ The educational and missionary work of the Church of England seems to have encouraged other denominations to act likewise. There was a Wesleyan Literary and Scientific Institution in Accrington by 1842 and in January 1843 the Preston Catholic Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge had a library and reading room.³⁵ The Burnley Church of England Literary Institution was founded in January 1848.³⁶ The Reverend T. Nolan of Liverpool was a guest at its first annual festival and said that the Burnley Institution was, 'so far as he knew ... the first instance in which the Church of England had established a literary institution'.³⁷ The Lancaster Church of England Instruction Society was also established in 1848 and by April 1849 Accrington's Christ Church School had a Church of England Institution which provided gratuitous evening classes.³⁸

In March 1849 a Wesleyan Literary Institution seceded from the Burnley Mechanics' Institution and by January 1851 there was a Church Reading Society in Marsden.³⁹ This is by no means an exhaustive list of the church and chapel institutes and literary societies which existed in North Lancashire in the early Victorian period - there were probably many more. Such institutes were clearly more numerous than mechanics' institutes, although they tended to be somewhat smaller and perhaps less stable. They certainly seem to have lacked purpose-built accommodation.

To some extent the church institutes were a conscious imitation of mechanics' institutions; this may help to explain why the former were not founded until the latter were well-established. Relations between churches and mechanics' institutes were complex and varied from town to town. In Warrington there was little ill-feeling between the two bodies; their work was largely complementary.⁴⁰ A partial explanation has been suggested by W.B. Stephens: 'there was in the town no clear-cut Tory-Anglican, Liberal-Dissenting division in the area of adult education both religious and political rivalry was distinctly absent'.⁴¹ It may also be significant that Warrington was overwhelmingly Tory from 1841 to 1868. A. Howe has argued that the local Liberals were only able to maintain a 'skeletal existence'.⁴² A similar situation seems to have existed in Lancaster. The county town was predominantly Conservative and Anglican, and relations between the local institutes seem to have been reasonably cordial. The three Burnley institutes were fierce rivals, however; indeed, the

two confessional bodies seceded from the Burnley Mechanics' Institute.

The origins of the Burnley Church of England Institute are somewhat obscure and local historians are divided. W. Bennett claimed that the Church Institute owed its existence 'to a desire of churchmen for a society or club that should be closely associated with, and supported by, members of the Established Church. They were particularly influenced by the success of the Mechanics' and the growing strength of Catholicism'.⁴³ This view was rejected by A. Lloyd-Davies, the historian of the Burnley Mechanics' Institute; he argued that 'the information available gives no indication that there was any serious discord'.⁴⁴

W. Bennett appears to be nearer to the truth. The Church Institute seceded from the Burnley Mechanics' Institute in January 1848; a year later the Reverend R.M. Master, the President of the Church Institute, claimed that, 'the object of the institution was the cultivation of science and literature in connection with religion as its attendant handmaid, and to facilitate the most desirable object of self-improvement'. He added that, 'The institution was founded in accordance with the teaching and spirit of the Church of England; but they did not wish to exclude any who could be content with their general principles of superintendance and internal regulations'.⁴⁵ In February 1849 the Reverend W. Thursby resigned as Vice-President and as a member of the Burnley Mechanics' Institute. His letter of resignation contained a scathing

attack on the institution and a copy was sent to the Blackburn Standard. The Chairman of the Burnley Mechanics' Institute, James Roberts, was obliged to reply to Thursby's criticisms. He observed that,

Several attacks have been made, more or less covertly, on the Institution, which are entirely destitute of truth; and ... the directors cannot help expressing a belief that some improper influence has been used to induce you to write and publish your letter... 46

Relations between the two institutes remained strained for some time. In February 1851 the Reverend R. Nicholson, one of the teachers at the Church Institute, fiercely attacked the local mechanics' institute.

I have always understood that a mechanics' institution professes to have nothing to do with religion, that its distinctive principle is perfect indifference to it in order that men of all religious creeds, and men of none, Socinians, Infidels, and Romanists, may be members of it whatever does not acknowledge God virtually denies him. Whatever is not of faith is of sin, consequently every institution founded upon the negative principle of disregard to religion is sinful. 47

In the eighteen-forties churchmen were increasingly concerned about what appeared to be a growing divide between education and religion - a divide perhaps symbolized by the establishment of mechanics' institutes. The foundation of the Burnley Church of England Literary Institution was, in part, a response to this situation. The growth of denominationalism was another factor. By the eighteen-forties Burnley was a battleground between Anglicans, Nonconformists, and Catholics. In 1849 Thomas Hogg, the Secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of Mechanics' Institutions criticized the situation in

Burnley; he deeply regretted that strong sectarian feeling existed 'in a small town like Burnley, where, by kindly co-operation and Christian forbearance, one large and useful institution could easily be maintained'.⁴⁸ Burnley was also divided politically; the coal mine owners and their colliers were staunchly Tory while the mill-owners and their dependents tended to be Liberals.⁴⁹ This is significant because Church Institutes often had political functions. P. Joyce considers that, 'Church Institutes and Church Defence Associations were of vital importance in co-ordinating the party effort of Toryism in all northern towns in the 1860s and 1870s'.⁵⁰ Burnley also had many socialists and secularists in the mid-nineteenth century; when George Holyoake lectured there in 1851 he had to double his entrance fee 'in order to reduce the numbers to the limits of order, hearing, and health'.⁵¹ Many secularists were active members of the Burnley Mechanics' Institution and prominent secularists were invited to lecture there.⁵² This confirmed the worst fears of many clergymen.

The founders of the Lancaster Church of England Instruction Society were also concerned about the growing divide between religion and education but they were less worried about the local mechanics' institute than about the threat of secular schools. According to the report read at the Institution's second annual *soirée*,

To endeavour to supply the youth of Lancaster - especially those who are members of our own Church, [with] sound and wholesome instruction, by public lectures and by access to a library and reading room; to season the secular information

thus gained by religious teaching; and by such means to seek to withdraw those who avail themselves of these advantages from the temptations to idleness and sin, which are so thickly strewn on all hands - and in forms so alluring to the young: these were among the chief motives which influenced the founders of this Society in its formation.

The report went on to condemn 'those modern, half-infidel schemes of education, falsely so-called, which either utterly ignore the existence of the religious element in the instruction of the young, or place it in a subordinate and most unworthy position'.⁵³

Church institutes could attract almost as many members as mechanics' institutes. In 1851 the memberships of Burnley's Mechanics' Institute, Church of England Literary Institution, and Wesleyan Institution were 311, 250 and 81 respectively. The Lancaster Mechanics' Institute had 220 members while the Lancaster Church of England Instruction Society had 202. Little is known of the social backgrounds of the members of church institutes but their membership fees were similar to those of mechanics' institutes and it is therefore reasonable to assume that they appealed to the same social strata. The ordinary members of the Burnley Church of England Literary Institute paid subscriptions of 10s per annum; the members of the Burnley Mechanics' Institute paid 10s or 6s 6d per annum.⁵⁴ Some of these members were undoubtedly members of local élites. The sons of several cotton manufacturers were educated at the Bolton Church Institute.⁵⁵ Church institutes were almost as male-dominated as their secular rivals. The Burnley Mechanics' Institute had three female

members in 1851; the Burnley Church of England Literary Institute had nine; and the Wesleyan Institute had two. ⁵⁶

Church institutes may have tended to be more short-lived than mechanics' institutes but they were by no means ephemeral bodies. The Burnley Church Institute broke away from the local mechanics' institute in 1848 and was still thriving in 1897. ⁵⁷J. P. Hemming states that the two institutes merged in 1857; ⁵⁸ this is not true although they both joined the East Lancashire Union of Mechanics' Institutes about this time. Church institutes seem to have been reasonably well financed; in addition to members' subscriptions they relied on donations from wealthy patrons. P. Joyce claims that employers 'poured their time and effort' into them. ⁵⁹

The central feature in the church institute was the library; church institutes were as committed as mechanics' institutes to the principles of educational self-help. At the time of the Educational Census of 1851 the Burnley Mechanics' Institute had 3,300 books in its library and the Burnley Church of England Literary Institute had 1,900. ⁶⁰ This was a remarkable achievement given the different ages of the two bodies. In 1851 the Burnley Church of England Literary Institute received a donation of 4,000 volumes. The Blackburn Standard observed that 'the library of the institution, with this addition, will be one of the most valuable, not only in the number, but also in the choice and excellent character of the books, in any town of like size in the kingdom'. ⁶¹

Although of secondary importance, the provision of lectures was taken seriously by the church institutes of North Lancashire. It should be noted, however, that church institute lectures differed from those given at mechanics' institutes both in their subject matter and in their delivery. Eight lectures were provided in 1850 by the Lancaster Church of England Instruction Society. The subjects included: 'Man in his Physical, Mental and Moral Condition' (two lectures); 'the Shipwreck of St. Paul'; 'the Canon of the New Testament'; 'Cowper and his Writings', 'Luther and his Times'; 'the Importance of Knowledge and its Right Application'; and 'the Law of Labour'.⁶² Six of these were delivered by clergymen; it is clear that strong clerical control was a feature of the institute. The Burnley Church of England Literary Institute provided fortnightly lectures on 'Literature, Science, Religious, Social and Political Subjects'.⁶³ While some of these presumably resembled the lectures provided by mechanics' institutes, others had a more devotional tone. In 1851 the Reverend D.C. Grundy M.A. gave a lecture on 'the Papacy'; he may have been prompted by developments in Italy and the restoration of the English Catholic hierarchy. 'The proceedings were commenced, as usual, with singing and prayer, the devotional exercises being conducted by the Reverend R. Nicholson in a very solemn and impressive manner'. The 'higher orders of society' were not well represented in the audience although there was 'a fair attendance of the operative classes'.⁶⁴

Church institutes also provided classes for their members. In 1850 the Lancaster Church of England Instruction Society organized classes in geography, scripture, grammar, writing and arithmetic.⁶⁵ The Burnley Church of England Literary Institution provided classes in these subjects and additional ones in Latin and French. W. Bennett stated that 'some really good work was done and great success attended the classes'.⁶⁶ They continued until 1886.⁶⁷ Elementary classes seem to have been provided by Accrington's Christ Church Institution.⁶⁸

It is clear that church institutes, despite their obvious popularity, were less than entirely democratic. The success of institutions which sought to provide opportunities for adult education did not always depend on a degree of popular control. The Vicar of Lancaster was the President of the Lancaster Society and the other clergy of Lancaster and Skelton were vice-presidents. There was also a treasurer, two secretaries (one clerical, one lay), and a committee of twelve laymen - six of whom had to be Sunday school teachers.⁶⁹ It may be significant that Sunday school teachers were allowed to pay reduced membership fees.⁷⁰

What becomes apparent is that church institutes could be substantial bodies with extensive library facilities and impressive membership rolls. They were also numerous; it is likely that North Lancashire had a range of church and chapel institutes by 1850 although many of these have left few records. The evidence from Burnley and Lancaster

suggests that the educational work of these institutes was very valuable - probably as important as that of the local mechanics' institutions. Useful though it was, however, it could not begin to rival the Sunday schools' massive contribution to adult education in North Lancashire.

Section Three : Sunday Schools:

Historians seem to be completely divided about the nature and value of the work of nineteenth - century Sunday schools. F. Engels was not favourably impressed by the Sunday schools of Salford; he claimed that they

are most scantily supplied with teachers, and can be of use to those only who have learnt something from the day schools. The interval from one Sunday to the next is too long for an ignorant child to remember in the second sitting what it learned in the first, a week before. 71

More recently, A.P. Wadsworth reached a similar conclusion after examining the Sunday schools of Manchester; 'Educationally they were a makeshift, a miserable substitute for day schooling'.⁷² Other scholars have been more sympathetic. P. Cliff has pointed out that, 'the Sunday school organization was larger than any other body in the period [mid-nineteenth century]. It taught more children to read, and, in many cases, to write, than any other body'⁷³

Some historians believe that Sunday schools were powerful agencies of social control. J. Foster and C.E. Ward have argued that the Sunday schools of Oldham had clear social control functions.⁷⁴ C.E. Ward claims that,

the new cotton manufacturers and their servicing bourgeoisie (bankers, machine makers, accountants) associated with Dissenting schools, found themselves pushed back more and more onto reliance on Sunday schools as agencies of control. For not only was the possibility of day schooling blocked by the economic and familial structure of the town, but working-class consciousness, class violence, and industrial dislocation presented an ever-growing threat. 75

This approach is at complete variance with H.F. Matthews' view that, 'The prime motive which inspired the Sunday-school movement in Methodism was philanthropic - a sincere desire to save the children of the working class from ignorance and illiteracy'. 76 P. Cliff also rejects the social control hypothesis and claims that the aims of Sunday school promoters and teachers were essentially religious. 77 His view receives some support from the work of T. Tholfsen. 78

One of the most important areas of controversy concerns the social backgrounds of the Sunday school teachers. T.W. Laqueur regards these schools as 'indigenous institutions of the working class community'. He argues that teachers and taught were members of the same social class. 79 M. Dick seems to believe that Sunday school teachers were predominantly middle class although he concedes that 'working class' teachers may have been particularly numerous in industrializing areas such as Lancashire. 80 P. Cliff is content to observe that 'the majority of the teachers were drawn from the socio-economic class of the providing church'. 81

Although many aspects of the history of Sunday schools are shrouded in controversy there seems to be general agreement among scholars that the education of adults was only a peripheral function of Sunday schools in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The historians of the Sunday schools seldom devote more than a few passing references to adult education. There is, however, considerable evidence which suggests that in North Lancashire at least the education of adults almost rivalled in importance the education of children.

T.W. Laqueur has referred to 'the advanced classes in the Sunday schools of the north in which older scholars, perhaps 10-15 per cent of the Sunday school population, remained for between six and ten years or more, studying not only religious questions but topics in history and the natural and physical sciences'.⁸² This is a significant admission given the extent of the scholarly neglect of adult education within Sunday schools, but T.W. Laqueur still appears to underestimate the number of 'older scholars'. A. Treadwell has calculated that 33 per cent of Burnley's total population was attending Sunday schools in 1853.⁸³ A large proportion of these scholars must have been adults. The February 1853 edition of the Burnley Advertiser complained that although the town had 3,000 males between the ages of fifteen and twenty, only about 700 attended Sunday schools. A. Treadwell is justified in calling this level of attendance 'a noteworthy achievement'.⁸⁴ The total membership of Burnley's Mechanics' Institute, Church of England Literary Institution, and

Wesleyan Literary Institution was only 642 in 1851.⁸⁵ An even greater proportion of Accrington's citizens attended the town's ten Sunday schools in the early eighties. In 1841 Accrington had a population of 8,719; by 1843 3,293 of these were scholars and a further 508 were teachers.⁸⁶

It is likely that about a quarter of the Sunday school scholars of North Lancashire were over fifteen years old.⁸⁷ This may help to explain why several Sunday schools were based in public houses; Accrington's Red Lion and Collier's Arms provided hospitality of this kind.⁸⁸ It is possible that Sunday school authorities were obliged to make use of such places because there was a severe shortage of suitable accommodation but it is at least equally likely that public houses were particularly attractive seats of learning for working men. The Red Lion may have been the haunt of the members of the Accrington Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge.⁸⁹ Adult members of Sunday schools may have had few inhibitions about combining drink with their scholarly activities. It is amusing to recall that in 1838 the members of Accrington's Methodist Sunday schools 'were processed through the town and regaled en route with ale and porter'.⁹⁰

Some Sunday schools seem to have concentrated on the needs of adults and adolescents while others had separate classes for adults and children. In a few cases adults were required to study with infants. In 1866 an illiterate

twenty year old miner moved from Church to work as a collier near Burnley, and called at a Primitive Methodist Sunday school.

It was Mr. Wyld's day at school this particular Sunday, and when Mr. Talbot entered the school, immediately Mr. Wyld asked him to teach a class of young scholars. But Mr. Talbot had come to be taught himself. He explained to Mr. Wyld his difficulty, that he did not even know his letters, and almost pathetically requested him to place him in the infants' class where he could begin at the very bottom rung of the ladder and gradually climb to the higher classes by merit. 91

Larger Sunday schools had two choices: they could provide separate classes for adults or establish mutual improvement societies for their adult members. The latter course of action was adopted by a Clitheroe Sunday school in the eighteen-seventies. On 25 March 1877 the St. James's Mutual Improvement Society was formed; it was resolved that 'members must belong to St. James's Sunday school or Church and shall be sixteen years of age or upwards'. The society met four times each month; three meetings were devoted to 'learning', i.e. classes in writing and mathematics, and one meeting was devoted to discussion. Essays were sometimes read to introduce a subject for discussion. The St. James's Mutual Improvement Society was under firm clerical control. The Reverend G. Fielden was its President and the Reverend J.M. Grimshaw was its Vice-President. These gentlemen kept a tight rein on the monthly discussions. The Reverend G. Fielden selected and introduced the first subject for discussion; his introductory talk was entitled, 'Ritualism : What it is and What it Leads to, Alike opposed by the Bible and the

Book of Common Prayer'. The society was not wholly undemocratic, however; the Committee was elected every three months and the Secretary and Treasurer were elected every six months. Membership was also comparatively inexpensive at 1s per quarter. ⁹²

It is probable that most Sunday school teachers were members of the middling class. A person who wished to be a teacher had to have two basic qualifications; membership of a church and at least a basic general education. The first of these implied a degree of respectability; P. Joyce has analysed church attendance in this period and has concluded that 'the great mass of the working class went nowhere, and were not directly influenced by church or chapel'. ⁹³ It is probable that only members of the middling class could satisfy these two basic criteria in sufficient numbers. It must be remembered that Sunday school teachers constituted a large proportion of a town's population. Accrington had about 9,000 citizens in 1843. Half of these were presumably too young, too old, or too unhealthy to be teachers. Of the remainder, at most a quarter, i.e. 1,125, would have been both literate and regular churchgoers. ⁹⁴ The middle and upper classes could have supplied only a fraction of the town's 508 Sunday school teachers. It is also reasonable to assume that most of the town's illiterate non-attenders plus the majority of its 3,293 scholars were members of the working classes. ⁹⁵ It follows that the middling class of skilled artisans and shopkeepers provided the bulk of Accrington's Sunday school teachers, although a sizeable minority may have been

members of the upper working class. The story of Henry Talbot suggests that unknown colliers could be asked to become teachers. It is possible that Sunday school authorities were so deluged with scholars of all ages that the class backgrounds of their teachers was the least of their worries.

J. Foster has argued that the Sunday schools of Oldham were originally religious institutions which were primarily concerned with labour control, but by the eighteen-thirties had become 'secular schools devoted to teaching reading, writing and accounts'.⁹⁶ The evidence from North Lancashire suggests that Sunday schools remained closely associated with churches and chapels although increased attention was certainly given to secular instruction in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It is clear that many thousands of adults and adolescents were taught how to read, write and calculate in the Sunday schools of North Lancashire. Some of these scholars became Sunday school teachers or monitors and required a different kind of instruction. A description of an advanced class may be found in one of James Kay - Shuttleworth's novels; it is set in Great Harwood around 1815 and the class teacher was Alice Hindle, the daughter of a Nonconformist minister. It was her

custom to meet on one or two evenings in the week the female teachers of the Sunday school, and those advanced scholars of her first class who were nearly prepared to take charge of classes. They assembled successively at one of the elders' cottages ... Sometimes Alice ... sang to them some of Handel's or Hadyn's music, or some of the anthems, hymns, or carols of our own English composers. Sometimes she read to them from Cowper, or Milton, and then paraphrased, in which she had great skill, so as to make the meaning

clear. Sometimes she told them the history of some worthy - some saint of the middle ages, separating what she deemed to be the superstitious elements, or some modern hero. 97

Classes of this kind were probably very numerous given the favourable pupil-teacher ratios which must have existed in many schools.

It appears that Sunday schools made a major direct contribution to adult education in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It is also clear that they encouraged and facilitated other forms of adult education. James Hole said that there was 'little doubt that the general establishment of Sunday schools did very much to prepare the way for the general establishment of Mechanics' Institutes'.⁹⁸ The Reverend Jonathan Bayley was enthusiastic about Accrington's New Church Sunday School; 'from the young people, as junior members, have sprung mutual improvement societies and supporters of all that is good, cultivators of thought and music, and excellent members of the church'.⁹⁹ More recently, J.F.C. Harrison has claimed that 'the Adult School was a first child of the Sunday School'.¹⁰⁰

Although Sunday schools were primarily educational institutions, they also had important social functions. Like most other institutions of adult education, they brought together members of different social classes and united them, at least partially, in a common endeavour. A.P. Wadsworth has pointed out that, 'In the North and North Midlands ... rich and poor, master and man, met in

the Sunday school. The mixture of social classes was freer there than perhaps in any other sphere of life'.¹⁰¹ Sunday schools were sometimes used as agencies of social control but this should not be exaggerated. Attendance at the schools was voluntary, there were many schools to choose from, and the teachers often had the same social backgrounds as their students. It is also likely that adult scholars who were keen to become literate and numerate would have been most resistant to crude attempts at indoctrination. It is probable that most Sunday school teachers were sincere church-members who were committed to the principles of self-help and respectability, but they were far from being the agencies of bourgeois cultural hegemony. Their values were familiar to intelligent and educated members of all social classes; they were 'the consensus ideals of the nation'.¹⁰² Some working people undoubtedly rejected the real educational opportunities provided by the Sunday schools but in such cases apathy may have been a more important factor than radicalism. There does not seem to have been much demand for 'authentically working class' Sunday schools; Padiham was the home of what appears to have been North Lancashire's only socialist Sunday school.¹⁰³

Section Four : the Decline of Church-Sponsored Adult Education:

Sunday schools and church institutes were complementary; the former provided essentially elementary instruction while the latter supplied the library

facilities which were a prerequisite of more advanced educational self-help. Both brought potential autodidacts into contact with like-minded men and women, gave appropriate moral support, and tried to isolate church-members from worldly temptations and less desirable creeds. Sunday schools were easily the most important source of class instruction available to the working men and women of North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century; the libraries of church institutes in their turn rivalled those of mechanics' institutions and literary and philosophical societies.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, church-sponsored adult education declined dramatically. Church institutes and Sunday schools were pushed to the periphery of the British educational system and the current state of these institutions may help to explain their neglect by modern historians of education.¹⁰⁴ Sunday schools have lost much of their educational importance; part-time non-professional teachers now provide a few hours' basic instruction to young children who already receive educations in local authority or private schools each weekday. Church institutes are now largely hidden behind a variety of titles. Their predominantly female members occasionally listen to talks on improving subjects but most of their activities are social or charitable.

The decline of church-sponsored adult education owed much to rising popular literacy and Forster's Education Act of 1870. These developments enabled Sunday schools and

church institutes to abandon their former responsibilities and to concentrate on the perhaps more congenial tasks of providing religious instruction and social activities. Forster's Act may also have reduced sectarian animosity; P.T. Phillips has observed that it led to 'the first glimmerings of sectarian compromise over a volatile social and political question'. It may also be significant that the liberal James Fraser replaced the evangelical Prince Lee as bishop of Manchester.¹⁰⁵ The churches probably felt that by assigning new roles to Sunday schools and church institutes they were responding rationally to two serious problems: the increasing secularization of the British educational system and declining church attendance. In reality, their withdrawal from adult education may have encouraged the decline which they were so keen to avert.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE DECLINE OF EDUCATIONAL SELF-HELP
IN NORTH LANCASHIRE

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century a lively culture of educational self-help existed in North Lancashire which was manifested in a wide range of institutions, organizations and societies. This culture began to decay in the eighteen-fifties. Popular demand for adult education declined and self-help organizations withered.

Mechanics' institutions, literary and philosophical societies, mutual improvement societies and public houses began to face serious competition. Public libraries constituted a particularly insidious threat; the promoters of adult education could hardly oppose them yet library facilities were the central features of many institutions. The decline of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute coincided with the rise of the Blackburn Free Library. The membership of the former peaked at 545 in 1859, the year when the Free Library was first opened to the public. The Library thrived in the eighteen-sixties and had 12,124 volumes by 1867. The membership of the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute had fallen to 465 by 1862 and in 1865 was a mere 208.¹ The widespread hardship associated with the Cotton Famine may have encouraged this decline but there was no recovery when the cotton trade revived. In March 1868 the Institute had its last annual meeting; there was 'a very meagre attendance, not more than 30 persons, including a few of

the directors, and a number of boys being present'. A debt of £348 ensured that the demise of the Institute was inevitable and could no longer be postponed.² Three years later the Darwen Mechanics' Institute collapsed and its library was transferred to the town's recently established public library.³ The survival of the Accrington Mechanics' Institute into the twentieth century owed much to Accrington's failure to establish a public library before 1899. It is no doubt significant that the Institute became a literary society in that year.⁴

The establishment of a large number of clubs provided competition of a different kind. In 1849 Blackburn acquired a Union Club, a Literary Club was founded in 1863, and Conservative and Reform Clubs were established a year later. At least three of these possessed newsrooms and all were essentially middle class.⁵ They probably owed their existence to two factors : the evolution of local political parties and the development of what D. Fraser has called a more 'rigorously class structured society'.⁶ The eighteen-sixties also witnessed the establishment of working-class political clubs.⁷ The foundation of social clubs for working men was a parallel development. Working men's clubs were rare before 1860. In that year the Reverend Henry Solly established a Working Men's Mutual Improvement and Recreation Society in Lancaster.⁸ This was extremely successful and led to the establishment of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union in 1862. Within five years there were around 300 working men's clubs in Great Britain.⁹ P. Bailey has called this movement

'the most prominent example of rational recreation formally organized on a national scale'.¹⁰ Although these social and political clubs were not hostile to adult education they provided social attractions which eroded support for educational institutions.

Traditional sources of adult education also faced increasing competition from schools and suffered as a result of their own success. Although there is considerable scholarly debate over the precise numbers, it is generally acknowledged that there were far more schools in, say, 1870 than in 1830, and that the average child gradually came to spend more time at school.¹¹ Literacy and numeracy rates probably rose faster in Lancashire than in Britain as a whole. The Cotton Famine of 1862-5 led to the establishment of adult schools by relief committees. The Blackburn Relief Committee claimed that, 'The progress made in education in these schools even by the aged was most gratifying'.¹² A similar view was taken by the Inspectors of Factories. In a report which described conditions in Blackburn they observed: 'No mode of distributing relief to the unemployed has been so popular among the people, nor more efficient in attaining the object aimed at, than the establishment of sewing classes for women, and industrial and educational classes for men'.¹³ As illiteracy and innumeracy declined in importance, popular demand for elementary instruction also waned. Mutual improvement societies contracted, Sunday schools began to concentrate on the religious instruction of the young, and the remedial classes of mechanics'

institutes ceased to be viable. The effect was cumulative. As memberships fell, mechanics' institutes became increasingly insolvent and their social functions declined in importance. As Sunday schools became progressively more committed to spiritual and juvenile education, the position of those adults who remained in their classes became increasingly difficult.

The 'people's schools' decayed in the eighteenth-seventies because they faced unfair competition. Only public elementary schools could issue the certificates of attendance and proficiency which were required by employers. Children between the ages of ten and thirteen could not start work without these and were forced to desert the private schools.¹⁴ Although the various types of adult education were not actively discouraged in this way, the advent of national examinations in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was a serious blow. National examinations were provided by the Society of Arts, the Science and Art Department, and the City and Guilds of London Institute from 1856, 1861, and 1879 respectively. Most of these were in commercial, scientific, or technological subjects.¹⁵ These examinations were not without value but they encouraged students to attend formal institutions such as Higher Grade Schools and Technical Institutions.¹⁶ Although some mechanics' institutes were able to provide the necessary facilities,¹⁷ mutual improvement societies and public houses could not compete in this field on anything resembling equal terms. The development of public examinations and the increasing

opportunities available to those who passed them may also have encouraged students to adopt an instrumentalist approach to study. In the eighteen-forties social mobility was very limited and adults were, in a sense, free to study whatever they wanted. Metaphysics was only marginally less useful than mechanics. Thirty years later young adults had strong incentives to study subjects which would be of practical value to them.¹⁸ This may help to account for the decline in the quality of working-class poetry which began about 1870.¹⁹ In 1882 William Billington lamented this development in a poem entitled 'Where are the Blackburn Poets Gone?'²⁰

The expansion of the temperance and teetotal movements and the growth of the cult of respectability²¹ drove a wedge between educational self-improvement and the life of the public house. It is likely that most educational activities had disappeared from public houses by about the turn of the twentieth century. Robert Roberts failed to mention even the provision of newspapers in his study of Edwardian Salford.²² The 'Mass Observation' study of public houses in Bolton in the nineteen-thirties claimed that 'the pub has apparently given up its one-time function of a reading-place; few even have an evening paper for their patrons'.²³

The slow secularization of British society undermined the educational activities of the churches. As the churches declined in importance and became increasingly preoccupied with sectarian issues,²⁴ they lost both the

desire and the resources to make a major contribution to adult education. The average age of their members increased as young men and women drifted away.²⁵ E. Halévy argued that by the mid-nineteenth century the Methodist classes 'were losing their importance, were, indeed, doomed finally to disappear altogether'.²⁶ It is significant that John Ackworth does not mention these societies in the Methodist novels he wrote in the eighteenth-nineties.²⁷ Church institutes and Sunday schools proved more resilient but by 1900 their contribution to adult education was almost negligible.

The vitality of adult education in early Victorian Lancashire ultimately depended on the strength of its social and cultural foundations. These were in a state of advanced decay when Thomas Cooper visited the county in 1870.

In our old Chartist time, it is true, Lancashire's working men were in rags by thousands; and many of them often lacked food. But their intelligence was demonstrated wherever you went. You would see them in groups discussing the great doctrine of political justice ... or they were in earnest dispute respecting the teachings of Socialism. Now you will see no such groups in Lancashire ... Working men had ceased to think, and wanted to hear no thoughtful talk; at least it was so with the greater number of them. 28

This apparent decline in educational self-help was not an isolated phenomenon. N. Kirk has claimed that 'the cotton districts provide dramatic, in some cases classic, examples of important shifts or "breaks" in working-class attitudes and behaviour and class relations at mid-century'.²⁹ Political and religious passions seem to

have mellowed around 1850 and even the campaigns of teetotalers became far more restrained than they had once been.³⁰ It is likely that as political, religious and moral issues became less vital, people felt less need to discuss them. This may partially account for the decline of the northern secular societies from about the mid-eighteen-fifties.³¹

How can these be different if not unrelated changes be explained? Rising prosperity seems to have been an important factor. Throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century most British people lived in poverty or close to poverty. Extreme want was a real and ever-present danger. The situation began to change in the eighteen-fifties. W.H. Fraser has pointed out that

for most people the late nineteenth century brought a real improvement in living standards. The British people were able to concern themselves with more than mere subsistence; they had a surplus to spend on more and better food, on a wider range of clothing, on more elaborate furnishings for their homes and on a greater variety of leisure pursuits. For the first time people had a choice of how and where to spend their money.³²

This scholar has described the development of 'the mass market' in Britain from 1850 to 1914. Rising living standards were particularly marked in Lancashire and the rapid expansion of friendly societies and the co-operative movement are clear illustrations of this.³³

As people became more prosperous, they had ever greater incentives to devote time and attention to their homes. The construction of the railways and the appearance of new forms of mass entertainment provided further dis-

tractions and opportunities to acquire status. In the eighteen-forties autodidacts could plausibly argue that intellectual achievements were the most secure form of 'wealth' a working man could have.³⁴ By the eighteen-eighties such claims were seldom made. It is likely that as people became more affluent their willingness or capacity to endure self-inflicted privations of the kind experienced by William Billington or Joseph Livesey waned. It may also be suggested that as more people became 'respectable', the social status of eccentrics declined. Respectability implies conformity and this was not a defining characteristic of most autodidacts, radicals, or itinerant teetotal lecturers.

It is possible to argue that rising living standards and the appearance of consumerism eroded individual and collective self-help. According to C. Lasch, 'The social arrangements that support a system of mass production and mass consumption tend to discourage initiative and self-reliance and to promote dependency, passivity, and a spectatorial state of mind both at work and at play'.³⁵ It is more likely that the late-Victorian period witnessed a significant change in the nature of self-help. The importance of self-help did not diminish - Samuel Smiles's Self-Help was first published in 1859 - but there was increased emphasis on material well-being and upward social mobility. In the eighteen-thirties mutual improvement societies were perhaps the most numerous and important manifestations of collective self-help in North Lancashire. Fifty years later they had been all but eclipsed by

friendly societies, trade unions, co-operative societies, and savings banks.

Economic growth also caused important social changes. N. Kirk has claimed that 'shifts' in 'class relations' occurred in the mid-Victorian period. The middling class - which had been the main source of support for most adult educational ventures in the second quarter of the nineteenth century - was 'transitional'.³⁶ It declined in importance after 1850 as the working class became larger and increasingly homogeneous.³⁷ The growth of the working class was caused by the expansion of the factory system, improved communications, the advent of compulsory elementary education, and the unionization of the unskilled. These developments coincided with the geographical separation of the working and middle classes within towns and cities, and the spread of limited liability companies which depersonalized industrial relations.³⁸ As class divisions became more sharply defined it became more difficult for educated and intelligent men to co-operate. They could no longer meet with ease in public houses or mutual improvement societies, and the middle classes preferred their new clubs to mechanics' institutes.

Perhaps the most insidious factor which led to the decline of educational self-help was a loss of confidence. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century it had seemed possible that self-educated men and women could make valuable scientific discoveries and write important works

of literature.³⁹ These worthy goals seemed far less achievable by the eighteen-sixties and - seventies. The experts or specialists had replaced the amateurs.⁴⁰ This is undoubtedly one of the main causes of the decline of the phrenological and scientific societies. The increasing professionalization of society⁴¹ also sapped confidence in the pedagogic abilities of self-taught men and women who had not received any formal teacher - training. Opportunities for teacher-training had been negligible in the eighteen-thirties; by the early eighteen-fifties there were 40 colleges in England and Wales.⁴² In 1842 there were 142 certified teachers; twelve years later there were 12,604.⁴³ These developments inevitably challenged the status and authority of autodidacts who offered to teach others. In 1887 William Billington received a telling tribute. William Whitaker, his friend and biographer, said that he had 'done more to stimulate a lust for literature by his lectures, classes, and private intercourse than any other unprofessional man in the town'.⁴⁴

It must be emphasized that educational self-help did not disappear in the eighteen-fifties. The decline was gradual and there were new initiatives. Friendly and co-operative societies made significant contributions to adult education in North Lancashire in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some lodges and societies provided classes, lectures and library facilities. The Oddfellows established a literary institute in Preston and supported Sunday schools in East Lancashire. By 1877 the Rochdale Co-operative Society had fourteen libraries and a labora-

tory.⁴⁵ The importance of such activities should not be over-exaggerated, however; it is clear that the provision of facilities for adult education was generally regarded as, at best, a minor function of these societies. In 1871 Lancashire had a population of 2,819,495; about one million of these were friendly society members yet the educational work of these organizations was extremely fragmentary. Society officers were often poorly educated. In 1874 E.L. Stanley described the problems of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows : 'the greatest difficulty this and other orders have to contend with is the want of education in the lodge secretaries'.⁴⁶ The Co-operative Wholesale Society urged local societies to devote 2.5 per cent of their net profits to educational activities but many were unable or unwilling to do so. T. Kelly has pointed out that 'only a minority of co-operative societies at this time made any significant contribution to adult education'; it may be added that those which did resembled mechanics' institutes rather than mutual improvement societies .⁴⁷

Trade unions tried to promote adult education in Lancashire in this period. Union leaders were often well-educated men and senior officials had to pass competitive examinations.⁴⁸ In the eighteen-seventies a weavers' institute was established in Preston and spinners' institutes appeared in Preston and Blackburn. The Cotton Factory Times began publication in 1885 and the eighteen-eighties witnessed the formation of weavers' newsrooms and mutual improvement societies. The educational work of the cotton trade unions had real value but was modest in

relation to their size. In the eighteen-seventies Preston had a small weavers' institute and 15,000 weavers. It is likely that such institutes catered for the educational and social needs of union officials and a small minority of committed union members. P. Joyce has pointed out that, 'With many trade unionists the social life the union offered was vestigial'.⁴⁹

In the late nineteenth century self-help was most frequently associated with material prosperity and security. The educational dimension of self-help did not disappear but it was increasingly marginalized. This is clearly illustrated by the nature and extent of the educational work of friendly and co-operative societies and trade unions. Their modest activities were a poor substitute for the spontaneous, informal, and often radical self-help organizations which had been so numerous in North Lancashire in the eighteen-thirties and - forties.

NOTES

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9. Ibid., p. 117.
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46. Ibid, Friendly Societies, pp. 63-64, 47.

47. History of Adult Education, pp. 208-210.
48. William Crossley, Secretary of the Blackburn Powerloom Weavers Association, is a good example of a self-educated union leader; see Blackburn Times, 13 February, 20 February 1875. For the qualities of union officials see Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, p. 83.
49. Work Society and Politics, pp. 291-292.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

Historians sometimes imply that autodidacts were isolated individuals who pursued knowledge in the teeth of opposition from relatives, neighbours, and friends.¹ The evidence from North Lancashire lends little support to this view. From the eighteen-twenties to the eighteen-fifties educational self-help was a familiar - almost commonplace - activity in this area. Autodidacts were found in public houses as well as mechanics' institutes. Self-educated men and women were extremely numerous and were engaged in a wide range of related activities. In 1851 Burnley had a total population of 14,706.² About a third of these were Sunday school scholars; it is known that 700 youths between the ages of fifteen and twenty attended these schools.³ The town had a Mechanics' Institute, a Church of England Literary Institution, and a Wesleyan Literary Institution; these had a total membership of 642.⁴ The Burnley Union contained twenty evening schools for adults; these catered for the needs of 690 scholars.⁵ It is likely that Burnley had one or more mutual improvement or scientific societies at this time. In 1852 the Burnley Secular Society had 28 members.⁶ Some adults were undoubtedly members of more than one institute, school, or society, but it is highly likely that most of the town's inhabitants had some experience of educational self-help.

Access to adult education was not restricted to the members of a small close-knit intellectual élite. Knowledge was widely regarded as the birthright of all. Only a minority of Burnley's 'readers' could have been familiar with the works of John Milton, Thomas Paine, and Robert Owen, but the labours of these dedicated autodidacts were probably intelligible to most of the members of their community. Most people probably felt that the reading of literary and political works was a praiseworthy and commendable activity even though few had the enthusiasm or commitment of a William Billington or Joseph Livesey.⁷ The struggle to read and write was the greatest hurdle faced by most autodidacts and self-help, however, directed, received general approval within the community.

Although slightly more females attended Sunday school classes than males, it is clear that the members of mechanics' institutes, Church institutes, and literary and philosophical societies were overwhelmingly male. Women were encouraged to attend classes in order to learn basic skills; they were not encouraged to develop literary, scientific, and philosophical interests. To some extent this reflected the patriarchal nature of the Victorian family - a characteristic that may have been particularly marked in parts of northern England. Many men undoubtedly felt that their wives and daughters were incapable of real intellectual improvement. Most women probably accepted this situation; they were usually free to join mechanics' institutes or write poetry but very few seem to have done so. Women were also obliged to consider their reputations.

Arguing about Lord Byron or Thomas Paine in a beerhouse was hardly compatible with the Victorian ideal of femininity, and an unescorted respectable woman could not have joined a group of young male secularists in a Blackburn hay-loft to discuss politics and religion. Women were able to attend Sunday schools because these institutions had enough students to provide segregated classes.

Some historians have tried to interpret the provision of adult education in terms of social control or class conflict. Scholars such as S. Shapin and B. Barnes have argued that mechanics' institutes were established to promote and extend middle-class cultural hegemony within their communities.⁸ B. Simon appears to accept this view of mechanics' institutes and argues that radicals established independent institutions which were 'a challenge to the very conception that the middle class should monopolize and control the workers' education in their own interests'.⁹ J. Foster has claimed that Oldham's 'bourgeoisie' encouraged adult education in the eighteen-fifties as part of a wider strategy to 'reconstruct the labour force in ways which would isolate the working-class vanguard'.¹⁰ Other scholars have described and analysed the establishment and growth of educational institutions in terms of the 'social legitimization' of 'marginal men'. I. Inkster, for instance, has argued that mechanics' institutes and literary and philosophical societies were founded by and for professional men who did not enjoy secure social positions within their local communities.¹¹

The evidence from North Lancashire provides little support for these interpretations. The various institutions, societies and informal groups which existed in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century were sometimes conscious rivals but usually complemented each other. Adult education in this area was essentially a co-operative, collaborative enterprise founded on a common culture which greatly prized educational self-help. There was no logical progression from one society or institution to another but there was a degree of specialization. Sunday schools, for instance, were primarily concerned with elementary instruction while literary and philosophical societies facilitated the most advanced study. Individuals were faced with 'networks' or 'configurations of education'.¹² They obtained the educations they wanted, at the pace they required, and from the organizations which suited them.

The various manifestations of educational self-help were all, to some extent at least, products of a local culture. Although mutual improvement societies were more obviously the creations of local people than literary and philosophical societies, most forms of adult education ultimately relied on popular support. Although some received the patronage of the affluent, and were probably grateful for donations of money, books, and even rooms, they were unable to survive without the subscriptions and active assistance of their members. There was at least the semblance of a free market in adult education and few of the purveyors could afford to alienate their customers.

Even comparatively well-equipped institutions had to compete with mutual improvement societies which were often independent and could allow their members intellectual freedom and a chance to study at their own pace. No organization could take its members for granted. If it failed to satisfy them they would go elsewhere.

North Lancashire's lively culture of educational self-help was the product of several factors. The most important of these appears to have been the presence of a substantial middling class. This class supported a wide range of educational activities and united educated and intelligent members of many trades and professions. It is likely that educational self-help was less common in towns like Oldham which had two major classes.¹³ Class conflict flickered only occasionally in North Lancashire in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and therefore made only a minor contribution to the history of adult education in this area.

Adult education was also encouraged by urban conditions in this period. The rapidly expanding towns of early Victorian Lancashire were dismal, violent, and overcrowded places. Their inhabitants worked long hours and had few opportunities for recreation. Educated and intelligent members of all social classes sought to promote educational institutions which would be refuges for themselves and centres for the diffusion of knowledge and civilizing influences within their communities. Many people supported the establishment of churches, chapels,

and temperance institutes for broadly similar reasons. The towns of North Lancashire were also small; it was possible to cross most of them on foot in less than an hour.

Serious autodidacts could hardly avoid meeting each other and it was comparatively easy for them to see each other regularly. They were assisted by the factory system, improved communications, and by the near-absence of residential segregation.¹⁴ Members of all social classes spent much of their lives in near proximity¹⁵ and this encouraged co-operation in educational matters.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of adult education in this period was the contrast between the achievements of autodidacts and their personal circumstances. Most self-educated men lived and studied in conditions which would now be regarded as hopelessly inadequate. They worked long hours and lived in homes which were small, overcrowded, and poorly-lit. Many had illiterate parents and no formal educations. Few could even afford newspapers. Despite these major difficulties, a significant proportion gained impressive educations, and published books, articles, and poems. These men also assumed much of the responsibility for the diffusion of knowledge within their communities. Schools were established in beershops and mutual improvement societies met in hay-lofts and private houses. It may be tentatively suggested that material well-being and institutional support are not always ideal foundations for educational achievements. It is certainly the case that many autodidacts faced and overcame their difficulties in a manner that was little short of heroic.

Educational self-help is often seen as a poor substitute for formal instruction in schools and colleges. It must be emphasized that self-help did not mean no help. Autodidacts taught and assisted each other; most successful scholars were learners and teachers. In 1843 Accrington's Sunday schools provided work for 508 teachers; ¹⁶ many of these were undoubtedly autodidacts who wished to put their knowledge and intellectual skills to good use. Self-educated amateur teachers were often criticized but it is likely that their enthusiasm for learning at least partially compensated for their lack of formal training. It is also possible that a desire to teach was a major source of the enthusiasm felt by many autodidacts.

The work of scholars such as R.K. Webb and D. Vincent suggests that self-educated men could be found in all parts of early-Victorian Britain. ¹⁷ North Lancashire clearly did not enjoy a monopoly. The activities of autodidacts seem to have reached a peculiar level of intensity in this area, however, and their concerns seem to have been primarily intellectual rather than political. It is apparent that adult education varied from area to area, and that it cannot be adequately analysed in isolation from the communities within which it occurred and the networks which linked people and institutions.

NOTES

1. 'Although readers would sooner or later need to make contact with each other if they were to make the most of their limited opportunities, their activity demanded as much privacy as they could obtain ... the range of beliefs and activities which became associated with the pursuit of knowledge set in motion a permanent crisis of personal relations between the readers and those with whom they lived and worked'; D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography (1982 edition, first published 1981), pp. 182-183.
2. Census of Great Britain, 1851; Population Tables: North Western Division, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, LXXXVI, p. 46.
3. A. Treadwell, 'Religious Provision of Schools in Burnley, 1800-1870' (unpublished M. Ed. dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1974), p. 24.
4. Census of Great Britain, 1851, Education, England and Wales, PP, 1852-53, XC, pp. 244-245.
5. Ibid., p. 39.
6. Reasoner, 27 October 1852.
7. Serious autodidacts seem to have enjoyed considerable social status within their communities. 'When a fluent reader of the daily newspaper was wont to be thought a "great scholar" and "a far-learned man", the influence and prestige of self-educated working men among their class gave them a social importance out of all proportion to their numbers'; J.F.C. Harrison, Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51 (1979 edition, first published 1971), p. 167.
8. 'Science, Nature and Control : Interpreting Mechanics' Institutes', Social Studies of Science, 7 (1977).
9. The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870 (1974 edition, first published 1960), p. 217.
10. Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (1977 edition, first published 1974), p. 250; see also pp. 211, 224.
11. 'Science and the Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850: The Case of Sheffield', Annals of Science, 31 (1975); 'The Social Context of an Educational Movement : A Revisionist Approach to the English Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850', Oxford Review of Education, 2, No. 3 (1976).

12. L. Cremin, Public Education (New York, 1976), p. 30; 'Each of the institutions within a configuration interacts with the others and with the larger society that sustains it and that is then affected by it. Configurations of education also interact, as configurations, with the society of which they are part'.
13. Foster, Class Struggle, passim.
14. The factory system enabled autodidacts to meet each other. William Billington met 'Ned' Whittle, another self-educated man and a future trade union leader, when both were employed as weavers at a factory in Blackburn's Jubilee Street; they remained friends for many years. See Blackburn Standard, 6 October 1883. There is evidence that poor communications inhibited educational self-help in other areas; see R.A. Lowe, 'Mutual Improvement in the Potteries', North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies, 12 (1972), p. 75.
15. Employment was concentrated in the towns and most autodidacts had to live near their work. This situation was eventually transformed by improved communications, suburbanization, and social mobility. In 1939 the 'Mass Observation' study of Bolton observed that, 'There are very few "upper class" people : there is a constant tendency for people who are economically or intellectually successful to leave the town and the district'; The Pub and the People: A Worktown Study (1987 edition, first published 1943) p. 18. Cf. R. Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (1958 edition, first published 1957), p. 336 : 'the intellectual minority, with particular effect during the latter part of the nineteenth century, used to stay within the working classes more than it does today. Its members formed some of the fermenting elements in their groups, and were an important part of that "working-class movement" which helped to bring about considerable improvements in the material lot and status of all working-class people'.
16. Edward Baines, junior, The Social, Educational and Religious State of the Manufacturing Districts (1843), p. 43.
17. The British Working-Class Reader, 1790-1848 (1955), passim; Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, passim.

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APPENDIX

MAPS AND GRAPHS

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MAP ONE

NORTH LANCASHIRE IN 1851

Hills and Towns

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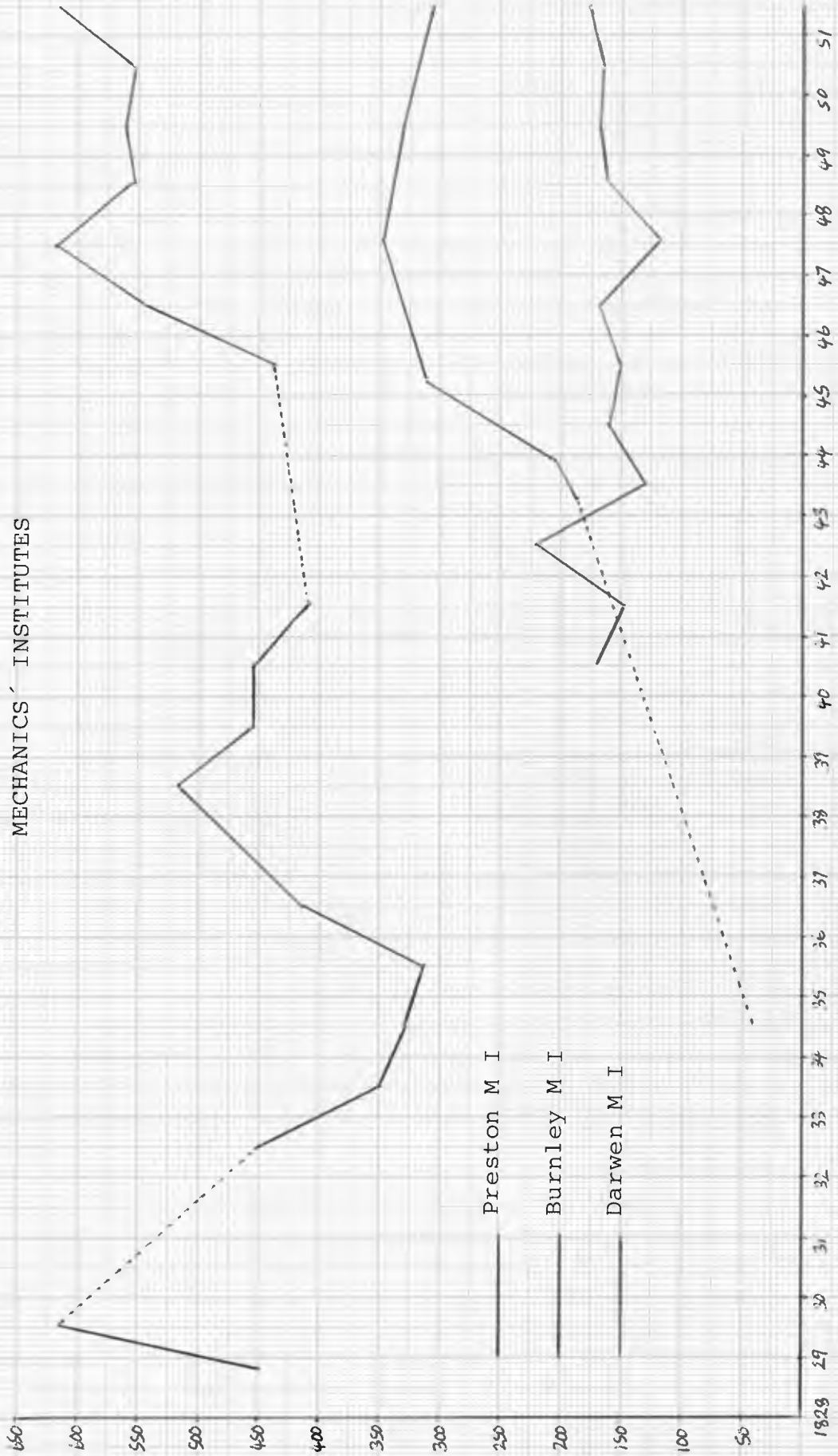
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NORTH LANCASHIRE IN 1851

Railways and Main Roads

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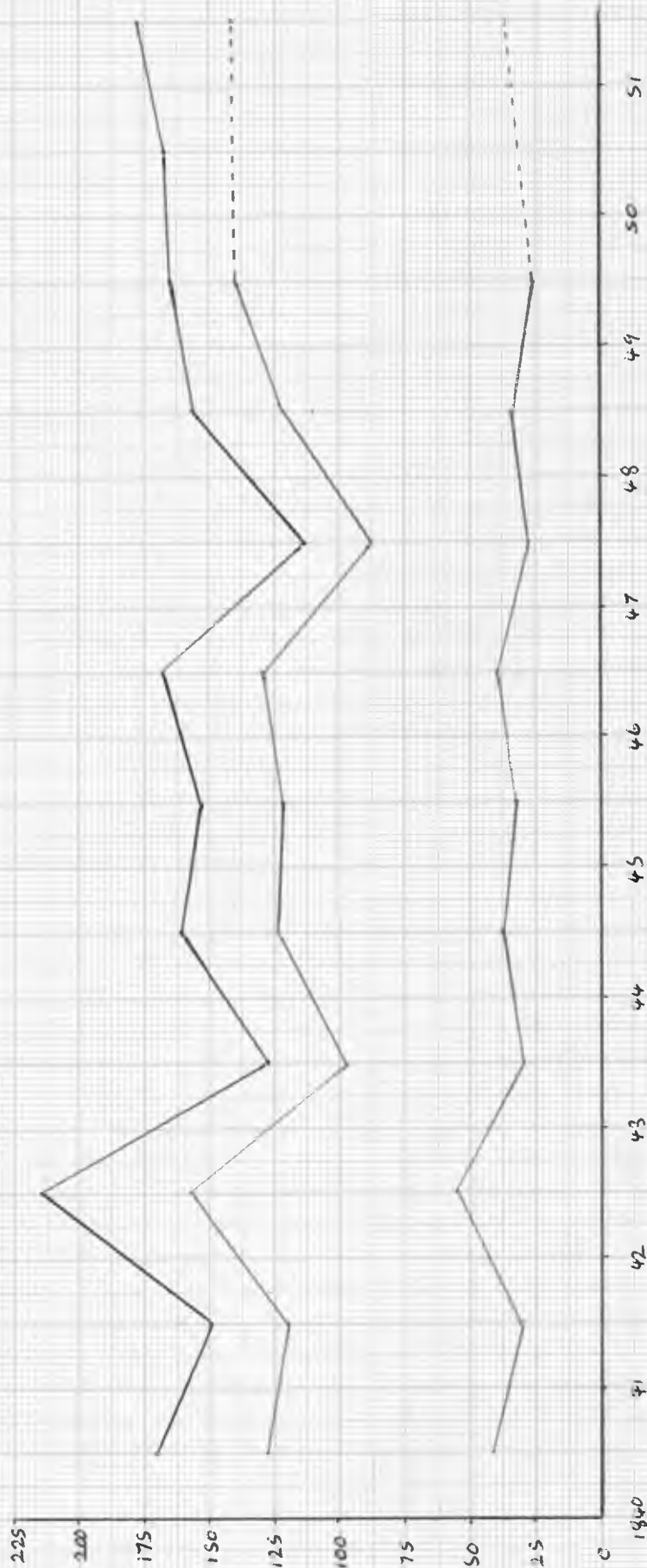
GRAPH ONE
 THE MEMBERSHIPS OF THREE
 MECHANICS' INSTITUTES



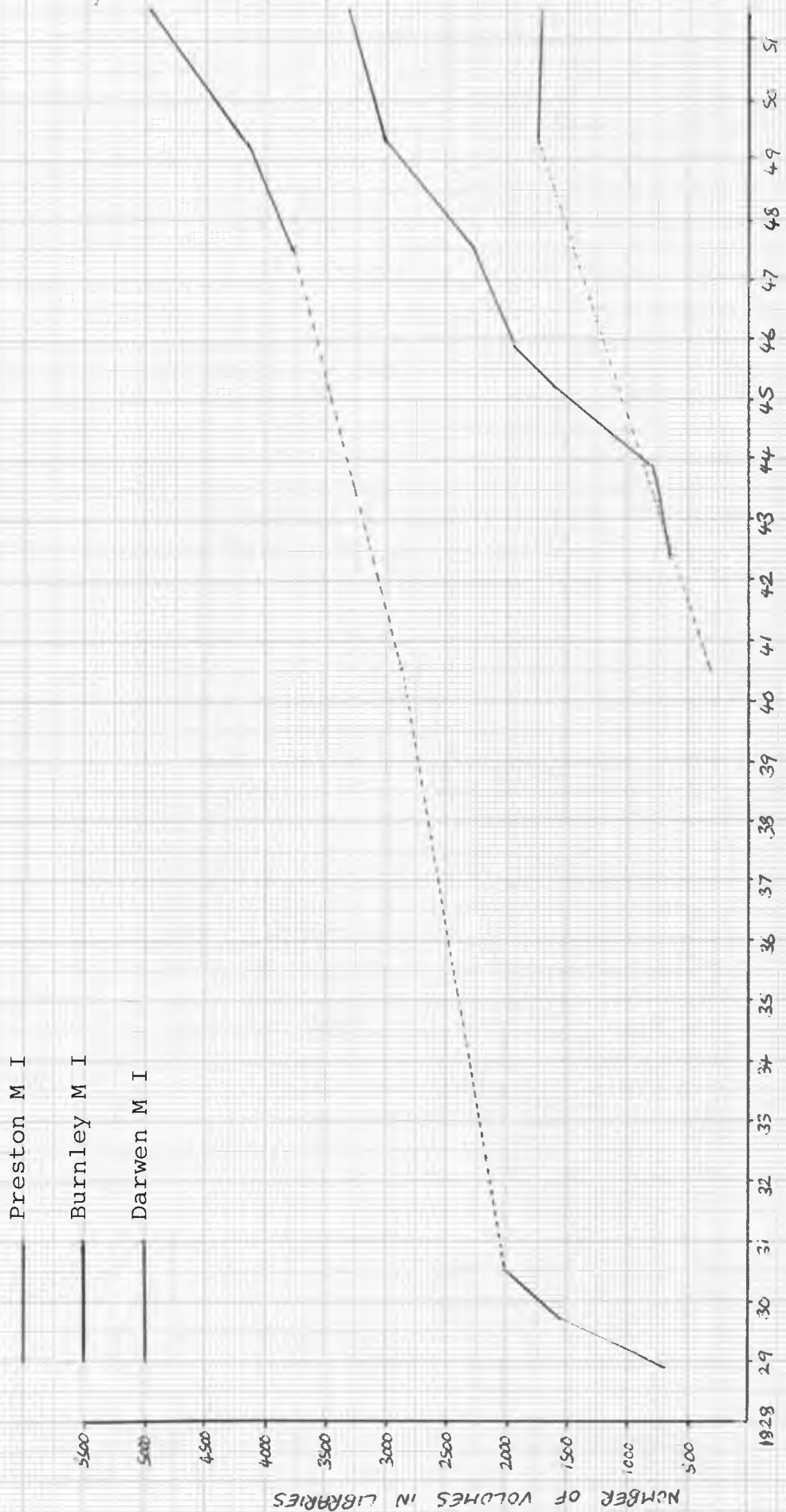
GRAPH TWO

DARWEN MECHANICS INSTITUTE:
'ORDINARY' AND 'HONORARY' MEMBERS

— All Members
— Ordinary Members
— Honorary Members



GRAPH THREE
THE LIBRARIES OF THREE
MECHANICS' INSTITUTES



Sources for Graphs : Select Committee on Public Libraries, Parliamentary Papers, 1849, XVII, pp. 22, 311-314; Census of Great Britain, 1851, Education, England and Wales, PP, 1852-53, XC, pp. 242-45; Darwen Public Library, Darwen Mechanics' Institute Annual Reports, Q431, pp. 34-142; Thomas Coates, Report of the State of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions in England (1841), pp. 96-100; J. Mannex, History, Topography and Directory of the Borough of Preston (Preston, 1851), p. 40; Lancaster Gazette, Blackburn Standard, and Preston Chronicle.