"Strawopolis"
The Transformation of Luton
1840 – 1876

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Abstract

Luton's development in the nineteenth century was largely governed by the fortunes of the straw hat industry, studies of the workings of which have already been produced (Dony 1941, Pindar 1970). The reason for the ascendancy of Luton, an unimportant market town with communications inferior to its neighbours, has never been explained convincingly. This thesis contends that the fundamental reason for Luton's swift dominance, and consequent rapacious urbanisation, lay with the abundance of freehold building ground which became available from the 1830s. This allowed for the widespread growth of the domestic production units which were the distinctive feature of the hat industry in Luton in its earliest phase.

It was not only the economic base of Luton that was transformed: the abandonment of the market town by a substantial proportion of its landowning elite left a vacuum which was filled by a new generation of entrepreneurs who can loosely be placed within the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, and by a small number of larger manufacturers, professionals and theologians. United by politics (overwhelmingly Liberal) and by religious denomination (nonconformists outnumbered anglicans by a ratio of three to one in 1851), these two groups frequently possessed differing perceptions as to how Luton should develop.

New institutions and ethics were also required to replace those obliterated with the market town. The new ethos which emanated from the chapels, and the sheer necessity for public improvements, revealed a stark dichotomy with the prevailing spirit of opportunistic enterprise upon which the town was built. Only divisions within the petty bourgeoisie allowed for the development of institutions which can be regarded as the hallmark of a stable and mature society. Often undertaken against a backdrop of bitter acrimony, public improvements were driven on by an active minority, culminating with incorporation as a borough in 1876. This accolade was achieved in the face of widespread indifference from the majority of Luton's citizens.
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It is with considerable regret that the death of Dr. John Dony before first drafts of this thesis deprived me of his unique depth of knowledge of Luton and its economy but I nonetheless will remain eternally grateful not only for his published work but for the insight into the workings of the town that he was able to convey in various conversations which we held. My colleague Marian Nichols, the Keeper of Social History provided helpful observations and comments and Alan Taylor, Chris Grabham and Mark McCall gave enormous assistance in the printing and editing of this thesis.

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<td>ag. lab.</td>
<td>agricultural labourer</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Luton is very much a twentieth century success story, recording a population which tripled between 1901 and 1951 on the back of rapidly expanding engineering industries which planted themselves in the town in the century's first decade. The momentum of this growth was carried through the inter-war period when the town became a magnet for migrating workers, many of whom came from the depressed regions of Britain. As such, Luton was one of a number of urban centres whose social and economic structure were conducive to further levels of growth.

To understand the reasons behind the rapid expansion of towns and cities such as Oxford, Slough, Coventry and Luton during the early twentieth century requires an appreciation of the root causes which lay in the century before. The structure of land ownership, the nature of the regional economy, the strength of communications and the composition of new populations - the concentration of economic, political and cultural power, and in turn their causes - all have to be investigated in order to build a clear picture of the causes and effect of what, it is little exaggeration to claim, was a revolutionary economic and social transformation. In a wider context, comparative study of similar urban centres is not easy. There still remains insufficient published work on the smaller cities and towns of England with most effort being carried out amongst the rich seam of London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham, with more occasional studies of places such as Newcastle, Bradford, Nottingham or Bristol. Notwithstanding the scholarly excellence of much of this research it therefore becomes difficult to compare Luton, the chosen town of this thesis, with other similar urban areas since each is a distinctive entity with its own peculiar social and economic make-up, possessing also a unique relationship with other populations in the vicinity. Studies on the smaller towns between 1840 and 1875, the formative years of modern Luton, tend to be very few and far between, frequently concentrating upon individual features - a Board of Health in Heaton, carpet making in Kidderminster and so on, rendering parallel comparisons over a thirty five year period nigh on impossible. Much work remains to be done on the numerous smaller urban centres before broad conclusions in a number of areas (such as the evolution of workshop industries, the involvement of the petty bourgeoisie in local politics or the nature of small scale property ownership) can be made.

Luton does not offer itself up for comparison at another level: its rate of growth was such that long term juxtaposition with other towns is simply not possible. For example in 1821 Luton bore much in common with nearby Leighton Buzzard both being market towns in the straw plaiting region of the south east midlands with roughly equal populations (2986 and 2749 respectively): forty years later Luton was four times the size of its near neighbour. Other towns which were larger than Luton in 1821 such as Hemel Hempstead or Hitchin were barely half its size in 1871 (see graph below). The 1851 census returns reveal that Luton was already bigger than more than half the municipal boroughs in England and Wales.

Further afield towns such as Canterbury offer only fleeting opportunities for comparison as Luton's population swiftly rises from behind to first match and then surpass them. Centres such as Oxford, Leicester or Coventry present interesting common perspectives on economic
progress over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a whole, but the latter two in particular offer numerous divergences, especially being on a bigger scale. For other towns such as Peterborough which might present a greater number of parallels there remains, as already stated, insufficient data at present. Luton's experience was too dissimilar on too many levels for a useful comparison to be made. To grab at random a clutch of towns (for example Chester, Honiton or Burnley) just because one perhaps possessed a cottage industry and another a strong local Liberal party, even if there existed accessible source material, would be pointless.

The story of modern Luton is very much the story of the middle class, and in particular the ranks of shopkeepers, small masters and traders who, more than any other class collectively formulated the town's economic and social composition. A German visitor to Luton in 1835 felt moved to write:

I have now had the opportunities to be convinced how incorrect the assertion so constantly repeated on the continent, is, that in England there are only rich people and beggars. In no other country perhaps is a very prosperous middle class so numerous as in England; and this class, in which industry, integrity, simplicity and purity of morals, and a truly religious spirit prevail, forms the real healthy heart of the nation, and gives it such extraordinary vigour.

This, the visitor attributed to the fact that for "nearly 800 years, England has not seen (at least for any length of time) any foreign enemy". His abiding impression of "extraordinary vigour" and a "very prosperous middle class" (albeit in a very middling sort of way) is certainly one which shines through Luton in the nineteenth century, although had he taken a closer look at the town he may well have wished to qualify assessment with regards to the "purity of morals". Richard Cobden did not know Luton well, and so when he described it as "the Manchester of Bedfordshire" he was not drawing any precise comparisons with the great pioneering industrial city but rather was referring in general terms to the busy spirit of the town, an enterprising centre of industry which operated free from the influence of the aristocracy. Working-class activity remained disorganised, disregarded and unrecorded, the aristocracy represented only by a steadily diminishing land holding around the town, and the gentry largely remote from most aspects of local life. Even within the local middle class there were no examples of major industrialists, men who measured their employees in the high hundreds or thousands and whose personal wealth could be measured in the tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds. There were no example of men who exercised great sway over local politics and perhaps who aspired toward the aristocracy itself either through personal advancement or through marriage. Luton became a town characterised by a small number of medium-sized manufacturers and a vast number of independent, small-scale units producing goods and services.

It is here that the first problem lies in researching Luton, accounting for its economic development and assessing this effect upon its evolving institutions, character and values. There has been, as Crossick writes, an "unease" about accounting for the petty bourgeoisie in Britain, caused in part by a problem of generic definition, the blurring of the lines between the artisan
and the independent outworker at one end of the spectrum, and between the scale of production which marks a division between species of middle class at the other. This stands in stark contrast with the continent and is made more difficult in the British context by the absence of data and primary sources of information. Consequently after the culmination of Chartism, the British petty bourgeoisie often appear as a negative deadweight, baulking at reform promoted by the liberal bourgeoisie, a group with whom many modern historians would probably share a natural affinity. This does the lower middle class scant justice, failing to allow for their own personal struggles, tenuous economic stability and a feeling of social isolation brought about by the solitary nature of many of their occupations and long hours of work.

With fewer mechanisms than other classes for social and political organisation, the petty bourgeoisie remain a grey area in British history, one which does not present an inviting area of study. In Luton, a town principally built upon the activities of the middle class this presents awkward obstacles. Of the other significant group, the class of larger builders, manufacturers and professionals there at least survives some small amount of data upon which to build an assessment of their contribution to their time - Literary Society records, a history of freemasonry in Luton, chapel histories, handbills and campaign posters, some company records, and above all newspapers, dominated by the terminology, attitudes and correspondence of the upper strata of the local middle class. For the petty bourgeoisie, leaving no tangible evidence of their lives and work (save for a dwindling number of dwellings in the centre of the town) the task is far more difficult, leading one perilously toward conjecture and class stereotyping. This would be markedly at odds with the sense of individualism which was so potent in Luton, certainly far more so than any notion of collectiveness, be it social, religious, parochial or political.

It is almost impossible to enter the minds of individuals who left few clues as to their unique aspirations and values, no diaries, no personal correspondence, no business and property records, not even a short letter to the local paper. Literacy levels were poor and business deals were frequently made verbally, especially in the straw hat trade, with even big manufacturers such as Edmund Waller or John Everitt preferring to travel personally to various markets in order to purchase straw plait. Waller would rise early each Wednesday, walk the several miles to Dunstable market in order to buy plait and would carry a quantity of it on his back on the return journey, arriving back in Luton by 8 am in order to open his drapers business. Everitt, who evidently worked for the Wallers in some capacity, would also attend Dunstable market and return with the plait in a "capital strong cob and trap." The modern town of Luton is the only, if appropriate, tactual legacy of the lives of these men and women. Much of what occurred is hidden in a network of personal relationships, family connections, social, business, political and religious links which crossed and re-crossed one another within the small town. The late John Dony, recalling late Victorian and Edwardian Luton, claimed that the town did need not a Borough Council: during the day it was possible to walk down George Street past the hat warehouse of Asher Huckleby - Liberal, Congregationalist, self-made man and five times Mayor of Luton. There one might see Huckleby and a handful of Luton's other great and good discussing various affairs of the town on the steps of his premises. Aside from illustrating the power which a handful of manufacturers were able to exert over the town at the turn of the
century, a feature far less pronounced in mid-Victorian Luton, this anecdote also indicates that
discussion, debate and decision were frequently made beyond the forum of public office - and not
in secret. This fact would have applied to an even greater extent in mid-nineteenth century
Luton, a smaller town, bereft of an all-encompassing local authority. The biographical notes in
the appendix hopefully will illuminate part of the tangled web of personal connections in the
town.

Luton is a difficult town to fathom and for all its economic buoyancy assessments of the
place have always been at best, mixed. Deprived of easily appreciated distinguishing features - a
harbour, coastline, slums, cathedral, medieval streets, university, peculiar social customs - it
presents a bland perspective to visitor and resident alike. Unable to understand the motor which
drives the town many outsiders resort to cheap sneers:

Luton is an easy place to have nothing to do with. Drive past on the M1 and you
won't [sic] register much more than an urban smudge amid the green of
Bedfordshire. Arrive by train on your way to the airport, and the diesel-belching
Luton Flyer bus offers little in the way of views beyond multi-storey car parks and
ring roads. 5

Other descriptions have been even less kind: "Luton has an airport. It is situated on the
highest point of the gigantic rubbish heap that the town has become....Its airport lounges should
be fitted with signs announcing, "Welcome to Luton, the trash capital of the British Isles". 6 For
the indigenous population, resentful though they may be at perpetual lampooning, their own
complaints bear a marked degree of consistency. In modern terminology Luton is often described
as "a dump", its suburbs sprawled around a featureless town centre, cultural facilities pushed to
the fringe and the handful of distinctive buildings which the town ever possessed, mostly
demolished. Luton has a significant proportion of immigrants, although the numbers are
exaggerated in the popular imagination, a factor which also applies to the perceived crime rate
within the town. The evident absence of a sense of communal identity is manifested in many
different spheres - even when in the First Division Luton Town Football Club attracts pitifully
few spectators to its embarrassingly shoddy stadium. A tradition of a relatively high proportion
of home owner occupancy is reflected in the home orientated nature of the town's facilities - a
proliferation of DIY stores (almost every major retailer has at least one branch within the Luton
environs) and video rental shops. A London woman who was evacuated with her children to
Luton in 1939 complained "Heaven preserve me from ever becoming like Lutonians. I never met
such a snobbish, selfish, unfriendly, rude lot in all my life. All they think about is their houses.
House-proud, that's their trouble". 7 By eight PM the town centre is largely deserted, even at
weekends. 8

This sense of disenchantment with the town persists in spite of its many good features,
or at least absence of negative ones. There are no slums in Luton, indeed never were on a scale
experienced by bigger towns such as Nottingham. The town's industries thrive, even during
periods of recession the town has been markedly less affected than other manufacturing centres,
and it sits advantageously at the hub of an air and land communications network. Since the early
nineteenth century Luton has been a place to which thousands have migrated in search of work and housing, a testimony to the fact that for all its shortcomings it is regarded as at least preferable to from whence they came. In an effort to counter dissatisfaction within the town local authorities have undertaken various schemes for improvement which occasionally have betrayed a misunderstanding of Luton's heritage. That ubiquitous panacea, the civic centre, finds itself wedged into every conceivable corner of the town centre (and sometimes beyond) regardless of whether there exits any real demand for such a centre that would ensure that it would be sufficiently patronised. With the ideas for such houses built upon sand, it is not surprising that Luton's repositories are steadily acquiring a developing archive of improvement schemes which were either compromised out of all recognition with the original plan, or never travelled beyond the discussion phase.

It has occurred to few people that Luton is a congenital product of its own economic and social heritage and that it has not suddenly acquired its negative features through a recent aberration. It would be a small consolation to Lutonians (and perhaps instructive for planners) to discover that people have for long been complaining about its perceived defects - its brash pursuit of wealth, its lack of architectural beauty, paucity of recreational facilities, absence of careful planning and preparedness to sacrifice evidence of its past for the sake of the present. All of these have been noted and commented upon. Even in the century before industrialisation descriptions of the town were so varied that it is difficult to believe that they were talking about the same place. Thus we find that "North East of Dunstable is Luton, a pretty little Market-Town, pleasantly seated amongst Hills. It has a large Market House and a very great Market on Monday" (1715). We also find in contemporary descriptions that it is "pleasantly situated between two hills" (1764) but that Arthur Young felt "If the Earl of Bute's park at Luton Hoo was not an inducement, there certainly could be none to visit that town: Notwithstanding the wretched roads I was forced to crawl through" (1769). Luton is both a "handsome town" (1772) and a "long dirty market town of one street, meanly built" (1776). Luton is a "small dirty town" (1782), a "considerable market town" (1806), "irregularly built" (1819), "tolerably, but very irregularly built" (1827) and a "poor town" which "evinced marks of decadency" (1828).

Most detailed descriptions of the market town in the early nineteenth century are drawn from the recollections of Lutonians recorded at a later date. Little is known of the medieval town but the extent of the urban area (known as the township) which lay within the large parish of Luton had grown little since at least the late seventeenth century. Luton was basically two main streets from which five others, plus a number of lanes and courtyards, also ran.

From the Luton Hoo northward ran Park Road and Park Street which at its northern extremity was the Long Pond, stagnant and smelly, with Church Street running away at an angle of ninety degrees to the right. Veering to the left from the Long Pond Park Street was joined at Market Hill to George Street, and further to the left, Castle Street - the beginning of the road to St. Albans and London. At its northern end (at Cross Hill) George Street divided into a "Y" shape with Dunstable Lane to the left and Tower Hill to the right. Until 1832 the road to Bedford left Tower Hill opposite a tavern known as the "Red Cow", crossing the River Lea. Castle Street and
Hog Lane, which ran parallel with it approximately seventy five yards away, were only developed to a limited extent. On its south western side Luton was overlooked by the Dallow Hills, to the immediate south lay the parks of Stockwood and Luton Hoo, and across the northern and eastern edge of the urban area lay the Great Moor. Through this ran the River Lea which although at this point was not very substantial, occasionally burst its banks during heavy rain - sometimes with loss of life.¹⁰

Frederick Davis in the first edition of his "History of Luton" wrote of his home town at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

Luton a little more than half a century ago was a dirty town, with streets narrow and low, so that there were few places in which two carts could pass each other; there were banks on each side, covered with grass, in almost every part of the town; the houses were generally very low and overhanging in front about two feet, many of them thatched.¹¹

Since Davis was not born until 1815 many of the details which he gave were beyond his recollection. His sources probably included elderly Lutonians and perhaps a survey of the town from 1804.¹² This, plus Davis' account shed light upon the very rural nature of the town at this time; George Street contained four farms and a row of trees. A large chestnut tree stood near to the site of the present Town Hall. Davis' recollection was reinforced by a contemporary: successive letters to the Bedford Times in 1848 lamented the passing of "old Luton", a town of "houses with overhanging stories, mossy tiles, open gutters..." and also apparently stocks, still functioning in the first quarter of the nineteenth century but derelict by this time.¹³

An account of the development of Luton from market town to manufacturing centre is essentially an account of a town building itself upon the fortunes of the straw hat industry. John Dony's seminal work, tracing the growth and structure of the trade, and the reasons for its concentration in the South East Midlands, leaves further account largely superfluous, but stemming from this a number of questions remain to be answered: starkest of all, and the starting point for this study is simply, why Luton?¹⁴ The town was only one of a number of similar sized market towns, St. Albans, Dunstable and Hitchin being the most notable, which at face value also possessed the potential to become the centres of the trade. Yet despite possessing decidedly inferior communications until the late 1850s, Luton swiftly outgrew its immediate neighbours (see graph below).¹⁵ The underlying reasons for this are examined in chapter one together with an account of the physical growth of the town, one which was devoid of planning and which in the early stages at least was little short of anarchic. The facilitator for this development, and the decisive difference in accounting for the growth of the town, was the nature of the local land market. Bereft of local authority control and with major landowners (in particular the Marquess of Bute) departing the town, speculators were encouraged to rush in, pressure consequently increasing upon the remaining undeveloped land to be released for building.
For very nearly three-quarters of the nineteenth century the story of Luton's straw hat trade is one of the development of a seasonal cottage industry which represented perhaps seventy five percent of total production, working both independently and in conjunction with the handful of larger factories who directly employed 100 or more persons. This industry is frustratingly devoid of data and the records of the workings of even these large organisations are scant; even the largest however, such as Willis', Vyse's, Welch's and Munt and Brown would directly employ no more than 500 or so at their factories at the peak of activity, although this would be supplemented by a small army of outworkers. A consequence of this type of economic activity was that it produced two varieties of Lutonian: those who were resident and those who migrated to work just for the "busy" season, usually commencing around October and increasing in intensity from February through to the end of May. This cycle of production was determined by the summer fashion market, both in Britain and abroad, and to a lesser extent by the availability of labour after harvest time. For the latter group, predominantly young and female, Luton's straw hat trade offered wages which were unapproachable in other spheres of employment and plenty of lodgings. For the former, a vast number of whom were also migrants possessing little or no capital, Luton offered myriad economic opportunities - hat manufacture and related activities such as dyeing, blockmaking etc., property speculation and ownership, shopkeeping, retailing and wholesaling.

From this burst of frenetic activity stems two other areas which are worthy of study. Firstly, a new society was created as the existing social and economic elite disintegrated (with the notable exception of the Quaker family of Brown) leaving a new set of values in its wake.
Standards of behaviour, and a growing gulf between classes as to what was acceptable and expected (chapel going and sobriety being two of the most notable) swiftly became evident: also apparent is a divergence of opinion as to the balance between the role of the individual and public authority in determining the town's future. Intermixed with these values was the growing obligation upon the new Lutonians to come to terms with the town which they had helped to create. It fell to the local Board of Health to wrestle with the consequences of economic growth both in the excesses of unrestricted urban development and with the attitudes of a large class of independent producers and sellers who remained suspicious of the intrusion of local authorities upon their lives.

Precisely who controlled Luton is very difficult to answer. In terms of wielding power Luton was essentially a town of the middle class, but it becomes very clear that there was a sharp difference in attitude which carried overtones of inter-class rivalry: the small bourgeoisie of professionals and larger manufacturers tended to be more interventionist, advocating the creation of public bodies (supported from a locally levied rate if needs be) in order to acquire the facilities and trappings commensurate with a modern town. From the much larger petty bourgeoisie, jealously defending its independence and economic gains, there was demonstrated a clear preference to remain unincumbered by local authorities, and, more pertinently, to pay as little rates as possible.

It was therefore the upper middle class who initiated and piloted within Luton the more positive aspects of the Board of Health, the formulation of a railway company, the creation of public utility companies, the provision of education and the achievement of incorporation, changes which were genuinely regarded as being for the good of the town as a whole. Unable for a number of reasons to organise and initiate, sections of the petty bourgeoisie were driven into a reactive role, sometimes passive, sometimes sullen, and just occasionally (when organised by dissenting members of the upper strata) turning upon the promoters with negative, largely inconclusive venom. One can begin to see that an evolving awareness of collective identity was therefore being perceived quite differently by various classes within Luton society. It would be convenient if one could address the issue of the exercise of political power and social control in these clear terms: the waters, however, are murkier than this.

I will argue in the first chapter that it was the fluid land market within Luton which was the catalyst for the establishment of Luton as the centre of the straw hat trade, its nature being favourable to the spawning of the small units of production which gave the town a distinctive, and decisive edge. This however, is in no way to depreciate the contribution made by the Waller family in the late 18th and early 19th century which did so much to establish the base for later expansion. The Wallers were a remarkable family descended from London merchantmen who had long been connected with the manufacture of straw hats. They were related to another London hat manufacturing family, the Whites, and (through marriage with the Whites) also to the Huguenot family of Goujon, an early nineteenth century member of which, Samuel, became involved in the hat trade in High Town, arriving circa 1818 and leasing land there from Edmund Waller.
James Waller settled in Luton during the late 18th century, having at least five sons, Edmund, Thomas, James, John and Robert. All being businessmen of considerable ability, they made an enormous impact upon the small town, with Edmund and Thomas being the most formidable. Edmund, as a draper and hat manufacturer did much to develop the system of "making up" by dealing with sewers who worked within their own cottages, as well as those directly under his employ at his factory. He sold his product through his national (and international) agencies. Whilst Edmund developed the manufacturing side of the trade brother Thomas concentrated upon improving the quality of locally produced straw plait. With supplies of the fine quality Leghorn plait from Tuscany cut off during the Napoleonic Wars, Waller resorted to buying straw plait produced by French Prisoners of War at Yaxley near Peterborough (virtually all of these camps produced straw plait) and experimenting with ways of improving the quality of English plait. Although the production of straw plait by the prisoners was suppressed by the authorities, much work was smuggled out for the Luton merchants by local travellers and tradesmen, often with the connivence of the guards. With the Napoleonic Wars over and the duty upon plait steadily decreasing, Waller twice visited Tuscany (once in 1825) and began importing straws from that region for production of a variety of plaits which he patented.17

It would be most interesting to know precisely why the Wallers chose to come to Luton and to stay there. The town was centrally placed within the straw plaiting district of the South Midlands, but for Thomas Waller at least, not the ideal point from which to operate an illicit trade with the prisoner of war camp at Peterborough; Hitchin, lying near to the Great North Road, or even Shefford, would have been a better location. St Albans lay closer to London. For whatever the reason, the presence of the Wallers, with their commercial contacts with London hat producers and their manufacturing resources, made an enormous influence upon the development of the Luton trade in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, which the land market was able to sustain. In 1826, Vyse's became the first of the big London firms to open a factory in Luton, a year later also opening a branch in Tuscany.

The straw hat trade was flourishing in the Hertfordshire market towns at the same time that Luton's begun to develop. Most places of significant size contained hat production units, many run by women, although how many there were it is not possible to accurately account for. Within small towns such as Hoddesdon, Baldock and Bishop Stortford could be found at least a handful of manufacturers, and larger towns such as Hertford and Hatfield, appreciably more. St Albans possessed eighteen listed hat manufacturers in 1832, against Luton's thirteen (four of these the Wallers) in 1830. At least one London hat manufacture, Thomas Henley of Goodge Street, had also opened a branch factory in St. Albans. Vyse and Sons were also there - by 1854 at least.18

The last encumbrance lies in the paucity of records for Luton. The nature of the town during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, deriving its population from recent immigration, has mitigated against a sense of collective identity, and consequently an appreciation of Luton's heritage - a heritage in which they have played a key role. This has applied not only to Luton's wholesale demolition of older buildings, oblivious to any value save monetary gain, but also in the
total destruction of such personal records which may have been compiled as well as the official records for the town: the surviving papers of the Luton Chamber of Commerce, formed in 1877, were retrieved literally from a skip by staff of Luton Museum as the organisation moved its offices. Parish records are poor and the societies and organisations which were spawned during the mid nineteenth century have for the most part left no evidence of their existence other than reports in local newspapers, upon which this researcher has had to rely more heavily than he would have wished. A significant proportion of those records which were preserved during the nineteenth century were presumably kept, uncatalogued, within the Town Hall, but were mostly destroyed when the building was burnt down during the Peace Day Riot on the night of 19th July 1919. Requests for records are still proffered the lame excuse that the papers were destroyed during the Town Hall fire, even for material which post-dates the event!

One is aware that much of the following thesis is an account of what happened as much as why it happened. Whilst naturally it is vital to avoid an antiquarian ramble through the mid-Victorian era this researcher has been acutely aware of the need to tell the story of the development of a town whose history in this period has not been accounted for hitherto, as well as to analyse the overall causes and seek to establish answers to certain questions which present themselves such as the extent of property ownership or the cycle of recorded crime. It is with some regret however, that I must acknowledge that this approach blunts somewhat the incisiveness that would be carried with a more thematic approach.

Modern Luton, its economy, its society, its institutions, was forged (or more aptly plaited) during the mid nineteenth century. The thesis which follows has to acknowledge failings other than those of the scholar. The paucity of compatible research and more crucially the absence of crucial, and often basic data (such as land prices) inevitably leaves some questions unanswered. What nonetheless follows, is an attempt to account for the cottage economy antecedents of a modern engineering town: not merely its industrial base but also the society, ethics and institutions which were created during the mid nineteenth century.
NOTES


2) Luton Times 12.4.1851


4) Hawkes, Joseph. 'Memory Sketches of Luton'. Published in the Luton Reporter between 1895 and 1897.

5) Sunday Times 15.10.1989. The article was entitled "Who Loves Luton ? ".


6) Luton Borough Council. Gulbenkian "Out of Hours" Study for Luton Town Centre. Draft Report, (1990). History and Heritage Consortium report on feasability of the "Luton Adventure" (1990). In 1981 Luton's total population of 163,209 included 6,591 who originated from Eire (4.04% of total population), 4,589 (2.81%) from Scotland, 2,384 (1.46%) from Wales, 3,302 (2.02%) from the Caribbean, 2,784 (1.70%) from India, 1,487 (0.91%) from Bangladesh and 3,455 (2.11%) from Pakistan. It is certain that a greater number of Lutonians would associate themselves with one of the above groups, particularly the long established Irish, Scots and Poles, even if they themselves were not born in those countries.

The Borough of Luton calculated that in 1988 66% of Lutonians were classified as owner occupiers (above the national average), and that 23% were council tenants (below the national average). Unemployment was approximately 5% (below the national average) and there was a high level of car ownership, unsurprising in a vehicle manufacturing town with a poor public transport network, 62% having access to at least one car.

10) Flooding occurred in 1795, drowning one member of the Brown family, and again in July, 1828, when several houses were damaged so severely they required rebuilding, although fortunately no-one was killed.

11) Davis, Frederick. The History of Luton of Luton with its Hamlets, etc. (1855).

12) 'The Town of Luton in 1804.' Copies of this are held at Luton Museum.


15) I am indebted to Nicola Clarke, the Local History Reference Librarian at Luton Central Library, and Rosie Dugeon and Beryl Housley at St. Albans district Library, for obtaining these statistics.


20) It is difficult to establish what precisely was held within the Town Hall. Although the town already possessed a public library, founded in 1883 and given a new building opposite the Town Hall thanks to financial assistance from Andrew Carnegie in 1911, few records were kept
there. Luton Museum was not established until 1927 - in the Carnegie Library. Medieval Papal Bulls adorned the walls of the Mayors parlour (and were destroyed in the fire) and Board of Health records also resided in the Town Hall, the minute books fortunately surviving the fire.
PART 1. LAND, PROPERTY AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Land was the key to the transformation of Luton from a slightly shabby market town to a manufacturing centre. Luton's growth rested metaphorically as well as literally upon the land around it with the changes in property ownership both reflecting and stimulating a new social structure and attendant institutions within the town itself. This small Bedfordshire town possessed precious few advantages that made it inevitable that it should become the centre of the straw hat trade, and it certainly achieved its dominance without the benefit of an excellent communications network. Rather, a unique blend of factors removed its characteristic market town elite, putting a peculiar new structure in its place, and thus providing the arena in which economic and social transformation could be realised.

It is not entirely satisfactory to compartmentalise a process spanning forty years, one which dictated the pattern, quality and fortunes of thousands of lives. Luton's physical, economic and demographic evolution comprised numerous threads which intertwine and disappear (due to absence of data) like a complicated length of straw plait. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity it is necessary to draw distinct threads from the myriad personal ambitions, activities and experiences which collectively built the town of Luton. The logical starting point for this lies with Luton as the principal centre for the manufacture of straw hats. The supply and demand relationship between the hat trade and land development is of central importance in plotting the progress of a town which developed a variation upon the cottage industry falling somewhere between the two examples which have been exemplified by the *Kaufsystem* and *Verlagsystem*: in Luton's case a mixture of independent small masters and artisans, an extensive putting out system and a significant proportion of property owners in all but the poorest sectors of the population. It is then necessary to answer as to precisely why this should be; the answer lying with the principal local landowners of the early nineteenth century, for it is from the lack of close estate interest which the principal owner exercised that the stage was set for change. Thus far, the weak manorial control exercised by Luton's main landowner certainly within the nineteenth century, and possibly for long before, had consequences both for the form of land tenure and the type of economic structure which came to be built upon it. Tenure reflected the landlord's remoteness, with Luton starkly opposite from the "typical" example of "aristocratic" influence: elaborate settlements, careful planning, a preference for long term secure income from investment. With such influence minimal, the running was made by an army of small local speculators who relentlessly pursued a policy (no doubt from financial necessity) of rapid return from their piecemeal investments. This account will include a brief outline of the process of urban growth.

It is also necessary to look at what exactly this process produced in the way of a living environment. This growth involved much more than the mere grafting of a new town upon an old social structure to be followed then by a degree of mutual assimilation: with the departure of the old property owners a new breed arrived. It is therefore important to look at who these people were who built Luton, and for that matter to identify from which sectors came the speculators and builders.
Chapter 1. A Distinctive Local Economy

The Luton hat trade.

At this point a brief outline of the nature of Luton's hat trade is necessary. During the mid-nineteenth century there were two strands to this with the plaiting of straw undertaken principally in the rural areas, and the production of hats in the town. Plaiting of straw was concentrated in the fertile corn producing region of the south midlands and also in Essex with other plait regions such as Devon, the Lake District and Orkney declining into extinction in the face of reduced import duties from 1842 (they were finally repealed in 1860) and increased competition from imported plait from Leghorn, Switzerland and Saxony. The south midlands industry withstood this competition (50% of imported plait was re-exported) and was not finally killed off until the last quarter of the nineteenth century when confronted by cheap imports from the far east. Within Luton Union 60% of women over the age of twenty were engaged in plaiting in 1861, a work which also absorbed some young boys and men as a secondary occupation.

Plaiters were independent producers with straw dealers (selling to the plaiters), and plait dealers (buying their finished product), as separate entities. The cost of the straw represented approximately 20% of the finished selling price and therefore a plaiter had to work continuously in order to make a living: between four and six shillings was the average weekly income but the proximity of the plaiter to a particular plait market, and the person to whom their wares were sold, could make a difference of earning between two and ten shillings a week. Most plaiters lived a hand to mouth existence, and as soon as sufficient was produced they sold the plait to the village grocer either for money or in exchange for goods. This latter deal could help to keep the income of the plaiter secret from the local Relieving Officer or indeed from husbands whose own income, most likely as an agricultural labourer would not be that much greater. Those who could afford to wait would sell to the travelling plait dealer, and some would even travel to market, the fulcrum point of the trade where assorted plait dealers, small domestic producers, big warehouses and individual plaiters would all be vying for the best possible price. The bigger the market, the better the price. As Luton became the principal centre for the hat trade it was therefore natural that those involved with plait would increasingly be drawn toward it. Short measure in deals was a constant threat with a "score" of plait often turning out to be no more than sixteen yards. To prevent abuses a Plait Dealers Association was formed in order to stamp out abuses, its members guaranteeing their lengths of plait. More than hat sewing, plaiting was vulnerable to changes in fashion - even a small reduction in the size of bonnets would significantly alter the demand for plait.

Like plaiting, bonnet sewing had become concentrated in the south east midlands with the quality of the finished product steadily improving in face of competition from Leghorn, improvements spearheaded by the Wallers, amongst others. Exports steadily increased with 235,000 dozen hats being exported between 1871 and 1875 against thirty one thousand in the
corresponding period forty years previously. Hat sewing was also undertaken in the villages but was mainly concentrated in the market towns. Sewing paid more than plaiting, a further inducement for plaiters to move to the town. The earnings for sewing however, would vary according to the place of production which in Luton varied a great deal indeed. The big hat factories, many of whom were London firms who had opened up branches in one or more of the small towns of the region would employ as many as five hundred sewers with a similar number of homeworkers and sewing rooms in the town or in neighbouring villages. In such a factory a bonnet sewer could earn approximately eighteen shillings a week, being paid by the piece. Most towns in the region - St. Albans, Hertford, Dunstable etc. possessed large and medium sized factories but the distinctive feature of Luton, for reasons which will be examined below, was the array of "makers-up", producing whole or part of hats in small domestic units which were then sold on to a large warehouse or factory which operated a counter trade. T.G. Austin estimated that in 1871 this accounted for 75% of the Luton hat trade. For little or no capital outlay it was possible for a man to set himself up in business with himself and other grown males of the family undertaking the blocking of hats downstairs, whilst women - family and lodgers alike - to carry on sewing elsewhere in the house. In addition to the makers-up there were many individual rooms where just sewing was undertaken - this could be sold through numerous outlets in a town, and there were a number of medium size factories.

The definition of what constituted a "large" or "medium" sized hat factory is an entirely arbitrary one, made all the harder to pin down by the absence of data about the workings of most of these factories and by the fact that the numbers employed were constantly fluctuating both inside the factory and amongst the outworkers beyond it, people who would not technically be direct employees. Charles Robinson, who in behaviour and denomination could serve as a typical member of the bourgeoisie employed just twenty three people in 1869 (although in better times this probably would have been greater): anything between twenty and one hundred can be classified as "medium" and above that figure, "large". With perhaps only a couple of exceptions, around two hundred was the maximum number employed at a large factory, and there only a handful of these.

In this period in question, little production was mechanised. Hat sewing machines were being introduced in the mid 1860s but were not refined enough for use in factories for another ten years: this part of the production process, both inside and out of the factories, therefore depended upon the skill and speed of the sewer working on the plait from the crown outwards. After stiffening the hat was then blocked, a process which had once required wooden mallets and mushroom shaped glass slicken stones, but from the mid nineteenth century was becoming mechanised with the development of large blocking machines. After that the hat went for finishing, also carried out by hand. Bleaching, in order to give attractive variations in colour to the plait was also developing as an ancillary branch of the hat trade.

The small production units paid less than the large factories, between five and thirteen shillings a week. These were attractive earnings for young girls in villages with no other prospects other than farmwork, domestic service, plaiting or, in the north, lacemaking and thousands of girls would temporarily migrate to Luton from the surrounding villages to work in
the hat trade during its busy season, at its most intense between December and May. Because of
the discrepancy in earnings the small production units became the focal point for younger girls
who, as soon as they were more proficient moved to the larger factories where the pay was better
and the hours were less, small units being less easy to monitor by the factory inspectors. The hat
trade was a mobile and, for the luckless and "disregarded" Factory Inspector, a largely hidden
industry. It also absorbed more women than men - a ratio of approximately ten to one in the \bigger factories where men would carry on tasks such as blocking, a skilled work, and also dyeing
and packing, in addition of course to buying and selling. A blocker in mid-century could earn
between twenty and thirty shillings a week, but a bleacher or dyer earned no more than women
sewers - between twelve and fifteen shillings.

Despite the difference in pay, there were parallels between the lives and work of the
plaiters and sewers. Both were paid by the piece, both working long hours although the urgency
to make a living was greater with the poorly paid plaiter. It was said that sewers in the towns
were not wanted back into their lodgings too early in the evenings, a second inducement for a
sewer to stay working late. The necessity to make as much of the busy season as possible before
the lean times further encouraged long hours. Also because of piecework factory discipline was
loose: sewers worked late but also arrived late. From such a working lifestyle came complaints
from various employers, clergymen and others that outworkers led an immoral life, although
straw plaiting had been regarded as beneficial to the poor by the Poor Law Commissioners in
1838. Relatively high earnings gave women economic power which it was feared compromised
their station in marriage. The obsession with producing goods led to untidy homes and badly
neglected children. There is some supporting evidence for this last point, not only the appalling
plait "schools" to which children were farmed out, but also in the succession of tragic cases of
death of infants from administration by mothers of "Godfrey's Cordial", an opium based sedative.
One can sympathise with a distracted if misguided mother, attempting to quieten small children
in order that she could carry on working during the respite. Recent research however, has
indicated that fears of immorality represented by a supposition high number of illegitimate
births, in the villages at least have been greatly exaggerated.\(^2\)

The influence of land upon the hat trade

The method of land disposal and property development both complemented and formed
the evolving structure of Luton's hat trade. The pattern remained consistent throughout the
period in question; frequent, sometimes large scale, occasionally unintelligent disposal of freehold
land, subsequently carved up into small plots to meet domestic and industrial demand. What was
manifestly evolving in Luton from the 1820s onward was a distinctive model of proto-industrial
society - the cottage economy of at least partial hat production, whether producing the hat from a
length of plait to the finished item, or working on a particular stage, domestic production
frequently integrated with the factories and warehouses in the town. A number of integral
features of such a society have been identified in which workers were self-employed and a
substantial labour input came from women and children, especially in the textile trades. Little capital was required in a process which generally encouraged young marriage and the early begetting of children. The process of urbanisation - affordable, plentiful, unconditional freehold land - allowed a maximum of freedom for the requirements of the market to express themselves.

Writers on the Luton hat industry have identified four features which they are agreed were the fundamental reasons for Luton's emergence as the centre of the straw hat trade. These factors all predate the arrival of the railway, which is acknowledged as reinforcing an existing dominance already held by Luton. The key period in which this pre-eminence was established was the years of depression which followed the ending of the Napoleonic Wars through to the resurgence of the hat industry in the 1840s. Broadly, these four are identified as the establishment of large branch factories by several London firms and the development of good quality but cheaper hats - an initiative attributed to Edmund and Thomas Waller. This enabled much work to be carried out by the small domestic production units undertaking the "making-up" of the hats. The small units were also flexible enough to meet any changes in hardware fashion and the developing industry substantial enough for Luton to support a number of specialised ancillary trades - bleaching, dyeing, blockmaking etc.

Although important, these factors alone could not have given Luton the decisive edge over neighbouring towns. The firms which came from London were only part of the expansion of the industry relying upon the hundreds of small "makers-up". These small units were crucial in giving Luton a broad and flexible base but without land upon which to build the growth of the town could not have reached the levels that it did. Land was the key, the abundance of which in the 1830s and 1840s sucked in workers from the depressed agricultural areas surrounding Luton.

The large factories therefore possessed not only a large and growing pool of labour to recruit into their firms, but also one to whom outwork could be sent. William Hunt, the manager of London based Munt and Brown declared that whilst the company employed approximately 215 persons at their Luton factory, they also used between three hundred and five hundred outworkers elsewhere in the town. William Willis reckoned that there were "eight or ten" factories in Luton on the scale of Munt and Brown or his own, all operating on a similar system by augmenting a factory workforce with outworkers in the hundreds of small workshops and dwelling places around the town. This process, possible only in Luton, encouraged the abandonment of straw plaiting by older females for the more lucrative sewing of the plait, a consequence bring that the former activity became increasingly restricted to the surrounding villages and the youngest children in the town.

Luton was dubbed "Strawopolis" - there was no felt hats made in the town and neither was there other complimentary crafts such as silk or umbrella manufacture production. The London firms which opened up branches in Luton (and neighbouring towns) did so, one presumes, in order to get closer to the supply of domestic plait, and more importantly, the pool of skilled labour. They arrived in Luton before the onset of mechanisation, their factories being initially no more than large sewing houses. The details of the economies of this scale are regrettably, not known.
Swiftly, an escalating momentum of activity developed in Luton, one which received only
the occasional check. The prospect of higher wages encouraged continued migration and the part
played by word of mouth must not be underestimated in understanding migratory patterns. The
straw plait and hat trade, with its network of markets was ideally suited to accommodate a relay
of news. Information concerning the auction of some building ground in High Town, the need for
more sewers at a factory, empty cottages awaiting tenants in Dumfries Street: all would be
discussed at Luton market on a Monday and by the end of the week would have reached the ears
of places as far apart as Tring, Hemel Hempstead, Hertford and into Essex.

In an industry which required so much more female labour than male (for sex ratio
balance in New Town see graph 2.2) the physical development of the town with an expanding
indigenous population was only possible whilst there existed land upon which to grow. "It may be
taken as a rule that two hundred and fifty females keep about twenty men employed in blocking" estimated William Hunt. A high number of these women would be single, seasonal migrants,
reducing somewhat the need to provide complimentary employment for spouses, but Luton was
more than merely a static production centre boosted by seasonal commuters. Although men
however, were able to work as blockers, warehousemen, bleachers, dealers or even a combination
of these jobs, the hat trade alone could not provide a sufficient quantity of unskilled and
semi-skilled male jobs upon which to build sustained urban growth. Neither could retailing and
Luton's traditional industries - brewing and milling - together make up the slack. The last part of
the jigsaw lay in the demand generated by Luton's peculiar hat trade and the town upon which it
was growing - the construction of its distinctive houses as well as its factories, roads, sewage
works, chapels, public buildings and so on. The extent of this can be gauged to a limited degree
by comparing a selection of occupations of males over the age of twenty in Luton, Bedford and
Hitchin in 1861.

Fig 2.1 Occupations of males aged twenty and over (percentages in brackets. 1861.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Bedford</th>
<th>Hitchin</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agric. lab.</td>
<td>1640 (24.4)</td>
<td>3556 (38.13)</td>
<td>2352 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building*</td>
<td>471 (7)</td>
<td>575 (6.1)</td>
<td>371 (5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>513 (7.6)</td>
<td>301 (3.2)</td>
<td>314 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brickmaking</td>
<td>45 (0.8)</td>
<td>83 (0.9)</td>
<td>44 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>924 (13.7)</td>
<td>4 (0.04)</td>
<td>40 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Luton and Hitchin statistics cover as always the whole districts, distorting the
proportions by considerably exaggerating the numbers involved in agriculture to the detriment of
the urban based trades. This is given additional emphasis by the 1841 return for New Town
Street and Prospect Place, streets which were then still adjacent to open fields and carrying one
of the highest proportions of unskilled labour in the town, contains no men listed as agricultural
labourer. Extrapolating the New Town return one can therefore assume that few labourers within the urban area were involved in agriculture with the consequence being that the proportion of other unskilled occupations would increase accordingly. What is shown by the

**Fig 2.2  Sex ratio by age group**

*New Town 1841*

above statistics is that important though the hat trade was as a source of male employment, the numbers involved in the building of its production units, large and small, were greater. These bare statistics do not give the full picture: it is clear that many men had by necessity more than one string to their economic bow and that therefore attributable occupations may not accurately represent an individuals means of accruing income; others migrated to the town on a seasonal basis. The hat trade would have attracted some of these and the town retained its rural tradition with the hiring of labour at the September 'Stattie' Fair. No supporting evidence is known but one wonders whether the local building industry also operated upon a seasonal basis, taking up the excess labour at the end of the had trade's busy season and agriculture's harvest. If true, this would point toward the majority of those working in the building trade being more or less permanent residents.7

The 6724 males listed in the 1861 census shared a town with 9332 females. Luton's hat trade, operating to the extent that it did from domestic dwellings was allowing an overwhelming predominance of women and children which was rare for the textile industry. The carpet trade in Kidderminster for example, employed fewer women than men but here the industry was based in larger units of production.8 In Luton it was possible for a woman to stay at home to be a mother, a wife and to even exceed her husband's earnings. To repeat, the importance of the contribution of children to the family based economy should not be underestimated. This is reflected in the
absence of evidence for many of the notorious plait schools within Luton, an institution which was very common in the surrounding villages and even in smaller towns such as Leighton Buzzard. The factory orientated production is most noticeable here - at the earliest possible age concentrating upon the more lucrative sewing of plait. There was little discernible benefit to a Luton family in packing their children off to a plait school at the cost of threepence to a "mistress" (some of whom could not even read or write) whilst their mothers and older siblings worked in the main centre of production (i.e. their home) deprived of the extra help which the young child could provide. Mother and older children could teach their young plaiting and sewing at least as well, probably better. They were unlikely to impart the rudiments of general learning worse.

The economy and the family

The hat industry was ideally suited to accommodate female and child labour providing an opportunity for all to contribute to the household income, and allowing women to equal or surpass the earnings of their husbands. The surplus male labour in the south east midlands, plus the low wages available, gave an impetus for women and children to seek a living in domestic industry. Earnings varied enormously, fluctuating according to individual proficiency and the fortunes of the market. To repeat, within an industry where it was possible to begin work as early as four years of age there was the opportunity for a plaiter to obtain anything between three shillings and thirteen shillings per week. As stated, a good sewer could earn between eighteen shillings and one pound a week although for those who were less swift or worked in smaller workshops this sum was more probably between ten and twelve shillings. These can be compared with the wages of a male agricultural labourer which were approximately nine shillings per week rising to around fourteen shillings in the 1870s.

The comparison in fortunes can be made by the following example taken from the 1841 census for New Town Street, one of the earliest areas to be developed, and recorded in June, at the end of the busy season. In one of the cottages lived Joseph Barber, a thirty-five year old labourer, together with his wife Martha, ten year old daughter Mary, and a lodger named Mary Fisher, aged about twenty. All females were bonnet sewers with the only non-earner recorded on the census being their nine year old son, also called Joseph. Although occupations were not listed for children under the age of ten it is possible that Joseph junior also contributed his labour, if not as a sewer then perhaps as a plaiter instead. In any case, as Levine points out, it is wrong to assume that children were a "drag" on the family economy: especially before compulsory education they were able to assist in a number of domestic chores whilst mother (and in the Barber's case) elder sister were busy at work. Presumably Mary Fisher also paid a proportion of her earnings as lodgings.

The Barber weekly income can therefore be estimated to be in the region of £2.0.0 - £2.6.0. This can be compared with the lot of a labourer from rural Bedfordshire, Phillip Peddor, from Cranfield, near Bedford, who emigrated to Derbyshire around 1836 where he was able to almost double his income whilst retaining the same occupation. The members of his family also greatly increased their wages by taking employment at the local mill. At Cranfield their earnings
were as follows: Phillip (aged thirty nine) seven shillings a week; his wife (not named) lace maker, one shilling a week; handicapped daughter Mary (aged nineteen) lacemaker, Is. 6d. per week; daughter Sarah (aged sixteen) lace maker, 2s. 6d. per week; son Thomas (aged fourteen) ploughboy 2s. 6d. per week; daughter Betsey (aged nine) lace maker, 10d.; son Phillip (aged four) nothing. Total family income for the support of seven persons was therefore 15s. 6d. Phillip claimed that he was on the verge of starvation in Bedfordshire. 12

Migration to a town offering conspicuously higher wages for a working family were especially attractive at a time of continued depression in agriculture which persisted from the end of the Napoleonic Wars until the 1830s. Within Bedfordshire, a period of aching poverty and social unrest culminated in a spate of rioting across the county in 1830, and further riots centred upon Ampthill five years later. 13 Luton was not immune from these with a depression in the straw plait trade in the late 1820s leading to riots in 1828 and 1829. On the first occasion a two hundred strong mob focused their attention upon an attempt to burn down the house of John and Richard Jones, straw hat manufacturers, but were repelled by gunfire from the latter. Both riots took place on 5th November, an event in Luton's social calendar which occasionally resulted in some level of disorder, usually spontaneous. At the depth of the depression earnings plummeted as elsewhere, but serious though it was, the depressed state of the straw plait and hat trade was not as sustained as that in agriculture in the surrounding area. For those not able or willing to migrate to northern mills, or to endure the risks of emigration, Luton presented an attractive haven from desperate circumstances.

Of those residing in Prospect Place and New Town Street in 1841, 282 (63.4%) were born within Bedfordshire, although the proportion of those born in Luton is unknown. This figure indicates that migrants were drawn from a limited radius, 161 (36.2%) were drawn from western Hertfordshire and east Buckinghamshire. The role of Luton as a centre for local migration is demonstrated further in the principal places of birth given for those residing within the Luton sub-district at the time of the 1851 census (Fig 2.4). The population of the township would constitute a little under 45% of this total, leading us to presume that the non-Bedfordshire proportions within the urban core was a little higher than the overall figure, taking as it does many surrounding villages. The eighty-six born in Scotland were comprised overwhelmingly of women (seventy eight). It would be interesting to know what, if any proportion of these had migrated from the declining plait industry which had operated in the Orkneys.

Fig. 2.3 Origins of Birth for People over the Age of Twenty in New Town Street and Prospect Place, 1841.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in Beds</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>(63.04)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>(48.83)</td>
<td>121 (54.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born outside Beds</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>(36.95)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>(51.16)</td>
<td>100 (45.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The question of whether whole families or at least young married couples migrated to Luton can be estimated less definitely. The places of birth of adults (i.e. those over the age of twenty) in New Town Street tabulated above shows most clearly that Luton was a focus of migration for single women. The figure probably underestimates the number of young women attracted to the town excluding as it does those who would be in their mid - late teens as well as those who had already just left the town at the end of the season. Single men would also be able to travel into town to seek employment, like single women often of a temporary nature, but for married men especially those with children the situation is less certain: how many men would be prepared to move home to somewhere where there was no definite job at the end, even if the prospects were that their wife and children could in combination accrue a wage which was at least as good as they could obtain? They would have to have a clear idea of their plans or conversely, be in a situation like Phillip Peddor, before countenancing such a move.

Whereas the birthplace for adults in Fig. 2.3 shows a balance between women born within and beyond the county boundary, those men from within Bedfordshire outnumber those from outside by nearly two to one. Accepting that Luton would account for a substantial proportion of those who were born within Bedfordshire, and that therefore the number of true migrants is more accurately represented by those not born in the county, these figures indicate that far fewer men migrated than women. The position of Luton - a Bedfordshire wedge protruding into Hertfordshire - may distort the figures on what is admittedly a small sample. It is nonetheless reasonable to assume that men were far less likely to tramp into town in the hope of finding employment. The employment prospects for women were far more favourable. Of the thirty-four men born outside Bedfordshire, thirteen were married to women also from outside it, fourteen to women from within and the rest were single. All this leads one tentatively to suggest that fewer than half of the male migrants came to Luton as married men. One also suspects that most married men were young and that relatively few had children.

Fig. 2.4 Principal places of birth of inhabitants of Luton sub-district, 1851.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where born</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>25,087</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beds</td>
<td>16,338</td>
<td>65.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herts</td>
<td>4979</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>1297</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London (Middx)</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northants</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambs</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Luton's economy offered an enticing range of opportunities to those from the rural hinterland who beheld few options other than agriculture, domestic service or unemployment. The occupations of the senior males within each household in New Town Street and Prospect Place in 1841 included thirteen who worked within the hat industry - one warehouseman, one plait bleacher, seven bonnet pressers, three plait dealers and one straw manufacturer. There were thirty two associated with the building trade (eleven labourers, ten bricklayers, two sawyers, seven carpenters, one plumber and a timber merchant) and sixteen whose occupations were typical of those to be found within any market town or urban centre (four grocers, a shoemaker, a shoe dealer, a baker, a sieve maker, a potato salesman, a schoolmaster, a general dealer, a butcher, a coal brazier, a miller, a thatcher and a coach maker). There were also eight tailors, one commercial traveller, one of independent means and three whose occupations were unreadable.

No beershops were identified on this part of the census, but a number of the above must have have had this as a second source of income as there were several (nameless) beer shops in New Town Street. Some of those in public houses and retail would also have acted as plait dealers (more common than a full-time plait dealer) and some men were also cottage proprietors. Building homes, owning homes, working in homes, selling from homes, selling to homes: Luton was a town built upon the cottage economy. Again, the number of large hat factories in Luton remained relatively few, with much labour being carried on as outwork, the link between factory and home often being the ubiquitous plait dealer, who could come in a number of guises. A handful would be specialist merchants such as Josiah Wright with warehouses in George Street and Hemel Hempstead, but a greater number would combine this with other trades such as William Smith, a Market Hill plait dealer and furrier, or George Tearle of Hastings Street, a blockmaker. Still more would deal in plait as a sideline to their principal business - shopkeepers and publicans being especially well placed to operate in this way.

The lack of precise data in the census returns makes it difficult to answer a question to another typical feature of the cottage economy, especially in textiles - did Lutonians marry younger than average? The returns again are for a district and the broad five year bands in which civil conditions are tabulated on the census returns make accurate assessments impossible. This is rendered doubly so by the fact that only a minority of Luton's couples were completely constrained by the laws of domestic orientated economic activity.

The New Town returns for 1841 are a little more helpful in calculating the earliest age at which couples produced children. This has been done disregarding those over fifty (whose oldest children may have already left home) and allowing for the enumerator rounding up (or down) ages to the nearest five as well as inaccuracy in some of the ages declared. The average ages for men and women working in a domestic environment (sewers, tailors, dressmakers, all men in the hat trade - it being impossible to know whether they worked at home or in a factory) possess a very slightly lower age at which they produced their first child to those in other occupations. 22.22 years as opposed to 24.87 years for men and 22.61 years against 23.18 for women. For all the qualifications which must be loaded onto this return this does bear out the quoted feature of the domestic textile economy - a predilection for fairly early marriage and consequently
production of children between the ages of twenty two and twenty five. There was little
incentive for girls to marry much before the age of twenty. They were mobile, only living in one
place for around six months, earning good pay (as good or better than their male contemporaries)
and able to spend this cash on attractive dresses (hat sewing was clean work and Luton girls were
noted for their vivacious looks) and other consumer goods. After all, as Lazlo Grof correctly
points out, the example of marriage from which many girls were escaping to work in Luton was
hardly an attractive one.

To judge from the above returns, couples did not produce enormous broods, 2.95 being
the average number of children per household. Naturally there are great variations in this; cases
of couples in early middle age with six, seven, eight or even nine children compared with young
couples who have little chance to many or any on this new estate. It is still noticeable that many
couples in their mid - late twenties had not opted to produce children at short intervals: "thirty"
year old Robert Taylor (a carpenter), and his wife Frances (aged twenty five, a sewer) had in
1841 three children - Ephraim, five; Robert, two; and Richard, five months. Next door labourer
Samuel ("thirty") and Elizabeth Barlow (a sewer also aged "thirty") had two daughters aged five
and three. Two doors further down George Bull, a "thirty five" year old carpenter, and Caroline
Bull ("thirty", a sewer) had children aged ten, eight and four respectively. In Luton's economic
context this was a prudent approach for families with an uncertain income. Whilst children could
be a benefit during periods of intense productive activity, the reverse was the case during the
slow season, or worse still a depression. Instead of vast numbers of children, many Luton families
sought to augment household production and/or family income by taking in migrant lodgers
during the busy season who could then leave when the work eased off. Unlike children, lodgers
were not a burden when times were bad. The Taylor's thus had one lodger, an eighteen year old
bonnet sewer, the Barlow's also one (Jane Axtell, a fifteen year old "apprentice") and the Bull's
had three "apprentices" (two aged fifteen and one aged ten). More than half of the houses in New
Town Street (53%) had lodgers at the time of the 1841 census.

Luton's predominance

Until the 1830s Luton had been one of a small number of principal centres of the hat trade in the
south east midlands. Other leading centres included St. Albans, Dunstable, Hitchin, Tring,
Hemel Hempstead and Leighton Buzzard in addition to which there were minor plait market
centres at places such as Hertford, Baldock and Shefford. Luton's communications were no
better than any of these and certainly inferior to those at Dunstable which, through its roads and
railway, could boast of a superior network until 1858, and equally good one until 1868. In fact
it had not been until 1784 that Luton acquired anything approaching a satisfactory road link with
Dunstable. This town was popularly supposed to produce a better quality hat in the larger
factories for which it was noted.

The comparison of land ownership between Luton and Dunstable is interesting. Records
are few and fragmentary, but the clearest contemporary and comparative source is a tithe award
list for Dunstable from 1840. The intersection of the town's main roads effectively cut it into
quarters, the built up area in the mid nineteenth century virtually restricted to those buildings abutting onto the roads. The south eastern quarter lay within the ownership of the church. The remaining three quarters mostly being within the control of five owners; William Frederick Brown, the executors of James Hopkins Oliver (his son succeeded), George Hooper, Edward Burr and Richard Gutteridge - the latter two being related to the Luton landowning families of the same name. Of these, Gutteridge and Brown, neither of whom were listed as tradesmen or industrialists, owned the most.

The marked difference between Luton and Dunstable was in the degree of availability of land in the crucial ten to thirty year period in which the straw hat trade expanded. Only one of the main property owners in Dunstable released land in this period - Edward Burr, who had succeeded to the ownership of the Dunstable Brewery in 1835, but retired just eight years later. In quitting the business Burr sold the entire brewery and its holdings, the neighbouring Brewers Hill Farm and fifty acres of land. The brewery was turned into a hat factory by Messrs Cooper of Manchester and the land was built upon. This isolated sale however, was insufficient to provide the necessary stimulus which could have provided a similar, rival mode of production to that which existed in Luton.17

The next major sale of land did not occur until after the death of Richard Gutteridge. Although having a son, Matthew, most of his lands were purchased by the British Land Company in 1861 who laid out several streets upon them before disposing of part of the acquisition in small plots (with difficulty) through several sales in 1862, 1869, 1871 and 1877.18 Well before this time Luton had stolen a march and established its pre-eminence as the centre of the industry. Again, one is pointed toward the veiled activities of the preceding century. The Dunstable charities held land in Luton, as opposed to their own town, pointing again to a disparity in the fluidity in the land markets in the respective localities in an era pre-dating the expansion of the hat industry.

Similarly, there was little movement of land at either St. Albans or Hitchin. At the latter land upon the southern and eastern sides of the town were held by two long established local families, the Radcliffe's and the Wilshire's.20 Frederick Delme Radcliffe, the then owner of Hitchin Priory was the latest in the family whose lineage stretched back to the sixteenth century. He owned other country homes and a 'town' house in Grosvenor Square, but very much the model of the country squire, he spent a great deal of his time at Hitchin where he sat on the local magistrate's bench and at every opportunity indulged in his favourite pastime - hunting. It was a sport in which Delme Radcliffe, a friend and fellow horseman of the Prince of Wales, particularly excelled.61 He had neither reason or inclination to sell the estate upon which he hunted, the house itself protruding right into the heart of town, with the park fanning out behind. Upon his death in 1875 the lands of Delme Radcliffe remained still remained inviolate.

Neither too were the Wilshere family, whose home lay at Welwyn willing to sell at this time. They were the biggest landowners in the area with William M.P. owning 818 acres, Charles 145 and William of Walsworth, 227 acres. They were not to dispose of their holdings until the twentieth century. The remainder of land was owned by a number of men, many of them being Quakers: the Lucas' - a family of brewers, bankers, artists and writers, the Ransoms, who were
millers and farmers, Joshua Sharples and John Whiting. Hitchin serves as a vivid example of a town where the close interest of the landowning families in their local estates acted as a bulwark against industrial expansion.

At St. Albans there was even greater fragmentation of land with a number local men and some women owning substantial field holdings in the centre of city, along side those of the Earl of Verulam. Such an arrangement, ought to have been more conducive than Hitchin or Dunstable to market driven land disposal but here, as at Hitchin, only a limited amount of building had taken place by the 1880s, again mostly in the vicinity of the railway station. Dunstable, Hitchin and St. Albans did not possess the same imperative for urban development as at Luton where potential speculators were encouraged with a continuous supply of freehold land. Furthermore, both St. Albans and Tring contained silk mills which provided an alternative employment for female labour. In 1851, some 60% of Luton women were working in some capacity within the straw hat trade (and 10% of men) compared with between 24% and 29% in St. Albans, Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamstead and Leighton Buzzard.

Dunstable's hat industry was not shackled by a desire to service only the more affluent sectors of the fashion world. Its factories, like Luton's were operated by businessmen, some from Manchester and London: two of the biggest, Munt, Brown and Co. and Gregory, Cubbitt and Co. had branches in both Luton and Dunstable. There was no intrinsic element within Dunstable's hat industry which prevented it adopting similar methods of production to that of Luton. Rather, there was literally no room for it to expand and locate new units. By the time that space became available the initiative had long since passed to Luton where the large factories were able to engage in a reciprocal relationship with the small production units springing up around. In Dunstable, this two way relationship was stifled by the absence of land with the consequence being that most production was carried out in the large factories, leading to a stunting of its potential development.
Chapter 2. Vendors and Builders.

The Landowners.

No Act was ever passed dealing with a comprehensive enclosure of commonable lands in Luton. The 'Luton Enclosure Act of 1808' dealt with specific portions of commonable land totalling just nineteen and a half acres: details of land ownership in the eighteenth century are consequently scanty. William Austin, who took a great interest in matters concerning land ownership, concluded that the absence of a General Enclosure Act was because intercommoning had virtually ceased within thirty years of the commencement of the eighteenth century. Thereafter, Austin suggested, enclosure took place in the following years through mutual agreement between respective landowners largely (and here Austin enters the realms of speculation) at the behest of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, acting as the Agent for the Earl of Bute. Whatever the truth, it is evident that there was already a considerable movement in the local land market from the mid-late eighteenth century, allowing new arrivals such as the Wallers, Goujon and Burrs to build up holdings. This is tantalisingly obscure as here lies a root influence over the accelerating events which subsequently took place in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, but is rendered impenetrable by the inaccessibility of much of the Bute archive. In Nottingham for example, the presence of vested interests (essentially the freeholders) upon the moribund Corporation prevented the enclosure of the extensive land which the Corporation owned around the edge of the city, thereby inhibiting its urban and economic development well into the nineteenth century. Such matters were largely settled in Luton before the passing of its own Act of Enclosure, but how and when are not precisely known.

In the early nineteenth century, John Crichton Stuart, second Marquess of Bute and owner of the Luton Hoo estate was pre-eminent amongst local landowners. The second Marquess was the great grandson of John, the third Earl of Bute who had purchased the 4468 acre estate in 1763. The third Earl combined a strikingly unsuccessful political career with a love of books, works of art and botany - fields in which he built outstanding private collections as well as a considerable level of knowledge. Through his activities as collector and patron of the arts, the Earl of Bute established Luton Hoo as one of the finest houses in England. At its peak it was observed that "the rooms are hardly to be equalled for grandeur of dimensions and luxury of decoration; the library is inferior only to that at Blenheim; and there is a large collection of paintings by the first masters."

Besides disappointing public careers another feature of the Butes was their accumulation of wealth and property through marriage. By the time of his marriage to Lady Maria North in 1818 the second Marquess owned property in London, Isle of Bute, Galloway, Glamorgan, Bedfordshire, Ayrshire and Durham - the last two containing coal mines. By marriage with Lady North Bute added estates in Essex and Cambridgeshire. Propitious marriage and personal vanity apart, the second Marquess was a significantly different character when compared with his immediate forbears; he was meticulous, hard working, enterprising - but not a collector. His serious commitment toward his scattered estate is shown by the carefully planned tours which he
regularly undertook. No amount of travel nonetheless, could allow even the most conscientious estate manager to spend sufficient time in each holding when they were spread hundreds of miles apart. Although the administrative headquarters of the Bute estate in England and Wales, Luton Hoo was becoming of decreasing importance to the Marquess. Thomas Collingdon, who became Secretary in 1817, officially resided at the Hoo, but like his master was forced by estate affairs to be frequently absent from Luton.\(^{26}\)

The logistical difficulties presented by scattered estates as well as the burden of family debts prompted the Marquess to rationalise his holdings. From 1821 until 1824 he was seeking to sell Luton Hoo but received no suitable offer. At around the same time the Marquess dabbled in a little property speculation attempting to build "superior houses" in order to attract "superior people" to Luton.\(^{27}\) The location of these houses is not certain (in all probability it was Wellington Street, commenced around this time upon land owned by the Marquess) and the purpose of "superior people" coming to Luton during a slump in the plait industry's fortunes is also vague. The venture was not surprisingly a failure and represented the Bute estate's last attempt at housebuilding in Luton. Following the failure of the attempt to sell the Hoo the Marquess commissioned Robert Smirke to undertake expensive alterations to the house in 1829.

Although not usually active in Luton's affairs because of absence, the Marquess was not uninterested, his closest level of involvement being with the early stages of the Board of Guardians. John Davies reports a boast made by the Marquess following the first election to the board in 1835:-

> I put the wealthiest Baptist in the Town, the most moderate of the Quakers and a friendly Methodist on my list. The radicals had a meeting for the express purpose of getting up a contest but the list was admitted to be so respectable that they were obliged to give up their intended agitation.\(^{28}\)

This approach may well have worked in Cardiff, but in Luton this statement speaks more of the Marquess' vanity than of his real power in the town. Bute and the Rev. Macdouall were ex-officio members of a Board which included Edmund Waller, Frederick Burr, Richard Marks Brown and Thomas Partridge as Luton Guardians. Far from being creatures of the Bute influence, these men were from prominent local families with opinion, abilities and influence in their own right. As such it was probable that they would seek election to the Board and highly unlikely that they would need or seek the blessing of a remote Lord of the Manor (nor agitating radicals) in order to secure a place.

At the first meeting of the Board of Guardians held at the the George Inn in April 1835, the Marquess was shown due deference and appointed Chairman with the Caddington Guardian, Henry Bebb Morris, as Vice-Chairman.\(^{29}\) Although Bute attended most weekly meetings in the first two months of office, from the end of June until the elections the following April he attended just three of the forty two meetings held, being completely absent between September 1835 and March 1836. Bute was re-elected Chairman by the board for the second year of operation (at a meeting which he did not attend) and for subsequent years, but remained an irregular member of
the Board being rarely present from April 1839 onward. Bute did however, chair every Board meeting between 4th November 1836 and 6th January 1837, and again between 9th November 1838 and 22nd February 1839.

This pattern reinforces the image of the Second Marquess of Bute with regards to public duty, suggesting that the reasons for irregular attendance were due to absenteeism rather than irresponsibility. It must be remembered that it was the Marquess who provided the land upon which new Workhouse was built, a contributory factor no doubt to his election as Chairman, but it also serves an example of the sense of responsibility which he still felt toward Luton.

The position of the Marquess of Bute was therefore, that of someone who maintained an interest in the affairs of the town but could only do so as far as commitment to the other estates would allow. Inevitably, this led to neglect. The market place in Luton, the responsibility and benefits of which lay with the Marquess as Lord of the Manor, was by 1834 in a very poor state of repair. An approach was made to Collingdon by the surgeon, Thomas Waller, in an effort to cajole the Marquess into making good the dilapidated facilities, the letter finishing "the cry is, Luton is improving and we want more accommodation in the very place now offered". Little, it appears was done and it was more than thirty years before the town's markets received substantial improvement at the hands of the Board of Health. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Marquess was regarded by Lutonians as distant figure who did not command a great level of affection or loyalty. An attempt by Frederick Chase to raise subscriptions toward a portrait of the Marquess was abandoned through lack of support with the hat manufacturer Thomas Waller, and remarkably the St. Mary's Curate Thomas Sikes, being amongst those who refused to subscribe.

In the light of his remote relationship with Luton and his increasing financial commitments, especially in Glamorgan, it is logical that the Marquess would come to regard the Bedfordshire estate as a saleable asset. Consolidation of land around Cardiff was taking place through purchase and sale in the 1840s, but indebtedness was forcing the Marquess to abandon further purchases and additional capital was required since income from his estates was insufficient to meet debt burden and all his other financial commitments.

The decision to put the Luton estates on to the market was finalised by the disastrous fire at the Hoo on 10th November, 1843. This destroyed the Great Hall, the library and the chapel, leaving the Marquess with repair costs which he had neither the will nor the resources to meet. Twelve months later, on 29th November 1844, virtually all of the Marquess' holdings in south Bedfordshire were offered up for sale in two lots at public auction. Lot One comprised the mansion (requiring repair "At the cost of a few thousand pounds"), the park with its farm, lodges and surrounding land, all of this totalling nearly 1300 acres. Also in Lot One were Someries Farm with the remaining ruins of a 15th century manor house of the same name plus the buildings and lands of a further six farms, three mills, two public houses, a "capital freehold brick built residence", forty cottages, brickmaking land and the title and privileges of the Lord of the Manor. Most of this land lay in East and West Hyde but there were also gardens of twenty cottages at Leagrave which were let at one shilling.
Lot Two comprised the advowson to the vicarage of Luton ("the present incumbent is in his 70th year") which with its accompanying property was purchased on behalf of the Curate, Rev. Thomas Sikes. Lot One was sold to C. T. Warde of Warwickshire for £160,000, considerably less than the upwards of £200,000 which Luton Hoo had first been valued at when placed on the market over twenty years earlier, although property prices had generally fallen in this period.

Thus, the Marquess of Bute severed most, but not all of his links with Luton. The Manor of Dallow (later purchased by J. S. Crawley), Maiden Common Farm and the Bury Farm were not included in the sale, but the most significant omission was that of the Bute lands around the centre of the township. These lands are shown in Appendix 1, based upon the earliest detailed map available, that surveyed by E. Brown of Silsoe. The Marquess was the dominant landowner in Luton to the extent that his land encircled the urban centre in an almost unbroken band.

Despite the absence of firm documentary proof it is likely that the Marquess of Bute's decision not to sell this crucial remnant of his Bedfordshire estate was made through a shrewd appreciation of the potential value which it possessed. This effective stranglehold ensured that the Marquess was in a position to determine the rate and direction of Luton's expansion. The decision not to sell at this point may have also been influenced by the current slump in the hat trade which periodically hit the industry and would have undermined the price. It is wholly characteristic that he should decide to wait in order to obtain a greater return for his patience at a later date.

The Marquess of Bute, or more precisely whoever controlled his estate's interests, was therefore the key figure in the provision of land to meet Luton's need for housing and industry. He decided to treat the Hoo land as merely a saleable asset, to be disposed of when the property market was deemed to be advantageous. It is to enter the realm of conjecture to try to assess what would have happened had the Bute estate's priorities in the second quarter of the nineteenth century been different from what they were. It is very likely Luton's growth could have followed a different pattern altogether and one in which the development momentum was appreciably lower. In this case it is possible also that with its rate of expansion as a centre for the straw hat trade significantly retarded, towns such as Dunstable or Hitchin (both of whom possessed superior communication networks until 1858) would have assumed a degree of commercial parity, or even seized an initiative that would have left the "long dirty market town" trailing along in their wake.

Although the Marquess of Bute was overwhelmingly the largest owner of land in the township there were other families whose fortunes, and the extent and location of their lands made them significant figures in determining the direction in which Luton moved. One of these were the Burr family of whom the brothers Charles and Frederick were the third generation of a prominent local brewing concern. Following the retirement of Charles in 1850 and the death of Frederick in 1856 the family ceased to play an active role within the affairs of Luton selling the brewery to Thomas Sworder the following year. Although the Burr family had been in Luton from only the 1770s they had established a substantial catalogue of property by 1839. Apart from the ninety or so tied houses the Burr's held land chiefly on the south-eastern side of Luton (see
Appendix 2) in the vicinity of Park Street and High Town although there were other parcels
adjacent with the Old Bedford Road and Dunstable Road. It is not known from whom the Burr's
acquired each piece of land - the Dunstable charities were amongst what appears to have been a
number of local vendors (see note 40).

The family of the Marquess of Bute's Luton solicitor, Frederick Chase, also held a
substantial amount of land within the township plus a further two hundred acres in the hands of
Frederick's father, John, in the Stopsley district. John, Frederick and elder brother Edward
owned a smaller, but still significant proportion of their estate in the vicinity of Park Street and
Castle Street (see Appendix 3). The Chase family bear much in common with the Burr's, possibly
being established in Luton for a little longer but abruptly ceasing to play an active part in the
town's affairs when their Frederick left Luton in 1851.

By contrast, the Gutteridge family had been living in the Luton area since the 16th
century and like the Bute's had accumulated considerable wealth through fortuitous marriages,
albeit on a more parochial level. The last prominent member of the family was James
Gutteridge, a Baptist of considerable pride and highly inflammable temper. Upon James'
death in 1831 the complexities of his will forced the executors to go to the High Court which
ordered the estate to be sold by auction. The Hertfordshire County Chronicle (there being no
Bedfordshire newspaper at this time) carried the notice of the sale providing the fullest account
of the late James Gutteridge's holdings in 1833:  

To be peremptorily Sold, pursuant to a Decree of the High Court of Chancery,
made in the cause of "Thomson -v- Waller", with the approcation of the Rt. Hon.
Robert Lord Henley, on of the Members of the said Court, at the Red Lion Inn, at
Luton, in the County of Bedford, on Monday the 30th September, and each
Tuesday, the 1st day of October, 1833, at One O'Clock in the Afternoon of each
Day in Lots the Freehold and Leasehold Estates of the late James Gutteridge, of
Luton, in the County of Bedford, Esquire, Deceased, situate and being of several
Dwelling Houses and Cottages, including the late residence of the said James
Gutteridge, in the Town of Luton, with the coach-house, stabling, and suitable
out-buildings, garden, pleasure-grounds, and plantations thereto belonging. Also,
two Farms, known by the respective names of Limbury Farm, and Crawley Green
Farms, and several pieces of arable meadow, and pasture land, containing
altogether upwards of Five hundred and fifty acres, some parts of which are
contiguous to the Town of Luton, and are very desirable for building.

The sale could not have been a total success, although the details are not known. Brown's
terrier, shows that in 1839 the 550 acres referred to in the sale advertisement (just over 555
according to the terrier) were still in the hands of the executors at the time that the list was
being compiled. "Executors of James Gutteridge" has been crossed out and replaced with the
name of Edmund Waller beside the entry for Limbury Farm (348 acres). "Thos. Waller" has been
inserted beside some parcels of land which include the garden of Gutteridge's former home
although Austin claims that it was John Waller who bought the house and gardens, and the 1844
Tithe Award list supports this. "John Waller" and "Jones" have been added to other lands. The
136 acre Crawley Green Farm however, (eventually purchased by Samuel Crawley) remained in
the hands of the executors. Within five years this, and the remainder of Gutteridge's land in
Luton township had been disposed of (see appendix 4).
It would be interesting to know why the Auction was not successful. Possibly the slump in the straw hat trade, which was not to recover until the mid 1840s inhibited property speculators. The Marquess of Bute was an interested party and appears to have joined in a dispute with the Wallers over the sale of land as this letter from Collingdon to Stanton indicates:

I must say that I am surprised considering what took place previous to Mr. Gutteridge's sale and the present proposed accommodation to Mr. Waller's family, that Mr. John Waller should make the least objections to his arrangements you have submitted to him - he distinctly pledged himself to Mr Roy (then Lord Bute's solicitor) on the understanding that Mr. Roy was not to oppose him Mr. John Waller in lot 26 that he would let the Marquis have whatever land he required to complete his arrangements in that quarter after the sale was settled, and with that understanding Mr. Roy actually Lot 26 for him....

You will be so good as to not proceed any further with the valuation of Mr. Thomas Waller's premises until the arrangements of the land beholden to the Marquess of Mr. John Waller is finally settled to his Lordship's satisfaction.

It would be better for Mr. Austin not to be placed at Mr. T. Waller's mercy but that he should make the purchase of garden from the end of the Barn from his Lordship to which I daresay there would be no objection upon his Lordship being paid what you think a proper sum for such an accommodation.

I cannot understand what Mr. Austin means by the pledge he mentions from the Marquess. I am quite aware that he wished to have part of the Barn but he can hardly expect the sale of his Property to be injured for this accommodation when it be open to him afterwards to meet with Mr. Waller.

The precise details of this dispute are unclear. The reference to the "purchase of garden" may mean that the friction arose over the pleasure grounds backing on to Gutteridge's former home. Bute already held a substantial amount of land in this area but (if development was being contemplated) no, or at best limited, outlet to George Street. It would be interesting to know what was Lot 26, and more importantly what were the Marquess' intentions - does it represent his last attempt at property development in Luton? Unfortunately, although there does appear to have been clarification of boundaries and negotiations concerning the exchange of land between the Marquess and the Wallers, the surviving records do not provide a full picture of events and motives at that time. It is apparent however, that the Wallers were demonstrating a marked lack of deference toward the Marquess, muscling in where they perceived business opportunity and, one suspects, taking advantage of their position as executors to get very much the better of the carve up of Gutteridge's estate.

The other lands purchased by John Waller from the Gutteridge estate were situated adjacent to the London Road (the Cutenhoe Closes) and in High Town. Besides the Limbury Farm, Edmund also purchased a small amount of land in the Dallow area (see Appendix 5) and he also rented land (on the opposite side of George Street to John) from Charles Cox. At some time between 1839 and 1845 this passed to his brother Thomas whose widow Jane, allowed a linking road (George Street West) to be made between George Street and Stuart Street on this land in 1847.

The Marquess of Bute, the Gutteridges, the Burrs, the Wallers and the Chases were thus the leading landowning families within Luton township during the first half of the nineteenth century. A substantial amount of land beyond family control and in the hands of the Luton and
Dunstable charities. These were in fact second in extent (within the urban area) only to that held by Bute (see appendix 6). The Luton charities numbered seventeen in all, classified under five groups - Bread Fund, Apprentice Fund, School Fund, distribution fund and Repairing Fund (for the Parish Church). All but three of these charities were the responsibility of the Church Wardens, a duty which an investigating committee appointed by a Vestry Meeting in March 1853, concluded was not being discharged in accordance with the donors original intentions.

In addition to the main landowners there were others who are worthy of mention. William Townrow, a yeoman farmer and Baptist owned small fields measuring a total of just three acres in the vicinity of Stuart Street, two acres on Bailey Hill as well as several other pieces on the northern side of the town (see appendix 7). The plots of land adjacent to Stuart Street were probably the first to be utilised as building ground - Austin claims the date for the initial conveyance in this area to have been 1845. It is therefore likely that William Townrow purchased this land specifically for building, the pattern of ownership suggesting that he acquired this from the Marquess of Bute, from whom whom Townrow rented fields further to the east.

Charles Cox was one of the few Luton landowners who did not reside in the town and very little is known of the man. His address was given as being in Finchley, Middlesex, and all but one of his scattered fields were rented as arable land - the Burrs numbering amongst the tenants. Cox also owned premises in George Street, already mentioned, which eventually passed into the possession of another of his erstwhile tenants, the Wallers. He died sometime around 1849 (see appendix 8). Henry Brown, the Quaker timber merchant, also owned a number of scattered pieces of land mostly concentrated in the area of Chapel Street and London Road (see appendix 9). Like Townrow his acquisitions could have been recently made, but it is not known from whom.

The notable omission from this list is the Crawley family of Stockwood. Following the failure of Samuel's political career the preoccupation of both himself and his son, John Sambrook Crawley, was the consolidation of the family estate through a succession of purchases of land and farms around Luton, and through the development of improved agricultural techniques within their holdings. As appendix 10 illustrates, the Crawley family's holdings were restricted to the periphery of the town centre and with only minor exceptions this was to remain the case. For the most part therefore, the interests and commitments of the Crawley's were focused upon their extensive estates in the vicinity if Stockwood Park, Dallow, Biscot and Stopesley. These lands, second in extent only to those of the Bute estate in 1844 within Luton parish formed a band across its centre, to the north of the township. Added to during the course of the nineteenth century, the extent of the estate reached its zenith by the last decade, but because of their relative remoteness from the urban core were not to become of importance in Luton's development until this time.
The Disposal of Estates.

Land held by the charities apart, it is therefore possible to identify five names whose position as landowners (not to say as citizens) ensured that their respective fates would to a large extent determine not only the rate and direction of Luton's growth, but also evolution of the straw hat industry upon which the town's fortunes rested. A little over a quarter of a century following the death of James Gutteridge in 1831 however, was to see the virtual eclipse of these families, an eclipse caused more or less by removal or mortality.

John Chase died in 1843 (at the age of 87) to be followed two years later by Thomas and Edmund Waller, the latter with no surviving heir. One year later the Marquess of Bute cut his close interest in Luton's affairs. Frederick Chase left Luton in 1851, Frederick Burr died in 1856 (brother Charles quit the town) and John Waller died in 1859. Both Thomas and John Waller had heirs but the power of this family declined appreciably from this point. Remnants of the Burrs and Gutteridges could also be found in the district, but the prominence of these families was also effectively lost. The Chases disappear altogether.

Potential property speculators were thus presented an irresistible double enticement - an expanding local industry allied to a steady abundance of freehold building ground. Details of land and property prices are scarce, usually no more than a scribbled note in the margin of a surviving sale catalogue, and therefore a clear indication of the overall movement of land prices is not available. What is more important is that land was sufficiently abundant in Luton to be affordable for many small, first time investors. From 1839 onwards speculative activity gathers momentum with individual fields purchased and carved up in anticipation of building being able to take place.\(^4\) The physical removal of the existing landowner weakened any potential influence over development from this source, a factor more greatly enhanced by the quantity of building ground available from a number of vendors serving to limit even the power of the Marquess of Bute and his executors. It was the consumer, the property speculators, who were to have the free hand, unconstrained even by bye-laws until the mid 1850s. Rarely were any conditions placed upon the sale of land.

The first stage of urbanisation

The steady supply of building ground was assisted by the major auctions of land being interspersed with smaller sales, ensuring a good supply at all times. By 1845, urban development had already taken place on the lands of four owners (see appendix 11): the Burr's in High Town, Townrow and the Chases in New Town.\(^4\) The first tentative stages of building were also taking place on the Marquess of Bute's land in Seven Acres, the development of which serve as an example of the difficulties which were caused by the repeated absence of not only Bute but also his Steward, Thomas Collingdon.\(^4\) In Collingdon's absence many local details were handled by two solicitors - Frederick Chase and Alexander Parkes (possibly a recent arrival in Luton). John
Waller, acting with the builder John Williams, had approached Collingdon in order to secure the purchase of some of this land but had been rebuffed because his offer was "not consistent with the value of the property." Delays and confusion caused by Collingdon's repeated absence reached comic proportions when in 1842 he and Parkes sold the same piece of land in Seven Acres to two different developers, John Gray and Charles Tomson, both of whom were tenants of the Marquess elsewhere in Luton. Tomson recently having held "the piece in common" which was now Prospect Place. Parkes accepted Tomson's offer of five pounds per pole (receiving a sixty pounds deposit) and Collingdon accepted Gray's offer of six pounds per pole. Gray began building, Collingdon blamed Parkes and Tomson dug in his heels, threatening legal action. Eventually, some agreement was found between Gray and Tomson whereby it appears that Gray showed willingness to sell some ground to Tomson, but still Collingdon meddled, claiming to be protecting the Marquess' interests. Frederick Chase clearly thought otherwise and placed the blame upon the Marquess' absentee Steward. He wrote to Collingdon, intervening upon behalf of Gray who appeared to be getting the worst of the deal:

I have taken an opinion on Tomson and Gray's case, and the result is that Gray cannot be allowed to execute the Deeds of Covenants as now sought to be altered by you, it would be an act of injustice toward Gray and would involve him in serious consequences and which if the case was properly explained to his Lordship would not I am sure for a moment be entertained; by allowing Gray to take possession and build, with the terms of the Covenants settled, you cannot afterwards turn round and introduce fresh clauses to bind subsequent purchases, I do not hesitate to say whatever trouble damages or expenses Gray may be put to, or sustain, you will have to bear it, the works are all suspended in consequence and Gray cannot fulfil his contract entered into with Tomson which of course will render him liable to an Action for damages.

The bitter fiasco involved another solicitor, William Hunt, with whom Gray had a "violent quarrel" and Collingdon went as far as to remove a roof from one of Gray's constructions which Collingdon claimed was overhanging the road and therefore an "injury to the rest of his (Bute's) property". The development was obviously not being handled satisfactorily with no oversight or building control. It is therefore, hardly surprising that two other prospective purchasers of land in Seven Acres, Frederick Davis and Frederick Gee began to show a marked reluctance to complete their transactions, with Davis opting to pull out altogether. Although much initiative lay with the demand side, a landowner could not fail to influence the property market, in whatever way he behaved. At this stage the Marquess of Bute was distant and passive, leaving competing speculators to make the running and thereby ensuring that mistakes would be made.

This first stage of the building boom in Luton remains a shining example of laissez-faire economic activity, maximum financial return being the primary, in fact virtually the only consideration which drove speculators on. The undeveloped portion of Thomas Waller's estate which was auctioned upon his death was headed on the sale catalogue simply as "eighty acres freehold building ground" graphically, if bluntly illustrating how vacant land was regarded in Luton by this time. Referring to the areas fronting onto Chapel Street and lying between George Street and Stuart Street, the sale catalogue ends with the footnote "Lots 16 to 24
inclusive would be a very desirable Investment to any Capitalist disposed to erect a Straw Plait Market, which is very much needed in the Town of Luton, and there is no doubt it would pay a liberal interest for the Capital employed". In a town currently devoid of any promoting public body, private enterprise was to view priorities otherwise and housing, offering a better short term return for smaller outlay, was to occupy these sites although some of Luton's more elegant were to be erected in George Street West, laid out across Thomas Waller's former ground. Luton would have to wait until the advent of public institutions for the provision of a purpose built plait market.

In the latter 1840s building activity became chiefly concentrated in the New Town area off Chapel Street (for development up until 1850 see appendix 12). The momentum of progress at Prospect Place diminished and the Seven Acres debacle appears to have inhibited speculation there. Solicitor E. C. Williamson however, who lived at the junction of Tower Hill and George Street and owned cottages and land close by, was pressing to buy further parts of Seven Acres immediately to the rear of his garden. Williamson was not planning to plant an orchard; he was acquiring land for a little property speculation of his own. By no means were all his social peers motivated in the same way: a public auction in 1847 saw Richard Vyse secure Kidmans Close, three acres of meadow between Chapel Street and Castle Street for £4000. Vyse purchased the land in order to extend the garden of his house which was situated alongside. In doing so Vyse apparently left a number of disappointed speculators - he also had snuffed out the possibility of low grade New Town housing coming too close to his house.

The new streets under construction were almost entirely for dwellings: public buildings were restricted to public houses, nonconformist chapels (of which four substantial examples were built between 1835 and 1850) and two schools. The Anglican church was making little effort to cater for the spiritual and educational needs of Luton's growing numbers. The one outstanding example of a public building was erected in 1847 - a Town Hall built at the northern end of George Street. In addition to this a "reading room" was situated in Castle Street and "public baths" owned by John Gray in New Bedford Road, next to his brewery.

The five years after 1845 saw approximately five hundred houses built in Luton. The census returns for 1841 and 1851 record that there were 1,139 and 2,081 houses in the township respectively. A tally drawn from the 1845 Valuation List numbers 1,481. This figure comprises houses, public houses and shops i.e. habitable buildings. It may be a slight underestimate because the latter is occasionally referred to in the plural i.e. "houses and shops".

Urbanisation 1850-1876.

On Monday, 7th April 1851, the Burr family placed more of their estate onto the market: "To Capitalists, Builders and Others Seeking Desirable Investments....Eligible Building Ground." It is unlikely that the leading brewer in Luton was in need of the money: no expansion of the business was occurring which would require additional capital. During the 1850s however, further land was to be released with a new road (Albert Road) being laid out upon a meadow
which linked Langley Street with Prospect Place. Still unsold by 1855 were the Burr's brewery, tied houses, fields along the eastern side of Langley Street plus the unsold assets from the 1851 sale. A series of fields in the south east of the township which the Burr family had acquired between 1803 and 1853 were bought by John Shaw Leigh in July 1856.\textsuperscript{56} It appears that the Burr's were deciding to cash in on the investment made by their family but if Frederick Burr was making plans to use the sums raised for business investment his sudden death halted this and the business was sold off very soon after. Leigh did not build upon these but instead left them as an undeveloped buffer between the growing town and his park immediately to the south.

By the mid 1850s the Chase family had relinquished nearly all their Luton holdings and departed the town. At the same time the Bute Trustees released more fields along Stuart Street as far as the lane to Buxton Wood. Much of the New Town lands however, remained undeveloped and with the disappearance of the Burrs and Chases, the Bute monopoly of land remained largely inviolate, and if anything had strengthened. What, if any, was the policy of the Bute Trustees toward their Luton lands is unknown.

The buoyant property market of this period was placing pressure upon other, minor landowners to sell. The freehold land which in 1839 was owned by the Rev. Lucas (non-local) was situated on a prime site between Manchester Street and Stuart Street, dissected by Upper George Street. All of this was sold off in one auction in June 1855, realising £9,961.\textsuperscript{57} Elsewhere, there was further building taking place along Guildford Street, but not at a rapid rate.\textsuperscript{58} The commercial potential of this area was to change when belatedly Luton's first railway arrived in 1858. Running from Hertford the route of the track crossed land still held by the Burrs near to the Brache and that owned by Ashton's Charity at the foot of Hart Hill before crossing Seven Acres thereby cutting off High Town from the rest of Luton. Crossing Lucas' fields it passed away from the urban area eastwards via the fields behind the Bury Farm along the Dunstable Road. Its entire route traversed open country and although necessitated the re-routing of roads in High Town, caused relatively little disruption. Inevitably the ground adjacent to the station and goods area at the top of Bute Street became extremely desirable and almost immediately applications were made for the land near to the station.\textsuperscript{59} This area between the station and George Street was to become the commercial hub of Luton, featuring a concentration of the larger hat factories.

In 1861 William Townrow died and his widow placed the entire estate onto the market for auction.\textsuperscript{60} Some parts of Townrow's land had been disposed of in the spring of 1860 at scattered sites around Luton - Bailey Hill, Dallow, Leagrave and High Town. This had been a great success realising prices between £100 and £165 per acre in the face of great demand.\textsuperscript{61}

It was during the 1860s that the Bute estate substantially diminished its land holdings in the township. The first major sale was held at the George Hotel on 26th June 1862 at which a collection of scattered lands were auctioned.\textsuperscript{62} Much of these lay in the vicinity of Park Street and a local newspaper reported that there was "good competition" for the garden ground which made "very good prices". Part of this ground was purchased by James Hopkins, a Park Street builder, but remained undeveloped until the late nineteenth century (a section becoming the East Ward Recreation Ground) and a further five acres were purchased by the Board of Health at that
time developing a sewage treatment plant. The Bute Trustees had made an astute calculation in the timing of the sale which was a success at which "there was a large attendance of gentleman and the bidding spirited".

In 1867 the Trustees miscalculated, overplaying their hand whilst seeking to take advantage of the arrival of the Midland Railway through Bute's land around Coney Hall. The sale resulted in the creation of new streets but took place at the beginning of a deep depression in the straw hat trade with an added disadvantage being placed upon hopes of success by the Trustees shackling the various lots with conditions of sale stipulating what type and value of building might be erected there. Each lot was sold but although "there was a good company present....the biddings were not spirited...."

Similarly, the sale of the late Richard Vyse's Luton estate two months later was also a failure, necessitating a second sale in 1872, once the straw hat trade had improved. The rate of urbanisation was notably dwindling during the late 1860s and early 1870s. King Street, the last street to connect George Street with Stuart Street was built upon its eastern side. This street - "one of the most imposing thoroughfares in Luton" contained a number of elegant three storey houses for the middle classes together with a small number of shops. There were however, no new streets and even after the hat trade recovered the period up to, and immediately after incorporation in 1876 saw no major sales of land but instead, consolidation upon that which had already been released for development (see appendix 16). The stagnation in the property market during this period provides a clear example of the correlation between the fortunes of the staple trade and the effects that this had upon property speculation, the various aspects of which will be considered in the next chapter.
Chapter 3. Property and the hat trade.

Housing and the building trade before 1850.

Much of Luton's housing stock in the mid nineteenth century was built to contain the primitive stages of the urbanisation of the straw hat industry. Later, a greater proportion of the work force was to undertake their labours within the confines of purpose built factories, but during the early stages of growth the system of "putting out" represented an urban evolution of a cottage industry. As thousands were drawn into the town on a seasonal or permanent basis on the strength of the hat trade, Luton's houses frequently doubled as workshops as well as dwellings, and were to be increasingly built with this intention. For this demand for housing to be met by the building industry it was necessary for the latter to expand apace: the ease with which farmers, brewers and retailers were able to diversify economic activity, or shift into a new area altogether, provides a hallmark of the dynamic stage which existed before full industrialisation with its greater specialisation and the formal public institutions which are associated with a more advanced economy.

Many of Luton's earliest (and consequently worst) examples of housing were removed in various private and commercial developments during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Those that did survive were virtually all swept away through a series of clearance programmes which were carried out by the Corporation between 1930 and 1938. A few lingered on in isolated pockets after World War Two but disappeared (along with much else in the town centre) during the re-development plans of the post war era. The period between 1830 and 1850 was one unfettered by building regulations and consequently one in which houses were built in little short of an unrestricted free for all, the limiting factors upon developers being the location and size of plot of ground, and the available capital. It is not easy to provide typical examples of Luton housing from this period but there are some common features.

Virtually all the houses were built of locally produced bricks and usually these bricks were a distinctive dark grey or plum colour. By the end of the nineteenth century brick kilns had opened at Stopsley, Round Green, Caddington, Bailey Hill and close to the Dunstable Road. It is difficult to establish a precise date as to when these brickfields were opened up and it is very possible that there were others, records of whose operations do not survive. Within Luton township there were three kilns which were known to have been operating before 1845, all of these were upon land which was owned by the Marquess of Bute illustrating another dimension by which he and later the trustees of his estate facilitated the urban growth of Luton.

The oldest of the three were situated on the eastern side of Dunstable Road close to "The Fox" public house. Operated by William and subsequently Elizabeth Gregory it was already functioning in the 1830s appearing to have ceased by 1855. In 1834 John Williams successfully negotiated access to the brick earth in White Hill Close (between the present London and Tennyson Roads), this necessitating the abrupt removal of the sitting tenant farmer, Charles
Tomson, who naturally objected to the somewhat shabby treatment which he received at the hands of Collingdon, not for the last time as the Seven Acres experience was to prove. Collingdon wrote to Tomson in September 1834:

I am sorry to find that it is unavoidably necessary to take the whole of White Hill Close for the purpose of Brickmaking....although you do not like to give up this land, that as it will be a considerable benefit to his lordship; you will not object to do so."2

Tomson did indeed object, but realising that there was little he could do hung out for alternative land and compensation for hedges and crops - he had been intending to sow barley:

....I understand that White Hill Close is intended for Williams if it must be so I hope you have secured the Bush Piece he bought at Gutteridge's sale, if you cannot Buy it must be rented of him, We must have it....you will please Observe that I will have nothing to do with Mr. Williams, therefore Whatever sum of Money I am to Receive for giving the field up, I shall Expect to Receive from You....NB Pray write to me very soon and where to address you."3

Although he was unable to prevent himself being turfed off the land Tomson was able to secure compensation at a valuation which was acceptable to the Hoo estate and to Williams. Clearly the Hoo realised that mollification of a disgruntled farmer was a worthy outlay when set against the return to be derived via Williams' operation, one which far outweighed the agricultural value of the land. The fourteen year lease arranged between Bute and Williams required the Luton builder to pay a yearly rental of £12 for the land plus a further £35.5s for its use for the purposes of brickmaking. Williams was obliged to pay 2/6d for every thousand bricks produced and further sums for every thousand tiles according to size; 2/6d if six inches square, 9d if nine inches square and 7/6d if twelve inches square.74

The monitoring of brick and tile production presented something of a problem as Collingdon felt that the estate's income was not something which should depend upon a gentleman's agreement with Williams. This matter was drawn to the attention of Frederick Chase when the latter was in the process of drawing up the legal agreement between Bute and Williams:

There is one difficulty which I will draw your attention that is how is it to be ascertained the number of each awhile to be made, we can check the Bricks and the Bricks only by the Duty paid to the Excise, but if the Duty should be taken off what is to be done then? This must be properly defined in the lease; it must not be left to the lessee.75

There was no duty upon tiles and therefore Chase recommended that Williams be obliged to declare an Affidavit. The agreement signed required Williams to keep clear records of bricks and tiles produced for the purposes of payment to the Hoo estate and also to agree not to sub-let the site. After twelve years the site was sold although it is not known whether Williams was the purchaser.76 Ten years later a similar agreement was drawn up between the Marquess and
another Luton builder, Robert Smith. At £10 per annum Smith secured the tenancy of land near to Kidney Wood (further south along the London Road from Williams' site) on a fourteen year lease.

Although there were later to be other brickfields to be opened up elsewhere these agreements gave Williams and Smith a monopoly of brick production in an area close to the main location of building activity. To what extent the proximity of one influenced the choice of location of the other is difficult to answer. What is certain is that Williams and Smith were strategically and advantageously placed to develop their building operations: both of course were amongst purchasers of land with Robert Smith in particular owning a substantial number of buildings in the New Town/Park Town area. The identity of the builder of each house in Luton in the mid-nineteenth century is unrecorded but it is reasonable to suppose that Smith and Williams were responsible for a substantial proportion.

Pre-1850 housing

There are few descriptions of working-class housing erected during the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The most vivid account of the type of living conditions which the poor had to endure comes from the public inquest into the cholera outbreak of the autumn of 1853 which had been concentrated in Adelaide Terrace. There, the thirty three back to back, one up, one down cottages were built of plaster and lathe. Amenities by 1853 comprised a communal (but defective) well, an open cesspit and four communal privies. Inherent difficulties due to the poor standard of building were further exacerbated by the proximity of Jennings and Gates candle factory, divided from Adelaide Terrace by a high wall which ran its length. The smell of the fat from the factory frequently caused the inhabitants of the Terrace to vomit their meals.

The period between the late 1830s and 1850 witnessed many examples of the desire to cram as many dwellings as possible into an allotted area for building. The prevalent building style of the time was noted in a wry letter to the Bedford Times:

Having bought a bit of land, and intending to build a house for himself, the Lutonian sees no reason why the house should not be his in every sense as well as in one, and he therefore stamps upon it at once the marks of and peculiarities of his own mind. If he was to build precisely like his neighbour who could tell that the buildings did not belong to one man? One therefore puts his house a little askew; another sets the roof at a different angle from that of his neighbour; a third aspires nearer to heaven; a fourth will be more humble and let another tower over him. One may admire the popular sense of the proverb that an Englishman's home is his castle, but it is to be regretted that it has not been gently curbed by a deference to public convenience and order, and that private whims have not been counteracted by the salutary provisions of a local building act.

Whilst not fully representing the motivation behind the various speculators and builders, the description vividly paints a picture of what was the result of their endeavours. The unregulated period of building which lasted until the mid 1850s provided the greatest diversity in housing which Luton was to see in the century. That is probably the best that can be said for it.
Ill-ventilated, shoddily constructed, with no facilities for lighting or sanitation districts such as Spring Place, Bryden's Passage, Gaitskell Terrace and Chase Street soon became bywords for squalor and its associated problems.

The bad examples of construction which were proliferating in New Town and High Town however, should not deflect one from observing that there was also being built at this time some perfectly respectable housing which even if small, was adequately ventilated, equipped with the necessary facilities and overall provided at least tolerable living conditions. There were also examples of housing which were even better than that. It should also be appreciated that bad though many parts of Luton had become the extremes of concentrated squalor that were found in medium size and large towns had not yet developed in what remained, despite its recent growth, a small town. There were no cellar dwellings, such as had proliferated in Manchester, and because housing was being erected upon scattered sites (determined by land available for purchase) there were not yet dense alleys and rookeries, impervious to sunlight and fresh air (not to mention the officers of the law) that could be found elsewhere in England. Nonetheless, with completely unregulated building, by the late 1840s it was clear in which direction Luton was travelling.

Housing and the building industry post-1850.

As already stated, the various public and private clearance programmes of the last one hundred years have deprived us of much of the material evidence to compare change in building quality between pre-1850 housing in Luton and, in particular, that erected after the passing of the Local Government Act of 1858. It is clear however, that the housing free for all, if not stopped short by the establishment of a local Board of Health was steadily curtailed within a period of ten years, many examples of this period being deemed of sufficient standard to escape the slum clearance programmes. In many respects this represents a quite remarkable achievement given the inherent weaknesses of the new system as laid down by the Acts of 1848 and 1858, which lied for their enactment upon local discretion. As will be seen in the following chapters there lurked within Luton, as in other towns, a pervasive negative influence which could be stirred into blunting attempts at local improvement.

Detailed analysis of building records during the mid-nineteenth century are severely hampered by the absence of records but the improvement in standards coincided with a greater uniformity of building materials. All constructions were now built with bricks drawn from an increasing number of kilns. With tighter controls being enforced by the Board of Health after 1850 it was no longer possible to construct external, internal or party walls out of wood or "composite" materials as had once been the case. The dimensions of houses increased and the roads became wider. With few exceptions Luton's working-class and lower middle-class housing became typified by brick two-storey terraced houses fronting onto the street and topped by pitched and gabled slate roofs. There were of course rear extensions for the manufacture of hats but more typically domestic dwellings were built with a large scullery or back room in which this
cottage industry was continued. No back to back houses were built after 1850 with all properties possessing at least a communal back yard in which was located a privy. Water closets became prevalent from the 1860s onward with the Board of Health keen to promote them, although their use was by no means universal.\(^{80}\)

Although uniform in basic materials and design a diversity of ornamentation and style was to be found within even the humblest of streets. Doorways were either square headed or carried a semicircular arch often with accompanying minor ornamental features such as jutting wooden lintels, decorated architraves and keystones topping an arch (see appendix 24) Windows were basically square and occasionally arched within which a vertically sliding sash was universal.

The main impact of the local Board of Health lay in the regulation of new buildings. Essentially this meant that ensuring that none were built which could impede upon the light, stability or sanitation of another, or which were injurious to those who would inhabit it. To this end it was also empowered to inspect all plans for buildings to see whether adequate facilities such as mains sewage disposal were incorporated or that no houses were occupied before completion. Its powers were not retrospective and its attempts to make significant improvements to Luton's worst dwellings were disdainfully ignored by their landlords. It is also open to doubt as to the degree of vigilance that the Board was able to bring to bear with regards to the sanitary conditions of houses once erected and occupied. The minute books of the Board show that its Surveyors and Medical Officers of Health made visits to homes and lodging houses but the conscientiousness and competence of some of its Surveyors left a lot to be desired and their often optimistic reports therefore, should not be relied upon too heavily. Working within a town whose staple trade encouraged periodic overcrowding, it is hardly surprising that the Board with limited powers, inattentive appointees, often low calibre members and embattled with occasional bouts of litigation, could not be a heavily interventionist body.\(^{81}\)

Of greater importance in Luton, as elsewhere was the application of central government legislation chiefly through the provision of local bye-laws. In Luton's case this was reinforced by the more active Board of the mid 1850s coupled with the Local Government Act of 1858. Section thirty four of this was concerned with in particular with the space around buildings, construction materials and the sanitary facilities which were supplied to them.\(^{82}\) Dead-end, dog leg developments exemplified by Spring Place cease from this time onward, to be replaced by typical bye-law housing: rows of solid, if plain terraced houses, each with their own piece of private space at the rear and differentiated from their neighbours in the street only by minor architectural adornments. By curtailing abuses on the part of the unscrupulous the bye-laws provided legal parameters within which builders could operate. Their influence upon what went on within this framework depended upon the discretion and conscientiousness on the part of the Board of Health.

One must be wary so as not to trivialise the lives of people past when one repeats the fact that although Luton's housing was very poor in certain quarters, in general it never reached the depths and scale of the large cities, or even medium size cities such as Nottingham. It would be of little consolation to the hapless tenant of Adelaide Terrace or Jones' Yard to know that although their children were ravaged by diseases brought about by the squalor in which they
existed, there were greater numbers still who were suffering in for example, Gateshead's flats. Discussion of slums in Luton's context however, concerns analysis of individual courtyards and small streets as opposed to whole districts. Similarly, the evident pride with which some Lutonians held the place should not deflect from the fact that in the mid nineteenth century we are still dealing with a small town, the relative political insignificance of which was brought home to Luton by Disraeli's brusque abandonment of its parliamentary aspirations in 1867. Although public attempts to remove the slums were ineffective, the improvement in building standards from the mid 1850s ensured that these were to form a diminishing proportion of the total housing stock as Luton expanded.

The Board of Health established minimum standards, encouraged good practices and took action against cases of infringements. It was considerably and crucially abetted by the limited building which had taken place in Luton prior to its formation and by the plentiful supply of land which removed the demand for intense development, a pressure which might severely tested the Board's ability to hold the line.

**Fig 2. Average number of persons per dwelling, Luton township.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Houses</th>
<th>Persons per house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>3961</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>5827</td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>10647</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>15329</td>
<td>2724</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>17316</td>
<td>3345</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>23960</td>
<td>4597</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of his criticism of lodging houses, overcrowding within dwellings was not one of the predominant features of Edward Cresy's Board of Health report of 1850 (made at the end of the busy season). Again, the widespread availability of building ground lessened the potential of this problem which tended to be periodic and dictated by the degree of brief intensity which this period was enjoying. Overcrowding was regarded as a low priority by a Board which was aware that it would go away come May as the migrant workers quit the town. Fig 2. shows little improvement, the .45 reduction between 1861 and 1871 attributable as much to the recession in the industry as to the activity of the Board of Health. The apparent lack of improvement in the figures must also be mitigated by the undoubted improvement in house construction and design: five people in a Chobham Street terraced house in 1881 would enjoy a far more comfortable life than five people occupying an Ainsworth Passage hovel in 1851.
### Fig 2.6 Comparison of average numbers of persons per house, 1881.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inhabited houses</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Persons per house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doncaster</td>
<td>4513</td>
<td>21139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterborough</td>
<td>4334</td>
<td>21228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnsley</td>
<td>5954</td>
<td>29790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh</td>
<td>4343</td>
<td>21734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford</td>
<td>3888</td>
<td>19533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>4310</td>
<td>21704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>4563</td>
<td>22979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilston</td>
<td>4422</td>
<td>22730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colchester</td>
<td>5479</td>
<td>28374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luton</td>
<td>4597</td>
<td>23960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crewe</td>
<td>4588</td>
<td>24385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T'bridge Wells</td>
<td>4435</td>
<td>24308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walthamstow</td>
<td>3870</td>
<td>21715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallasey</td>
<td>3706</td>
<td>21192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>4615</td>
<td>26424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravesend</td>
<td>3806</td>
<td>23302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunstable</td>
<td>1062</td>
<td>4627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitchin</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>8434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>38548</td>
<td>186575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>24973</td>
<td>122376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>9658</td>
<td>51881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>12185</td>
<td>82761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luton's record in this company is an average one with only Doncaster at the top and Gravesend at the bottom producing remarkably different ratios. Medium sized cities, districts on the fringe of conurbations, cathedral cities, dock towns, county towns, recently established county towns - all are represented within this table, all possessing very different local authorities and all subject to a host of different influences and experiences. The factor of changes and differences in housing must especially be considered when comparing the housing density of the above. The proportion of working class and middle class housing being rather different for instance in places as unlike as Crewe and Tunbridge Wells, just as it was between Bedford and Luton. The activities of an individual local authority was just one contribution to the blend of circumstances which collectively were decisive. Luton was no exception to this.
Influences on the demand for housing

Other identified influences upon building patterns and styles are numerous and various writers have placed differing degrees of emphasis upon each. Central government legislation, existing local social structures, the cost and availability of land, the desire for segregation between and within social classes, the location of employment, the nature of the local economy and the power of local landowners have all been cited as determining factors in the construction of houses and the layout of streets.

The overwhelming demand for housing in Luton in the period 1830-1876 was for dwellings which would also serve as units of production; consequently two distinct styles of housing evolved locally. The first, and overwhelmingly the largest was the two-storey homes in which many families, frequently augmented by lodgers, lived and worked. The latter part of the nineteenth century saw an evolution in this class away from the straightforward two-up, two-down pattern and toward houses with a third room downstairs, extended at the rear, and later with an extension to the upper storey situated above it. The second variation was built for those domestic and commercial premises which required a retail outlet on the ground floor. Examples of this type were concentrated upon the central streets in the town - George Street, Bute Street, Cheapside, Waller Street and Park Street. Here the cost of land was highest of all, encouraging additional storeys. Examples of three storey domestic dwellings were only to be found in middle class housing in certain areas - Rothesay Road, Castle Street and the lower end of Wellington Street. This latter road was ideally located to change its function during the last quarter of the nineteenth century to accommodate some of Luton's finest shops.

The fact that sufficient and available land was spread between a number of estates was crucial in holding down prices and diminishing the potential influence of landowning interests, an influence which was further diluted by death and removal. The cost of land and the conditions attached to it is one starting point in establishing why certain types of dwelling were erected, a quoted example being the tenement buildings of Scotland built upon land where the cost was high and governed by strict regulations. Luton's land was almost entirely freehold and regulated only by local bye-laws. There was always sufficient affordable land to satisfy the demand of small scale investors. Even the Bute estate was not in a position to force up the price by withholding land - as had the father of John Shaw Leigh in the dockland area of Liverpool earlier in the century. The availability of sufficient ground in the hands of several other smaller, but still significant owners ensured that there was little foreseeable advantage to the Bute estate in not relinquishing its town holdings. Only once did it attempt in any way to influence the type of buildings erected upon it - at the disappointing sale of 1867. The role of even Luton's biggest landowner was limited to that of vendor.83

If not the landowners, who or what shaped Luton's streets within the framework laid down by legislation and market forces? Again we are hampered by having to make do with bricks and mortar as tangible evidence rather than paper and ink, but this very evidence hints at the answer. In common with other towns Luton's builders were local, small-scale operators: with little capital required it was relatively easy to enter the building trade (and not much harder to
fall out of it) and little direct experience was necessary. Numerous self-help guides, such as "The Builder's Practical Director, were available for the small timer who, according to Dyos constituted some 80% of the national building trade. 84 This group was defined as those employing less than fifty men and it is probable that all of Luton's builders in the mid nineteenth century fell within this category. Many of these men had probably seen few towns other than their own and once the introduction of building regulations made it impossible for developers to throw up the likes of Bryden's Passage they were left with the town's traditional pattern of construction as their benchmark. This, to repeat Frederick Davis, was "in general very low": with no pressure upon them to do otherwise it is not surprising that local builders stuck with that with which they were familiar.

The decisive influence lay with the hat trade itself. In what was an inherently unstable cottage industry, carrying considerable variation in labour demands, the two storey dwelling made sense to landlord and owner/occupier alike allowing maximum flexibility for minimum outlay. During the busy season it could be crammed to the rafters with migrating workers - the 1841 census for New Town Street and Prospect Place reveals that approximately half the homes had at least one additional lodger.

Regrettably, data is lacking to establish the exact relationship between the cycles of the straw hat and building industries - particularly for the latter. Luton's builders responded only to local requirements but in often hazardous circumstances as they were relying upon the fortunes of a trade which was quite literally seasonal. To depend entirely upon the demands of the straw hat industry would have left the finances of many builders and speculators in a perilous state: the fortunes of the staple trade were so unpredictable that it was very difficult to tell whether one was experiencing a temporary downturn which would last for just a few months, or something more serious which would lead to a dramatic slump in the need for houses. By the time that a developer realised that the latter was the case it may well be too late.

After a number of years of expansion, the hat industry slid into a gradual downturn from 1843. It took three years before the effect of this told fully upon the building trade which continued to be active until 1846, just at a time when the hat trade was beginning to pull out of the trough:

For the first time for many years there appears to be a halt in the passion for building in this highly prosperous town. There are several house to let, and the fact is looked upon as a curious phenomenon by those who have acted as if no bounds could be assigned to the increase of the place. The business is as prosperous as ever, but the trading in bricks and mortar has been overdone...the little check this building propensity has received will probably be salutory. Like a nipping frost in March, it will make further operations more safe and sure. 85

The property market remained active with "considerable estates to small tenements" as well as the building ground continually being available, a factor which was to hold true throughout the century and into the twentieth. 86 If, as is likely, the overbuilding of the early 1840s led to a downward pressure in rents then this would have served to alleviate the financial distress of individual families and assisted in the recovery of the hat trade. In 1844 it was reported that
every house in Luton was full, sometimes with "exorbitant" rents being charged. Three years later the landlords were struggling to fill their homes with two or three apparently empty in every street, shops abandoned and people "forced into sales under distress".87

These rents would not rise until the building trade had also recovered: in Luton this appears to have occurred very swiftly facilitated by the healthy property market and the incentive to catch up with the rejuvenated hat trade, factors which both led to a demand for housing. Together with the anticipated construction of the Watford to Luton railway line (never built) this was leading to the production of "millions of bricks". "Some months ago" estimated the Bedford Times, there had been an estimated two or three hundred empty houses in the poorest streets of the town - Burr Street, Duke Street, Gaitskell Terrace, Adelaide Terrace, High Town Road, New Town Street etc - all were full now with returning workers. In August 1851 it was reported that the estimated one hundred houses built in the preceding twelve months were all full and the output of the building industry was encouraged to to increase accordingly - two hundred houses were erected in the twelve months to July, 1853.88

With land plentiful, even during a serious slump in the hat trade during 1853-54, the building trade to continue to boom throughout the decade: half a million bricks were reported for sale in March 1857.89 It was not halted in its tracks until the following decade when a small slump in the plait trade in 1860-61 was followed after a brief recovery, by a catastrophic depression in the hat industry as a whole from 1867 until the early 1870s, the revival being attributed to the re-opening of the Paris fashion market after the Franco - Prussian War.90 The building boom of the 1840s and 1850s fizzled out as the market became saturated with houses and land. In 1861 the census revealed that there were fifty four uninhabited buildings in the town out of a total of 2778, representing 1.93%. By 1871 the proportion had risen to 7.23%, a total of 261 houses. The rate of population increase in the decade slowed down (see fig. 2.7), and possibly even fell during the latter part of the decade, although overall it was still greater than that of neighbouring towns.

Fig 2.7 Population increase in Luton, 1831-1881.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>3961</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>5827</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>10649</td>
<td>4821</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>15329</td>
<td>4681</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>17317</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>23960</td>
<td>6643</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Local evidence is scanty but the subsequent slowing down in the rate of building must have placed enormous pressure upon not only the wider local economy but in particular its construction industry, wiping out some businesses altogether. Those builders who were also landlords would have felt the squeeze on another front as rents eased down. W. H. Attwood went bankrupt at the beginning of the depression (but bounced back) and the Luton Savings Bank closed in October 1871. In the light of this depression, the decision by the Bute Trustees to attempt a large sale of land in 1867, just five years after another, appears an ill-judged and ill-informed venture. One wonders upon whom the Trustees were asking for local advice. It perhaps explains why Richard Vyse (junior) did not attempt to sell plots of land which he owned in the Castle Street area, foreseeing the failure which would take place after his death.

Clearly, the distinctive structure of the Luton hat industry, the large numbers of "makers-up" in small domestic production units determined that there would be a concomitant relationship between the hat and building trade. The strength of the hat industry prompted the need for houses and the members of Luton's families fed the employment ranks of both. John Waller certainly had no hesitation in pleading the poor state of the hat trade when negotiating over land with Collingdon who had refused his offer of £1,000 for a plot of leasehold. In his reply Waller declined to increase his offer but instead that the Marquess of Bute should consider the depressed position of the industry as well as its "gloomy prospects" before naming a price.91

Whilst the Bute Trustees and Vyse's executors had certainly over estimated the demand for housing in 1867, the reason for such a large proportion of unoccupied houses by 1871 was due in the main part to people leaving the town whilst times were bad, just as they had first migrated to it when circumstances seemed attractive. It is inconceivable that local builders would erect whole streets on the off-chance that someone might show an interest. The 1869 Board of Health Rate Book, compiled as the recession deepened, records 160 empty, or partly empty buildings, the occupants of a number of these having "absconded".92 Two years later there were to be a further 101 unoccupied buildings. A sizeable proportion of these empty homes must have been completed before 1868 which, if correct, illustrates how dormant the building industry must have become. It would be interesting to know whether the period 1867-73 saw a real fall in Luton's population or merely negligible growth.

The property owners.

In many respects property is synonymous with power. In pre-industrial, and to some extent in proto-industrial societies this was reflected not only in the economic activity within towns but also the composition of its leading citizens, men who would almost certainly have property interests vested within it. At the top of the pyramid would perhaps be a magnate, more certainly the gentry, followed by farmers (who may be tenants of the former) and the established Church (the livings of whose clergy may be in the gift of the gentry); these would be augmented by the small professional class which could be supported by the town and the shopkeepers and
craftsmen - whose business depended upon the produce of the countryside. Power was exercised through local dispensation of justice over which presided (and occasionally in which practised) the leading owners of land and property.

Property can be the base of political influence, a source of wealth and in all societies a symbol of wealth and power. Examples exist where ownership of land has been used to both stifle and promote economic activity. Although all landlords possess a degree of power over their tenants, the relationship between power and property can be overstated, the limited influence of the Marquess of Bute being a case in point. It is also apparent that the further the concentration of property is diluted, so too does its political strength also diminish. By no means an absolute correlation, the principle remains that property ownership is indicative of the social and economic forces which are at work within society.93

In the first instance, it is clear that from the late 1830s Luton's balance of power began to shift away from the old market town elite, a process which reached its formal recognition with the granting of a charter of incorporation in 1876. As will become apparent in later chapters, it is deceptively simplistic just to claim that this vacuum of power was filled by the middle classes created by the revolution in the economic base of the town. Suffice to say for the moment that Luton's economy and society experienced an almost complete transformation in the second and third quarter of the nineteenth century, and that property ownership and the balance of power as a consequence. Within its tiny core Luton's leading citizens were broadly typical of what one might expect to find in almost any market town. In 1785 for example the town's listed trades and occupations contain the usual mix of shopkeepers, maltsters, millers, provincial attorneys and just one hat manufacturer (Williamson and Son).94 The Chase, Brown and Burr families all feature. The forty five families listed in a rate book compiled in 1811 included Crawley at Stockwood, two clerics, eight farmers, three lawyers, a surgeon, two millers, an innkeeper, five brewers and maltsters, two shopkeepers, a cooper, a painter and the Steward of Luton Hoo.95 Within this ratepaying elite only a small number owned more than one building. Those who did so in 1827 were the Marquess of Bute, the Wallers, Joseph Everett, William Burr, William Adams and Thomas Kidman (maltsters), Benjamin Harrison, William Burge, Thomas Butlin and Henry Brown.96 By 1860 this composition, the Brown's apart, had disintegrated.

Who then, benefited from this change? Before analysing this it is worth recalling the method of land disposal and the form of tenure which existed in Luton. There exists here a distinctive uniformity from the earliest days, one which was maintained into the twentieth century.97 In virtually all cases the freehold only was conveyed; a plot of land would be purchased (not necessarily by a builder), an auction being the usual venue. Buildings erected by a speculator would either be retained for rental or sold to a third party. Evidence for this last point is very thin and this suggests that a high proportion was held by the speculator responsible for the building, at least in the short term. Leases were few and long-term leases unknown. Rarely were any conditions ever attached to the purchase and after 1854 the Board of Health were able to apply minimum standards of building control with a minimum degree of success.
Certain groups within Luton society were to be the beneficiaries of the first stage of the property boom. An indication of who exploited the circumstances which presented themselves is given by the 1841 census plus a contemporary local guide compiled by John Waller. It is worth focusing upon New Town, the oldest districts of which were less than ten years old (see appendices one, seventeen and eighteen) at the time that these records were compiled. There, in 1842, were a total of 104 separate owners of property (including ten women). A high number of these, thirty nine (41%) do not appear in the nearest available poll book suggesting that they either were not resident in the district or, more probably, they had not previously held sufficient property in order to qualify for the franchise - the ten women of course, not counting in any case.

Fig. 2.8 Overall property ownership in New Town, 1842, (percentages in brackets).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of property owners</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of female owners*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of male property owners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not registered in the 1841 poll book</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of male property owners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listed as non-Luton residents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Mary Reynolds owned a house jointly with Ann Brown - counted as one owner.

Fig. 2.9 Occupational breakdown of New Town property owners, 1842, (percentages in brackets).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade/occupation</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The passage of time and the lack of comprehensive sources mean that occupations can only be attributed with reasonable certainty to about half of the owners of property in the New Town area. The occupational breakdown in Fig 2.9, however, does show some interesting pointers, especially when compared the occupational proportions in the town as a whole from the closest available trade directory, published in 1839. This lists a total of 492 individual tradesmen and professionals of which 31.9% are retailers, 10.9% are involved with the straw hat trade and just 4.2% involved with the building and allied trades. Even after allowing for all qualifications
with these figures one clear conclusion can be drawn. That is, those involved in the construction of Luton's streets were advantageously placed to acquire property, an option which they adopted, forming a phalanx of landlords which was out of all proportion with their numbers in the town as a whole.

Although not a surprising return, this sphere of economic activity adds another dimension to Luton's wealth generating growth, an area which has been overlooked because of a complete absence of data about the town's construction industry and the distinctiveness of the staple trade. The extent to which those involved with the building trade were also diversifying as landlords becomes even more apparent with Fig. 2.10

Fig. 2.10 No. of houses owned by selected occupational groups, New Town, 1842. (percentages in brackets).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of buildings</th>
<th>134</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>75  (55.97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>14  (10.44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewing</td>
<td>9   (6.71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>13  (9.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>23  (17.18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within New Town Street and Prospect Place there lived 451 people, 7.7% of Luton's population, in ninety seven households. Thirteen of these households owned their own, and others' property. Chief amongst these was William Lewington, an unmarried timber merchant in his twenties who lived alone and was not a registered voter; Lewington owned seventeen cottages in the immediate area. Some groups in local society are conspicuously under-represented amongst the property owners, notably the local clergy and gentry of whom there were a number of specimens scattered around the district but who provided no speculators or landlords. It was possible for these groups to play other roles in the property market, in particular by acting as lenders of money. The provision of mortgages will be discussed elsewhere but it is apparent that even those of humble origin were able to find the necessary capital or meet repayments and to find the reason why one need look no further than the town's staple trade.

Although women do not comprise a large proportion of property owners per se, their roles as contributors to household incomes is, as we have seen, of vital significance; an example of this is provided by the family of James Clark. In 1841 Clark, a forty year old plait dealer (born in Bedfordshire) owned two cottages in New Town, in one of which he lived with his wife Mary, eight children and a lodger, Emma Edwards, a girl between ten and fifteen years old. In addition to James’ income as a plait dealer the home possessed that of Mary, a straw plaiter, together with that of four of the children and Emma, who were hat sewers. It is possible that the younger children also plaited straw and having a plait dealer as the head of the household was an advantage, reducing costs to the sewers and removing a possible source of exploitation.
John Parkins, a middle aged carpenter, owned six properties in New Town. His household was much smaller than Clark's comprising just his wife Frances, and teenage lodger, Ann Birden, both women working as bonnet sewers. Ann, like many girls would probably leave the Parkins' home at the end of the season. Owner occupier Abraham Fountain was a carpenter in his early thirties living with his wife, Mary, a sewer, and three year old daughter Kitty: Fountain was far from being a model of the prudent, sober artisan and was frequently in trouble, on one occasion being convicted of assault on an Inspector in the Hertfordshire Constabulary.  

Ann Peach, listed as being "thirty" years of age in the census, owned her own plus two other cottages. Besides the rent derived from these, Ann Peach's household income was considerably abetted by the work of herself, her mother and her daughter as hat sewers.

The substantial proportion of people from relatively humble trades who owned property should not detract from the fact that the majority of householders were still tenants. Multiple incomes were no guarantee of financial stability, such was the precarious nature of much of the town's occupations, and many would prefer to rent for a variety of personal reasons. Of the thirteen owners of houses in New Town Street and Prospect Place, however, ten had more than one income coming in to household, in all but two cases one or more of the home's incomes were derived from the hat trade. An abundance of affordable land, an active construction industry and the structure and demands of Luton's straw hat trade were mutually complimentary, providing diverse sources of income for property owner and tenant, father, mother and even children. Bricklaying, blocking, carpentry, plumbing, plaiting, paper hanging, renting, retailing and sewing: all were provided opportunities for work in a town where the seasonal, fluctuating nature of many of its trades encouraged less reliance upon one source of income in order to provide greater security.

Of all this frenetic activity an astonished Bedford Times noted, "For some years past everyman who could scrape a few pounds together has built himself a house; success has encouraged him to further speculations, and cases have occurred of labourers and journeymen mechanics erecting whole streets". Whilst perhaps a slight exaggeration (no speculator erected an entire street) it does indicate that a fundamental revolution was taking place within the fabric of Luton's society, as well as in its physical environment.

Initial conclusions drawn from John Waller's survey and from the 1841 census are reinforced by a more comprehensive catalogue made at a later date when New Town and High Town were more fully established, and the town as a whole more extensively developed. Fragmentary though Luton's records may be, a surviving rate book compiled for the local Board of Health in 1869 provides sufficient data upon which to investigate who were comprising the town's property owning sector. The list of individual owners is headed not surprisingly by Thomas Sworder with his array of tied houses, brewery yards and cottages. Strung out below him are aligned a series of (mainly) men with a diversity of occupations but from whom four broad groupings emerge - those involved with the hat trade, retailers, the brewing industry and the building trade - plus one group which does not feature
strongly in 1842, but which still features strongly in 1869 despite the industrialisation taking place; farmers. As with 1842 there are all manner of qualifications to be made here but the number of individuals to whom occupations can be established with certainty, or whose range can be calculated, is tabulated in Fig. 2.11

**Fig. 2.11. Numbers of individuals in occupational groups who owned property in 1869 (percentages in brackets).**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewing</td>
<td>30 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>62 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charities</td>
<td>2 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>14 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen</td>
<td>23 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>13 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>149 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>15 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>57 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>12 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Institutions</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>136 (26%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Plus the following not shown on the graphs (appendices 22-24):
- Banks 2 (0%)
- G.N.R Co. 1 (0%)

A more meaningful insight into who were becoming the new property owners can gauged by comparing the above totals with an occupational breakdown based upon the number of properties concentrating also upon those who owned four or more in the town. This will assist in identifying to which groups fell concentrations of property filtering out the small owner occupier from the rentier.

The property owning dominance of five particular groups mentioned above - building, brewing, farming, retail and the hat trade is even more evident in Fig. 2.12 but it also clear that this is not an even balance. The brewing return in column three exaggerates the activity of those connected with the drink trade with those at its higher level including Sworder (eighty eight properties), the trustees of Frederick Burr (still with twenty two) and others who combined occupations - Richard How (publican and baker), James Hawkes (publican and wheelwright) - or those in an associated trade which might just as easily fall into another category: cooper Thomas Foster owned twenty four properties. Fewer than one in ten publicans owned property although one such exception was Kate Tomalin, a widow and retired publican who lived in a modest terraced house in Cobden Street. Whatever savings she had managed to accrue for her old age
were considerably supplemented by twelve medium sized cottages that she owned in nearby Hitchin Road together with the Harrow public house kept by twenty six year old Thomas Gutteridge Tomalin.

Fig. 2.12 Property ownership in Luton, 1869, based upon occupational group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of property owners</th>
<th>Total no. properties</th>
<th>Excluding less than four properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brewing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailers</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>553</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total including unknown. 754

The strong position of those from within the construction industry to become property landlords has already been alluded to. The names of Smith and Williams stand prominent in the list but they are by no means the only example of the builder-rentier dynasties: the Attwoods were one family who endured bankruptcy and one of the younger members of which, Arthur Bennett Attwood was able to set up a business when twenty years old from which he retired at the ripe old age of forty eight. He did so in order to pursue a public career eventually becoming Mayor of Luton on two occasions. The Smiths, Williams' and Attwoods were all Conservatives, which seems to have been a feature of Luton's bigger builders. Although the leading property owners in this sector are larger scale general builders, also featuring are carpenters, decorators and even bricklayers.

Those connected with farming possessed property which was out of all proportion with those connected within it. The number of homes that they owned were not merely the property residue of an echo from Luton's past, but rather a reflection that some affluent farming interests from the surrounding districts were able to recognise the opportunity which was
affording itself to those with capital to deploy. The Sibley family from East Hyde, of whom Henry was the most active in local affairs, benefited most. From having virtually no presence in Luton in 1839, and certainly no land, they had acquired seventy seven properties by 1869, usually of the poorest type. Their property was mainly to be found concentrated in the lower end of High Town and largely in housing erected before the application of minimum building standards by the local Board of Health. Deterred from further investment by the limited obligations set by the Board, the Sibley's callous indifference to the at times, fatal suffering of their tenants mark them out as the worst example of landlord (see part two). Of similar ilk was Joseph Dancer, whose property was largely in the New Town district.

One notable feature was the lack of involvement upon the part of the larger hat manufacturers in property speculation. The Wallers' owned few buildings other than those in which they lived and worked but Thomas and John in particular do seem to have been very active in the market as speculators. It has already been seen how Richard Vyse bought land but allowed it to remain undeveloped. The London firms had no real interest in the town other than in the manufacture of hats being neither qualified nor structured to diversify into anything else. The list of property owners connected with the hat industry is headed by Thomas Lye, the bleacher and dyer, with just sixteen buildings; the hat manufacturer who owned most was John Day with just eleven. A. T. Webster owned nothing apart from his small mansion home along the New Bedford Road. The 149 individuals to whom property was attributed, the most from any occupational group, was comprised mainly from the small operators, including sewers.

The tiny band of solicitors, Doctors, estate agents and surveyors which have been labelled "professionals" were also not prominent amongst amongst the leading men of property in the town with perhaps only five of their number who were definitely Luton residents operating as landlords. They were however, in a position to benefit substantially from the housing boom by the very nature of their professions - conveyancing (the bread and butter of provincial solicitors), land auctions, house sales, surveying, the occasional litigation between various interests - all provided a steady income for the professional class. This was not a guarantee of riches and at least one of the town's solicitors, William Hunt was so hit by financial difficulties that he was forced to quit his home and temporarily at least the practise.111 Frederick Chase and Edwin Brickwood left their Luton practises at the height of the building boom as did Thomas Sworder whose business passed to Richard Cooke.

The solicitor's key role was in oiling the machinery of property development through the arrangement and management of mortgages, a substantial proportion of which were provided by private individuals. In this the solicitors acted not only as the arrangers of a mortgage agreement but also on occasions as the mortgagee themselves. A surviving account book, that of Cooke and Sons (of the above business) sheds some light on who were the persons who provided the necessary finance for housing and purchase.112 This account book shows that besides the Luton Equitable Building Society and the South Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire Permanent Building Society (based in Hitchin), ten individuals appear as acting as mortgagees in the period between 1853 and 1857. Henry Gates (presumably the George Street grocer and ironmonger) made several loans of between £30 and £350. In 1854 Gates called in a mortgage of £200 made to
John Steel (or Steed) for property in Langley Field. The reasons for Gates doing so are not precisely known and the available source material does not make clear how frequently this occurred.\textsuperscript{113}

Like Gates, Richard Cooke also made a number of loans, one of which for £1000 to Samuel Lane who wished to build four cottages near to his own in Chobham Street. Other mortgagees included William Brown (whose death in 1856 necessitated the transfer of loans), Thomas Beeson, William Clarke (the builder), Charles Lawford and Henry Coles Brown. Sworder was also able to secure mortgages from Mr Smithman or Smitheram, an acquaintance of his from his home town of Hertford. Sworder also acted upon behalf of builder Robert Smith who does not appear to have required loans for any of his activities.

Luton's traditional elite and its bourgeois component - the aristocracy, gentry, professions, large hat manufacturers and the Browns - largely remained immune to the lure of property speculation and ownership as a source of income. One possible reason for this is that for those of substantial and/or assured incomes the return was simply not worth the investment, especially when the responsibilities and expenditure of a landlord are taken into consideration. It seems that few Luton proprietors employed agents or collectors to gather up the rent; most were too small scale (or too mean) to pay someone else to do what they could as well do themselves, especially one considers the localised nature of much of the town's property ownership. A busy, and physically more removed landlord drawn from the bourgeoisie would have neither the time nor the inclination to trail around grimy streets listening to well rehearsed excuses for not having the rent and complaints about defective downpipes from assorted cottage dwellers. They would have to eat into their profit by paying someone else to do it - and the return really was not really worth the trouble.

It is even possible that some of Luton's traditional elite viewed the burst of energetic acquisition with a measure of faint disdain. Land auctions and the humble, sometimes squalid houses which clustered around the town were regarded as an activity for grasping aspirants with limited income. Not only is it the attributed occupations for the property owners which lends credence to this; the identity of those who were to form the nucleus of the "clean" party, campaigning for a vigorous Board of Health and effective sanitary reform, were drawn conspicuously from the non-property owning sector of Luton society - the large hat manufacturers and professionals.

As far as the upper middle-classes were prepared, or needed to go into the property market was through loans and mortgages; what H. J. Dyos described as the "passive, safe as houses, five per cent way of taking part...."\textsuperscript{114} It offered profit with none of the risks entailed in pure property speculation. Some individuals would advertise loans (anonymously) through the local newspapers: one, to give an example, offered separate mortgages of £800 and £300 respectively, it being stipulated that neither sum was to be divided.\textsuperscript{115}

The building boom led to a rash of building societies being formed in the 1840s and 1850s. There was already one in existence when the Luton Benefit Building Society was formed in 1847.\textsuperscript{116} This apparently achieved immediate popularity with great competition amongst local solicitors for the post of Society Secretary and Society Solicitor as well as there being a
considerable demand for shares. Despite its initial success the Luton Benefit Building Society hit unspecified trouble in the mid 1850s (it may have been financially overstretched) and had to be reorganised with new Trustees. At this time it had approximately sixty members. The Luton Equitable Building Society was perhaps the oldest in the town and was certainly in existence at least by 1849 during which it lent out £2040 on mortgages and received an income of £2239.13.10. Frederick Chase was the solicitor for the Society.

The longest surviving building society in the town was the Luton Permanent Benefit Building Society, which was formed in 1851. Samuel Toyer was the first President of this with William Hunt the Secretary. Also with a strong Luton component was the South Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire Permanent Building Society with a number of the town's small tradesmen - Edmund Baisley, J. R. Brown, Alfred Barrett, John Keeling, Charles Lawford, Joseph Clarke, John Godwin and Charles Jones amongst its Directors. There was also the Luton Improved Building Society the Secretary of which, J. W. Pressey, was accused of embezzlement in 1859, and the Luton Equitable Loan Association which existed to lend out small sums - £190 in 1859-60.

In 1847 the London and County Bank opened a branch in Luton, transferring William Bigg from Whitney, Oxfordshire to the new branch, soon promoting him to be manager. It is acknowledged that banks were not usually prepared to advance mortgages but there is some indication that Bigg was more willing to promote growth in the town in ways which went beyond merely helping to finance public undertakings.

There was a further way in which the middle class could become indirectly involved in land development. The Luton Freehold Land Society, formed in June 1849 was influenced by the example of the Birmingham Freehold Society. The driving force behind the local imitation was A. J. Tansley, a man who does not appear to have been involved in direct speculation himself. Also prominent appears to have been Tansley's fellow hat manufacturer and radical, William Willis, as well as James Waller. Promoters of the Birmingham Society, William Scholefield M.P. and James Taylor were invited to Luton (addressing an audience of nearly eight hundred people) at a meeting of the Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Freehold Land Society in December, 1849. The finances of the Luton Freehold Land Society were based upon a weekly (unspecified) contribution ("within reach of everyman") in order to raise shares of twenty pounds each. Within two months the Land Society had approaching fifty members and by the beginning of 1850 was in a position to purchase some pasture land in the township suitable for development. In accordance with the Societies rules, upon completion the field was then divided between the shareholders, apparently by ballot. The extent to which conscientious middle class control was exerted was seen in the subsequent building which took place: the sewering of the streets was ensured at a time when there was no guarantee of enforcement by the recently elected *laissez-faire* Board of Health.

Although insupportable by clear evidence, Tansley's vision behind the formation of the Freehold Land Society was essentially to provide ordinary working men with an opportunity to own their own small piece of Luton, something which otherwise might be beyond them. In promoting this property owning democracy equal emphasis was placed upon the enfranchisement
which would be a consequence of the value of each allotted parcel of freehold. Upon reflection, it would therefore, have been no small disappointment to Tansley that, in his earnest desire to promote this cause he neglected to apply certain conditions upon membership. Consequently, many of the fifty successful allotees turned out to be men who were using the Land Society as a vehicle for speculative activity, including at least one man from outside Luton - a "Mr. Bontems" of Hemel Hempstead. Upon acquisition these men, who included George Bailey and tradesmen such as Raban, Charles Hanwell and Joseph Gardner, promptly sold their holdings at a considerable profit. Perhaps it was due to disillusion upon Tansley's part that little further was heard of the Luton Freehold Land Society.

In contrast to the arms length approach of the upper middle class is that of the petty bourgeoisie: the vanguard of this, Luton's shopkeepers, were the group who, alongside those connected with building, cashed in to the greatest extent from Luton's urbanisation. Even with only fragmentary indications of the price of land and building it is clear that it was within the resources of the retailers to secure freehold and property comprising nearly a quarter of Luton's built up area. They were in many respects more ideally placed than the town's professionals and larger manufacturers, living and working in the heart of development areas, able to keep tabs on their investment and tenants, using local knowledge to fill vacancies.

An element of disbelief lingers when confronted with the evidence that a Park Street ironmonger (William Barrett) could possess a property empire second only to that of the leading brewer and one wonders whether he was related in some way to the builder Thomas Barrett. Barrett's holdings included a third of the buildings in Regent Street, laid out in 1861, a rare local example of concentrated investment. Another such example rests with George Sole whose houses, apart from a scattering of cottages in High Town, included twenty eight former almshouses in Tower Hill. The usual approach for this class however, was piecemeal, periodic investment; Frederick Davis' ten properties comprised four in George Street West, one in Wellington Street, one on Market Hill (his own shop), three in Stuart Street and one in High Town Road.

More modest, and more typical of the new breed of landlord were Samuel Oliver and Thomas Puddephat. Oliver, besides his drapery business in Park Street, owned two houses in Park Street West and two pairs of cottages in New Town Street. Puddephat owned four buildings in Alma Street, one of which was his own residence and bakery, and the other three rented out. There was also a single property in Stuart Street and a further two in Buxton Road. Smaller still was draper George William Strange, who owned two houses (and "premises") plus a garden in Farley Road, one of which was occupied by himself and one which was rented out to a George Burnet. The pattern of ownership amongst the shopkeepers suggests that they were mainly opportunist speculators, investing as and when something small scale and affordable came on to the market.

Of the other listed occupations there are some interesting comparisons to be made: Thomas Mabbot, listed as a labourer in 1869 and unemployed in 1871 owned a row of four cottages in Chobham Street (one his own). It was unlikely that he was unemployed through choice and someone of independent means would have entered such on the census return. The
unemployed Mabbot owned one building less than surgeon Kitt Tomson. There are examples of people whose occupations would not immediately mark them out as owner occupiers, let alone landlords. Ann Cawdell, a widowed nurse of seventy (1871) owned two dwellings in John Street (one her own) plus another in Dumfries Street. Engine driver William Hudson owned his own home in Lea Road, thereby placing him on a property owning par with William Phillips, manager of the Gas Company. Three railway workers appear to have owned their homes raising the possibility of assistance from their employers. John Young, a stone sawyer, owned his cottage on Pepper Hill.

It is worth repeating that the majority of Luton citizens did not own property and there are plenty of examples from all sectors of Luton society of people who for varied and unknown reasons did not invest in property: William Allen, a builder employing two men, Charles Robinson, hat manufacturer directly employing twenty three in 1871, Thomas Briden, a lawyer and William George, a farmer, did not even own their own homes. Affluent farmers, such as Kidman at Biscot, or the Partridges at Leagrave, were not tempted to own blocks of housing as William Clarke or the Sibley's had done.

As already indicated, the upper class also kept aloof from the market. Colonel Lionel Ames never extended his close involvement with a number of aspects Luton life to its property market and the Bute estate deliberately diminished its holdings in Luton until it retained just a handful of buildings - most of these being a clutch of old cottages near to the parish church in St. Anne's Lane. As we have seen, John Shaw Leigh made no foray into the market except to consolidate around the perimeters of his own estate: in 1865 he purchased White Hill Piece from Samuel Lane, possibly in order to place a buffer between his pleasant estate and the grimy streets which were seeping towards it from the north. J. S. Crawley kept a low profile in all aspects of Luton's affairs.

Henry Coles Brown owned houses on the New Town and Park Town area, as did Lydia Brown, but this notable business family as a whole abstained from direct property speculation. The churches and chapels restricted ownership to the sanctuaries, vicarages, manses and schoolrooms. The Tower Hill almshouses that George Sole came to acquire were sold off in 1862.

Property ownership in Luton did not extend to being able to support a rentier class, and with fewer than 1% owning twenty or more buildings it was rarely a source of substantial income. Just four people on the 1871 census are described as living on "income from houses", three of these, all women, owning two or less in the town. The fourth, Samuel Toyer, was a retired builder. Similarly Charles Burr was retired, living off not only income from property but also whatever income he had accumulated from the brewery business and its subsequent sale. Those of independent means included two female Browns, at least one of which was from the above family and Ann Higgins, a seventy one year old widow described as an annuitant in the census return, and owning pairs of houses in Victoria Street and Davis Field.
Approximately 95% of Luton property owners had at least one other way of making a living demonstrating that property essentially served as a supplementary part of multiple incomes. Those whom it attracted were almost entirely the first generation of Luton's burgeoning entrepreneurial class; carpenters, small plait merchants, shoemakers and the like, all living and working in a district where a plentiful supply of small plots of affordable freehold kept the self employed of limited assets alive to constant opportunity. In very general terms, if there was such a thing as a typical Luton landlord of the period then this was likely to be self employed craftsman or trader living in a modest terraced house (or corner shop) from which he practised his occupation. He would perhaps own the cottages adjacent to his own and a couple of others, possibly on the other side of the small town where building was going on apace. Essentially, the demand for housing was generated by the economic activity of the same entrepreneurial class of freeholders and tenants who consumed its provision.

The total adult population (i.e. those above fifteen years of age) in Luton in 1871 was 15,584. The town's 750 property owners comprised therefore, 4.8% of this total. This figure needs redressing of course, as usually only the head of the household would be the owner of property. When compared with the number of inhabited buildings in Luton (3345) the proportion rises to 22.42%. Given the previously noted qualifications concerning the definition of property and the question of the small band of non-resident owners, this figure is probably a slight overestimate; approximately 18% probably represents the true proportion of Lutonians who were owners of property. This figure is considerably higher than the "unsupported" 10% quoted by Dr. Offer as being the proportion of home owners in 1914. A Luton property owner and householder, as defined in this chapter and in the source material was invariably male. This statistic consequently does a disservice to the thousands of women without whom, though they are technically not listed as a head of a household, their male partner could not hope to approach the financial level which he enjoyed.

The uniformity in housing throughout Luton, caused in part by the improved standard of building after 1850 contributed toward an even spread of occupational landlords throughout the town, with no particular group becoming attracted to any one particular standard of housing. Only at the poles of Luton housing i.e. Spring Place and Cemetery Road would one find a greater proportion of carpenters and tailors for example in the former, and their exclusion from the latter. The demands of Luton's economic structure determined that the demand for properties represented by Cemetery Road and Cardiff Road would be fairly limited: Alma Street or Adelaide Street were more typical examples of desirable and affordable Luton housing.

It also follows therefore, that there was not a substantial bourgeoisie within Luton and that consequently the issue of spatial differentiation is of only minor importance. There was not for instance, a substantial clerical class since Luton was not an administrative or commercial centre - there was no need to accommodate an army of Pooters. Exporting hats, instead of people to the capital, the streets adjacent to the railway stations (situated closer to the town centre than either Hitchin, St. Albans or Hemel Hempstead) saw not commuters' homes, but workshops and factories built upon them. With no military or academic tradition there was not
the demand for the substantial homes for retired and active officers and college or ex-colonial (significant in Bedford) staff. Most importantly of all, because Luton possessed no more than a twenty or so medium sized factories of any type, there was only a small managerial class.

At the time of incorporation there was a striking interspersal between various classes. The influence of the Bute Trustees had ensured the exclusion of the working class from the eastern side of the New Bedford Road upon which a line of small villas were built, and there were a smaller number of similar houses on rising land between Farley Hill and London Road. Crescent Road was laid out at the end of the 1850s from which the affluent middle class could gaze out of their elegant detached villas at the railway sidings which ran the length of the avenue. Crescent Road spanned the bottom width of Hart Hill, destined to become a middle class enclave by 1914, but which had seen only partial development by 1876.\(^\text{134}\)

The middle classes had not yet deserted the town centre with many of Luton's leading figures from manufacturing and the professions still preferring to live within the heart of town. William Bigg continued to reside in Castle Street until his death, not far from the home of Thomas Sworder and Edmund Vyse, William Willis lived in King Street and C. A. Austin in Upper George Street. Still clinging (just) to the status of a small town, living within central Luton remained tolerable whilst open countryside on the surrounding hills remained visible and accessible. The desire for most was to reside close to their place of business with few willing (amongst the minority which could afford to do so) to commute by train from Luton's semi-rural and rural hinterland - Leagrave, Harpenden, Wheathampstead.

The development of Luton's suburbia, with its eventual pressure upon the Crawley estate was not to take place until the latter years of the nineteenth century. Discussion of the structure of this particular urban centre does not take on great relevance until this time. For the afore mentioned reasons, Luton's landlords did not share the vested interests of the suburban landlord in protecting a smart, secluded area from the poorer housing around, as has been cited by Pooley as happening at Liverpool. Many of Luton's landlords shared the same requirements as their tenants: for an abode that would serve as a domestic and business/productive unit, or within walking distance of a place of work. The method of land disposal and their limited resources ensured that they would also live close to their tenants. Any manifestation of difference between social groups at this stage was still restricted to differences in architecture - a token, small or substantial piece of private space in front of a house, ornamentation around doors and windows, an additional storey - rather than through a clear division in living space.\(^\text{135}\)

The approach of individual speculators to their property varied considerably. Some did as Thomas Puddephat in the 1850s, repeatedly buying and selling land and buildings. Some would sell their houses in order to finance the purchase of more land for building elsewhere. A substantial number who purchased property however, did so regarding it as a long term investment rather than a short term speculation; twenty eight out of the fifty three surnames who owned houses property in New Town Street in 1842 still did so in 1869. Some steadily increased their stock as did Joseph Dancer who had added twelve further houses in New Town
Street by 1869 to the two which he owned twenty seven years earlier. Others continued with exactly the same: Ann Peach continued to live in her New Town Street cottage with two others rented out down the street. The attitudes of Dancer and Ann Peach toward their houses typifies the type of cautious small investor who comprised the bulk of Luton property owners.

The period 1830-1850 saw the development of an economic base which was consolidated in the decades after. The growth of the hat trade was central to this but it was underpinned by the availability of land. Analysis of property ownership reveals that hats alone were not the only way to earn money: income could be derived from buildings and land in numerous ways, each providing additional dimensions to Luton's economic strength.

On an individual basis, the hat and building trades did not provide scope for enormous fortunes to be made, a fact partly reflected in Luton's modest housing. Frederick Davis, a successful example of his type of small businessman left less than £2000 at the time of his death in 1874, and George Sole half that when he died four years later. Of Luton's middle class of larger businessmen, Charles Robinson and A.J. Tansley (who died in early middle age) possessed personal estates of less than £5,000 at death, and E.O. Williams' amounted to £4,284 upon death in 1886. The examples of William Bigg (leaving £16,000) and Henry Brown (just under £30,000) were rare exceptions. Far more typical of the town's bourgeoisie were Henry's namesake Frederick, a Wesleyan and hat manufacturer in Inkerman Street who left £249.8s at the time of his death in 1890, and William Dancer a grocer who cut his own throat in 1863 despite being regarded as having conducted his business life in a successful and prudent manner, had a personal estate amounting to less than £300. Many other small builders, hat merchants and manufacturers would have operated on the borders of insolvency and the housing market was insufficient to support a rentier class. What Luton indisputedly offered was a level of affluence that can best be described as "comfortable", a standard of living and an array of opportunities which for many migrants was beyond anything that they could have dreamt of elsewhere. All this frenetic enterprise, graft, ambition, exploitation, profiteering, failure and success generated a network of streets, the remnant of which serve as virtually the only evidence of the forces and processes which transformed a town. No-one planned Luton - and it showed.
NOTES


7) For example, after harvest many East Anglian farmworkers went to work in Bass' Burton brewery. In societies such as Luton where the level of literacy is low, oral tradition is often the only record of this kind of activity. Ewart Evans, G. Where Beards Wag All. The Relevance of the Oral Tradition (Faber and Faber, 1970).


9) Dony, J. G. op. cit. pp 108. Childrens Employment Commission (1862) 2nd Report of the Commissioners, pp 196-200. It was estimated that young children could earn "3s. a week or so ...and many of course, earn from that down to nothing".


11) The census enumerator rounded up the ages to the nearest five for all persons over the age of ten.


14) A deputation to the Board of Health in May, 1868 comprising Kershaw, Welch and Willis reckoned that the small workshops constituted "probably one half of the town" (see chapt. 2). Luton Times 7.5.1868.


18) Beds C. R. O. uncat. 355/4-8.

19) 'Apportionment of the Rent Charge in lieu of Tithes in the Parish of Hitchin in the County of Hertford....' (1844). Terrier and map at Herts C. R. O.


21) 'Apportionment of the Rent Charge in lieu of Tithes in the Parish of St. Albans.....in the County of Hertford.' (1847). Maps and terriers of the Abbey and St. Peters (as well as St. Michael's) in Herts C. R. O.


26) Davies, John. Ibid. p.17. See Luton Hoo papers at Beds C. R. O. (G/DDA) which contains much correspondence concerning Bute, and in particular Collingdon.


28) Letter from Bute to Edward Priest Richards concerning a tactics to be used at the forthcoming Cardiff municipal elections in 1835. Quoted in Davies, John. Ibid. p. 128.


30) Beds C. R. O. G/DDA 150/92. 7.8.1834.

31) Beds C. R. O. G/DDA 151/16.

32) Sale catalogue: "Particulars at Luton Hoo....which will be sold by Messrs Hoggart and Norton at the Auction Market...." LM 238/81.

33) This "capital freehold brick built residence" was occupied by the solicitor Edwin L. Brickwood. The benefits of being Lord of the Manor did not amount to much at the time of sale - less than £30 per year through rents and tolls of the market stalls.

34) 'Plan of the Township of Luton in the County of Bedford. 1839. Reduced from Plan of Luton Parish by E. Brown, Silsoe, Beds.' Scale - 8 chains to an inch. Beds C. R. O. c 2264.
The identity of E. Brown is not known. Thomas Brown was the land agent for Earl de Grey at Wreest Park, Silsoe at this time. The Brown map for Luton township (one for Limbury and Biscot also survives) provides a comprehensive list to the ownership of land in Luton Parish, being accompanied by a terrier giving (alphabetically in order of occupier) the occupier, owner, field name (if any) or type and size. The map does not, however, furnish details of property ownership in the urban area. Questions can also be raised as to its preciseness: neither the gas works (built upon a small piece of land owned by the Burrs) nor the Workhouse are represented on this map, although both were standing by this time. This however, should not detract from the maps usefulness as the earliest detailed survey of Luton.

35) Luton Times 21.10.1881: 'Sundon and its Memories - By a Lover of the Past'. The author of this article also said of Gutteridge "...he had many good qualities but he was a man of war..."

36) Hertfordshire County Chronicle 28.9.1833. Herts C. R. O.


38) Report of the Luton Charities in the County of Bedford and the Proceedings of the Vestry in connection therewith. 1853. LM 476/33. The investigating committee comprised J. K. Blundell, William Willis, Robert How, A. T. Webster, Alfred Tamsley, John Brett, Frederick Clarke and James Muir. It investigated the conduct of the Charities' management over a sixteen year period and concluded that because of the "inefficient manner" in which the Distribution Fund in particular was managed (there had been no annual statement of accounts), "Several Hundreds of Pounds have been lost to the Poor of this Parish".


41) Information concerning the Crawley family can be found in Austin, W. The History of a Bedfordshire Family (Alston Rivers Ltd., 1911). LM Library 6436.

42) Tithe Award List, 1844 and map of the Crawley estate (with register) made at approximately the same time. Both in LM collection. The Crawley family owned approximately 3,200 acres in Luton parish, an amount exceeded only by the Bute estate with its 4,000 acres.

43) The builder John Williams purchased Blackwater Field on the eastern side of town in 1844 from the Gutteridge estate, although this was never built upon. Beds C. R. O. LHE 7 & 8.

44) Who's Who in the Town of Luton in 1842? The Question Answered by John Waller. LM 117/43. According to this, of land developed to date, three cottages and yards belonged to Samuel, John and David Lane, two belonged to Charles Squire and one garden (soon to be built upon) belonged to Richard Brown, owner of the Sun Public House in High Town.

Elsewhere in the town, around 1841, Frederick Burr had laid out, or allowed to be laid out, a street in High Town which was to bear his surname. To judge from the field boundaries it appears that burr Street chopped off a portion of the adjacent field which belonged to Ashton's Charity. Townrow's development on the western side of chapel Street instigated the building of what would become known as New Town, New Street and Spring Place being the streets erected. Although owning property in the Park Street area, as well as Stuart Street, Townrow owned none of the New Street and Spring Place cottages at the time of his death in 1861. A little further up Chapel Street, Windsor Street was commenced between 1843 and 1845 upon land held, or once held by the Marquess of Bute. This land had been tenanted in 1839 by Thomas Waller and it is possible that he was an interested party in its development.

In the area bordered by Park Street and Castle Street the Chase family were active in releasing pasture land for housing with what what to become named Langley Street and New Town Street being developed between 1841 and 1844. The Chase's and the Bute's were also allowing building to take place upon an isolated arc of land not connected with any existing street and which was
dubbed "Prospect Place" (on Brown's map the fields are referred to as "Piece in Common"). The complexities of land ownership in this area suggest a degree of collusion between the Bute and Chase estates in allowing this development to take place.

45) The Marquess of Bute owned another field also by the name of Seven Acres, which lay between Dunstable Road and Leagrave Road. Collingdon's letters at this time are frequently riddled with words and sentences which have been crossed out suggesting a hurried man with much on his mind.


47) Beds C. R. O. G/DA 151/53.

48) Beds C. R. O. G/DA 15/37. "You are to blame for not letting Parkes know you had sold your land to Gray". Chase to Collingdon 14.7.1842. He described Tomson as an "obstinate stupid fellow". Chase's handwriting is very heavy going.

49) Beds C. R. O. G/DA 151/55

50) Beds C. R. O. G/DA 151/61, 151/68, 151/87

51) Sale catalogue 22.10.1845. LM collection. Frederick Chase acted upon behalf of the widowed Jane Waller. The sale catalogue provides details of Waller's estate which, being situated in the heart of town is detailed on Brown's map. This included land formerly owned by Edmund Waller and Cox.

52) Beds C. R. O. G/DA 244 & 265. Letter from Thomas Hyde, Surveyor, of Park Street. He reported that he had at present twenty men working in Seven Acres.

In New Town Windsor Street was virtually completed and Elizabeth Street, Dumfries Street and Hastings Street commenced. Peel Street, running off Wellington Street (by now a public thoroughfare as far as Stuart Street) was also begun in this period but urbanisation was mainly taking place upon land released by the Burrs in two areas: Park Street, where housing was begun around Queen's Square, and High Town where a further part of a field was sold off and a second road, Duke Street laid out to run parallel with Burr Street. The Chase family land close to Market Hill were replaced with a link road between Park Square and Langley Street; this was rather unimaginatively named Park Street West.

53) Beds Times 6.3.1847, 17.4.1847.

54) 'Valuation of the Messuages, Lands and other Hereditaments Liable to Poor Rates.....1845.' Borough Treasurers' Dept., Luton Town Hall. Unfortunately no illustration of these buildings exist.

55) Sale catalogue, Beds C. R. O. LHE 33. Lots One to Five were freehold building ground situated on part of the remainder of the Burr's Field between Hitchin Road and High Town Road. Lot Four was not sold but those in Duke Street went under the hammer for £54 apiece, that fronting on to High Town Road (121 poles) for £50 and a smaller piece of nine poles fronting onto a new street (York Street) was sold to Henry Sibley for £28. Land at Park Road (in Hyde parish), and at Hart Hill was also sold but a small strip of meadow adjoining the Old Bedford Road, a small garden opposite the workhouse and Hagdell Common close to the Farley Road were not to find buyers. The reserve price for the large field abutting the Old Bedford Road ("Coney Hall Field" - fourteen acres) and the remaining leasehold (379 years) upon two cottages in Castle Street are also noted in the sale catalogue but it is not clear whether these were disposed of; judging from development in the immediate future it appears not.

56) Beds C. R. O. LHE 85. The land had been purchased from a number of different owners: Daniel Chase, the Gutteridge's, Joseph Brown, Francis Coupees and the Marquess of Bute.

57) Copy of sale catalogue lent to Luton Museum by a member of the public. Lot One comprised three large fields on the road from Luton to Dunstable and Lot Three was situated along the Luton to St. Albans road. The remainder was within the township: Lots two and four
sandwiched land belonging to Bute (where Alma Street was already marked out as an "intended new road"). Lots five to eleven included a farm, outbuildings and fields and was bordered by Stuart Street, Upper George Street and Dunstable Place. All was in the occupation of George Gregory who had farmed the land for a number of years. The newspaper report of this sale is not too helpful: there appears to be a discrepancy between the Lot allocation between it and the sale catalogue, and the identity of the purchasers are not given.

58) James Hopkins, a Park Street builder, felt that the asking price for building ground was far too high. Beds C. R. O. G/DDA 340.

Following the death of John Waller in 1859 his executors sold portions of his estate (the pleasure grounds behind his house) laying out John Street, Waller Street and Melson Street (named after one of his executors). The Bute Street end of John Street was later renamed Silver Street. This network of streets crossed Cheapside which once had terminated at the iron gates leading to John Waller's garden, but which was now connected to Guildford Street.

59) Beds C. R. O. G/DDA 488. 15.11.1859.

60) Sale catalogue, LM 10/93/28. Lot Three comprised:

...a very valuable plot of freehold building ground having a frontage to Chapel Street of 84 feet by a depth of 366 feet or thereabouts, and an entrance from Hastings Street and Spring Place, and contains 1a 1r 4p (more or less). This valuable plot of Building Ground is well adapted for a New Street, and being so near the Centre of Town, offers an opportunity to Builders, Speculators, and others that cannot occur again on account of the absorption of Building sites in the centre of Town.

It is not clear why Townrow had allowed this area (to become Regent Street) to remain undeveloped - perhaps he was holding out in order to reap a better return at a later date. Other pockets of land which were not yet built upon remained in Windsor Street and Hastings Street. Besides the undeveloped land at the time of his death Townrow's New Town estate comprised two large houses and a bakery in Stuart Street, and three moderately sized houses in Chapel Street (one occupied by "Mrs Townrow"). There were also fourteen grim dwellings in Lea Road and one large house in Church Street.


63) The Lots purchased on the western side of Park Road were just within Hyde parish and bordered in part by the estate of John Shaw Leigh. Parts of this land had already been built upon and the streets that were to rise here were mainly for working class housing; terraced housing with small rear gardens and yards. The roads laid out were Bailey Street (the boundary lane), Wood Street, Kings Road and Park Road West. Part of this area had already been built upon.

Lot 18 comprised a row of small cottages in Old Bedford Road and Lot 29 was a small garden in the Hitchin Road. Lots 20 to 28 and Lot 43 were fields and gardens situated at the junction of Church Street and Hitchin Road on the western side of the railway which separated it from Lot 44, the Upper Pondwicks Gardens. Lots 29 to 42 were a series of gardens bordered by the River Lea, Henry Coles Brown's field to the rear of the Vicarage, Ashton's Charity land and the Pondwicks Road (built to provide a right of way alongside and then over the railway to the tenants' gardens on the other side.

The land in the region of Hitchin Road, Church Street St. Anne's Hill and the Pondwicks Gardens were sold. Apart from a few cottages on the corner of Church Street and Hitchin Road however, these lands were to see no building development whatever in the short term, and only one (Henry Street) in the distant future.

Curiously Lots 20 and 21, plus Lot 43 were described as being part of the hamlet of Limbury-cum-Biscot. The tenants of the properties in this area had been given notice of until Michaelmas 1862 to quit but were permitted to move that which belonged to them. The tenants
of course, attempted to buy their rented plots - the surviving catalogue shows that the tenant of Lot 39 (a garden), John Keeling, purchased his twenty two poles for £37. How many were able to do so in the face of lively bidding is another matter.

64) Luton Times 28.3.1862.

65) Sale catalogue, LM M356. Wenlock Street, Mill Street, Boyle Street (not named by 1870), Dudley Street and North Street were created. A house had already been built at the corner of the latter street and was also up for auction. Given their proximity to the railway line, it is not surprising that Dudley Street in particular and also North Street were to see a mixture of small industrial units and domestic premises.

66) Luton Times 22.6.1867. The land at the corner of Old Bedford Road and Mill Street was described in the sale catalogue as "unquestionably the most suitable spot for the Erection of a Railway Hotel or Tavern". The purchaser (Gray) took the hint and the Royal Hotel was erected upon the spot. Lot 32, on the opposite corner, however, carried the condition that the "Purchaser of this Lot will have to bind himself, his heirs and assigns for a period of 21 years, not to erect any Inn, Ale House, or Public house on the same, or to carry on the Trade of Beerseller, Innholder or Victualler." This applied to a number of Lots; in the case of Lot 32 the builder Smart purchased the nine pole plot for £70.

A private carriage road (now Villa road) linked Old and New Bedford Road. Between this and the River Lea, and upon the corner of Cardiff Road (where part of a meadow formerly used as a "Working Men's Recreation Ground" was divided up) purchasers were obliged not to erect any house of an annual rateable value of less than £35. On the other side of the private road the three plots of land were not permitted to support houses for an annual value of less than £25. Two plots on this side had already been sold to J. C. Conder and Messrs. Smart although it is not clear if further purchasers were found for the Villa Road area at the 1867 sale. Two of the four plots in the Dunstable Road/Cardiff Road junction were sold - to Cooke, the solicitor, for a total of £780.

The impact of the arrival of the railway upon High Town has been covered elsewhere (See also Dony, J. G. et al The Story of High Town published by Bedfordshire County Council (1984) pp. 13-15). Its route followed a similar one to that of the Great Northern, but slightly to the east. Apart from High Town, the lands that were affected were mostly owned by the Bute estate and the Charities. A helpful side effect for local builders, caused by the extensive demolition of property in High Town to make way for the line, was the availability of a considerable amount of second hand building materials and fittings.

67) Sale catalogue, M/340. The accompanying sale catalogue provides an insight into the Vyse's activity in the property market. Since 1840 they had purchased land from Frederick Chase and Henry Brown - acquisitions from the latter including Vyse's home, Holly Lodge. The land purchased from Frederick Chase lay between New Town Street and Union Street and through which Holly Street (unbuilt upon except for the corners) was now laid. The land was divided into a series of plots with frontages on to Holly Street of approximately eighteen feet.

68) Luton News 7.6.1862 and 27.4.1861. John Everitt had purchased the building ground and was offering terms to potential speculators: purchases could be spread over five years and loans were available. Building continued over John Waller's former gardens although patches with trees still lingered on. Behind the Town Hall Inkerman Street, Liverpool Road and Collingdon Street were virtually completed. Liverpool Road was advertised as "admirably situated for the erection of Private Residences, being high and dry, and commanding a pleasant view of the surrounding country" (Luton News 16.8.1862).

At Prospect Place, after some years of stagnation there was a spurt of building activity with New Town Street and Albert Road being connected across a field sold by Ashton's Charity. The Burr family appear to have sold off no more of their dwindling amount of land. Wenlock Street and Havelock Road were laid out and initial preparation had taken place for further streets in the High Town district by 1876. The area between the Great Northern Railway line and the Town Hall was now nearly fully developed with just one street (eventually to be Gordon Street) yet to be laid out. Here was a mixture of housing for the lower middle class, respectable artisans and small hat factories.
These are currently uncatalogued and stored in their original boxes at Beds C. R. O.

The 1930s clearance programmes contain the best details of housing in Luton erected during the period before the establishment of a local Board of Health in 1850. These records contain details of inspections of individual properties, notes on defects, recommendations for action to be taken, relevant correspondence, overall plans of the area and descriptions of room size (usually in area as opposed to dimension) with some notes on building materials. They do not however, contain plans of individual properties nor sadly, were photographs taken (at least none that have survived). Aerial photography, which was first being undertaken in this period, is just a little too late to record details of these streets, their former location being represented on photographs by blank scars across New Town and High Town.

The slum clearance programmes, together with a population increase of 18,000 between 1931 and 1945 necessitated an urgent house building programme. This, and other aspects of the town's housing problems were identified in two reports:

Grundy, Fred (Medical Officer of Health) and Titmus, Richard (Statistical Adviser to the Council) Report on Luton (Borough of Luton 1945).


The 1839 trade directory lists a number of "Brick and Tile Makers and Lime Burners": Henry Brown "near Market Place", William Clarke at "Cold Arbour", John Gray in New Bedford Road, James Gutteridge at Darley Hall and Frederick Pigott in Caddington. The exact nature of these businesses is not clear, nor indeed is it certain that the addresses which are given are the location of the field or the address of the operator for business communication.

The houses in Spring Place and New Street offer examples of what came closest to a typical style of construction before 1850. No. 6, Spring Place was built at some point 1842 and 1853 and was constructed with brick, topped with a slate roof. It consisted of two rooms on the ground floor, the front measuring 10' x 11'10" (13.6 square feet) and the rear 10' x 8'4". The height of the front room was 7'5" with the rear room 3" higher (see appendix 25). The house was inspected in June 1836 prior to a wholesale demolition of the area in which the report noted that there was a house density of 42.1 per acre. The Inspection Report does not make it clear as to the precise position of the staircase but in all probability this was between the two ground floor rooms as this is the most convenient position in houses where one enters the front room directly from the
street - most surviving houses of this type in Luton possess their staircase in this position. The staircase (which contained a coal place underneath) rose 8' in a going of 7'6" - "dangerous" according to the inspector.

The stairs led to two upstairs rooms both 7'3" in height and both with equal dimensions to the corresponding rooms downstairs. Fronting onto the street, the house had a yard at the rear which was twenty yards wide and was shared with no.'s 8 and 10, Spring Place. Within the yard was a wash house and we although contemporary records indicate that these were provided at a later date. There was no damp course and internal facilities were restricted to a fire place in three of the rooms.

Natural lighting in the ground floor back room was obstructed by the gable of no. 4, Spring Place. The report concluded that "the unsatisfactory condition of these premises is due generally to the manner in which they were constructed originally". At the time of the report the owner was Alderman S. H. Godfrey C.C. of Marlbourough Road, Luton.

93. New Town Street.

Inspected in 1935 (see appendix 26) this house contained two rooms downstairs, the front with an overall area of 108.2 square feet and the rear 79.3 square feet. The first floor front room was 115 square feet and the rear 86.11 square feet, all rooms being 7' 5" in height. Linking these were stairs rising 7' 9" in a going of 4' 7"

8. Back Street.

No. 8 was a surviving part of a High Town Street which was largely demolished in order to make way for the Midland railway line. At the time of inspection unlike other properties the rear ground floors were referred to as sculleries and may have been built as such. No. 8 contained a larger ground floor front room than the New Town examples (145 square feet) but this was at the expense of the scullery which was just 67.10 square feet. Both rooms were just 6' 102 high with two bedrooms above being 7' in height. Three feet beyond the back of the house was a hopper wc which was shared with no. 6. Although an early form of water closet, the hopper was not early enough to have been installed when the house was originally constructed.

Bryden's Passage.

Built probably between 1845 and 1850, Bryden's Passage provide a striking example of concentrated development upon limited space, in this case a narrow strip of land. It comprised six cottages, access to which was gained via a passage running between no's 105 and 107, New Town Street (see appendix 27). The land had been conveyed to Peter Bryden (or Briden) between and 1842 who then built the two New Town Street houses, choosing to live in one himself. The properties in Bryden's Passage were built of brick and boarded at the rear and side (presumably a cladding). There was no damp course on any of the properties, three of which comprised two rooms (one up, one down) the other with two bedrooms. At the time of inspection all had just one stand-pipe between them; in 1850 there was just one shared privy, although this would have been one more than in some courtyards. When inspected in May 1934 Bryden's Passage still had no gas, electricity or sink waste drainage. See also Cresy, Edward. Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Enquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Town of Luton. HMSO (1850) p. 11.

Taylor's Yard

Built at around the same time as Bryden's Passage this contained five cottages (three of them with one bedroom) lying between New Town Street and a parallel alley, Manor Path (see appendix 28). Some were built back to back with the sculleries of neighbouring cottages in New Town Street and whilst two hopper closets were located in the yard, these again were not contemporary with the construction of the cottages. The common yard was used as a thoroughfare between New Town Street and Manor Path and as elsewhere, there was no general damp course in any of the buildings. No.'s 1 and 2 were single storey cottages and no. 3 had a
corrugated roof by the date of inspection. No. 4 was built of brick and part cement rendered but no. 5 had been constructed out of "wood and composite material" - the external walls were wooden.

**Bailey Hill Cottages.**

These represented probably the lowest form of housing built in the 1840s (see appendix 29). Twelve one up, one down cottages built back to back, could be reached via a narrow passage from Chase Street. These cottages contained no amenities whatsoever and even by the time of inspection (in 1935) shared just one external tap on the wall of no. 7. The owner at this time was the publican of the nearby Mother Redcap P.H.

Other properties in New Town were built with rooms in the attic, and at Back Street, with both attics and cellars. No. 8, Gaitskell Terrace contained a wooden internal wall between the living room and scullery. The Sibley family still held property in High Town in the 1930s.

80) The local Board of Health conducted an exhibition of the working of the water closet at their offices in Stuart Street.

81) Over the years the local Board passed a number of individual resolutions in order to strengthen its bye-laws. For example in 1860 it approved a motion by six votes to three that all future party walls should be 9" thick (Board of Health Minute Book Vol. III, 17.4.1860) and in 1868 resolved to pass no plans which showed dumb wells (Board of Health Minute Book Vol. IV, 4.8.1868).


85) *Beds Times* 4.4.1846.

86) An example of the intense activity which took place in this period occurred when there was "great competition" for just "a small piece of building ground" that was put up for sale by the Chase family on the corner of Park Street West. It went to Samuel Oliver for £290. *Beds Times* 17.10.1846.


89) Ibid. 1.4.1857.


91) *Beds C. R. O. LHE* 151/19 and 151/20.

92) *Luton Town Hall* (Treasurer's Dept.) basement. Until however, they remember to ask for it back it will remain for safekeeping in Luton Museum.

One estimate was that up to one thousand young women and girls would leave Luton in one week at the end of the season. Evidence given to *Childrens Employment Commission (1862) 2nd Report of the Commissioners* by William Hunt, 1862. p.207.


95) The location of this original source is not known. Summarised in Austin, William. *The History of Luton and its Hamlets,* op. cit. p.110.


97) Evidence submitted by Charles Harrison (based upon information supplied by George Bailey, Town Clerk) to the Select Committee on Town Holdings. (1887) XIII. University of London, Senate Library.

98) Census enumerator's return for New Town, 1841 (copy on microfilm in Luton Central Library, Reference Library. *Who's Who in the Town of Luton in 1842? The Question Answered by John Waller,* LM 117/43. This is a reasonably detailed list giving property owners and the names of some of the occupants.


100) Occupations for Figs. 2.8-2.11 have been grouped into broad categories. These comprise the following:

**Building** Builder, timber merchant, carpenter, joiner, painter, decorator, bricklayer, plumber, plasterer, tiler.

**Retail** Grocer, baker, confectioner, general dealer, bookseller, butcher, ironmonger, chemist, fishmonger, draper, corn merchant, tea dealer, milliner, shoe maker and tailor. The last three occupations would have included a sizeable number who worked from home, but it is not possible to differentiate between such people and those who operated from retail outlets.

**Brewing** Brewer, publican, cooper, beer house keeper, victualler, wine merchant, F. Burr's Trustees.

**Hat trade** Hat manufacturer, straw manufacturer, blocker, plait dealer, plait buyer, sewer, blockmaker, plait bleacher, hat presser.

**Farmers** Retired farmers, farm bailiffs, farm stewards, Clarke's devisees.

**Independent** Independent, landowner, gentleman, annuitant, pensioner, Charles Burr.

**Public Institutions** Postmaster, Police Superintendent, Board of Guardians, Assistant Overseer, Board of Health, Town Hall Company.

**Church** Mostly church buildings and clergymen's homes.

**Craftsmen** Coach builder, rope maker, blacksmith, harness maker, saddler, stonemason, wheelwright.

**Professional** Solicitor, estate agent, auctioneer, surveyor. I am mainly concerned here with those professionals with a close involvement in the land market during the early stages of the property boom.

**Other** This includes labourer (many of whom would work within the building trade), miller, poulterer, surgeon (who could have been included in above category, but were not in any case significant property owners), engine stoker, hotelier, market gardener, coal merchant, railway carmen, gardener, warehouseman.
The tallies do not include the following:

- Thomas Hawkes - bricklayer and baker.
- William Hawkes - publican and wheelwright.
- Richard How - publican and baker.

101) Slater's Directory of Bedfordshire, 1839, (Luton Section). The figure of 492 is by no means a comprehensive list of the town's businesses, being less likely to count the small workshops at the expense of high street operations. The occupational categories in the enumerator's summaries are too general ('Buyers and Sellers', 'Textiles', 'Mechanic Products' etc) to provide precise enough comparisons. The Directory must also be qualified by the fact that some businesses will list themselves (and therefore be counted) twice.

102) This figure does not include milliners or tailors, both occupations which could be carried on from domestic premises, but does include small manufacturers such as clockmakers who would in all probability have a retail outlet as part of their business.

103) The properties of Thomas Hawkes, William Hawkes and Richard How, together with those to whom a trade could not be attributed have been omitted from this total.

104) Beds Times 7.2.1846

105) Ibid 4.4.1846.

106) 'General District Rate Book of the Local Board of Health for the District of Luton.... Prepared by George Bailey, Law Clerk to the Local Board of Health for the Luton District. Made 16th February 1869.' Luton Town Hall Treasurer's Dept.

107) 'Property is defined here as a dwelling, public house, commercial building, vacant premises, public building, building ground, garden and any vacant land in the urban area of less than one acre. Frequently the nature of property is not specified and one unit of property can be classified as two or more individual items (i.e. house, workshop and stables) thereby exaggerating the amount which some own. J. S. Crawley with just a few lodges and a cottage on the western perimeter of the township has not been included.

108) A fair margin of error in attributing occupations to individuals must be allowed for here. Occupations are not given in the rate book and these have been established by drawing upon entries from the lists in the Luton entry of Kelly's Directory for Bedfordshire, 1869, and the returns for the township from the 1871 census. The two year discrepancy may compound further errors made by the compilers of the rate book, the Directory (itself not a comprehensive guide) the Directory's printers, the census enumerator and not least, the present day researcher. Vagaries of handwriting and spelling, of which there are all too many examples, do not help.

The duplication of names increases the margin for error and reduces the likelihood of precisely establishing who owned what; there are four or five "Samuel Lanes" including one who is a butcher or builder, two carpenters and two who lived just a few doors from one another in Cumberland Street! Not surprisingly there are five Thomas Smith's and often father and son share the same name and the same house. Occupations may change between 1869 and 1871 or simply be described differently: George Hodge, who owned eleven houses in Liverpool Road is listed as a bricklayer in 1871 and as a builder in 1869. People die or move away (especially during this period of recession) and it is very possible to confuse a property owner living outside Luton with someone of the same name living within it. For all of these it is not possible to gain an assessment of the number of speculators and landlords who came from beyond Luton parish.

Where there is a multiplicity of occupational categories which can be placed against a single name these have been divided between each group. Whilst acknowledging a further distortion by inevitably attributing more, or less, property than was actually owned, it is hoped that overall this
will balance out. Unless there is virtual certainty labourers and hawkers have been discounted as owners of property. The presence of labouring men in the category shows this to be something of a presumption, but overall, I trust that it does not grossly underestimate their numbers.

109) Tuesday Pictorial 28th January 1936.

110) In allocating the total number of properties held by those from within the farming interest, there still remains the problem of William Clarke of whom there were at least two, and possibly more, and maybe two of which had died by 1869 leaving their estates to be administered by trustees.

111) Beds C. R. O. G/DDA 214, 234, 235, 238, 241, 248, 253, and 254. To judge from the Directories Hunt appears to have resumed practise by 1862.

112) Account book of Cooke & Sons, Solicitors, George Street West, Luton. The first entry in this dates from 1854 when the business was still operated by Thomas Sworder. The format of entry is altered in 1857 when the practise was taken over by Richard Cooke making it far more difficult to glean worthwhile information.

113) In this particular instance it was for a Mr Waring "to complete the business" a reference to Richard Waring, Solicitor, who was possibly part of Sworder's practice in Park Street West. F. C. Scargill reputedly foreclosed on a number of occasions.


115) Luton Times 25.5.1855.

116) Beds Times 30.1.1847.

117) Ibid. 20.2.1847 and 5.6.1847.

118) Luton Times 20.9.1856.

119) Beds Times 3.3.1849

120) Ibid. 16.8.1851. The Luton Permanent Building Society has was taken over in recent years (circa 1875) by the Town and Country Building Society. Generous help was offered by T. H. Pashley, formerly of the Luton Building Society but efforts to trace the whereabouts of the minute books through the Town and Country Building Society have proved fruitless, and this is the cause of some concern.

121) Luton Times 28.2.1857.

122) Ibid. 30.10.1859 and 1.9.1860.

123) Beds Times 27.2.1847.


125) Sadly, no records of this Society have survived and all evidence, therefore comes from local newspapers. Beds Times 9.6.1849, 18.8.1849. 15.12.1849 and 12.1.1850.

126) Ibid. 9.11.1850, 13.11.1850.

127) Beds C. R. O. LHE 185, November 1865.

128) Sole purchased this "very eligible property" for £365. Luton News 29.3.1862.

129) Martha Mortimore owned two and Elizabeth Butt and Ann Bellshaw one apiece. These alone would not have provided them with a living but it is not known what were their other sources of income.
This percentage may be reduced slightly by the fact that could be a number of persons, not identified, who could be outside investors and who also have no occupation.

Figure taken from *Census of England and Wales, 1871, Population Abstracts. Ages, Civil Condition, Occupation and Birth Places of the People.* (H. M. S. O. 1873) Brit. Lib., P. P.


Attributed property owners in Spring Place (thirty two houses, average rateable value of £6) included in 1869 two builders, a beer retailer, a coal merchant, ironmonger, housewife, medical practitioner, publican and baker, plait warehouseman and bricklayer. In nearby Adelaide Street, built during the 1850s and 1860s (thirty seven properties, average rateable value £11) the houses was were owned by amongst others, two hat manufacturers, two plait dyers, two bakers, a builder, a carriage builder, a grocer and a retired medical practitioner. Alma Street (sixty three properties, average rateable value of nearly £12) contained a similar mix of landlords: ironmongers, grocer, tailor, two hat manufacturers, a blocker, a plumber, estate agent, widow, decorator, ropemaker and warehouseman.

*Luton Times* 26.11.1859.


Probate returns from Somerset House.
A photograph taken from the newly completed Corn Exchange of the last open air straw plait market in George Street in 1869. The covered stalls nearest the camera appear to be for general goods, and the open stalls stretching toward the Town Hall for straw plait.
APPENDICES

1) Land in Luton Township owned by the Marquess of Bute, 1839.
2) Land in Luton Township owned by the Burr family, 1839.
3) Land in Luton Township owned by the Chase family, 1839.
4) Remnant of the Gutteridge estate in Luton Township, circa 1840.
5) Land in Luton Township owned by the Wallers, circa 1840.
6) Land in Luton Township administered by the Charities, 1839.
7) Land in Luton Township owned by William Townrow, 1839.
8) Land in Luton Township owned by Charles Cox, 1839.
9) Land in Luton Township owned by Henry Brown, 1839.
10) Land in Luton Township owned by the Crawley Estate, 1839.
11) Urban development by 1845.
12) Urban development by 1850.
13) Urban development by 1855.
14) Urban development by 1862.
15) Urban development by 1870.
16) Urban development by 1876.
17) New Town property owners, 1842.
19) Spring Place, 1839.
20) 93, New Town Street, 1935.
21) Bryden's Passage, 1934.
22) Taylor's Yard, 1930s.
24) Examples of housing in Luton.
APPENDIX 1
Land in Luton Township
owned by
The Marquess of Bute, 1839
APPENDIX 2
Land in Luton Township
owned by
the Burr Family, 1839
APPENDIX 3
Land in Luton Township
owned by
the Chase family, 1839
APPENDIX 4
Remnant of the Gutteridge estate
in Luton Township, circa 1840.
APPENDIX 5
Lands in Luton Township
owned by
the Wallers, circa 1840
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Lands in Luton Township
administered by
the Charities, 1839
APPENDIX 7
Lands in Luton Township
owned by
William Townrow, 1839
APPENDIX 8
Land in Luton Township
owned by
Charles Cox, 1839
APPENDIX 9
Land in Luton Township
owned by
Henry Brown, 1839
APPENDIX 10
Land in Luton Township
owned by
The Crawley Estate, 1839
APPENDIX 11
Urban development
by 1845
APPENDIX 12
Urban development by 1850
APPENDIX 13
Urban development
by 1855
APPENDIX 14
Urban development
by 1862
Scale: approximately 1/2 mile
APPENDIX 15
Urban development
by 1870
APPENDIX 16
Urban Development
by 1876
### New Town Property Owners, 1842.

(* indicates that this person is not in the 1841 poll book)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>No. on map</th>
<th>Property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Wm.</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>1 cottage</td>
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<tr>
<td>(corn merchant &amp; baker)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ainsworth, Wm.</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>1 cottage</td>
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<tr>
<td>(farmer, Crawley Green)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attwood, Thos.</td>
<td>416</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrett, Ben.*</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>2 cottages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrett, G.*</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>2 cottages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(carpenter)</td>
<td>561-3</td>
<td>3 cottages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrett, Jn.</td>
<td>403</td>
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<tr>
<td>(bricklayer)</td>
<td>445</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>497</td>
<td>1 cottage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barton, Jn.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bennett, Ben.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Dunstable brewer?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bennett, &quot;Mr.&quot;</td>
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<td>Bennett, Sam.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bigg, Thos.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolton, Ben.</td>
<td>581</td>
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<tr>
<td>(straw hat manf.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bradden, Wm.</td>
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<td>1 cottage</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ag. lab.?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown, Jn.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(shopkeeper, New Town St.)</td>
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<td>garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>565</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown, Wm.*</td>
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<td>Bryden, Peter*</td>
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<td>Burr, Fdk. &amp; Chas.</td>
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<td>(brewers)</td>
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<td>plantation</td>
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<td>public house</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Property</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Butters, G.*</td>
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<td>- ditto -</td>
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<td>(builder, Dumfries St.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cain, Hy.*</td>
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<td>(builder, Church St.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chalkley, Jn.</td>
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<td>cottage</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Kimpton, Herts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chase, Fdk. &amp; Edw.</td>
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<td>house</td>
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<td>(solicitors)</td>
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<td>orchard</td>
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<td>Chase, John</td>
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<tr>
<td>(surgeon)</td>
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<td>Clark, Rbt.*</td>
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<td>Craker, Jn.</td>
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<td>(straw hat manf., High Town)</td>
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<td>Dodman, Jos.</td>
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<td>(London)</td>
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<td>Edwards, Hy.*</td>
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<td>Ellard, Sophie*</td>
<td>503</td>
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<tr>
<td>(publican, Vine P.H.)</td>
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<td>2 cottages</td>
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<td>Ellison, Jn.*</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>3 houses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>No. on map</td>
<td>Property</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<td>Eyles, Jn.*</td>
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<td>(tailor/draper, Church St.)</td>
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<td>(carpenter)</td>
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<td>Gamby, Sophia*</td>
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<td>Gee, G.</td>
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<td>Gilbert, Dan.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Gregory, Elizabeth*</td>
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<td>Haselgrove, Rich.</td>
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<td>cottage</td>
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<td>Haselgrove, Thos.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(builder, Church St.)</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>3 houses</td>
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<td>396</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>399</td>
<td>yard &amp; barn</td>
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<td>(bricklayer or baker)</td>
<td>442</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>481</td>
<td>cottage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>486</td>
<td>cottage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkes, Wm.*</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Haydon, Wm.</td>
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<td>Hedges, Thos.*</td>
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<td>(sawyer)</td>
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<td>Higgins, Ann*</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4 cottages</td>
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<tr>
<td>(painter, plumber &amp; paper</td>
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<td>hanger, Cross Hill)</td>
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<td>_Horman, Jas.*</td>
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<td>cottages</td>
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<td>(publican? Park St.</td>
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<td>Humphreys, Wm.*</td>
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<td>(plait warehouseman)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Property</td>
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<td>Inwards, Mary* (widow of Wellington St. shopkeeper)</td>
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<td>Jarman, Mary*</td>
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<td>Jones, Jn. (gentleman?, Dunstable Rd.) farmer?, New Mill End)</td>
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<td>Kidman, Thos.*</td>
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<td>Lawrence, Jos.*</td>
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<td>cottage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee, 'Mr.'</td>
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<td>Lewington, Wm.* (timber merchant)</td>
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<td>Lewin, Chas.* (bricklayer)</td>
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<td>Mayes, Jas.</td>
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<td>13 cottages, 2 houses</td>
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<td>Musson, Jn*</td>
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<td>house/shop</td>
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<td>Oliver, Sam. (shopkeeper, Park St.)</td>
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<td>Parkins, Jn. (carpenter)</td>
<td>466, 565</td>
<td>2 cottages, 4 cottages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peach, Ann* (bonnet sewer)</td>
<td>496, 507</td>
<td>2 cottages, house</td>
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<td>Pressley, Deborah*</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>house</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pryor, Alfred</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>Vine P.H.</td>
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<td>Reynolds, Mary* (sewer) &amp; Brown, A.</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>house</td>
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<td>Roberson, John*</td>
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<td>house</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Property</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott, Walter</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>4 cottages</td>
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<td>Shaw, Gilbert*</td>
<td>476</td>
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<td>Sherlock, Jn.</td>
<td>480, 487</td>
<td>6 cottages, 2 cottages</td>
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<td>Smith, Jn.</td>
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<td>Smith, Rbt.</td>
<td>413, 493</td>
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<td>Taylor, Rbt.</td>
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<td>Taylor, Wm.</td>
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<td>Terry, Jn.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tomalin, &quot;Mr.&quot;**</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>garden</td>
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<td>Townrow, Wm.</td>
<td>381, 398, 387-8, 389, 406, 408, 424, 458</td>
<td>orchard, building ground, 6 houses, garden/rickyard, building ground, - ditto -, 3 houses, 2 cottages</td>
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<td>house</td>
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<td>garden, stables, garden, meadow</td>
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<td>Wallace, Ann*</td>
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<td>Waller, Jn.</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>farm &amp; cottage</td>
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<td>Property</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>Waller, Thomas</td>
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<td>Warren, Richard*</td>
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<td>390, 418</td>
<td>2 houses &amp; warehouse, 2 cottages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Jn.</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>10 cottages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(builder, brick &amp; tile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maker &amp; corn merchant,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George St.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Thos.</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>6 cottages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worsley, Wm.</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, Jn.*</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>4 cottages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 18
New Town, 1842
APPENDIX 20
93, New Town Street, 1935
APPENDIX 21
Bryden's Passage, 1934.
APPENDIX 22
Taylor's Yard, 1930
APPENDIX 23
Bailey Hill, 1935
APPENDIX 24
Examples of housing in Luton
38, New Town Street,
(built pre 1850), 1956.
Chobham Street in 1969 (built 1860-55).

Wood Street (late 1960s).
Chase Street
(built 1860s)

Liverpool Road
61, Chase Street,  
(built c. 1870).

Liverpool Road  
(hat factory)
PART TWO. THE LUTON BOARD OF HEALTH 1850-1876

Know ye the stream where the cess-pool and sewer
Are emptied of all their foul slushes and mire,
Where the feculent stream of rich liquid manure
Now sickens the people, now maddens the squire?¹

Before incorporation in 1876 the most powerful of Luton's public institutions was the Local Board of Health. The question of power is dealt with separately in Part Four but the local Board's history forms an undercurrent to the development of the town in this period and as such warrants a chronological account. The Board was a bridge between the medieval and modern system of local government for the town, beginning as a health authority but developing into Luton's "little parliament in Stuart Street" and as such it came to be regarded as a shadow town council, a role for which it received more brickbats than bouquets.² The more that the Board became involved in various areas of the town, the more was expected of it. The local Board of Health therefore, came to exemplify Luton's inadequate administrative structure and political impotence: it became the focus for frustrated criticism for perceived failings in areas which were far beyond its remit. It acquired many of the powers of the Vestry, not least as a focal point of public debate, which had once been purely an ecclesiastical body but which had gradually assumed secular responsibilities: the only other public body of similar significance was the Board of Guardians (see also part four).

A second distinctive feature which punctuated the period in which the local Board was operational was the way in which it served a vehicle for the promotion of middle class influence and ethics. As such it became a forum for occasional power struggles between the new urban elite of professionals and bigger employers on the one hand, and the old market town elite (especially the farmers) and the petty bourgeoisie on the other. The occasional nature of these struggles must be stressed, and if there was any overall conclusion to be drawn from these it was that the limitations of power and influence of each of the above groups were made apparent by the battles which were fought around and beyond the Boardroom. The farming influence dwindled, the petty bourgeoisie were a largely negative force and the upper middle class found that the local Board of Health could only serve to fulfil aims which were close to their hearts if usurped for a specific issue. A number of Luton's leading citizens were to discover very early on that the local Board of Health was not a suitable substitute for a borough council.
Chapter One. Pre-Board Luton

To appreciate the imperative by which a Board of Health was established in Luton it is important to understand the manner in which the perceived problem of sanitation and public health was addressed. Williamson makes the case with hindsight that, for several reasons, there was a failure to invest in the "social overhead" with the onset of industrialisation, but however valid this is as a retrospective generalisation it does not satisfactorily comes to terms with the salient factors which drove industrialisation and which Luton's contrasting experiences in the nineteenth century vividly illustrates. The second phase of Luton's industrialisation was actively promoted by a loose cabal of businessmen and councillors through a series of public and private institutions and agencies which deliberately set out not only to attract new industries to Luton but to also provide sufficient land and housing (in fact an over abundance) to accomodate the town's growing population, and to provide the various amenities required by a modern town. Luton therefore, possessed the class with the cohesiveness, self-awareness and control of necessary institutions both to promote industrial expansion and to deal with its consequences. Essentially however, Luton second phase of growth was spawned by the first, and was able to build upon the institutions, experiences, social connections and wealth generated in that time. The break between the world of market town Luton and manufacturing Luton in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was far more traumatic and the failure in Luton was not one of investment, but one of institutions as Lutonians (like John Williams) switched occupations, others diversified economic activity, others quit the town and as many more arrived. Just as the ways of making money for Lutonians changed, so also the bodies which administered the town had to alter also. The land scarcity (and consequent high rents) which Williamson cites as being a major contributory element toward rising mortality in the towns and cities was not, as we have seen from Part One, a significant factor in Luton.3

No amount of investment would have helped the Vestry which was simply outgrown by the town which it administered: between 1801 and 1851 Luton's population trebled to over 10,600, by which time the standard of public health and sanitation in parts of the town had become appalling. The problem lay in two particular areas - old cottages and recent property developments. The town had long lived with the pockets of squalor which existed in courtyards in the centre of town such as Adelaide Terrace and Spencers Yard in George Street, or Bull Court or Old Yard in Park Street: in such places "the alleys are in some case about four feet wide so that the houses stare at one another in most dark and ominous proximity" 4. What really concentrated the minds of those considering the viability of municipal reform however, was the even greater problems caused by the housing boom of the previous twenty years. The waste of houses constructed without adequate means of disposing of such matter spilled over onto the street beyond. At the foot of Wellington Street (built on a slight incline) lay an accumulation of water and "filth" beside the new Town Hall 5. The main centres of concern however, lay in the state of the expanding districts of New Town and High Town. Part of this problem was caused by building activity itself: "Middle-aged people now give up hope of seeing Luton a clean town, on
account of the constant trade in bricks and mortar, which is not likely to cease in their time" lamented the Bedford Times. It went on to report that "the late high wind has carried much brick rubbish into the eyes of Lutonians, and caused much inconvenience".

Specifically though, the problem lay in what the builders produced. Unlit High Town presented a number of hazards. One unfortunate gentleman recorded how, after attending a meeting at the Methodist Church he lost his way "and was detained above a quarter of an hour in the midst of slippery turf, heaps of stones and muddy pools". Referring to recent correspondence in the newspaper concerning literary societies he added that "before Luton enters into any controversy respecting literature and the graces it would be well if the town were to study municipal reform". The hazards lay beyond falling into unlit trenches: in February 1847 two deaths in Back Street were attributed to the "mud and filth, emitting the vilest odours, (which) occupy the centre of the street through all its length". However unscientific was this kind of diagnosis, the link was established in peoples minds between dirt and disease. With the only check upon building activity being the law of supply and demand, there lay only the prospect of an increase in the depths of destitution.

It was from this perspective that the state of Luton's sanitation was addressed. According to the Board of Health report on the township made in 1850 the death rate for Luton in that year was twenty-seven in every thousand, with the average life expectancy being twenty-five years, one month. Statistics however, were not then, and are not now, easy to come by: the Registrar General's reports published from 1837 provide insufficient detail with the township grouped into the large Luton Registration District with Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Caddington, Barton, Sundon and Hyde. This leaves one only able to make generalisations which will be outlined in a comparative discussion of the impact of the Board in chapter five. To an extent though, discussion of mortality is irrelevent as a factor which influenced the promotion of a local Board of Health. There was no discussion of diminishing life expectancy, rising mortality and certainly no evidence of awareness of the link between poor sanitation, bad housing, poverty and the nature of a local economy which provided seasonal wages. Stagnant pools of waste water, news of epidemic, squalid houses, dangerous building sites, overcrowded lodging houses - the visible signs of change - these were what provided the motivation.

Clearly, the Vestry was no longer capable of dealing with the problems of an expanding manufacturing centre and in the absence of any other modern machinery of local government the Board of Guardians attempted to fill the breach. From the mid-1840s it had two Acts of Parliament at its disposal; the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act of 1846 gave local authorities (including Boards of Guardians) the power to apply to the Court of Petty Sessions for the removal of those things deemed hazardous to the public health. This Act was consolidated a year later by the Town Improvement Clauses Act. The Luton Board of Guardians had not waited for the arrival of legislation: in November 1845 the clerk (E.C. Williamson) was ordered to write to James Newman regarding the defective drains adjacent to his properties in Old Yard although Newman attempted to dodge responsibility by claiming that Old Yard was a public thoroughfare.
The composition of the Board included Henry Tomson as the Sundon representative plus Richard Marks Brown, Richard Vyse, John Brett, J.J. Johnson from Luton and Richard Gutteridge of Dunstable. Henry Tomson, as vice-chairman frequently chaired meetings in the absence of the Marquess of Bute as did Richard Marks Brown. It was the conscientious son of the former, Dr. Kit Tomson, who in his capacity as Medical Officer for Luton district, inspected the condition of selected hovels in Luton and reported to the Board of Guardians for action. Twenty copies of the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act were ordered and sent to each Medical Officer and parish in the Union, accompanied by a letter requesting enforcement 10. In November 1847 Williamson issued notices of intention to obtain an Improvement Bill although there is no evidence that this was carried through 11.

Armed with this, Kit Tomson began listing various properties which, as he saw it, presented nuisances and submitted these before the Guardians. Old Yard, Tower Hill, Adelaide Terrace, Gray's Yard, Lawford's Yard in Church Street, cottages on Hitchin Road together with numerous properties in High Town including Wren's Yard, Gaitskell Terrace and at least one public house were all identified as problem areas.

Initially, the Guardians attempted direct communication: George Gregory, like Newman, was written to by Williamson on two occasions and ordered to remove nuisances (unspecified in the minutes) at cottages which he owned in Old Bedford Road. Dr. Tomson followed up the second letter within three weeks and reported back that the "nuisances were not removed to his satisfaction" 12.

After the failure of the personal approach toward first Newman, Gregory and then a number of other property owners the Board of Guardians, chivvied by a frustrated Tomson, resolved to take the next stage. Legal action was prepared against the owners of the Tower Hill almshouses, the Hitchin Road cottages (William Clarke), a public house in High Town (unidentified) and the laughably named "Mount Pleasant" in High Town (John Wren). Magistrates made an order against the latter to remove his "foul cesspool" but the continued presence of "Wren's Yard" on various subsequent nuisance reports suggest that at best this could only have brought temporary alleviation 13.

Edward Cresy's Report

The Health of Towns Act passed in September 1848 by Lord John Russell's Whig administration created a General Board of Health with defined but limited powers. Because there was no other authority in Luton to approach, the General Board of Health wrote to the Board of Guardians in November 1848 enclosing copies of the Nuisances Removal Act (not realising that the Guardians already had copies) "trusting that this Board give immediate and careful attention to them". The Guardians responded by unanimously resolving "to report to the Board (of Health) all Nuisances in their respective Districts" 14. Over a period of three years George Street was paved, this being paid for by a levy on the Poor Rates 15.
Despite Tomson's efforts, the failure of the Board of Guardians to make headway against problem areas showed that the existing legislation which applied to Luton was inadequate to cope with the growing problem which unrestricted building development represented. The adoption of an Improvement Commission under the auspices of the 1847 Act did not spare Bedford from the cholera in 1849. A fever ward was prepared at Luton but the dreaded epidemic never struck. Luton's escape can only be attributed to good fortune although perversely, Bedford's suffering could have been taken by some as proof that central government legislation was an ineffective additional expense.

More fundamentally, the supervision of public health was simply not a duty of the Board of Guardians. The Poor Law Board were already requesting that the Luton Guardians keep separate accounts for work done for the General Board of Health and anticipating that initial contact with the General Board was probably the thin end of a very long wedge, the Guardians attempted to disengage themselves. In January 1849 they wrote to the Churchwardens and overseers of Luton to see whether there was any prospect of a visit from an inspector from the General Board of Health. This request was evidently passed on as the General Board replied via the Vicar of St. Mary's, Rev. Thomas Sikes, that they were giving their attention to Luton.

As the local Board of Health were eventually to find out, carrying out duties which were not strictly theirs only served to make the Guardians vulnerable to criticism from the ill-informed. "A Friend of the Poor" wrote to the Bedford Times complaining that the Guardians were neglecting to properly inspect the "filthy" areas of Luton which defy the power of language to define them. In any case there was clearly not universal confidence that the Guardians were fully capable of controlling their own affairs. The same correspondent described the Union workhouse as a "miserable pauper prison": fever had swept through it in the summer of 1847 carrying away Gardner, the workhouse master.

The Health of Towns Act allowed for the creation of a local Board of Health if ten per cent of ratepayers in a district petitioned for one and this was swiftly raised largely at the instigation of one of the Guardians, Richard Vyse, (the total number of ratepayers was 1,863 - nearly a fifth of the town's population): in March 1849 Edward Cresy was sent by the General Board to make a report on the sanitary conditions in Luton. Cresy, whose report was published in February of the following year, spent several days in Luton where he heard evidence at the Town Hall before being conducted around the route of his inspection by a phalanx of Luton's bourgeoisie - Richard Vyse, James Muir, C.A. Austin, William Phillips, William Willis, Robert How and Doctors Tomson, Heale and Beale.

After noting that in 1847 twenty-one people had died of "endemic, epidemic and contagious diseases", Cresy made some general observations on Luton. There was no general system either for the drainage or a supply of water. Worse still it was evident that the drainage from the bleaching houses of straw hat factories was seeping into some of the wells used for drinking water. Also reporting "a total absence of ventilation" Cresy then made specific observations upon individual areas. In Tower Hill (now Manchester Street) he discovered that there was "...one privy for 28 houses. The utensils made use of are all emptied into open brick channels within 5 feet of the doors and windows and the earth is saturated." The appropriately
named Blackwater Lane had "not a house with a healthy inhabitant". The Blackwater Lane cottages were more than 200 years old, but at High Town the buildings were barely twenty. Yet here the sanitation was no better and Cresy found that "in some instances the stench is scarcely to be endured". In a lodging house in one room "12 feet x 9, was a dead child 4 years of age . . . it was stated that the previous night three persons slept in the other beds in the room where the corpse lay." ②3

Cresy made six recommendations - a supply of clean water, the removal of cesspools and dungheaps, the construction of sewers, the establishment of a public slaughter house to replace the unsanitary ones in existence, "better arrangement and superintendent of the public lodging house" and improved construction of the small tenements. Cresy coupled these recommendations with another:- "I therefore humbly recommend the application of the Public Health Act and appointment of 9 persons, to be elected as pointed out by the Act . . ." ②4

Establishment of the Local Board

The debate over whether Luton should adopt the Health of Towns Act was fought principally within the upper middle class, naturally enough between those who were significant landlords and those who were not. Because of this there also existed an undercurrent to this division, with the landlords comprising a substantial proportion of established families, notably farmers, and the non-landlords who were promoting the Board from relative newcomers to the town. The subsequent debate therefore, also carried overtones of economic division and possibly (although there is no evidence in support) of personal animosity. The opposition to the proposed formation of a local Board of Health was slow to move but finally manifested itself at an acrimonious meeting of the Vestry on 30th May 1850, the precise composition of which, regrettably, is not known. Richard Vyse, in advocating the proposed Board was confronted by Edwin L. Brickwood "a keen-witted "waspish" lawyer who gained an unenviable notoriety in his day as being always in opposition on public matters".②5 There was an angry exchange between the two at which the meeting sided with Brickwood and "overstepping the bounds of propriety hissed Mr Vyse out of the room".②6 The Vestry meeting then passed the resolution "that this Vestry protests against the Health of Towns Bill being applied and extended to Luton" and further resolved to find out who had raised and signed the original petition. It is remarkable that there still remained uncertainty as to this last matter. Cresy had spent several days inspecting virtually every street, courtyard and midden of a small town in the company of some of its leading citizens, during which he held a public meeting on the 20th March. That the visit could not have escaped local attention is indisputable and it can only be attributed to the detachment and indolence of the Board's opponents that they waited until the horse had bolted before they attempted to slam the stable door. In the introduction to Cresy's report the Secretary of the General Board, Henry Austin, had requested comments on or before 1st April 1850 and yet it was 1st May before the special Vestry meeting was called.
It is no surprise to see that the fiercest critics of the Board were to be found amongst the ranks of the principal property owners; even the most insensitive and hard-nosed landlord would have been stung to see their property so harshly condemned in an official report. Under the provision of the Health of Towns Act tenants paying less than £10 per annum would not be liable for the local rate to support the work of the Board, this being borne instead by the landlord. For landlords in Luton the immediate consequences of the application of the Act was to face the cost of providing a system of drainage to their property. Certainly, there appeared to be a widespread fear amongst ratepayers (stemming partly from ignorance) of the prospective cost to the town of fulfilling all of Cresy's recommendations, particularly regarding water supply and sewage, as well as that for supporting full-time officials to the Board. The constitutional argument which was used by those who opposed the passing of the Act in 1847-48 (that it represented a dangerous move toward continental despotism) was also to be echoed locally. But in Luton, if not at Westminster, this argument was a thinly veiled guise for the fundamental motives behind the opposition.

The main preoccupation of those resisting the Board was clear enough: economic self-protection. That this was recognised locally is apparent from a handbill produced by an unnamed supporter of the Board immediately after the Vestry meeting in May 1850. The handbill, referring in particular to the speech made by Brickwood, concludes that the Board's opponents: "know they are now exacting the highest possible rent for their human pigsties, and they fear they shall be compelled to expend a portion of their 101 per cent profits in adding to your comforts".

If a local Board of Health was established few men would face a greater outlay than Henry Sibley. Sibley, an affluent farmer who had proposed the motion at the Vestry meeting protesting against the need for a local Board, owned at least fifty cottages in High Town as well as the squalid dwellings in Adelaide Terrace. The latter, a courtyard running off George Street contained thirty three cottages which provided Sibley with an estimated income of over £165 per annum from a rental of £4 and £8. Sibley also owned many of the cottages in the notorious Back Street. Another farmer who was a substantial property owner was William Clarke: like Sibley, Clarke owned new cottages in the area of High Town (those along Hitchin Road, already mentioned) as well as an older courtyard, "Clack's Yard" at Amen Corner (opposite the Parish Church), in which Cresy had noted that the twelve cottages shared one pump and one privy. In addition to these Clarke owned a scattering of cottages in Park Street. Other opponents of the Board included solicitor, Frederick Chase (who had chaired the Vestry Meeting) and farmer William Townrow. Both these men owned property in the recently developed New Town, which had been singled out by Cresy for particular attention regarding the poor sanitation.

The most senior of the proposed Board's opponents was John Waller. Waller owned a large house fronting onto George Street and the extensive grounds to its rear comprised the largest parcel of land within the small urban area. Unlike the other leading opponents of the Board he did not own a substantial number of dwellings. In this Waller had more in common with the pro-Board faction amongst whom there represented few substantial landlords and who
comprised at their head principally those in the hat trade and professions. The Wallers had however, been active within the property market, principally in land speculation and John may have calculated that the proposed Board would inhibit activity in this sphere.

It was subsequently revealed that 188 names had been added to the petition raised calling for the establishment of a local Board of Health. In response to this, the opponents had by mid-June raised a rival petition of 1423 names, some of which had also signed the original petition. However, the General Board refused to receive either this, or a delegation from the Vestry comprised of Waller, Brickwood, Clarke and Henry Browne. A 600-name petition hurriedly raised and presented to the House of Lords also failed. The issue of compulsory regulation and public health had uncovered depths of bitterness and acrimony not seen in Luton within living memory. The Bedford Times drily noting "the threatened operation of the Health of Towns Act at Luton seems to excite some parties to be as offensive as they can in proportion as their time is limited". Those resisting the Board continued to hold meetings resolving to "offer an obstruction ... to those who incline to centralisation principles," but their delay in organising a defence of the existing administrative structures plus Luton's high death rate which at twenty-seven per thousand was above the legal minimum required (twenty-three per thousand) by the Act, meant that there was no prospect of the ratepayers being able to prevent its application to Luton.

Paradoxically, the Anti-Act forces found their refuge in the Health of Towns Act itself. In unincorporated districts the Act laid down that a local Board would consist of nine men elected by the ratepayers with property owners possessing plural votes, one for each £50 of the rateable value of their property, and up to six in total. Against such a limited and inequitable voting system it became apparent that the Board's supporters stood little chance in any election held. A lecture at the Mechanics Institute from R. Fish (a contributor to the "Cottage Gardener") attracted a "respectable but not...a numerous audience" indicating that the Board did not have large numbers of supporters to call upon. Fish shrewdly declared that whilst Luton would adopt the Act, it would probably need central government authorisation for effective measures. When news was received that the General Board was to appoint Richard Vyse as Chairman of a local Board on the 24th July 1850, Brickwood and Chase seized the opportunity to successfully petition the Board for an election to be held immediately. Luton's small electorate then split into two factions, the "Blue" (pro-Act) and the "Yellow" (anti-Act) for the first election of its type ever seen in the town. In reporting this development the Luton correspondent of the Bedfordshire Times was able to conclude as to the likely outcome ..... if the Bill must be carried out, it will be at the least expense possible to the town.

Faced with an increasingly confident opposition the "Blue" faction could do little more than assume the moral high-ground reiterating its reasons for advocating the creation of a Board. A letter to the Bedfordshire Times from "A Reviewer" contained what was essentially the "Blue" manifesto: "wherever the eye is turned it rests upon batches of newly-built, ill ventilated, badly drained cottages. The sole design being a large percentage for the outlay." Like Cresy before him, the writer then singled out individual properties: Bull Court in Park Street (partly owned by Brickwood) and the Tower Hill almshouses (where it was claimed that there were ten persons
in one room) were cited as particularly bad examples. Henry Sibley may have been riled to find that Adelaide Terrace "baffles all description" where the "stench is intolerable" but it was the "putrid" Blackwater Lane, whose cottages were owned by a number of small landlords, for which was reserved the most cutting invective: dead dogs, cats, and carrion were listed amongst the "thousand ills" contained within the ditch which ran along its length. Against all of this, the writer concluded, the existing machinery for the improvement of sanitation had been found to be "defective", hence the urgent necessity for the establishment of the Board of Health whose expenditure would be controlled by the ratepayers. The letter is also evidence that none of the landlords of the said properties had felt so moved or threatened by Cresy's report or its consequences to attempt any improvements.

The same article also carried details of a well-attended meeting at the Town Hall organised by the 'Yellow' party. This was addressed by the barrister Toulmin Smith of the Anti-Centralisation Society (for two hours) and a local man Mr. Bambray, who had since switched camps. The chairman of the meeting, Frederick Chase, opened the proceedings with an attack upon the Act: "The spirit was bad; it was opposed to the British Constitution and the best interests of a free people". Edwin Brickwood also spoke, concurring with Chase's view that the Act would "annihilate freedom" but candidly admitting that "personal considerations" influenced his position on this issue. Even at this stage Brickwood still appeared to be entertaining ideas of preventing the Act from being applied to Luton.

Reporting "great excitement" in Luton, the Bedfordshire Times listed the candidates standing for the 9 places upon the Board, eleven from the "Blue" faction and nine from the "Yellow" faction (for occupational details see biographical notes). There were no independent candidates. The result of the election, never in any real doubt, was published in the newspaper the following week. The votes cast were as follows:
### Elected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Waller (Yellow)</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Clarke (Yellow)</td>
<td>739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Kidman (Yellow)</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John James Johnson (Yellow)</td>
<td>713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Davies (Yellow)</td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Smith (Yellow)</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Clark (Yellow)</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Sibley (Yellow)</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Townrow (Yellow)</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Not elected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Muir (Blue)</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Brown (Blue)</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Vyse (Blue)</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Phillips (Blue)</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Daniels (Blue)</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Brown (Blue)</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E C Williamson (Blue)</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J K Blundell (Blue)</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Sworder (Blue)</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert How (Blue)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A T Webster (Blue)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It must have appeared to the "Blue" party that the legislation which offered the hope of transforming the town had been ambushed, bound and gagged by those who had already shackled or ignored the existing institutions for sanitary improvement. The weakness of the General Board, which tended to leave efforts to local initiative, the limited extent of the Act and the nature of the voting system produced a frustrating result, especially for Richard Vyse. Set against the numbers on the rival petitions, the result indicates that the "Blue" party had maximised their vote. It was nonetheless an overwhelming victory for the "Yellows".

The immediate future for the reformers must have appeared bleak; the "Yellow" party, comprising men whose greed and negligence had harnessed them to an institution which they would rather have avoided altogether, had at least been able to gain control of the beast. They would now be able to "carry out every necessary measure, at a very trifling cost, as compared with what would have been the case had their opponents been successful".39
The establishment of the Luton Board of Health followed the procedure as laid down in the Health of Towns Act. Edward Cresy's visit and report followed the normal procedure, and his observations and recommendations could have been applied to any number of English towns containing old and new slums bedevilled by thoroughly inadequate sanitation. As with other towns, the mere fact of a death-rate exceeding the legal minimum ensured that once the petition was raised nothing could prevent the creation of a local Board and Finer's assessment was that "assisted by the full weight of the Board, the 'clean party' (dubbed the "intelligent minority") triumphed everywhere . . .". In Luton, the 'triumph' possessed a hollow ring as the conservative forces gained the initial advantage. If by "intelligent minority" Finer meant the bourgeoisie then their clear division decisively altered the outcome. That the anti-Board forces gained the upper hand can be attributed to the tenacity and energy of Edwin Brickwood and Frederick Chase. It is probably not a coincidence that their departure from the town was to coincide with a revival of the "clean" party interest.
Chapter Two. The Early Work of the Luton Board of Health

The victorious nine members of the 'Yellow' Board held their first meeting at the Cock Inn on 12 August 1850: John Waller was elected chairman and Frederick Chase, able to overcome his misgivings about the Board's threat to Englishmen's freedom, accepted the post of Clerk. Richard Vyse, in his capacity as Returning Officer was admitted to the meeting just long enough to deliver the ballot returns.\textsuperscript{41}

The immediate priorities for the Board were to consider the state of the town's streets and drainage. John Cumberland was appointed to make a survey of the latter and contracts were obtained for the supply of stone flags. A general rate of 9d in the pound was levied and it was "ordered that when the annual value of any cottages or tenements liable to assessment . . . does not exceed the sum of ten pounds a composition shall be made by this Board with the Owner of such premises for the payment of the said rate . . . and levied upon such a reduction of the net annual value of the premises as shall leave two-thirds to pay the assessment."\textsuperscript{42} Little detail of the Board's early financial arrangements are recorded, but their is little reason to dispute the opinion of the Luton correspondent of the Beds Times that the Board was pushing the concept of composition to an extreme in order to assist the landlords in the town.\textsuperscript{43}

The initial attention of the Board was focused in particular upon Blackwater Lane, an area which not only urgently required improvement but which also was not owned by any member or official of the Board. Rev. Thomas Sikes was ordered to widen the path near to the lane and sewers were connected to the property. Twenty-two men were employed on work that was scheduled to take two weeks, this achievement being marked by the changing of the name to Lea Road in October 1850. An Inspector of Nuisances was appointed and following his report that the nearby Old Yard in Park Street (part of the Bute estate) was in a "filthy condition" the Board ordered the Trustees of the estate to make the necessary repairs otherwise this would be undertaken by the Board and a bill presented to the them.\textsuperscript{44}

Plans for new buildings were scrutinised and if they did not meet the requirements of the Health of Town's Act were refused; moreover, proceedings were undertaken against those who built contrary to the Act or without the Board's approval.\textsuperscript{45} Nonetheless, for the first two years the Board undertook the absolute minimum to satisfy its legal obligation, which was, of course, its members' very intention. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Board's highly selective approach towards Luton's sanitation: notwithstanding the fact that they owned some of the poorest dwellings in the town no measures were commenced to improve the conditions of the tenants of Board members. On only one occasion was action taken against a member of the Board when William Townrow, (after refusing an informal request), was ordered to make a drain to run from one of his properties in New Town into the recently laid main drain in Stuart Street. Townrow must have regretted not being present at this meeting.\textsuperscript{46}

Before the Luton Board had served a full year it was clear that the "Yellow" interest was on the wane. Frederick Chase announced his intention to leave Luton and resigned in March 1851. Although he was replaced by Edwin Brickwood the following month this appointment only
lasted until July when Brickwood also left Luton, to live in Putney. Brickwood's successor as Clerk was George Bailey who had served his articles in Chase's practice. Details of elections until 1853 are not available but a contested one may have occurred in March 1851 when Sibley, Townrow and John Clark were replaced by James Warr, Joseph Mead, a Park Street grocer, and James Waller. These appointments did not alter the balance of the Board. The following year came the significant election of Henry Brown, the first of the 'Blue' party to obtain a seat.

Meanwhile, the Board plodded on. Sewers were begun in Gaitskell Terrace and Tower Hill, the lighting of the town was undertaken, (the tender of the Luton Gas Company, the only local company, being accepted), a register of lodging and slaughter houses was prepared; people were ordered not to drive wheelbarrows along Barbers Lane. The rate was increased to one shilling in the pound. This progress did not impress the former members of the "clean" party. Under the heading "Industry and Filth" a critic of the Board of Health opened a letter to the Bedford Times thus: "Sir, As a general rule the above terms are and always have been diametrically opposed, but an exception is afforded by the busy town of Luton." Although much of his specific allegations were not strictly true, and were subsequently refuted by John Cumberland, it was clear that the defeated "Blues" were regrouping. Prior to the annual elections in March 1853 a public meeting was called at the Town Hall at which the performance of the Board to that date was criticised as achieving no fundamental improvement for Luton despite £2,000 expenditure. Proclaiming "efficiency with economy" the meeting put forward five candidates for the approaching election. Four, William Willis, Frederick Brown, A T Webster and Thomas Sworder had stood for the "Blue" party in 1850. They were joined by a fifth, the energetic John Everitt.

From a total of ten candidates three of them - Brown, Sworder and Everitt were successful. Re-elected was William Clarke and also joining the Board was John S. Crawley, making a rare excursion into Luton's affairs. This election altered the balance of the Board with the Browns, abetted by Sworder and Everitt, the dominant members whilst they served there. Henry Brown usually chaired the meeting although he deferred to Crawley on the infrequent occasions that the latter attended until his resignation the following February.

The primary reason for the changing composition of the Luton Board of Health was not an expression of electoral dissatisfaction in its early performance. Rather, it appears that the bitterness and fears that were so swiftly formed in 1850 just as rapidly faded in the light of experience of a cautious and only partially effective Board; so whilst the justifiable criticisms of Luton's sanitary conditions continued to motivate the "clean party", in the absence of Brickwood and Chase there was no-one on the other side with the energy and organisation to prevent its electoral success. This success was achieved through the disintegration of 'Yellow' interest and the votes cast at subsequent elections reflect this: in 1856 William Bigg and Thomas Sworder topped the poll gaining 328 and 295 votes respectively. Six years earlier these votes would not have secured them a place on the Board.
If the "Yellow" members of the Board had to choose an epitaph for their early work it would be that, (in the words of one supportive correspondent in the Bedford Times) they undertook improvements to the town "gradually but surely". Their abiding, and more fitting legacy was to be harsher, and indeed more tragic - cholera. Whilst the consequence of the cholera epidemic was to reinforce the necessity of electing "clean" members, it was a political irony that it was the "Yellows" erstwhile opponents who were to reap the results of the previous three years' negligence.

In another bitter twist of fate, it was in a "Yellow" members' property that Asiatic Cholera first struck. After suffering for nine hours, a child died in Adelaide Terrace in October 1853. Kit Tomson had attended him and after receiving his report the Board of Guardians wrote to Sibley requesting that he take some action, as well as to the Board of Health offering assistance and co-operation. The Board of Health responded by forming a Cholera Committee: John Everitt, J.S. Crawley and the Browns were members of both the Board of Guardians and the local Board of Health.

Within four days, as the respective Boards desperately attempted to apply such primitive measures as were at their disposal, it was reported that another child was fatally ill. The Union Relieving Officer was ordered to ensure that someone in Adelaide Terrace maintained a supply of at least three pails of boiling water and the Medical Officer ordered a quantity of brandy. The Board of Guardians engaged three nurses and the Board of Health a full-time assistant who distributed peat charcoal and chloride of lime to a number of properties. The cottages owned by Brickwood in Bull Court, those by Elizabeth Gregory in Old Bedford Road, Richard Haselgrove, Joseph Dancer and J.S. Crawley amongst others were ordered to be whitewashed and have their refuse removed. Five hundred notices advising people on remedial actions against cholera were printed and sent to the local ministers for distribution amongst their congregations.

Although the cholera did not spread these belated efforts were not sufficient to prevent a deterioration in Adelaide Terrace. The approaches to Sibley on the part of the local authorities suggesting joint action were ignored: it was obvious that Sibley was prepared to callously stand by whilst his tenants perished and it was also clear that there were other landlords in the town who would follow his example. The authorities therefore, intensified their efforts. On 1st November 1853 a joint emergency meeting was held which also included William Willis, Rev. Sikes, Dr. Benson, Dr. Tomson and R.D. Grainger, the Medical Superintendent Inspector of the General Board of Health. Grainger had already made his own inspections of the town. As a consequence of the meeting two medical assistants were appointed to assist Tomson, specifically working in door to door visitation. Preparation was made for two further medical assistants to be engaged for the following two weeks at £4.4.0. per week, including medicines. The joint Cholera Committee met twice on the 2nd November and daily thereafter.

Adelaide Terrace presented a particular problem which required a direct remedy. At the end of October, as the cholera in the courtyard intensified, Kit Tomson reported that it was "so overcrowded, so filthy and unfit for human habitation that nothing short of an entire removal of the inhabitants to some distant place and the property put under quarantine until declared fit for habitation would meet the urgency of the case." Faced with Sibley's non-co-operation the local
authorities took matters into their own hands. Some outbuildings belonging to Everitt in High Town were converted by a local builder at a cost of £60 to act as "places of refuge" for people who needed to be removed from their homes and once the Adelaide Terrace refugees were safely on the other side of the town, their sty's were cleansed with lime. By the middle of November Tomson was able to report that the cholera was easing and by early December there were no further cases. The Board of Guardians paid £20 renumeration to Kit Tomson on behalf of a grateful town.

Meanwhile, the inquests on the death of one of the Adelaide Terrace victims, an eleven year old boy named Frederick Green, focused the attention of Luton not only upon the squalor in its midst, but also upon the inadequacy of its relevant local authority. At least ten of the fifteen people who died as the result of the cholera came from the two hundred or so who constituted the population of Adelaide Terrace. The inquest jury found that there were but four privies in the Terrace and that there doors had been removed for firewood. There was one well (broken) and an open cesspit. On behalf of the Board of Guardians, T.E. Austin reported that there had been previous complaints about Adelaide Terrace but that the Guardians felt that it was a Board of Health responsibility. The "clean" party members of the Board made no attempt to defend their "dirty" colleagues and predecessors. Everitt gave evidence stating that not a single bye-law had been passed by the Board in three years up until the March 1853 elections. He reinforced this in a subsequent letter to the Bedford Times specifically highlighting its failure to fulfil Cresy's original recommendation of regulating lodging houses and slaughter houses. Against this Everitt claimed that an Inspector of Nuisances had been appointed to relieve a busy John Cumberland of this extra responsibility. Between one hundred and two hundred conveniences had been built upon existing property in the previous twelve weeks. Bye-laws had recently been prepared.

Evidence from George Bailey and Joseph Anstee showed that Sibley had made little effort to improve his property but it was an inspector from the General Board of Health (possibly Grainger) who put this into its proper context. His evidence concluded that the cholera outbreak would have been avoidable but for the activities of the "dirty" party upon the Board who used their electoral power to protect their own interests, and to subvert the health legislation, even at the expense of their tenant's lives. Sibley (with his one hundred cottages) and his confederates had the power to be able to swamp all opposition in any election: Henry Brown pithily remarking that "Mr Sibley's property in Adelaide Terrace, is a terrific proof of the power of filth". The inspector concluded that ".....there cannot be any doubt that the sanitary state of the town is worse than before the Act was applied". The Bedford Times, viewing these events from the county town applied comments to the inquests. It lost no time in administering a ticking off (laced with a degree of patronising smugness) to the brash upstart from the south of the county:

In this great emporium of commerce, political freedom and social happiness, there is the most terrible want of all features which would stamp it as a clean and wholesome town....open sludgy gutters...accumulations of muck.... decomposing animal and vegetable matter in snug places, dumbwells...cess pools and open soil pits daily and hourly invite Typhus and cholera to come and hold a great field day.
The Luton Board of Health it concluded, was just an "ornament". If they were honest, the Yellows would have admitted that they never intended it to be otherwise.

Tragic though it was, the cholera epidemic had one salutary effect in that never again was the Board run in such a negligent fashion. Cholera threatened again in October 1857 and a Board of Health sub-committee was formed to meet it, but the Board's improvements were not put to this particular test. From the middle 1850s onwards the "clean" party ensured that the Luton Board adopted a more vigorous position, although this was no more than commensurate with the pace of Luton's expansion or its urgent requirements. A series of inspections were made and a report was compiled by the Officer of Health in the autumn of 1854. This gave considerable detail but also demonstrated how little had hitherto been achieved. The worst of the landlords, notably Henry Sibley, Joseph Dancer, Richard Haselgrove and Edwin Brickwood were pestered to comply with the law; on the occasions when they failed to do so the work was carried out by the Board. Bye-laws were applied for but regrettably no detail of these are available. Immediately however, the Board showed a willingness to bring (successful) actions against those who contravened them.

Amongst the Luton Board of Health's acts in its first "clean" phase of existence was the appointment of Inspectors of Nuisances, Common Lodging Houses and Slaughter Houses. Edward Godfrey, Superintendent of Police, was appointed to this post in June 1853 but dissatisfied with his performance the Board dismissed him a year later. The Board had not yet learnt the lesson of John Cumberland by persisting with the appointment of part-timers. They fared even worse with Thomas Lloyd Evans of Torquay who was appointed Surveyor in May 1854. Evans resigned four years later before a vote of no confidence could be passed in him; the Board had discovered that he had kept no day book recording monies received but that although there appeared to be some discrepancies, because he had kept few records it was very difficult to clarify. The Board found itself in the embarrassing position of having to request contractors to supply details of charges which they had carried out. The Board, however continued to use a Police Superintendent as Inspector of Nuisances, Lodging Houses and Slaughter Houses. By 1858, Samuel Pope was confident that the condition of the lodging houses (at least the regulated ones) improved to the extent that he was able to report that they were in a "clean and healthy condition . . . I have no cause to prefer any complaint." Pope's optimistic report, if correct, showed that there had been a remarkable improvement in the condition of Luton's lodging houses in a very short space of time. In the early spring of 1856 the Luton Times highlighted the plight of one visitor to Luton. Arriving late at night with his family he made his way to a lodging house in New Town. There, the family was shown to a small room (swarming with vermin) which contained two beds and a bedstead. Already in the room were seventeen other occupants. One suspects that Pope was not looking too hard. A later successor, William Sandoe, confessed in 1864 "...one great difficulty which we cannot reach is the crowding in lodgings, owing to the number of girls who come in from the country for work."
Most of the township was paved and as a result of the cholera epidemic Luton also acquired two cemeteries. In addition to criticising the Board, R.D. Grainger's report also passed some observations upon the poor state of some of Luton's graveyards. The result of these inspections was an order from the Home Office, made under the terms of the General Interments Act, to close all burial grounds by the 1st June 1854. A Vestry meeting was called to debate how best to comply with this order. The proposal by E.C. Williamson and John Waller that a new cemetery for the town be opened immediately revealed a serious split between the Anglicans and Nonconformists. William Willis (in a characteristically lengthy speech) and Joseph Everitt both objected to paying for a Church of England controlled cemetery and an amendment opposing the act as detrimental to dissenters was carried by a large majority. Subsequent attempts to find common ground between the two sides through the formation of a Joint Stock Company foundered in squabbles over voting rights. The Bedford Times wearily remarked "there appears to be something mysterious in the atmosphere of Luton, for even so peaceful a subject of the grave and its decent requirements cannot be discussed unless accompanied with an unseemly exhibition of oratorical stream." Consequently, Luton acquired two cemeteries in 1854. The General Cemetery Company on a hill overlooking the town (secured from the Bute Trustees) and the Church Cemetery on a hill on the opposite side of town upon land secured with financial support from J.S. Leigh and J.S. Crawley who provided £100 each.

Loans were sanctioned by the beleaguered General Board of Health for sewage, paving and other works; by October 1856 the local Board held three separate mortgages with the General Annuity Endowment Association amounting to £1900, £14,9096 and £570, all payable over thirty years. However, the local Board's spending plans were always threatened by an electoral backlash from the ratepayers and wherever possible it tried to ensure that the cost of sanitary improvement was borne by those in the locality for whom the work was being carried out. This itself caused problems with some property owners and occasionally sympathetic Board members. The Board's finances were delicate: William Bigg and Alfred Tansley, who comprised the Finance Committee reported in February 1858 that because of the "accumulating obligations of the Board it is obvious that without a vigorous collection of the outstanding rate, and the speedy preparation of another of at least equal amount, the position of the Board will shortly become embarrassing and discreditable." 

As the Board tried to establish itself the inescapable image is of a legally hamstrung institution, not fully in control of the affairs over which it was required to have jurisdiction. This is most clearly illustrated in the manner in which Luton's first sewage treatment plant was built. Less tragic than the 1853 cholera outbreak, this was the most damaging legacy of the "dirty" Board. Although there was not yet a piped water supply, from 1850 drains and sewers were laid out around the town, collecting surface water and miscellaneous commercial and domestic waste - the contents of which passed into the River Lea. Flowing out to the south of Luton the Lea widened near to the Brache Mill worked by Richard Marks Brown and thence on into John Shaw Leigh's Luton Hoo estate where it widened still further into a small lake before continuing its journey south towards the Thames. Leigh understandably took umbrage at receiving the untreated effluent of ten thousand Lutonians and by 1854 was threatening legal action against
Forced into action the Board investigated sewage treatment systems at other towns such as Hertford and Tottenham whilst fighting a legal rearguard action against John Shaw Leigh. A loan was sanctioned by the General Board and tenders were invited for the various tasks.

Erection of a deodorizing works was commenced in 1856 on land purchased by the Board near to Windmill Road. Throughout 1857 as contractors struggled to overcome various practical problems (a fall of earth in Guildford Street after heavy rain hindered progress) Leigh kept up the pressure upon the Board by continuing with his legal suit, successfully obtaining an injunction preventing the Board from discharging any new sewage into the Lea. Not until January 1858 was this abandoned by which time the Board was involved in another lengthy legal battle, this time with Richard Marks Brown. Brown, whose Mill stood close by downstream claimed damages caused during the erection of the plant and for loss of water caused by the intercepting works. All of this occurred at a time when the Board were discovering that their Surveyor, appointed to oversee construction of the sewage works had simply not been fulfilling his duties. The work by contractors around the town predictably caused considerable inconvenience: gaping holes and noisy navvies was the oft-repeated complaint. More serious was the ominous threat that loomed in the form of the Ratepayers Protection Society. The Society was formed as a direct result of Leigh's legal action and the fear of the effect of the consequence of this upon the rates. Builder Thomas Barrett chaired the first meeting at the Town Hall at which the "reckless spending" of the Board was criticised. Wild accusations concerning the Board's motives appeared in the local press.

Fortunately for Luton, the organisation of the Board's opponents did not match their opprobious language. With the farmers a diminishing presence, the Wallers a lesser force and Chase and Brickwood gone, the Ratepayers Protection Society wore a far more distinctively petty bourgeois profile - with weaknesses in sustained organisation as a consequence. The Society, although agreeing at its first public meeting to levy a subscription of 1d a week did not formulate any rules and for the 1856 elections it was rumoured that there were to be seventeen candidates but in the end only eleven stood. The Protection Society failed to whip up the "dirty" backlash of 1850 and achieved only partial success in a moderate turnout (the average number of votes for an elected candidate was two hundred and eighty. Thomas Barrett was elected and Tansley and Anstee, both "clean" members, were unseated - Tansley (ninety four votes) spectacularly so. Bigg, Sworder and Everitt however, remained in place. Although more or less obliged to publish the ill-informed (and usually anonymous) criticisms of the Board in its correspondence columns, the Luton Times steadfastly sided with the Board on the question of sewage: if the Board members were so scurrilous, it reasoned, then it was a poor reflection upon the town which elected them. In a later leader article it came out strongly in support of the Board's areas of expenditure and against those who argued for "economy". A year later Tansley and Anstee were re-elected unopposed.

Relations with the Luton Gas Company were often strained with a fair degree of mistrust on the Board's part. They often quibbled over the price of gas that the Company supplied and even called in independent assessors to measure the power of illumination; however, in the
absence of any other source of gas they were obliged to accept the Company's tender each year to
light the town. In 1858 the Board were successful in altering some clauses in a bill placed before
Parliament to incorporate the Gas Company which it felt were detrimental to the interests of
itself and other consumers in the town.\textsuperscript{77} Essentially, the Board was resisting the Gas
Company's monopolistic powers and it is clear that many in the town were expecting the Board to
make representations on their behalf. This issue split the Board, some of whose members were
also Directors and shareholders in the Gas Company, and who subsequently resigned.\textsuperscript{78}

Involvements in disputes such as this were not the affair of an authority formed to
undertake the requirements of the Health of Towns Act. The gas issue was one example which
demonstrated however, that the Board was filling a breach left by the absence of any other local
authority. Increasingly it was assuming the mantle of the defenders of Luton's "interests" on a
number of issues, and in doing so was only reflecting the desire of many who saw that this should
be so. For example, one misguided correspondent to the Luton Times complained of the lack of
lighting in Victoria Street, requesting that the Board undertake to supply it.\textsuperscript{79} Another
correspondent complaining about the condition of Bute Street (there were numerous requests for
Board of Health work from residents - possibly even from those who were also members of the
Ratepayers Protection Society) referred to the Board members as "councillors".\textsuperscript{80}
Chapter Three. The Board of Health 1858-1868

Composition

Before the end of its first decade the leading figures of the local Board - the Browns, Bigg, Sworder and Everitt had resigned or retired their positions and were not to stand for election again. From March 1858 onwards the Board acquired a slightly more conservative composition. John Brett became Chairman of a Board which comprised William Willis, Charles Robinson, A.J. Tansley, Joseph Anstee, Joseph Bailey, who attended infrequently and who showed a very cautious approach to matters involving expenditure, and shopkeepers Joseph Mead (returning to the Board) and George Sole (the latter was also owner of property). Attendance was often poor, as few as three at a meeting on 10th February 1859.

From this time the Luton Board acquired something of a second rate character with shopkeepers replacing those drawn from the bourgeoisie. J.S. Crawley, E.C. Williamson and the above men mentioned, never stood again, Rev. James O'Neill and Kit Tomson on no occasion stood for election, and professionals such as Cumberland, Scargill and Willis chose to serve no more than short periods, usually seeking election to pursue a specific issue. Luton's leaders, the men who subsequently were to fight for control of the School Board and lead the Town Council, had deserted the local Board of Health. Presumably each had his own motives but in all probability it was frustration with the Board's impotence in the face of the many demands made upon it, and certainly from the 1860s former members such as Willis, Bigg and Anstee were becoming involved in the movement for Borough status or ad hoc issues such as the railway or control of the markets - issues which occasionally involved working through or with the Board of Health. What must also be counted was personal incompatibility: Frederick Brown's decision to stay away from the Board may have been influenced by animosity toward the type of people with whom he would have to deal. In a letter to John Shaw Leigh concerning the dispute with the Board over compensation for damage to the Brache Mill incurred by the sewage works, Brown was typically forthright:

I am quite sure judging from their (the Board's) past conduct (which I consider to have been exceedingly disgraceful) that if any power is placed within their hands, that it will be abused - some are proverbially well versed in the art of flattery and invective, and indulge in the one, or the other, as it best meets their purpose, but no confidence can be placed in the professions of such men....

This small-minded conservatism became even more pronounced the following year when Brett, Anstee and Sole retired and were replaced by Frederick Davis, Gustavus Jordan, draper and Samuel Lane, butcher: all three men were elected on a ticket of opposition to the levying of a Special District Rate and they gained reinforcement the following year with the election of Joseph Hawkes, who supported them and the second defeat of A.J. Tansley an advocate of the rate who, according to the 'Luton News' "lost some of his previous supporters by having publicly denounced existing nuisances and other malpractices". However, the position of the anti-rate
group still remained that of a minority and this was undermined still further by Lane's failure to attend meetings regularly; it was no surprise that he lost his place after a year when the durable Tansley was re-elected and assumed the Chair.

The issue of the Special District Rate was one of the few issues around which a party gathered to fight elections, and even this appears a tame affair when compared with antagonisms of the early 1850s. The 1861 election, which was fought over this question and which resulted in the election of three supporters of the rate (John Cotchin, A. J. Tansley and Samuel Toyer), was conducted "in a most orderly and respectable manner". 83

There was no issue confronted by the Board which resulted in a polarisation of economic interest or political allegiance. Although the upper middle class were abandoning the Board of Health, the petty bourgeoisie did not possess the necessary means by which to assert control over it. The shopkeepers, representative of small ratepayers, never acted as a cohesive force dividing amongst themselves upon particular issues, a feature which applied also to the hat manufacturers. No occupational group dominated; for the most part the local Board was comprised of individuals, not parties (see appendix). Luton at this stage possessed little in the way of party political organisation and it was in this limbo that the Board limped on in fits and starts.

The major effort on the part of the local Board of Health from the late 1850s to the early 1860s was devoted towards the complete paving and curbing of Luton's streets. A loan had been secured for £2300 but the Finance Committee's report in February 1858 concerning the Board's slender finances prompted it to levy a special District Rate at 10d in the pound. The result of this was the election in March 1859 of three men (Jordan, Davis and Lane) who campaigned against the rate and the bringing of a case against the Board at the Quarter Sessions of the Court of the Queen's Bench by Davis disputing its legality. Undeterred, the Board resolved to collect the rate taking legal advice from Frederick Day a Hemel Hempstead solicitor. 84 Day's advice was to proceed with the rate and take legal action against those who refused to pay, hoping that this would deter the rest. 85

The Board's Minute books do not provide details of the difficulties the Collector experienced in pursuing those who refused to pay the rate, nor their identities. That he had considerable difficulties is apparent but although divided, the majority on the Board persisted, resolving to redeem the rate. 86 They also therefore, had little choice but to also resist a further appeal to the Quarter Sessions by Davis. 87 The issue was finally settled by the victory of three advocates of the rate (Cotchin, Toyer and Tansley) in March 1861 over three opponents of it (Allen, Lane and Pledge) in the highest poll for at least eight years. At the first meeting after the election on April 2nd the Board passed a compromise resolution allowing those ratepayers who undertook to pave the areas adjacent to their property to be allowed to have this cost deducted from the amount of the rate for which they were liable. Whilst this still left the problem of ensuring that some ratepayers did either, it was sufficient for Davis immediately to withdraw his appeal.
In 1859 the local Board applied to the General Board of Health for confirmation of its bye-laws. Comprehensive in range, these covered the following areas:- the level, width, construction and sewerage of new streets; the structure and safety of walls within buildings; the ventilation in and around buildings; the closing of buildings unfit for habitation; drainage; to stop or pull down any buildings in contravention of the bye-laws; the prevention of nuisances; the regulation of slaughter houses; the cleansing of streets; the removal of refuse; the cleansing of privies.

Regarding the enforcement of the bye-laws as Luton continued to develop in the areas of New Town, High Town and the area between the Dunstable Road and New Bedford Road an increasing amount of the Board's attention was devoted to the inspection of building plans where it appears to have been diligent: the bye-law concerning the width of party walls on new buildings was that they should be a minimum of nine inches. The builder W.H. Attwood was warned that legal proceedings were being considered against him for allowing occupation of cottages in John Street before the Surveyor had certified that they were ready for habitation.

Much of the credit for the Board's conscientiousness through all its tribulations rests with its Surveyors. Joseph Keyte was active in the period 1860-61 making a number of inspections and reporting nuisances to the Board. Heading the list of problem areas was, naturally enough, Adelaide Terrace, which was condemned as "unfit for human habitation" and requiring a number of remedial measures. The Medical Officer was also making inspections and his findings were reported in the local press. The Luton Times summarised his conclusions thus: "One of the most important social reforms that could be effected, is the entire destruction of the hovels.....they endanger the PUBLIC HEALTH." As should have been expected such descriptions did not worry the breed of landlord typified by Henry Sibley who made little effort to comply with the Surveyor's requests. At the same time Keyte inspected another slum, Spencer's Yard, (on the other side of George Street from Adelaide Terrace) owned by a man named Pigg. What his tenants chose to call him can only be imagined but Pigg, like Sibley, chose to ignore Keyte's recommendations until the Board in despair voted in January 1864 to take proceedings to close Spencer's Yard. However, this either failed, or was not followed through and Spencer's Yard outlived the Board.

In 1863 complaints were received by the Board alleging Keyte's "inattention and inefficiency" in discharging his duties and he was promptly given his notice, a somewhat harsh decision. Keyte's replacement was William Sandoe who during his six years in office was the most energetic of the Board's surveyors. Sandoe supervised an extensive programme of paving, curbing, metalling and sewerage of Luton's streets as well as inspecting individual properties and pursuing recommendations for improvement such as the installation and repair of privies, the trapping of drains, etc. In connection with his diligence the names of How, Haselgrove and Brickwood recur in an unfavourable light. Bleaching and dyeing factories were also regulated and not permitted to be built in the centre of town, an enforceable decision whilst there remained sufficient building ground on the outskirts of Luton (and there always was).
Improvements to the efficiency of the sewage works were necessitated by a further injunction from John Shaw Leigh who found that sewage had been seeping into the Lea. Dissatisfied with the Board's measures Leigh gave notice of another lawsuit in 1861 which the Board staved off by purchasing land owned by Leigh next to the deodorizing works for the laying down of two large filtering beds. After a visit by the Clerk to Chelmsford, pumps were purchased similar to the models used there.

During the 1860s there were many issues in which the local Board increasingly became identified, and identified itself, as defending the 'public' interest, or at least the ratepaying section of it. In November 1860 they received notice of a proposal to form a Company to supply piped water with a reservoir on Hart Hill, backers of this move including William Phillips, Thomas Sworder, T.E. Austin, Alfred P. Welch, and Col. Lionel Ames. The Board's response, influenced by the strained relations with the Gas Company and wary of a private Company over which it would have no control, was that such works were unnecessary since "at the present time the water supply is abundant in quantity and good in quality".

This scheme was abandoned in February 1861 but four years later a bill was again introduced to establish a Luton Water Company with, (according to William Austin), the crucial support of a local bank, Sharples & Co. Its Manager, Edward Lucas, was one of the first directors of the Company - as were William Bigg, Frederick Brown, Charles Robinson and Welch. Faced with a more formidable proposal the Board first considered placing a number of public pumps around the town, thereby immediately conceding that the supply was not "abundant in quantity". It also resolved to raise a petition against the bill and then took issue on the failure of the Water Company promoters to give a guarantee concerning the supply of water to the Town Hall. Finally, the Board then shot itself in the foot: in December 1864 it adopted A. T. Webster's proposal that it should offer a premium to establish its own Water Company (Waller, Cotchin, Pledge and Pearman voted against) and then resolved to hold a referendum on the 19th December. Faced with the choice between establishing a Water Company on the rates or through a Joint Stock Company Luton's ratepayers chose the latter proposal by a margin of four hundred and fifty three votes to sixty seven. Although the local Board remained unanimously opposed to the establishment of a Water Company and succeeded in winning some concessions from its promoters the referendum was an end to its effective opposition. In 1865 the Luton Water Company was duly incorporated with its headquarters in what was to become Crescent Road.

Whereas the responsibility for the supply of water was now definitely not the responsibility of the Board, the disposal of waste water most certainly was. In this field the Board of Health had more success. In 1868, the Lea Conservancy Bill threatened the Board with being obliged to change its method of sewage disposal (Higgs Patent) at the deodorizing works to one which used a costly irrigation process. Having expended so much money and effort to achieve the sewage system it possessed, the Board of Health correctly concluded that the additional cost of changing the system (feared to be £50,000 and £70,000) would be too much for the ratepayers.
to bear. As the bill passed through the Committee stage E.O. Williams (as chairman) and John Higgins attended daily to give evidence.\textsuperscript{101} For once, Luton was united in its gratitude to the Board when the bill failed.

In contrast with its approach toward the Water Company, the Board of Health supported the establishment of a railway line for Luton. In this they were reflecting the universal desire for a line in the town and some Board members were active in promoting the two railway companies concerned. The railway lines did not intrude directly upon any of the Board's functions but in particular with the work on the Midland line, it again undertook the role of the guardian of public interest. The planned route of the line carried through High Town entailing the demolition of some ninety buildings and the diversion of two roads. The Board found this "highly objectionable" but eventually acceded to the plan in August 1865, which, whilst separating High Town Road from the rest of Luton, also removed some of its slums.\textsuperscript{102} The Board requested that the Railway Company place a bridge across the line to maintain a link between Luton and High Town Road and repeatedly asked the Company to ensure that the bridge was maintained; when it was reported to be unsafe the Board ensured that the Company replace it.\textsuperscript{103} Complaints of damage caused by excavations for the Midland line were addressed to the Board who, in turn, applied pressure upon the Company.

In proceeding to assume control of Luton's markets the local Board of Health went far beyond the role envisaged for it by Edward Cresy and the original promoters, and closer to the role of a town council. The town and its main industry had outgrown the existing facilities for market trading. Each market day (Monday) virtually the entire length of George Street from Market Hill to Wellington Street was occupied by "rickety old tressels and stalls exposing their goods and the people to all weathers in the open street". The market was mainly, but not exclusively devoted to straw plait. An evocative description was made of this in 1861:

It had been described to me as something combining many features of the picturesque....when the crowds from the country would hilariously display the golden Plait on stalls...and cheerful matrons and smart lasses would stand quietly on the pavement, each with scores of plait hooped on their arms. It was my misfortune to see this assemblage on a morning when the rain came down with a settled determination, that destroyed all the gaiety of the scene....every gateway that could give shelter, was filled with the poor women who brought their week's work to a certain market.\textsuperscript{104}

With the town's main street, and all its traffic, blocked for a whole day every week it was evident that improvements were needed. In addition to this the Market House was in a very poor condition. As early as September 1859 the Board agreed to approach John Shaw Leigh in order to lease the tolls of the town which Leigh held as Lord of the Manor. This move was temporarily spoilt by bad relations caused by disputes connected with the sewage works but this did not remove the demand nor the necessity for improvements to Luton's market facilities. A public meeting was called in April in 1864, under the chairmanship of Henry Brown jun., to investigate the possibility of erecting a Corn Exchange and a Market Hall. From this a committee was formed which looked at three sites (two in Cheapside and one on Market Hill on land at the rear of the Crown Inn) but was unable to decide upon any one.\textsuperscript{105}
In June 1865 the Board was informed that the ageing Leigh would consider an application to lease tolls. John Cumberland appears to have been the driving force behind this move and after representations to the Steward of the Manor acting upon behalf of Leigh it was agreed that the Board could lease the tolls for seventy five years at an annual rent of £150 on condition that the dilapidated Market House was demolished and replaced with another costing not more than £2000.

The Board opted for a controversial site for the Corn Exchange: Middle Row, the island of shops and a public house which stood on Market Hill. On a split vote (W.H. Higgins, Cumberland, Joseph Green, Shepheard and Frederick Davis for, and Pledge, Toyer and James Higgins against) the Board opted to purchase the site. Those who opposed the Market Hill scheme meanwhile placed their hopes in the 1867 and 1868 elections to the "little Parliament in Stuart Street". Their arguments dipped beyond that of unnecessary expenditure to the level of accusations of "trickery" toward the pro-Market Hill members who they claimed were seeking to make personal profit from the development. Davis, whose shop on Market Hill would have to be purchased and who was nearing the end of his active business life, and Cumberland, the leading estate agent and auctioneer in Luton, were obviously very vulnerable to this line of criticism - and a little of the mud stuck. Although Green and W.H. Higgins were returned at the 1867 elections, Henry Blundell, a leading advocate of the Market Hill and Plait Hall development failed badly in his bid to win election. The following year Cumberland (419 votes) lost his place on the Board in which Toyer (722 votes) and James Higgins (1007 votes - topping the poll) were re-elected. Whilst the anti-Market Hill faction had mounted a reasonably successful campaign amongst the voting ratepayers, the electoral formula ran against them in trying to turn a six-three deficit into a majority on the Board. It was also apparent that the pro-Market Hill faction had a broader level of support within Luton, as was amplified at a number of public meetings.

The majority on the Board then voted to proceeded to purchase the freehold of the tolls for markets and fairs from Leigh. At the same time the Board began to purchase land in Cheapside and Waller Street for the erection of a Market Hall to remove the plait market from George Street. The old Market House was pulled down and a temporary wooden building was erected whilst designs were submitted in the form of competition for the Corn Exchange. The temporary Market House was nearly more temporary than originally intended - it only narrowly escaped destruction by vandals on Guy Fawkes' night 1867. Surviving this, it was replaced the following year by the new Corn Exchange, designed by the London architects, Messenger and Grundy. The Luton building firm, Smart Brothers, successfully tendered for both the Corn Exchange and the Market Hall. In order to complete this programme a loan of £15,000 was requested from Whitehall and approved.

Although less prominently placed than the Corn Exchange, it was the Plait Halls which drew most attention in the town. The Luton Times now had the opportunity to sing the praises of the Board:
Travellers tell us no town in England is better paved than Luton; and the local Board of Health have done a great and useful work in the miles of streets new and old under their authority, but beyond all doubt their crowning achievement is the erection of the plait halls in Cheapside.¹¹

An impressive procession of dignitaries, headed by the U.S. Ambassador, Reverdy Johnson ("representing the most powerful nation in the world" according to the Luton Times) gathered for the opening ceremony at the Plait Halls and (in a shorter, smaller affair) for the Corn Exchange. In a day of lavish celebration it was a proud moment for the Board of Health and the supporters of the markets development scheme.

In other spheres the Board was also beginning to assume the role of the pre-eminent local authority. It subdivided itself into various committees - Finance, Gas, Deodorizing and, upon the conclusion of the Market Hill transactions, a Tolls Committee. A Fire Brigade Committee was added after the Board assumed control of the local brigade in February, 1864.¹¹² Whilst there is little doubt that many in Luton saw the Board of Health as a shadow town council, the fact remained that the Board was neither empowered or resourced to satisfy all the demands made upon it. In addition therefore, to the repeated dilemma of incurring the wrath of one ratepaying section for "needless expenditure", i.e. meeting the demands of another district of the town, the local Board also often appeared to act in an amateur, even petty way. Many Lutonians would have regarded its attempts to negotiate a low price with the Luton Gas and Coke Co. as laudable, but to others the expenditure of "four to five hundred pounds" in a futile dispute with a local monopoly was simply throwing good money after bad. This was especially the case when the resulting impasse was likely to leave the town in the dark.¹¹³ Ten pounds per annum were saved in 1859 by leaving the new Town Hall clock unlit.¹¹⁴ Most embarrassingly of all, allegations in 1861 by the Board against Mr. Clarke, their rate collector, regarding discrepancies in the books were suddenly found to be false because a mistake had been made by the bookkeeper. It was not, of course, unprecedented for a local authority to be fiddled by one of its employees (John Congreve, the assistant overseer embezzled £27 in 1872 and had to be retrieved from Newcastle) but the hasty manner in which the Board jumped to the worst conclusion with Clarke reflected badly upon them and showed the lack of confidence which they had in their own officers.

In the absence of anything better therefore, and despite its inherent limitations, the middle period of its existence saw the local Board become increasingly involved with the details of everyday life; in June 1860 it resolved that anyone found writing obscene graffiti "or otherwise" on fences and walls would be liable to 40/- fine or 14 days in prison. The Board also concerned itself with traffic problems in George Street, for example ordering the forcible removal of Inskips Photographic van if he persisted in parking it in front of the Town Hall.¹¹⁵ One example of the Board acknowledging a world beyond Luton and the Treasury was a message of sympathy to Mrs Lincoln and the American nation following the assassination of President Lincoln.¹¹⁶

Whilst relations with Luton Hoo improved those with the other large land-owning estate remained distant as the Crawley family played a remote role in the life of the town. The Board was able to enlist J. S. Crawley's support to "use his influence" to help thwart the proposed water
company in 1861 but in the main contact between the Board and Stockwood was restricted to clarification of land ownership around Stockwood Park. There was also an abusive skirmish with Crawley concerning a public right of way over Winsdon Hill which he had stopped up, and an exchange of land following the completion of the Midland line provided Luton with a park in Hightown and Crawley with land between Dunstable Road and the railway upon which he built houses. The Board was a peripheral mover in this latter development in 1867. The principal institution involved was the Moor Committee.

Whilst attention was paid to multifarious aspects of Luton's affairs it drew back from fulfilling one of Cresy's original recommendations - the construction of a public slaughter-house. This was deferred even though it had resolved that many in Luton were "prejudicial to the health of the inhabitants of the town."
Chapter Four. The latter stage, 1868 - 1876.

The short period to incorporation was marked by an abrupt change in the profile of the Board of Health. Dogged by the same failings and controversies which has marked the first twenty years of existence, the Board of Health imperceptibly slipped out of prominence in the minds of Lutonians: it ceased to be seen as a shadow town council when the prospect of the real thing seemed within the town's grasp. Two major undertakings featured during the latter part of the local Board's existence, one of these however, causing the last instance of controversy to be settled by election. In August 1870, a Committee of the Board was formed to consider the desirability of erecting a public swimming baths on land owned by the Board in Waller Street, next to the Market Halls, at a cost of £650. This proposal was supported by a public meeting, still officially a Vestry meeting, which resolved that the Board should "proceed to their speedy economic and efficient construction". Following this, on 4th July 1871 the local Board of Health formerly adopted the Washhouses and Baths Act, with two of the shopkeepers on the Board (Barrett and Oliver), voting against.

The decision to build public baths had split the Board and in October 1871 Frederick Davis presented a petition of three hundred and sixty seven ratepayers (measuring twelve feet long) requesting that they not be built. Unimpressed, the members of the Board who supported the baths proposal disparaged the petition. Scanning the list John Higgins claimed never to have heard of some of the signatories and Drewett went further stating that he had reliably been informed that some had signed simply in order to be rid of persistent attentions from the petitioners. The Board's vote to continue revealed that besides Davis, two other Board members, William Barrett and Dr H. A. Squires were also opposed to the construction of public baths (Oliver apparently changing his position). Beyond the Boardroom the "ratepayers" backlash was beginning to wind itself up. Samuel Toyer was again the guiding light for the opposition to expenditure, drawing together kindred spirits at "one of the most absurd and ludicrous public meetings ever held....." Toyer's proposal for the formation of a 'Board of Health Ratepayers Protection Society' received a slight name change to 'The Owners and Ratepayers Protection Association' but the original nomenclature was essentially correct - it was the Board of Health plans which Toyer and his supporters had their stern eyes upon. Toyer was one of the Association candidates along with Joseph Bailey and J.W. Haselgrove and it therefore became clear that the forthcoming elections in the spring of 1872 would decide the issue.

In contrast with the 1871 elections, passions were running high. "No more interest was taken in the Board of Health elections last year than in the selection of an errand boy or washerwoman" commented the Luton Times. It was very different now. For the last time in a Board of Health election, the labels 'Blue' and 'Yellow' were used; the former campaigning for the erection of the baths, the latter (the Ratepayers Protection Association), against. The debate cut across party political allegiance with the three 'Blue' candidates comprising John Webdale and Frank Chapman Scargill, both Liberals, and John Cumberland, a Conservative. This was also reflected in the nominations of the 'Blues' which consisted of both Conservatives and Liberals whilst T. C. Johnson, a former member of the Board, nominated both 'Blue' and 'Yellow' candidates. The 'Blue' candidates were formidable with Scargill in particular being a fluent
public speaker. Here, it was most apparent that Luton's middle class manufacturing and professional elite were combining to stop Toyer and his band of small tradesmen, although their combined votes alone would not have been enough - they had to win the argument. Meanwhile, the local Board had accepted the Smart Brothers' tender of £895 for the erection of the baths and had successfully requested permission to borrow £1250 to complete all the necessary work.

The result of the election, in the highest turnout for any in the local Board's history determined that baths would be built:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Webdale (Blue)</td>
<td>1214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Cumberland (Blue)</td>
<td>1133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank C Scargill (Blue)</td>
<td>1039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J W Haselgrove (Yellow)</td>
<td>618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph. Bailey (Yellow)</td>
<td>644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Toyer (Yellow)</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other major effort of the Board was to purchase the Town Hall which until 1874 was owned by the Company (the Town Hall Company) which had built it in 1847. According to William Austin and J. G. Dony the unsatisfactory way in which this purchase was concluded was a major contributory factor in the decision of the town to press for incorporation as a Borough. This is certainly true but even had the transaction proceeded smoothly it is unlikely that it would have made a significant difference to the development of the campaign for incorporation and for Parliamentary Borough status, which was already under way: the ownership of Luton Town Hall by a public body subject to the Justices at Bedford could only have acted as a spur to those campaigning for Borough status, one of whose main claims were for the establishment of a locally controlled Magistrates' Bench. As it was, the Board initially refused the Town Hall Company's low offer of £2250 in October 1873 before finally settling at £2125 in August the following year. Again, according to Austin, it seemed likely that the Town Hall would be sold to another buyer had not two Board members G. C. G. Lockhart and John Higgins, who was also a Director of the Company, secured a provisional contract privately and then persuaded their colleagues to take this over.

As its period of operation drew to a close the local Board remained actively preoccupied with the enforcement of building and street regulations. The Water Company was warned to repair a road (unnamed) which had been opened up for the laying of water mains, otherwise the Board threatened to carry out the necessary work, charging this to the Company. When, after heavy rainfall, it was discovered that the new roads in High Town had inadequate drains the Board succeeded in obtaining from the Midland Railway Company (who was responsible) £50 compensation to complete the work themselves. In more general terms the Board continued to clash with the public utility companies whose monopolistic powers it remained suspicious of, and who therefore, undermined the Board's own authority within Luton. It persisted in querying the price of gas, enlisting the support of one Professor James Copcutt in order to assist its case and even considered building its own gas works, an idea which had it been so foolhardy to try,
would have surely brought down upon it the wrath of more than just Samuel Toyer and his
confederates. At the same time as this, the Board of Health was in dispute with the Water
Company over the supply of water, the cost of sinking wells and gauging the level of water.
The sewage plant continued to give cause for concern; in October 1869 its foreman was dismissed
for not ensuring that the water was sufficiently "clarified". Whatever the problems with the
sewage works (and there were many) Luton was at least more fortunate than Leicester, where
the attempt to sell liquid manure was an economic failure. The idea of doing this, in order to
recoup some of the expenditure on the sewage works, was mooted in Luton, but never
adopted.

To the end, the names of Sibley and Brickwood feature in the Board's Minutes, a
testimony to the Board's persistence as well as to its weakness. Brickwood (by then living in
Brighton) ignored demands to build privies to his Park Street property and was presented with a
bill by the Board for £20.10.10. There is no record that he paid. The Market Hill controversy
lingered on with not all the properties alongside purchased for demolition by 1871 (even though
this had been agreed with the owners in 1868). An "uproarious" meeting of the ratepayers failed
to decide whether the shops of Frederick Davis, W. Taylor and the late Thomas Wingrave should
be purchased but eventually the Board undertook the last part of the scheme.

The fire brigade continued to be a source of occasional embarrassment despite the
purchase of a new engine in 1869. An amateur force, it was frequently thwarted by its inherent
weaknesses and the highly inflammable (and ill-designed) nature of buildings devoted to the
manufacture of straw hats. Like the Board of Health, its weaknesses led it to be castigated for
failings which were not really its business. "What use is the Luton Fire Brigade?" asked the
Luton Times after the brigade had failed to reach Stopsley, a village over which it no jurisdiction,
in time to put out a fire. The Luton Times' suggestion of copying the London Fire Brigade's
system of fining members who failed to turn out in time may have ensured a better performance
than the brigade mustered in August 1873. Here, a serious fire in a Cheapside draper's shop,
half a mile from the station, had been put out by the shopkeeper and public before the brigade
arrived.

The 1872 election for places upon the Board marked the last in which a single issue (and
personal abuse) created any excitement in Luton. The elections of 1874 were, according to the
'Luton Advertiser' "characterised by an amount of apathy that was almost unprecedented". By this time the attention of the town had moved to battles being fought elsewhere, chiefly to the
fight for control of the School Board and to the incorporation as a borough, a series of events in
which the Board played no part.

The decision to apply for incorporation marked the beginning of the end for the Board
although it continued to operate for another two years and three months (becoming the Urban
Sanitary Authority on 25th April 1875) as the formalities for incorporation were proceeded with.
The last meeting was held on the 9th March 1877 at which it resolved to be merged into the
Rural District Sanitary Authority of Luton Union and its debts and property to be transferred to
the Urban Sanitary Authority of the Borough of Luton.
Chapter Five. The Luton Board of Health in retrospect

Assessment of the performance of the Luton Board of Health, or indeed any other Board, has to be qualified by an appreciation of the limited extent of the powers vested in it by the Health of Towns Act. Sir Edwin Chadwick, the driving force behind the Public Health Bill watched with frustrated anger as the legislation was repeatedly compromised in order to secure its safe passage through Parliament. Thus, the emaciated powers with which the General Board of Health attempted to operate placed the onus for improvement upon local initiative and the result was that the performance of the Act differed in each area in which it was applied.

As Chadwick correctly forecast, powerful vested interests could thwart and nullify the effectiveness of the Act in many localities. The Merthyr Tydfil Board of Health formed in 1850 (the same year as Luton’s), was dominated by the local ironmasters with the support of the smaller ratepayers: consequently “implementation of the Public Health Act of 1848 was a half-hearted business”. At Hanley, an area of the Potteries with a greater population and with greater squalor than Luton (the death rate for the district of Shelton in the period 1846-1848 was thirty six per 1000) there already existed by 1850 Watching and Lighting Commissioners, Market Trustees and Highways Boards. There was therefore, determined resistance by the old authorities who saw the creation of a new one as an encroachment upon their traditional rights and powers. The latter bodies successfully led the opposition to the proposals for a local Board and the Market Trustees continued to oppose (unsuccessfully) the move toward incorporation. Similarly, at Stratford the old Corporation, responsible for choosing nine out of the twelve members of the Board, also operated as a focal point for the anti-Board efforts of vested interests.

Of the limited number of localities available for comparison it is Burton-upon-Trent and Chelmsford which bear most similarity with Luton. With a population of 7,934 in 1851 Burton, like Luton, comprised the old township plus two more recently developed areas, Burton Extra and Horninglow. The two towns also shared a similar standard of sanitation and neither possessed borough status. Edward Cresy was also the inspector for this area (in 1853) but there the parallels end and the contrasts begin; Cresy only inspected Burton Extra and Horninglow but would not recommend the application of the Act to these areas without Burton itself.

Consequently, Burton was left with the Town Improvement Clauses Act which was adopted in 1853 but which proved to be a poor substitute for a local Board of Health. Both the Improvement Commissioners and the Highways Committee were “hopelessly incapable” of dealing with the town’s sewage which was polluting the Trent, and it was not until after a local Board was established (in 1863) under the Local Government Act of 1858 that various improvements to Burton’s sanitation were commenced. A.J. Archer’s conclusion was that “what was lacking in Burton was not the will to improve, but the power to do so effectively and permanently”. Burton’s experience could well have been Luton’s had not circumstances combined differently and although the comparative data is limited it is possible to draw some conclusions as to the degree of effectiveness of Luton’s Board of Health and the crucial reasons for its establishment and subsequent performance.
An even closer similarity rests with Chelmsford, also visited by Cresy (in 1848). Here pockets of deprivation in old courtyards were contrasted with the miserable conditions in the new part of town. Five hundred houses had been erected after 1839 (although only three hundred were occupied) when land to the south of Chelmsford was sold by the Mildmay family. With no building controls exercised contemporary descriptions echo those of Luton; ill-ventilated, ill-lit with open cess-pools and stagnant ditches. The Chelmsford Board of Health, established in the same year as Luton appears to have met with even greater success, reducing the death rate per thousand to nineteen by 1871 (see table) and its sewage works acting as a model for Luton's Board.

A striking feature of Luton in 1850 was that there existed a power vacuum in the town. There were no powerful local institutions with vested interests which could suffocate the Board; no Corporation nor Improvement Commission, no Highways Committee nor Tolls Trustees. There was, of course, the Board of Guardians but this appears to have had little contact with the Board of Health nor involvement in its affairs. Neither did there exist large scale industries dominating the life of the town and led by men whose baleful influence could make a local Board bend to their will. The two most extensive landowners for the most part sought not to exert any influence over the life of the town. Both John Shaw Leigh and J. S. Crawley concentrated their interests upon their immediate estate and whilst Leigh can take indirect credit for the sewage and market improvements both he and, in particular, Crawley remained inactive in Luton's affairs. The experience of Merthyr Tydfil could not be repeated in Luton where the town's elite were individually not powerful enough to alter the affairs of the town in order to satisfy selfish ends. Collectively, they were far more inclined to promote "clean" issues, with, at times, a striking degree of unity. They were however, by no means typical of their class, nationally. Nottingham Corporation was dominated by an oligarchy of middle-class, non-conformist Whig traders. Yet here the majority of the Corporation were inert, ineffective and corrupt, not unwilling to court unpopularity and the possible loss of their seat by showing up and tackling the intense squalor of which they were all aware. This perhaps goes some way to explaining why most of the leading 'Blues' stayed away from the Board apart from specific forays in the early 1850s, 1861 and 1872. They recognised that lengthy tenure of office was not compatible with effective performance. John Cumberland and A. J. Tansley did not follow that line and both suffered electoral defeat at the hands of lesser men as a result.

There is no indication that party politics played in any way an important part in the Board's affairs: that in a Liberal town leading Conservatives such as Sworder, Williams and Cumberland could be elected, and serve as chairmen, is proof of that. Divisions and disputes in Luton on Board of Health matters took place on cross party lines. The fiercest critics of expenditure - Samuel Toyer, Frederick Davis and Abraham Hobbs were all Liberals. What did matter was the issue of expenditure or more accurately effective expenditure. Comparative data is limited, but a selection of the General District Rates levied are tabulated:
General District Rate (per annum)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1/4d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>1/6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>2/6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>3/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>2/6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>2/9d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The early figures clearly reflect the Board's intention to spend, and do, as little as possible: the rise in the General District Rate after 1854 show circumstances forcing the Board to change its approach as well as its membership. Tansley's and Bigg's grim financial report of February 1858 can be taken as much as an indictment of earlier mismanagement as of the Board's current predicament. Loans secured for sewage and for paving put pressure upon the Board's delicate resources necessitating a Highway's Rate at 1/3d in December 1857 and a further Highways Rate of 1/- in July 1858.

The decision to levy a Special District Rate of 10d in June 1859 (to offset the loan and interest for paving the town) led to two years of bitter fighting at Board meetings, the polls and the Courts. Although the more progressive elements on the Board eventually got the better of the final compromise (the Board voted to allow all ratepayers who undertook the paving of adjacent premises to have this deducted from the Special District Rate), the first decade of its operation, in particular, demonstrated the vulnerability of a local Board to the brand of myopic, corner-shop economics which had stifled the advancement of public health elsewhere in England.¹⁴⁶ Never capable of organised, sustained influence, these people had little in common except property and selfishness. The threat of their ability to organise an occasional electoral or legal backlash forever haunted the operations of the Board. Also constant was the continued sniping of those who wished the Board to undertake expenditure in their particular locality or upon their particular scheme.¹⁴⁷

A more informative comparison of the Board's effectiveness can be made by observing the death rates of a selection of similar towns.¹⁴⁸ A qualification that must be made is to repeat that Luton's return covers a Registration District and therefore includes the Borough of Dunstable plus neighbouring villages. The figures are as follows:
Luton's figures had improved since 1850, but not outstandingly so. These figures echo conclusions already drawn, namely the larger the town, the higher the death rate, and here lies a crucial answer to the degree of success achieved by the Luton Board of Health. In carrying out its functions the Board was fortunate that the town in 1850 was still a relatively small one. Unable, for a number of reasons, to remove existing slums and other nuisances (no public slaughter house was built as recommended by Cresy in 1850) it was able to make sure that minimum standards of good building were applied for the future. The consequence of this was that as Luton expanded the proportion of its inadequate dwellings diminished within the town as a whole. If it also accepted that rural districts had lower mortality than urban areas then it also very possible that a return for the township could well have been higher than the the figure of twenty one in a thousand, the figure for the district. Regrettably, the Luton Local Board did not employ a full time Medical Officer of Health and so detailed figures are not available. It must also be remembered that although Luton's worst housing was very poor, it was restricted to individual courtyards and streets and never approached the same scale as towns such as Hanley, Leicester, or Nottingham (where the lack of building land served to intensify the squalor), let alone the big cities. Nonetheless, individual cases of destitution and squalor lingered on, seemingly beyond the power of the Board of the local authorities.

Ultimately, even the Board's inadequacies made a positive contribution to Luton's development; that it nearly lost the Town Hall, that it had merely nine members, that it was subject to the Justices of the Peace at Bedford, all of these factors focused in Lutonians' minds the need for a more comprehensive representative body. At the root of the matter lay the
Board's inability to fulfill the expectations of many in the town. The concept of "public health" can have an enormous range of interpretations covering roads, fire prevention, sewage, building control, paving, public baths, graveyards and so on. Yet the terms of reference for the Luton Board of Health were far narrower than this. Its attempts to cover a number of fields (such as the provision of a fire brigade) which were beyond its original remit, simply brought further disapprobation. It was also clear that the Board had a distinct lack of confidence in its officers, with the very notable exception of Sandoe. There were many instances, great and small, minor and tragic, where the Board's officers failed to satisfactorily fulfil their duties. In June 1864 a workman was killed by collapsing earth whilst sewers for the Board of Health in Stuart Street. At the inquest, the Coroner and jury cited the lack of supervision as contributory factors in the accident.  

Repeated failure to achieve the impossible standards which others set for it did not relieve the Board from further representations. In March 1868, it received a deputation from the large hat factories led by Messrs. Welch, Kershaw and Willis concerning the Workshops Regulation Act (30 and 31 Vict. cap. 103) 1867. These gentlemen did not oppose the principles of the Act, but feared that the factory inspectors would only visit their premises to see whether employees were working excessive hours. They therefore requested that the local Board of Health undertake to apply the Act to all the small workshops which, they acknowledged, constituted "probably one half of the town". Given that they felt that the Factory Act inspectors would be unable to root out the abuses of long hours of work in Luton's small workshops, it is astonishing that men such as Welch and Willis, who were amongst the better informed in the town, thought that the Board of Health would be equipped to carry out such an arduous task.

Many of the fears initially expressed concerning the detrimental effects of the Health of Towns Act were never realised. The dread of encroachment upon Luton's affairs by central government were most frequently articulated by Frederick Chase but by few others. This contrasts with other towns with more clearly defined administrative structures, notably Nottingham. Often local authorities attempted to keep the central government at arms length, even going as far as to go through the motions of compliance with the Health of Towns Act in order to satisfy the General Board of Health. Little fear of London was ever articulated in Luton, a town lying just thirty miles from the heart of the capital and whose economic activity involved frequent contact between the two. Many of the large hat manufacturers, such as Richard Vyse, came from London and many more frequently travelled there on business, and, after the opening of the railway, for pleasure.

The creation of the local Board of Health did not inhibit building in Luton: the absence of building regulations was advertised for a land sale at Caddington in 1861 (the development was not subject to "surveys by the local Board"). Caddington, however remained a small village near to the road from Luton to London and the issue of building control (applied fairly vigorously by the Luton Board) neither inhibited the property market within its jurisdiction, nor promoted
Until incorporation in 1876 Brown Brick (the streets on the western side of Park Street - Wood Street, Brache Street, Bailey Street, Kings Road) lay officially within the hamlet of West Hyde, just beyond the limits of the Luton township under the jurisdiction of the Board of Health. Whilst Luton possessed its pockets of pre-1850 established poverty, overall the standard of public health was perceived to be lower in Brown Brick, even though many of its houses were built after 1850. During another of its recurring outbreaks of fever the Luton Times asked one of the rhetorical questions with which it occasionally opened its leader column. "What is to be done with Brown Brick?" was followed by a diagnosis for the fever: the district was without a Board of Health. The filth and squalor of houses erected after 1850 were in marked contrast with their contemporaries in Luton. The large property owners in Brown Brick were reported to be opposed to the Luton Board of Health extending its powers to that district.154

It is evident that from very early on in its existence the Luton Board of Health begun to evolve into a town "council". One reason for this is self evident - the absence of any other local authority and the need for action in many areas. There is however, another deeper, and less easily quantifiable reason for this: civic pride. Disparagement of the Luton Board of Health for becoming emeshed in affairs beyond its remit does not take into account this factor. For a quarter of a century the local Board of Health was the closest which Luton had to a town council, and those who aspired to serve upon it were determined to act in a matter befitting "councillors" whilst waiting for the real thing to arrive. In operating in such a way, Luton's Board of Health was no different to many other towns in a similar position. At Heaton, near Bradford, their Board of Health, "small, impecunious and semi-amateur" though it may have been, performed in a very similar style. It subdivided its nine members into various committees (finance, General Purposes, waterworks etc), moved into a cottage which became the Board's 'town hall', and undertook street lighting, which it negotiated with a local gas company.155 Public improvements in towns such as Heaton or Luton were not merely done for the benefit of the health of the inhabitants. In the absence of the dignity of office the erection of a market hall, the paving of a street, the lighting of a town were outward manifestations of inward pride. They were tangible evidence of personal, as much as collective, progress.

That Luton made real improvements since 1850 (a statement which could not be applied to all of the towns mentioned above, even those with low death rates in 1871) is undeniable. The contribution of the local Board of Health, willingly or otherwise was the major factor in this improvement, and no mere coincidence. Inconsistent, tardy, enfeebled both by initial legislation and local vested interests - all of these are criticisms which could be levelled at the Luton Board at various times with justification. There can be no doubt however, that in the middle of the nineteenth century the Luton Board of Health made a decisive contribution to the making of a modern town.
NOTES

(1) Luton Times 18 March 1856. Poem entitled "The Luton River".

(2) Letter in the Luton Times 16 March 1867.


(4) Beds Times 31 July 1847.

(5) Complaint in Beds Times 17 Nov. 1849.

(6) Ibid 1 May 1847.

(7) Ibid 13 March 1847. The pointless literary debate, much of it an exercise in sophistry, had taken up much of the correspondence column in preceding weeks.

(8) Ibid 6 Feb. 1847.


(11) Beds Times 20 Nov. 1847.


(14) Luton Union op cit vol. 9, P.U.L.M. 9, p 330, 10 Nov. 1848, p 372, 8 Dec. 1848.

(15) Beds Times 24 Oct. 1846 and 18 Aug. 1849. The newspaper's Luton correspondent noted that the site of labourers repairing twenty yards of footpath "created no small degree of curiosity" and that the ratepayers were "bracing themselves for an additional levy".


(17) Beds Times 14 Sept. 1847.

(18) Finer, S.E. The Life and Times of Edwin Chadwick (Methuen, 1952) pp 299 = 300. According to Finer, Edward Cresy, the author of the 'Encyclopaedia of Civil Engineering', was one of a number of engineers who were "fanatical devotees of pipe-sewers and smallness".

(19) Cresy, Edward. Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into the sewage, drainage...of the town of Luton. (H.M.S.O., 1850) p 3. A report of the visit was also carried in the Beds Times 24 March 1849.

(20) Ibid p 8.


(22) Ibid p 9.


(25) Austin, William. *History of Luton and its Hamlets* vol. 2, p 146, (1928). William Austin was a young relative of C.A. Austin who may have been present at the Vestry meeting. Austin also noted that Vyse and Brickwood had already clashed in 1845 over the appointment of an assistant overseer. On that occasion Brickwood lost.

(26) *Beds Times* 6 June 1850.

(27) A conversation between a Master and his workman upon the proceedings at the late Vestry held in Luton (Luton Museum 5/12/29). Although the publisher of this handbill is not identified it was certainly produced by someone who was at the meeting and who took exception the manner in which Richard Vyse was removed. It may well, therefore, have been published by Vyse himself. Edwin Brickwood is described as "the great gun of the Vestry".

(28) The sources for the assessment are *Who's Who in the Town of Luton in 1842* (Luton Museum 8721), the accompanying map, and a property valuation register of 1845 (Luton Borough Council, Borough Treasurer’s Dept.).

(29) Sometimes spelt "Clark". There were two men by the name of "William Clarke" in Luton, both of whom were property owners and electors. However because of inconsistencies of spelling it is not always possible to establish who was who.

(30) *Beds Times* 15 June 1850.


(33) *Ibid* 6 July 1850. This meeting was held at The Cock Inn, of which William Clarke was either the landlord or owner, thus saving the expense of hiring a room at the Town Hall.


(35) *Beds Times* 18 May 1850.

(36) *Ibid* 13 July 1850. An editorial comment was added to this report from the Luton correspondent - "few towns require active sanitary measures more than Luton does".

(37) *Ibid* 20 July 1850.

(38) *Ibid* 27 July 1850.


(40) Finer, S.E. op cit p 436.

(41) Luton Board of Health Minute Book. vol. 1. 12 Aug. 1850.


(43) *Beds Times* 9 Nov. 1850. The Board’s offer was described as "a great boon to cottage proprietors".

(44) Luton Board of Health op cit 18 Nov. 1850.

(45) For example proceedings were agreed upon against Benjamin Mills of Burr Street who erected cottages in High Town (ibid 3 May 1852) and E.O. Williams for building in Bute Street (ibid 31 May 1853).

(47) Bailey was to serve as Clerk throughout the remainder of the Board's existence.

(48) Luton Board of Health op cit 6 Oct. 1851. William Clarke voted against and Daniel Davis, a member of the Company, abstained.

(49) Ibid 26 Jan. 1852. Clarke voted against.

(50) Beds Times 31 Jan. 1852 and 7 Feb. 1852.

(51) Ibid 26 March 1853.

(52) Ibid 29 March 1856.

(53) Ibid 11 Sept. 1852.


(56) Luton Union op cit p 287, 1 Nov. 1853.


(58) Ibid pp 297 = 298, 1 Nov. 1853 - 4 Nov. 1853.

(59) Ibid p 344, 9 Dec 1853.

(60) All evidence was summarised in the Beds Times 5 Nov. 1853 to the 26 Nov. 1853.

(61) Ibid 5 Nov. 1853.

(62) Luton Board of Health op cit. A series of reports were transcribed in full in September/October 1854.

(63) Sibley was ordered to construct privies in Adelaide Terrace (Luton Board of Health op cit 12 Sept. 1854). At the same meeting Brickwood was ordered to construct privies in Bull Court; repairs to the existing ones plus the removal of "offensive accumulations" had eventually been undertaken by the Board. A summons was eventually issued to Brickwood for nine pounds for the repair and for his non-payment of rates (ibid 13 June 1854). Joseph Dancer appears to have been a particularly truculent citizen. Like Sibley and Brickwood he neglected his property, even during the height of the cholera outbreak (ibid 3 Nov. 1853).

(64) Notice of this application appeared in the Beds Times 14 Jan. 1854.

(65) Charges were brought against Charles Payne, a saddler, for removing privy soil and vegetable waste during the day (it caused an offensive smell), Beds Times 23 Oct. 1854. Samuel Haydon was prosecuted for a similar offence, Beds Times 25 Nov 1854.

(66) Luton Board of Health op cit 13 June 1854.

(67) Luton Board of Health op cit, vol. 2, 7 Dec. 1858.

(68) Ibid 1 June 1858.


(70) Beds Times 11 Feb. 1854.

(71) Ibid 23 Sept. 1854.

(73) Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 2, 9 Feb. 1858.


(75) First meeting reported in Luton Times 5 Jan. 1856.

(76) Ibid 8 March 1856 and 27 Sept. 1856.

(77) 21 and 22 Vict (session 1857-58). William Phillips' copy of this, with some notes, is in the collection of Luton Museum (141/66).

(78) They were replaced by William Willis, Charles Robinson, Joseph Bailey, Samuel Toyer and Joseph Mead; all were opposed to the bill.


(80) Ibid 15 Nov. 1856. Frederick Lawford, in a letter to the paper on 3 April 1858 referred to the town's Board of Health as "our local parliament".

(81) Letter dated 27 Sept. 1858. Beds C.R.O. LHE 249. Writing from his home on Farley Hill, Brown was forewarning Leigh who was about to receive a delegation from the Board.

(82) Luton Times 31 March 1860.

(83) Ibid 30 March 1861.

(84) Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 2, 14 June 1859. Jordan and Allen were not present.

(85) Ibid 19 July 1859.

(86) Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 3, 4 Dec. 1860.


(88) Summarised in Luton Times 19 Feb. 1859.

(89) Luton Board of Health op cit 17 April 1860. Davis, Bailey and Lane, although Toyer supported Jordan's resolution.

(90) Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 4, 24 May 1864.

(91) Luton Board of Health op cit vol 3, 14 June 1860.

(92) Luton Times 2 June 1860.

(93) Luton Board of Health op cit 17 February 1863.

(94) Children's Employment Commission, 1862. 2nd Report of the Commissioners...1864. No. 43, p 208. Evidence given by Charles Lutes, blockmaker. Lutes added "The Board is very expensive, but I suppose it is good".

(95) Ibid 22 Nov. 1859.

(96) Ibid 27 July 1861.

(97) Ibid 20 Nov. 1860.

(98) Austin, William op cit p 181.
Most of the Water Company's archive is deposited at the Beds C.R.O. (X739). Lea Valley Water Company still retain some material. The buildings in Crescent Road were demolished toward the end of 1987.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 4, 27 Oct. 1864.

Ibid 11 Nov. 1864.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 5, 28 May 1867.

Knight, Charles. 'British Almanac and Companion', 1861. Quoted in Austin, T.G. The Straw Trade. (Patrick O'Doherty 1871).

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 4, 27 Nov. 1866.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 5, 16 July 1867. This was not the design which gained first prize in the competition. Grundy and Messenger had submitted another design and this had come second.

Luton Times 2 April 1870.

Luton Board of Health op cit 3 Feb. 1863.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 6, 20 June 1871.

Luton Times 14 Oct. 1871.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 3, 17 April 1861.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 4, 24 April 1865. A message of thanks was received from the American legation on 16 May 1865 and the Board later received copies of "Tributes of the Nations to Abraham Lincoln" on 4 Aug. 1868.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 3, 20 Feb. 1861.


Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 4, 19 Dec. 1865.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 6, 20 June 1871.

Ibid 8 July 1871. Toyer received a kind press from the Luton Times on just one occasion - his obituary.
(123) Luton Advertiser 30 March 1872. The Advertiser, a Conservative newspaper supported the 'Blue' party. It previewed the election on 23 October 1872 with very unflattering pen-portraits of the three "Yellow" candidates whom they described as being "a most dangerous party". Toyer was accused of a public career devoted to self-service and of Bailey it wrote "We trust that whoever has the welfare of the rising generation of Luton at heart will show their appreciation of Mr. Jos. Bailey by placing him the position he deserves."


(125) Luton Board of Health op cit 14 June 1874, 30 June 1874 and 11 August 1874. The minute book do not appear to give full details of the saga.


(128) Luton Times 21 May 1870.

(129) Ibid 16 July 1870.


(131) Luton Times 12 April 1856.

(132) Luton Board of Health op cit 2 Dec. 1873 and 14 June 1874.

(133) Luton Times 9 Sept. 1871.

(134) Ibid 5 March 1870.

(135) Ibid 30 Aug. 1873.

(136) Luton Advertiser 28 March 1874.

(137) Sir Edwin Chadwick in a letter to Lord Landsdowne, 13 July 1848. Quoted by Finer, S.E. op cit p 324.


(142) Ibid p 108.

(143) Ibid p 102.

(144) Thomas, E.G. 'Chelmsford and the Board of Health Report of 1849'. This article, the source of which is not known, covers the events leading up to the formation of a Board of Health in that district.

Luton Board of Health op cit vol. 3, 2 April 1861.

It would be nigh on impossible to list all the attacks made upon the Board of Health for its "inattention", or every ludicrous idea which was promulgated. For example this complaint in the *Luton Times* on 12 March 1870 concerning Liverpool Road which, apparently was "in a state bordering on ridge and furrow, with holes deep enough and wide enough to bury a good size quadruped". Almost immediately the candidature of Dr. Squires of Liverpool Road was announced. Squires was successful in gaining a seat on the Board and the work on Liverpool Road was carried out in February 1871.

Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Registrar for Births and Deaths Annual Mortality (Deaths to one thousand Living, 1861 - 1870) pp 190-203.


In September 1871, Mr Gardiner, the Relieving Officer for the Luton District of the Union, found one family in Ainsworth Passage, Park Street living in dreadful conditions. The mother, son (aged twenty-seven), daughter (twenty-two), son (seventeen), son (thirteen) and "idiot" son (eleven) were "sleeping on the floor of one bedroom having scarcely any clothing and no bedding". *Luton Times* 9 Sept. 1871.

Beds Times 7 June 1884.

Ibid 7 May 1888.

*Luton News* 20 July 1861. The advertisement was entitled "Bargains for the Working Man".

*Luton Times* 15 Oct. 1870. The following week a Brown Brick resident (and landlord ?) responded, less convincingly, that the fever in the district was caused entirely by the stench from the Board's nearby sewage works.

Appendix 1

Composition of the Board by Occupation, 1850-1857

Farmers:
- James Kidman
- John Clarke
- Henry Sibley
- William Townrow
- Francis Butterfield
- William Clarke
- James Warr

Shopkeepers:
- Thomas Smith
- Joseph Mead
- E. J. Beale
- G. Sole

Publicans:
- Daniel Davis or Davies
- James Burge

Building trade:
- Henry Brown (timber merchant)
- Samuel Toyer
- Thomas Barrett

Manufacturers:
- Thomas Sworder (brewer)
- Frederick Brown (engineer)
- James Cook or Cooke (maltster and brewer)

Straw hat trade:
- J. J. Johnson
- James Waller
- John Everitt
- A. J. Tansley
- William Willis

Other:
- William Bigg (bank manager)
- J. S. Crawley (landowner)
Appendix 2.

Composition of the Board by Occupation - 1858-1868

Shopkeepers:
  Joseph Mead
  George Sole
  Gustavus Jordan
  Frederick Davis
  Samuel Lane
  W. Thompson Pledger

Builders:
  E. O. Williams
  Robert Smith
  Samuel Toyer

Straw hat trade:
  William Willis
  Charles Robinson
  A. J. Tansley
  John Cotchin
  James Waller
  A. T. Webster
  James Higgins

Manufacturers:
  Joseph Green (Ironfounder)

Merchants:
  Frederick Pearman (Wine and Spirits)
  Joseph Cox (Coal)

Other:
  John Higgins (Plumber and Glazier)
  John Cumberland (Auctioneer)
  James Hawkes (Registrar of Marriages)
  Joseph Anstee (Registrar of Births and Deaths)
  John Brett (Farmer)
  Joseph Bailey (Farmer)
  William Shepheard (Gentleman)
Tower Hill.

Lea Road (Blackwater Lane) c. 1890.
PART THREE. SOCIETY: BELIEF AND BEHAVIOUR

It will be readily admitted by all persons conversant with Luton, that there is no place in the county, and I almost said in England, where there is greater independency of thought and action, or a freer or more unrestrained expression of opinion of every kind and shade, whether having reference to civil, political, religious considerations.*

The twenty years following the ending of the Napoleonic Wars had seen a new town created. The economic structure, the social order, the topography and the very character of Luton was altered irrevocably by new forces, new demands, new people. As we have seen from the first chapter, the old market town elite largely disappeared from active involvement in local life to be replaced in the mid-nineteenth century by a new social order which reflected the economic life of Luton - vibrant, open and unstable. If not great fortunes, then certainly comfortable livings could be acquired through activity in the straw hat and building trades - and also swiftly lost. This section is the most awkward in terms of its potential for nebulousness but this does not detract from its need to be addressed. Essentially it will seek to answer the question as to what sort of society is created by the rapid transformation of the type and in the manner which Luton experienced. To that end it is concerned primarily not with the structure so much as with the ethics (leaving political belief to be dealt with in Part Four) and behaviour. In doing so it will concentrate upon the dominant and distinctive force created by the town's economic expansion, its middle class, and analyse the changing ethics, clashing ideologies by highlighting the major concerns of the day, issues which transcended local parameters - religion, crime, temperence and education.

Luton's aristocracy withdrew behind the walls of their estates: John Shaw Leigh, by far the richest man in the locality, in particular wished to play little or no part in Luton's affairs. An outsider, he had purchased the Hoo, not the town, and he wished to enjoy the life of a country squire which good fortune had brought him. The peculiar structure of the local hat industry, inhibiting labour organisation and removing a forum for potential class conflict and heightened class awareness, left Luton's male labour selling class disorganised, transient, marginalised and ignored. In so far as the poor come into the reckoning in nineteenth century Luton it is as a counterpoint to the town's middle classes, as the focal point for programmes which were thought to be good for them, and indirectly therefore, as a source of conflict within the middle classes themselves.

There are distinctive features to Luton's social structure, ones which blur the lines between classes and conspire to obscure the threads from which broad observations can be made. The most visible and easily defined, Luton's bourgeoisie of large factory owners, the clergy, bank managers and the professions remained small - probably little more than one hundred individuals plus their families in 1850 in a population of some ten thousand. What comprised the bulk of the town's population can broadly be categorised into two groups of male occupations, the small retailers and independent producers on the one hand and those who sold their labour on the
other. Women, operating frequently as home builders and plait sewers/dealers simultaneously transcended both categories and it was not unusual for men to alternate between the two according to fortune or season.

Luton in mid nineteenth century was a mobile society, physically, economically and socially, blunting clear suppositions of class and ideology. Asa Briggs' definition of the greatest division in Victorian society was between those who were able to employ domestic servants and those who were not. It is impossible to provide a definitive calculation of how many in Luton employed domestic servants - the functions between bonnet sewer/lodger and 'female servant' is bound to have been blurred - but it is apparent that few in Luton could afford or were inclined to do so. As we have seen in the opening chapter, the method of land disposal and urban development in Luton led to a high degree of intermixing between people of widely varying lifestyles. The spatial differentiation which became a feature of cities such as Leeds and Liverpool does not occur here, consequently depriving us of distinctive suburbs and ghettos. With many of the wealthiest Lutonians such as Henry Brown and William Bigg living close to their business in the town centre we are not able to witness the development of a "carriage society" marking them out as distinct from their pedestrian fellow citizens.²

A caveat to be applied when studying Luton's middle class is to be wary when applying twentieth century descriptions to nineteenth century groupings as perceptions and identity vary with time. For example, a meeting held at the Primitive Methodist Church, High Town in March 1876, comprised a company of self-professed "working men" seeking like minded candidates. They saw no discrepancy between that title and their occupations - shopkeepers, small manufacturers (usually hats), publicans and the like - even though in modern terminology they would be seen to form the backbone of the local petty-bourgeoisie. At a time when one's business could provide a striking level of social mobility, it was easy for a man to carry his origins with him, all the way to the detached mansion, wearing them as a proud measure of how far he had come. Asher Huckleby, the richest of Luton's hat merchants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, stands as a striking example of the social mobility which was possible. There are few rags to riches stories, and many people are prone to exaggerate the humbleness of their origins, a feature of a number of Lutonians, Huckleby included, but in Luton through a few good years in business relatively rapid social elevation was possible and there were many who revelled in their new social standing.

A second warning is to be careful not to impute motives either to individuals or groups. In a town with such a poor literary tradition as Luton this is compounded by the fact that there is precious little data of any sort to support hypothesis, but the perceived character of the town does provide some pointers. For example, the Hart Hill district on the south eastern corner of the town developed in the late nineteenth century as a middle class enclave - the closest the town possessed at that time to a distinctive suburb. Yet even within tiny Hart Hill (numbering no more than thirty or so similar detached houses) there were subtle nuances of perceived superiority, based in the main on how close one had the misfortune to be near the railway sidings at the foot of the hill. Whilst Luton's small bourgeoisie of larger manufacturers may be reckoned by modern historian to share common interests and objectives, from contemporary perspectives
this was not necessarily the case: one second hand oral recollection from around 1900 recalls how the children of one of the managers of a new engineering firm were forbidden to play with the children of one of the larger hat manufacturers on the grounds that "they were trade". Perceptions of being "different" to ones neighbours ran through every class, every district and every street and this was especially the case in a small town such as Luton with merely fledgling bureaucracies and organisations. Individuals matter more in such places.

An issue which has pre-occupied many historians of the middle class in recent years is the issue of social control, the question of whether, and to what degree institutions, philanthropy, religion and various social causes were manipulated for the imposition of a set of values upon the poorer sectors of society who were regarded as needing it. Education therefore, becomes a mechanism for indoctrination, the provision of public facilities through Joint Stock Companies a method of exclusivity, philanthropy a vehicle for self-glorification. In each of the sections where this issue is relevant the validity of this argument will be considered and in a town such as Luton, where individual activity was more pronounced than collective, this is not an easy motivation to perceive. The very fact however, of a bias away from collective organisation, the lack of formal structures and, it must be stressed, the absence of very rich businessmen with close control over large workforces limits the degree to which social control could be applied to Luton. The middle classes in Luton, rarely its upper strata, and virtually never the petty bourgeoisie, were men and women who gave scant evidence of being bound together by common interest and identity.

It has been observed how the workshop economy tended to produce its own peculiar set of ideas and values: putting it simply, freedom of thought and action in the processes of production gives rise to a preference for non-conformist protestantism and radical politics. Taken as a simplification this could distort the fact that there were other forces operating in the town, but at face value this applies to Luton to a very striking degree. The town was ideally suited to the cult of domesticity which was a feature of nineteenth century religion and philanthropy being devoid of amenities, untidy, unplanned, uncouth and in parts reckoned to be quite hostile. All of these encouraged a retreat into the sanctuary of the home where one could best find security, comfort and familiarity. Many people in Luton did not possess deep local roots nor the wide family network to be found in long established communities, having little more than the nuclear family around them. These factors were reinforced by the domestic orientated nature of many businesses, whether manufacturing, wholesale or retail and the absence of formal social institutions abetted this introspection: in a bewilderingly changing world the home was one of the few institutions over which an individual could retain control. For many it served as the sole manifestation of a lifetimes work, and as such its sanctity (from punitive local rates) was to be jealously guarded. The commercial and social world of the average Lutonian was a largely hidden one.

The disintegration of the old elite, in particular the removal of the Marquess of Bute and the disarray of the established church left not so much a void to be filled, as the town itself was to be physically transformed, but it did ease the way for a new ethos to establish itself within industrialising Luton. The politics of the town will be treated in this study separately but Luton's
protestant denominations forming as the focal point of many people's social activities, the mouthpiece of collective opinion and vehicles for reform, form a powerful undercurrent to local events in the mid 19th century.
Modernising Luton was most conducive to the "moral entrepeneurship" which took root in Britain's middle class parlours in the late 18th and early 19th century. The dissenting Protestant denominations were able to expand unfettered by competition from the Church of England which, bereft of active support from the local aristocracy and gentry, and with its traditional rural source of support being eroded by urbanisation, lay in a state of utter torpor for the first half of the century. The consequences of this, by the time of the Ecclesiastical Census of 1851, are laid out below.

### TABLE 3.1. Ecclesiastical Census. Returns for Luton churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Name</th>
<th>30 March 1851</th>
<th>Average over previous 12 months</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Mary's General</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cong.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>(Church Street) Cong.</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Scholars</td>
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<td>Cong.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholars</td>
<td>178</td>
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<td></td>
<td>516</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Society of Friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>General</td>
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<td>Cong.</td>
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The Church of England

The established church remained at a low ebb for much of the nineteenth century a factor caused in part by a succession of absentee or short lived incumbents. Charles Henry Hall, Vicar of St. Mary's from 1804 until his death in 1827, never again preached in the church after his initial service. He was succeeded by a relative of the Marquess of Bute, William McDouall, M.A, with Thomas Sikes becoming curate at the same time. McDouall's most notable act in a twenty year tenure was to remove the old pews within the church and replace them with new ones which, according to Cobbe, separated "the congregation into classes according to their grade in Society". Like Hall, McDouall chose not to live at the vicarage, residing instead at nearby Copt Hall, leaving nearly all the work to Sikes. He refused to allow the church to be lit with gas and consequently in winter evensong took place in the afternoon. By 1850, having had no active vicar within living memory the spiritual life of the church, as well as its fabric, was in a poor state. Comment was made about the poor standard of singing and music. The death of McDouall, coinciding with the removal of the Bute interest in the town, the adowson was purchased on behalf of Sikes by some of his friends. For eight years from 1835 Sikes had served as Rector of Puttenham, Herts leaving one to wonder who actually had carried on the Anglican interest in Luton as the town was transformed.

Upon succeeding McDouall in 1850 Sikes, who had married into the Burr family and was active in local affairs began to raise the profile of the established church. The large numbers attending evensong on the date of 1851 census indicating how deep was the reservoir of potential support for the Church of England: immigrants from the rural hinterland would in all probability possess at least a nominal Anglican allegiance. Plans were made to carve out a new parish from the unwieldy St. Mary's to cater for the growing town. Sikes was vicar for just four years exchanging with Rev. Thomas. Bartlett of Chevening, Kent, but Bartlett continued Sikes' work, establishing Christ Church as a separate parish on the northern side of the township. The support of the Crawleys appears to have been tapped in order to finance the new venture but the Church building itself, opened in 1857, almost immediately presented problems having been built upon the site of recently exhausted clay pits. Bartlett appointed two curates with one taking responsibility for Christ Church, and by dividing the town into districts instigated a programme of door to door visiting. Many clergymen were to be overwhelmed by the effort of ministering to the needs of Luton and Bartlett was such a man: after just three years he found the task "too onerous" and quit. With Bartlett's resignation the Church of England's revival fizzled out. Bartlett's successor, the scholarly Dr. Thomas Williamson Peile made little impact in his three...
years and his successor Rev. G. Quirk lasted just fourteen months. A ballot of worshippers (over a choice of times for the morning service) in March 1861 drew one hundred and twenty-three votes which, even allowing for a substantial number of abstentions indicates that a church able to seat two thousand was attracting a pitiful level of support from parishioners.

Quirk's successor in 1862 was to very nearly see out the century. For some, Rev James O'Neill was the most remarkable figure to appear in Luton's public life during the whole of the century. For others he was simply the most odious. He was born in Kerry, Ireland and lost his wife in childbirth whilst they were missionaries in Ceylon. Having served as a curate in Devon, O'Neill came to Luton where he concentrated his energies in a wholesale restoration of St. Mary's (described in 1864 by the Bedford Times as "eerie, bleak and desolate") as well as the further sub-division of St Mary's parish into Limbury and Biscot, St. Matthew's and St. Paul's. All this work, however, was of minor significance compared with the abrasive manner in which he conducted his ministry in other fields. It is not necessary to record here every battle he fought, nor every personal vendetta which he pursued, but for all the extensive restoration of the church building itself it is questionable whether O'Neill's aggressive style restored the spiritual fortunes or the credibility of the Anglican church, a fact which has been supposed locally and which occurred nationally in the second half of the century. The cause of the Church in New Town could not have been helped by an acrimonious and petty dispute instigated by O'Neill in an attempt to force out Rev. C. N. Harris of St. John's College, Cambridge, who had established a successful, independent, 'Wooden Church' in Albert Road and who also ran a private school in Stuart Street. This was apparently caused by the fact that Harris had married his late wife's sister (an act contrary to the Prayer Book), but no doubt it was also caused by O'Neill's determination to maintain control over religious developments within the Anglican community. By June 1867 O'Neill was appearing before the local bench charged with assaulting his own churchwarden, Samuel Oliver. A verger who gave evidence against O'Neill was promptly dismissed and when Oliver resigned his office O'Neill gave the job to Thomas Dunn, the vicarage gardener.

For a man attempting to gather Anglican support around him O'Neill's tactics were to say the least, bizarre. John Shaw Leigh and J. S. Crawley, men above all others O'Neill needed for financial assistance and personal example in the restoration programme, were so alienated by his behaviour that they refused to serve as church wardens at St. Mary's. The ageing Leigh proffered the excuse of physical incapacity as reason for refusal to serve, but O'Neill compounded his problems by going to press, a tactic which he rarely could resist. On this occasion he made bitter sideswipes at the two aristocrats and especially toward Leigh, who, he sarcastically noted, was still able to "mount his horse at a meet of hounds". A condemnatory vestry meeting called in support of Oliver did not deter O'Neill (who refused to attend); William Willis, who was his main critic here (and on other occasions) was, according to O'Neill, just talking "an inordinate amount of bosh".

Some non-conformists might have sniggered uncharitably as the dispute between O'Neill and Oliver lingered on, with a sideshow provided by the fact that O'Neill was simultaneously being sued for libel by Shepherd, Oliver's solicitor. By July 1868 O'Neill was facing legal action
by Crawley for blocking up the access to the Chancel, which was repeated nine months later in a
dispute between the two over money for the church restoration. One of the most combatitve
clergymen ever to step into a pulpit O'Neill is credited with the much needed restoration of St.
Mary's, a task which was largely completed by the time of his death in 1896. One wonders,
however, how swiftly this work might have been completed had not O'Neill antagonised so many
of those who would have featured amongst his natural allies. He had his supporters, who saw
him as a staunch bulwark against the spendthrift inclinations of the nonconformist liberals in
Luton, and he improved greatly the quality of the music within St. Mary's. The fact remains,
however, that he also alienated many within his own constituency.

Of far different calibre was the Rev T. Jones Lee, the vicar of Christ Church from 1862
until his death in 1875. Lee was O'Neill's confederate in the formation of the Luton branch of
the Church of England Defence Society but kept his distance from the abrasive Vicar in other
religious and secular matters such as the School Board issue which, although Lee also opposed
the formation of this, he preferred to organise his own tactics. The low profile Lee, together with
the other Anglican clergymen in the district, were probably more embarrassed than encouraged
by O'Neill's style of ministry. Although O'Neill reformed the content of Sunday services it is
difficult to imagine that many could really warm to such a man. Consequently, it is unlikely that
attendance and support for St. Mary's greatly increased, although Christ Church was enlarged
under Lee's ministry.

Nonconformity

By the time of incorporation there were four Baptist chapels plus one Primitive Baptist chapel in
High Town with small outstations on the Hitchin Road and at Brown Brick, five Wesleyan chapels
and the Society of Friends meeting house at the bottom of Castle Street. Even if the local
Anglican church had been in better shape than it was, Luton would still have been a fertile
ground for the non conformist faiths. The correlation between the independent protestant
churches and a "work ethic" has already been noted by many writers from Weber onward, a thesis
which can be exaggerated in significance to the degree that it becomes propaganda. At one level
however, free from the oppressive disciplines of organised production in factories, free from the
disapproving glare of clergymen in positions of secular power and free from the coercive peer
pressure set by the gentry, people have greater liberty to think for themselves, a fact reflected in
Luton not only in the strength of the mainstream non-conformist churches but in the number of
other sects and independent churches that were scattered around the town. In Luton this
factor was undoubtedly greatly accentuated by the weakness of the established church, plus the
withdrawal of the old elite from the affairs of the town and the consequent void which it left to
fill.

The synthesis of the ethics between commercial life and the evangelicals - good
stewardship, hard work, honesty, self-discipline, sobriety, punctuality, straightforwardness,
un-academic (if not anti-intellectual) suited many strands of nonconformity in a town whose
commercial nature precisely required these very morals. So much of Luton's trade, the
purchase of quantities of straw plait for instance, relied upon the above virtues, particularly
honesty. Furthermore, in a town experiencing great social upheaval, where many were rootless
and livelihoods often precarious, the teachings of the active protestant churches provided
reassurance, motivation and a sense of wider perspective. No matter what were one's individual
circumstances, individual day to day conduct could all be seen as possessing a value, personal
redemption, evangelising, setting example, christian service - all of these could be lived out
through personal, public and business life. Self help could be pursued in business and domestic
life combined with thrift, duty and cleanliness. The non-conformist churches, shorn of the overt
class structure which crucially had collapsed and become of no relevance in Luton, offered a
philosophy which was attractive to so many.

Interlocking with this was the collective identity which the non-conformist churches
provided to Luton: a town which often appeared only to be a community in the sense that it was a
collection of family homes and production units. The myriad social events and meetings which
the churches provided must be appreciated in this context. Barely a week passed in the
mid-nineteenth century without Luton's newspapers carrying reports of a tea meeting which
invariably was in support of a cause associated with one of the Methodist, Baptist or
Congregational churches. This may be a specifically church orientated act of philanthropy such as
a tea provided for the poorer members of the Baptist Meeting House or an attempt to raise
support on a wider, secular front such as the Aboriginal Protection Society. In a town lacking
in recreational facilities the churches served as a social forum, and in the absence of the
machinery of local government the churches also did much to fulfil this gap - the provision of
education (to be dealt with separately) and as a focal point for discussion, agitation and
mobilisation on particular issues. It is a great shame that not at least a handful of sermons from
some of the ministers who filled Luton's pulpits have survived. Did the symmetry between
cleanliness and godliness entail support for the provision of public baths in the town referendum?
One suspects so but without firm evidence it is not easy to state with certainty how firm were the
churches in supporting 'clean' issues.

To these ends the degree of impact of the non-conformist churches relied to an even
greater degree than the Church of England on the energy, ability and integrity of their Minister.
Despite the transient nature of an incumbency, contrasting with the permanence of the officers
and congregation (which set the basic social and theological tone of the church), it was by the
pastor that a church succeeded or failed. Progress, therefore, on the the new Wesleyan church in
Chapel Street ebbed and flowed during the 1840s according to the drive of the circuit minister:
building work on the new chapel faltered after Rev John Crofts left Luton in 1846 and with two
weak men following him, did not gather momentum until the advent of the aptly named Rev
Wright Shovelton in 1851.

An even more outstanding example was Rev Henry Burgess who flashed, fizzled and
finally flopped across Luton's religious and social scene in the 1830s and 1840s. Burgess became
Minister at the Baptist House in 1831 at just twenty-three years of age. He was a fine preacher,
or more specifically, a persuasive speaker and seems to have made an excellent early impression,
no doubt especially with the female section of the congregation. With no local newspaper,
Burgess began a monthly (secular) newsheet and he became involved with various railway schemes that were then being mooted. From his home at the Bury on the outskirts of town he ran a Grammar School and was the driving force behind the early days of the Mechanics Institute and Harmonic Society, both of which met upon the church premises. What were Burgess’ motives? Working in isolation from his contemporaries he appears to have been motivated by a mixture of altruism and a desire to boost his personal curriculum vitae. Although his warning of a "levelling" tone within the Mechanics Institute hints at an innate conservatism, there is no evidence to suggest that his various activities were designed to impress his ideology upon others, and in practise he was not sufficiently well organised to formulate any such strategy, neither did he elicit the support of like-minded men. Sadly, the substance did not match the early promise and Burgess’ cavalier approach to spending other people’s money undermined his position. William Drewett a Quaker contemporary recalled “poor people let him (Burgess) have money to invest for them but that trust he betrayed and failed.” The Sunday School Anniversary collection was pocketed by Burgess and spent "as he saw fit" and the money which he was spending was placing this once big church in debt. Divisions within the church led to a split to form the Union Baptist Church in 1836 and more acrimoniously, to the formation of Wellington Street Baptist Church in 1847. Edmund Waller applied the necessary financial prop and personally cleared the debts but clearly things could not go on as they were. In 1848 the Baptists paid Burgess £250 on condition that he leave. He reluctantly accepted and joined the Church of England in 1850, enjoying a career successful enough to gain himself an entry into the Dictionary of National Biography.

Burgess’ successor, John Jordan Davies, effectively rebuilt the church (down to 173 members in 1849) and made changes to its structure, introducing new posts of assistant deacon and deaconess (a suggestion of John Everitt). By 1852 there were 307 members, a number of these wooed back from the breakaway church in Wellington Street, an indication of how mobile religious congregations could be and how shallow could be allegiances to churches, the minister often being the principal attraction. Ill-health forced Davies to resign in 1857 (he died a year later) but his rebuilding work was carried on by Rev Thomas Hands, although the office of deaconess was removed. Davies was one of many ministers who found the Luton air too much for the health of not only themselves but also their families; Hands’ successor Rev. Genders quit after six years to live in the gentler climate of Portsea for precisely this reason. Rev. Henry Wonnacott took on the incumbency of the Congregational church in King Street in 1870 at the age of nineteen, but was forced out by ill-health four years later.

The great vitality which, according to Bradley, the evangelicals in England were losing in the mid-nineteenth century (to be replaced by "a good deal more cant and a great deal less practical piety") was still apparent in Luton. The churches were reflecting a town which was still experiencing the pangs and momentum of an industrial development which was later than many other parts of the nation, and which was to continue for most of the middle period of the century. There was no market for revivalists such as Moody and Sankey whose visit to the town in 1875 was not well supported. Luton’s chapels were still on an upward curve by 1876, with a number of new chapels being spawned by the central bodies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries, and vibrant ministries were needed to fight the good fight against social evils as well as to keep the money coming in. Congregations were certainly prone to mobility not just within denominations. Richard Vyse attended both the Old Meeting and St Mary's and the ebb and flow of attendance at the latter church indicates that its congregation may have done similarly to Vyse but more exclusively with one and then to another. Religious roots in Luton were not deep.

Some churches were clearly richer than others reflecting class divisions between the chapels. The Primitive Methodists in High Town, who with the Ebenezer Baptist probably contained the highest proportion of working-class support required in its early days the women members to sell plait to help fund the preacher's stipend. At this time the Luton correspondent to the Bedford Times speculated that the "enormous sums lately subscribed to places of worship about to be erected "was having a detrimental effect upon investment into the hat industry." It is not possible to test the accuracy of this statement but it does touch upon a distinctive factor which comes into play in terms of the provision of public facilities of all types in Luton: there were none active in Luton who possessed access to vast fortunes and the drive for church building placed great demands upon the resources of their supporters. An example of this is the Congregational Church which was formed in 1864 by an amicable split from the Union Chapel. Probably the richest of all the chapels it contrasted sharply with the High Town Primitive Methodist counting amongst its leading lights professionals, manufacturers and builders such as A. J. Tansley, Charles Robinson, Dr. Woakes, William Cotchin, Hugh Gunn, Arthur and George Smart, William Sandoe, A. T, Webster and Charles Tomalin to which was eventually added John Everitt when he became estranged from Park Street Old Meeting. The forty-two who seceded from Union faced an initial cost of £1,150 to secure the land and to begin building what was an ambitious architectural project in terms of external features and internal fittings. Although £2500 had been raised by May 1865 costs continued to increase, eventually reaching somewhere between £7,000 and £8,000 by the time of opening in April 1866. Such a commitment (a loan was required) placed great pressure upon the personal resources of people who although contained a substantial number of comfortably off middle-class, could not turn to anyone with vast wealth. A Minister who provided nothing but "cant", a dilettantate, like Burgess, or a bullying oaf, like O'Neill, were luxuries which the nonconformists could ill-afford. The Congregationalists needed a church builder and this they found in the Rev. James H. Hitchins, who added over 200 members to the roll by the time that he left in 1870. It was the narrow margins upon which Luton's churches operated, as much as their theology and the instability of the town, which gave them the dynamism which they possessed.

This point is aptly demonstrated by contrasting the burgeoning Baptists and Methodists with the Society of Friends which, by the mid-nineteenth century had become rigid, narrow and insular, relying upon the support of a handful of wealthy families - the Browns, Marsh's, Green's and Pearman's in particular. Luton, Leighton Buzzard and Hitchin were embattled strongholds in an area in which the Quaker fortunes were swiftly declining. In some respects the Society of Friends represented pre-industrial Luton, its old trades (malting, milling etc.) and the stability, values and praises of a market town. Luton Monthly Meeting (MM) incorporated St. Albans by the time of the Religious Census but undertook no recruiting evangelism whatever, its active
members preferring to place their energies into the cause of literacy which arguably was the most
effective outreach conducted by any religious group. The Minister at Luton MM was grocer John
Foster, a small, wiry man nicknamed "Old Pinch Plum" because of the excessive precision which
he brought to his business activities - even to the extent of removing individual raisins from the
scales when selling to customers. William Drewett recalled that "... he usually waited for one
and a half hours before commencing and then spoke for a quarter of an hour the message being
usually heralded by a sonorous trumpeting from his nose to which he applied a large silk
handkerchief held in both hands and which effectively called attention to what invariably
followed." Such meetings must have been tortuous to the younger Friends and Samuel Drewett
recalled walking with his parents to the Luton MM from their home in Park Street against the
tide of people going to the Baptist Meeting House and with whom Samuel was forbidden to mix.
Marriage before a priest would result in disownment. "I am sorry to say that as a rule, they were
an uncharitable set of persons" wrote Samuel and it is little wonder that in later life so many of
the younger Friends kicked over the traces, the case of J. W. Green providing an example laced
with irony. As one of John Foster's grandsons he benefited from his will when the Minister died
in March 1864. This he used to build up a highly successful brewing business, renouncing his
Quaker and Liberal roots for the Conservative Party and the Church of England. The sons of
wine merchant Daniel Pearman (died 1857) Henry and Frederick, squandered his fortune within
generation indulging in the good life and expanding the brewing side of the brewing business
"regardless of expense". Pearman's were swallowed up by J. W. Green and Henry also joined the
Church of England. The generous, liberal spirit of William Bigg does not appear to have fitted
in with the prevailing ethos at the Luton MM and Luton's first Mayor was not an active member
amongst them. Whilst the Quakers peacefully declined other sects established themselves in
Luton. Amongst the major groups, the Roman Catholics had planted roots by 1846 and the
Mormons were meeting in 1851.

There were numerous examples of co-operation between the Churches but links were
largely informal and joint efforts ad hoc. Secular campaigns would involve Ministers and their
congregations but were not directly sponsored by individual churches or ecumenical
organisations. This was entirely natural in a small town where personal relationships were the
dominant bond. When the Baptist Old Meeting House was destroyed by a gale in February 1866
temporary accommodation was offered for the displaced congregation by the Methodists as well
as fellow Baptists (but not by O'Neill or Lee). The greatest Baptist preacher of the day, Charles
Haddon Spurgeon, visited Luton to preach at a service to raise funds for a new Baptist chapel a
year later and this service was held at the 1800 seater Wesleyan Church in Chapel Street -
described as a "Cathedral of Methodism" - as no Baptist chapel in Luton was big enough. Relief
funds for the alleviation of suffering and provision of cheap bread were established during the
depression of 1855/56 and this was repeated in 1867 when further recession necessitated another
Relief Fund. The £700 collected by January 1868 included subscribers from ministers of all
denominations (but seemingly nothing from O'Neill) who presumably actively promoted the fund
within their churches. Similarly, cross denominational was the Luton Female Town Missionary
Society, an earnest if short lived example of middle-class evangelism. In November 1855 it was
able to report over the previous year nine visits workrooms to 1006 to individual houses and the
greatest success - "two couples living unlawfully have been induced to marry". Attempts at
formal organisation were usually short-lived and were not sanctioned by church leaderships.

Relations between the nonconformists were cordial and informal, but those between the
nonconformists and the Church of England were another matter altogether. The abrasive nature
of O'Neill's Ministry did not help matters, but things were bad enough although it is possible to
exaggerate the schism between the two wings of the Protestant denomination: Anglicans and
nonconformists worked together well enough as individuals on Luton's various social and political
institutions, and debates within the town usually transcended religious lines. The issue of the
proposed Church Rate in the 1830s, which was successfully defied by the nonconformists, did
much to define the parameters of Church power, and where problems arose it was usually where
one denomination was attempting to resist a perceived encroachment by the other other on what
it considered were its own rights. There appeared no case of ecumenical effort and with the
above criteria any issue was a potential source of dispute - they even squabbled over the
denomination of the workhouse chaplaincy. The establishment of a town cemetery is the
best case in point (see Part Two, chapter two).

The religious census returns indicated that approximately half the population attended
church on the Sunday evening and a third in the morning. This would indicate that the
observation of the Sabbath was held to a slightly greater degree than the national average (47%
as against 40%). The striking difference lies in comparing the relative strengths of the
non-conformists and Anglicans, nationally and locally. Basing the figures upon the evening
returns 11.27% of Luton's total population were at their pews in St. Mary's on census night,
1851. This compares with the Anglican national average of 21%. The nonconformists in Luton on
the other hand attracted more than 30% of Luton's population to their evening services,
compared with a national average of just over 19%. This imbalance between the two probably
does not reflect the Church of England at its lowest ebb: Sikes was already making an impact and
had the census been taken six or ten years earlier the proportionate gap between the two could
well have been greater. Although Luton was conducive to the appeal of nineteenth century
nonconformity its strength was probably due in part to the weakness of the established church
within its neglected, unwieldy parish, as to its own evangelism.

It could be easy to dismiss the non-conformist churches standing proud and solid within
the fabric of the town as bastions of middle-class values and virtues. This would be an
exaggeration, since there certainly was a substantial, if indefinable proportion of working class
people within the congregations, if not the membership. The leaderships of the biggest churches,
however, (i.e. the deacons and elders), were overwhelmingly drawn from the middle classes, with
a distinctive leaning toward its upper strata. It was not extensive education or exalted social
origin, but existing status which gave one standing amongst one's peers. It was a sign that
socially, rather than spiritually, one had achieved something of note. For example, the deacons
who supported Rev. J. Hitchens at the Congregational Chapel were all men who owned
prosperous businesses in the heart of town: G. M. Johnson, a provision dealer with outlets in Wellington Street, Bute Street and Chapel Street, Charles Robinson, a hat manufacturer with premises on Market Hill, W. T. Coates, a Park Street draper, Charles Tomalin, a baker also in Park Street and two George Street hat manufacturers - A. T. Webster and Hugh Gunn. Any random sample of Luton's leading citizens would reveal that they played active and prominent roles within the local nonconformist churches. The values that these men (usually of business) brought to the Chapel, and in turn absorbed within it, permeated throughout Luton's life and affairs. Inevitably such men would shape a chapel to reflect their own values. Architectural design, pew rents and Sunday 'best' reinforced the image that one had carved oneself a niche in a new society. The proud standing of an individual within a Church, and consequently the physical one of the Church itself, was a rewarding symbol of enterprise, thrift and hard work. At the same time it further alienated the poorer people within Luton.

There is ample evidence that many within the middle classes were acutely aware of a barrier between the poorest sections of Luton's population and the rest - even if they remained ignorant of the causes. The sporadic speculative property developments from the 1840s had provided Luton with a high degree of intermixing of social groupings within districts (see Parts One and Two) and yet, remarkably perhaps, there was a marked degree of ignorance about the manner in which one's neighbour lived, such being the introverted, domestic orientated nature of people's lives. Luton's poorest streets were regarded in much the same manner as Africa - impenetrable, dark, mysterious places where the light of the gospel did not shine. An 1859 editorial from the Luton Times succinctly encapsulates this concern. It recommended a visit to the weekly Police Court (in the awe-struck nature of a trip to the zoo) there to witness the "haggard, dissipated victims of vice and evil passion" and it continued:

Probably there are many good people in this town... who know very little of the condition of their neighbours. Seeing little of those outside their own circle except in the well-dressed and orderly assemblies of church and chapel... they are unaware of the seething mass of moral pollution which in their own immediate neighbourhood is continually throwing off its deadly poison, and spreading its fearful infection.

In praising the work of the Gaitskell Terrace School, Dr. Clarke and some nonconformist Ministers the editorial suggested that a few more of the town's leading citizens visit the poorest streets of New Town and High Town. As a consequence "many good easy people who are quite satisfied with things as they are, and think they have done their duty to society and to God when they have bestowed their accustomed charities and paid their annual subscriptions, would perceive that there is much yet to be done."

This editorial touches on another level of concern, often repeated since industrialisation brought so many diverse incomes within close physical proximity. In essence it was the fear of the 'contagious' nature of poverty, 'vice and evil passion'. A dread, if not in particular that hordes of dissipated labourers would storm the railings of middle-class homes (although that was occasionally alluded to), but also that the social diseases associated with poverty would contaminate the respectable working class. Disquiet at this state of affairs would involve middle-class and Christian intervention in a number of areas - education, policing and temperance
in particular - but as institutions the churches also sought to evangelise to those districts which they felt were in need. Such attempts, well-meaning though they most certainly were, revealed the gulf that existed between the classes: it showed scant understanding of people's needs and motivation on the part of the churches. There were broadly two approaches: firstly (and the more common) was to establish a separate mission hall or even Church within the district. The second was to send a missionary out into the field. The afore mentioned Luton Town Female Missionary was one such venture, another example of the latter was the appointment of a Town Missionary to King Street Congregational Church, perhaps the most affluently middle-class of all the nonconformist chapels.

The unidentified missionary - earnest, sanctimonious and hard working - made a total 2,348 individual visits in less than two years. He followed a clear strategy, visiting an identifiable range of streets spread across Luton: Adelaide Terrace, Chase Street, Tower Hill, numerous High Town courtyards and side streets. The missionary placed emphasis upon individual visits in particular praying with (or preying upon) those on their sick-beds to whom the next world seemed more imminent. In between times he led cottage meetings and took services at various Baptist and Methodist churches as well as at King Street.

It was a depressingly uphill struggle with few conversions to encourage the naive missionary in his labours. The excuse of "the want of suitable clothing" was repeatedly offered as a reason for non attendance at Church. This was not merely a lame excuse, there was certainly a sharp degree of alienation between the poorest class and the rest, clearly articulated by the people in Chase Street who openly stated their desire for their own chapel. The missionary was at times starkly ill-equipped for the task, able to offer no practical advice to very real problems.

"In conversation with a milkman at Tower Hill he told me it was impossible for him to be religious and live; if he did not tell lies in his trade, he should starve". The missionary's response to this offered either help nor hope - there was little point in the milkman feeding himself and his family if in the process he lost his soul. Another man lost to the Church. Usually he was confronted by apathy and excuses: in Adelaide Terrace he preached in the open air - "some of them listened for a while and then went away". On other occasions he was greeted by outright hostility. A woman living at Amen Corner (in Church Street) was "much insulted" to be presented with a gift of a dress. When the Missionary called and wished her "good morning" the following altercation took place:

(Woman) "I don't want none O' yer blab"
(Missionary) "Will you accept a tract?"
"No, I don't want none o' yer blab, there's nobody here as does."
"I am sorry for you."
"I don't want you to be sorry for me."
"Well, we will pray for you."
"You want praying for yourself as much as ever I do."
"I know it, I will pray for myself and you too."

The Missionary's journal continued:

"I then stepped inside the door to put a tract upon the chair hoping she might read it after I left. You shan't come inside the house" she said and took the tract, threw it out of the door, picked it up, tore in the middle and slammed the door in my face.
She sat within hearing during the whole of the open air service sometimes mocking and sometimes singing in a low tone. The Lord grant that his own word may reach her heart."

Although the heart of the woman in question was apparently "softened" by illness this episode encapsulates how the difficult nature of the task was made all the harder by well-meaning but insensitive acts of charity which failed to comprehend the fundamental reasons for poverty, nor to provide any practical alleviation of it. The resentment of those being patronised in such a way is hardly surprising given the ignorant and occasionally insulting way in which some from the middle-class approached the intended recipients of the gospel. The Luton Times, in applauding the establishment of a local branch of the Wesleyan Home Mission Society that would go into alleys and back streets commented "Preachers in pulpits can never do this; sermons are no good for this evil. The dregs of Society will never come to the fashionable chapel." 34 Charity was frequently accepted, but resented also as this recollection of Aubrey Darby, a Lutonian born at the beginning of the twentieth century indicates:

On Good Friday invitations went out to attend the free breakfast. To qualify for the meal one must be the offspring of poor parents. So a multitude of children gathered outside the Congregational Church. Inside, the elders prepared the feast. The Church, a massive structure of grey stone was was noted for its high steeple, and gazing aloft we imagined the spire would fall down upon us before we could crow into the depths of the crypt. Breakfast was a bowl of porridge, an orange, a bun and much salt to flavour the "skilly", the providers believing this repast would sustain us on the road to salvation. We showed our appreciation by flicking the manna in all directions, like the pauper's lament over his Christmas pudding, if we were to accept charity, something more substantial than a bellyful of porridge would have to be more forthcoming. Before the feast we chanted "May the Lord make us truly thankful", most evident after the telling of the crucifiction, when we stormed up the stone stairs into the warmth of a cold Good Friday morning.

The other approach that could be taken would be to plant a Mission Church within a district. This was especially important in a town whose economic structure deprived the chapel going middle class of sustained contact and influence over the working class through the workplace. Such a move could be interpreted as an attempt to do one's evangelistic duty whilst keeping the rougher world of the working class as a separate entity, at arms length from the demure sensibilities of the main congregation. It is evident, however, that there was a level of demand from communities such as Chase Street for their own centre for worship, and an awareness of the limited appeal of the vast one thousand seater chapels was recognised on both sides. Mission work nonetheless represented hard graft on largely infertile ground and, as in most spheres of life, there were few who were prepared to get their hands dirty. Apathy was by no means the only problem. The Union Baptists had attempted a mission in Chase Street as early as 1847, opening a hall there largely due to the initiative and funding of A. J. Tansley. 36 There was a degree of support for the mission but the early work was undone by the rift in manners and modes of behaviour between the promoters and the congregation - "the work was hard and very rough, those who attended having the freest idea as to their liberty of speech and conduct". 37 The boisterous, and in middle-class eyes, uncouth behaviour of the indigenous
congregation led to an abandonment of the missionary work although the hall remained in the hands of the Baptists until the work was taken over by the maverick Baptist Councillor, Charles Haddon Osborne at the end of the century. The already mentioned attempt by Rev Harris to establish a working men's church in Albert Road was also well supported until undone by the sustained animosity of O'Neill.

A substantial proportion of the working class remained therefore impervious to the good intentions of middle class patronage. At least two churches, the Ebenezer Baptist in New Town, and the Primitive Methodist in High Town, appeared to possess quite significantly different backgrounds from the other nonconformist churches, not only the make-up of the congregations but also (in the early days at least) of their leaderships. The Ministers of these two churches played a notably less prominent part in the public life of the town. The Primitive Methodists had established themselves in High Town through the zealous work and charismatic preaching of two men from the Aylesbury circuit, Rev. Henry Higgins and Rev. Samuel Turner. The pitch of their appeal, and that of successive ministers, appears to have been specifically to the working people in that district although it is not known whether they attracted working people from elsewhere in the town. The result of this was that for many years they were the only church of any denomination in the area. Impact from the other nonconformist churches did not come until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, again being initiatives of the Mission variety instigated by individuals.

As in so many fields, middle-class philanthropy was spasmodic, unco-ordinated and on the whole largely ineffectual. It is therefore tempting to make a sweeping and dismissive assumption as to its aims and motives. This is of course, highly unsatisfactory being unable to guage the perceptions of individuals, long dead, from the organisers of meetings, societies and missions, let alone the thousands in Luton (and elsewhere) who attended and placed a few coins in the offertory box. Then as now people lent support to what they saw as good causes within their own locality, and further abroad, for a variety of reasons - to show off their own wealth, to raise themselves up in the sight of their peers, to score points to be used in Judgement Day, for feelings of guilt, because of pressure from others, for reasons of pure altruism. There were no doubt many such as Mrs Pardiggle of Dickens' Bleak House who would march into the home (but not the workplace) and harangue a resentful working class, and there were surely also examples of Snagsbys, Chadbands and Jellybys: but there would also have been Jarndyces (albeit in a smaller way) and most likely of all, people were motivated through a combination of factors. If a form of social control was a primary motivation then one is led to wonder why the members of the middle-class, with all the power and resources of society at their disposal, did not operate more effectively than they did.
Chapter Two. Leisure, the Secular World and Self Help

This section is shortened by placing to one side the great field of education, to be dealt with as a separate division of this Part. It is also shortened by the paucity of facilities within the town. Deprived of the social outlets, as well as the spiritual nourishment which was provided by the middle class orientated chapels and with educational provision until the 1870s, feeble, the question must be raised as to what existed in the secular sphere for Luton's non-church going population, the answer to which appears to be, not much. Beehagg notes that much working class culture remained a largely hidden entity, immune to the attentions of middle-class evangelists (and later scholars) but whilst there is probably much in this, the almost utter dearth of evidence concerning in particular the working class secular world guides one to the conclusion that beyond the public house and whatever one's home contained, there was very little. 39

Secondly, the provision of societies and facilities for recreation and leisure have been regarded as another form of social control - "The provision of leisure facilities and cultural diffusion had become the concern of rich and powerful citizens" states Helen Meller, referring specifically to Bristol. Temperance, educational, medical, youth, environmental work was all dominated by a small group interconnected by social, religious and political ties. From this general observation stems an argument that all forms of social provision were used as a mechanism, in the words of MacLaren, "by which the whole society was regulated and shaped in an attempt to create an environment in which middle-class respectability could flourish at all levels in the social structure." 40 This viewpoint has a very limited mileage with regards to Luton, although the middle-classes were involved in all spheres of Luton life. The first, and rather obvious point is that if the provision of leisure served as an example of social control, then in Luton there existed precious little influence being exerted by the respectable over "the dregs of Society". Two distinctive features concerning Luton are also important here. Already alluded to was the fact that Luton's bourgeoisie was of insufficient size and insufficient financial means to be able to exert the influence of, to quote a Bristol example, the Wills family: no Luton entrepreneurs ever received the national recognition of a knighthood. The formal associations, potential vehicles for the exertion of middle class control, which would for example, have been necessary in a large town or city for the dispensation of medical care or provision of libraries, did not exist (for various reasons) in tiny Luton where individual, informal contacts could still be maintained.

The lack of facilities for working class social organisation should come as no surprise in a town where many would be migratory workers in transient, seasonal employment. Neither was the petty bourgeoisie, working in isolated retail and manufacturing units be in a much better position to establish well founded social institutions. A branch of the Royal Industry Lodge of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity Friendly Society, was formed in 1842, and a second formed in 1853 by approximately twenty men at a meeting in the Foresters Arms. By 1859 the older lodge comprised 202 members being able to give support to sixty widows and forty orphans, whilst the younger lodge contained 121 members supporting sixty-three widows and possessing a half yearly income of £207. 40 The formation of the second Oddfellows lodge taking place at the Foresters Public House suggests that there was already a branch of this Order in
Luton and in 1861 a new Court of the Ancient Order of Foresters (at the Wheelwrights Arms) was established. 42 Records of these Organisations no longer survive and therefore it is not possible to establish a precise proportion of membership based upon social groupings but some of the prominent members of the Oddfellows included middle-class professionals, shopkeepers and craftsmen - Charles Austin (solicitor), Charles Ellis (saddler), F. J. Clarke (surgeon), William Flower (baker), George Rutland (hat manufacturer) and Thomas Smith (tailor).

A Co-operative Association was formed in 1860 although this appears to have lapsed after a few years. Like the various Lodges the limited evidence available suggests that its supporters drew principally from the independent producers and retailers. 43 The Luton Rifle Volunteer Corps drew upon a similar social background, being formed in 1859 during a scare of possible invasion by the armies of the French Emperor, Napoleon. Letters had appeared in the national press (criticising milliners in general) and local press (criticising Lutonians in particular) for not being prepared to raise a force to defend the nation. The (printed) reply to this was undoubtedly as true for this occasion as well as for the absence of a military tradition in general: small businesses could ill-afford to lose men to military activity and in any case, war was bad for the local economy, destroying supply sources and export markets. 44 Eventually, sufficient numbers were so motivated to form a Corps in April 1860 which did little of note except allegedly disgrace itself at a fete at the home of Lady Frankland Russell by brawling with members of other Corps.45

Luton's economy was founded upon independent enterprise and it little surprise that it resulted in a society governed by independency of thought and of action. In a town such as Luton the obvious consequence of this was that in a place built in such an un-planned manner by small scale developers (operating upon narrow margins), there would be a dearth of communal recreational facilities. This factor would be reinforced by the seasonally intense demands on time by the hat industry and the home orientated values imbued through the Churches. In what swiftly became an unattractive town, carrying the atmosphere of a building site, the most comfortable place beyond the chapel or beer house was the home, although for some the beer house would have been preferable to either. Luton swiftly developed a tradition where sustained social organisation, beyond the chapel embrace, was very rare. The bucolic institutions of the old market town faded with the onset of industrialisation and accompanying bourgeois dissenting protestant ethics. The agricultural society had lapsed by 1854 and if the bacchanalian Soaksters Club (rule - no "low quarrelling") lasted to the end of the 1850 s it wisely kept its profile low and away from the disapproving glare of the burgeoning temperance movement. 46 The two outstanding institutions of the market town, the bi-annual fairs and the alehouse, were caught up in specific issues which will receive separate investigation. Contemporary societies attracted minimal support and frequently relied upon the enthusiasm of one or two individuals. The Vyse and Burr families propped up the Luton Horticultural Society in the 1840 s, particularly after a disastrous year in 1845 when it rained at every show. The Luton Harmonic Society gave performances or soirees at the Town Hall to enthusiastic, but small, audiences until it hit upon the idea of annual People's Concerts. These, providing programmes of popular music attracted audiences of three hundred packed into the Town Hall. 46
An authority able to promote and plan facilities for recreation and socialising was not the only deficiency from which Luton suffered. The small workshops, less regimented than the large factories, not only diminished the potential for middle-class control of leisure but also the opportunity for paternalistic promotion, a factor which was so important for the development of sport and recreation elsewhere in Britain.\(^{48}\) The bigger factories sought to act in this way, Welch and Son taking one hundred of their sewers to the Great Exhibition in Luton 1851, and Munt and Brown organised cricket matches (with a tea) between their Luton and Dunstable branches.\(^{49}\)

Those in the direct employ of large factories represented a minority of the working population and consequently relatively few were able to enjoy these benefits, in any case many of these factories were branches of London concerns and not fully controlled by local men. Neither did Luton possess a prominent public school presence which elsewhere also did much to initiate the development of mass participation sports such as rugby and soccer. There is record of one football match being played between the Collegiate School and Villa School but nothing else.\(^{50}\)

Either code of football was rarely played, certainly not on an organised basis. Occasional horse racing events were mounted on the outskirts of town, but the principal sport played was cricket. Again, this was not organised in the sense of leagues and cup matches, but ad hoc teams representing rival public houses, factories, trades (i.e. butchers versus bakers), streets or "married" versus "singles". These matches involved middle-class and commercial interests rather than those from the labouring class and were played on a ground between Park Street and St. Anne's Hill. The town lost this facility with the arrival of the railway in 1862 which cut right through it, and was not to gain an adequate replacement until the acquisition of People's Park in the late 1860s and the building of 'Bramingham Shott' by F. C. Scargill at the same time.

Scargill, a keen cricketer, laid out a fine pitch alongside his house and even had his own team, Scargill's XI.

Virtually no record, written or oral, survives of working-class recreation, which, given the absence of recreational facilities and opportunity, was restricted to orientation at public house, street, or home level. Varieties of street gambling, such as Crown and Anchor, were apparently popular in Chase Street but being illegal it is hardly surprising that records should be so scarce.\(^{51}\)

Dances were held in barns at the rear of public houses such as the Roebuck Inn or the Antelope, but details of these only appeared in the local papers when they degenerated into brawls which ended before the Magistrates' Bench. The General Cemetery was popular as a park where people could promenade at the weekends. Admission, however, was by purchased ticket which served to keep this largely a middle-class preserve. In a Society which contained such a high rate of illiteracy amongst its working class there would be little point in written public announcements of events, oral communication being far more effective.

Organised entertainment was therefore largely provided by outside bodies - visiting theatre groups (often unlicensed), exhibitions at the Town Hall, circus, Wombwell's Menagerie. Swimming baths existed in New Bedford Road in the 1840s and baths of a sort in King Street in the 1860s but these were small and relatively few could afford to use them. Various proposals were mooted by individuals for the establishment of public baths one of which got as far as the
foundations being laid (also in New Bedford Road) before the scheme was abandoned. It was 1872 before public baths were built, credit for which lay mainly with the Board of Health, who remained resolute in the face of stiff opposition. A Gymnastic Society sprang into life in 1873 but had lapsed through lack of support within three years. By 1875 Luton boasted one public bath hall and one public park. There was no theatre until 1880 which, like the baths, saw a number of abortive schemes before fruition. Few would disagree with Henry Wright when he complained at a public meeting called to discuss the lack of educational facilities in Luton, that for most people nothing existed between the church on the one side and the public house on the other.

Luton had, therefore, become an outstanding example of the spirit of free enterprise and individual initiative. In the first stage of industrialisation, the termination of which can be marked by incorporation, a crude but in part truthful allegation could be made was that if an activity bore no profit, then it was not worth undertaking. The Board of Health, the outstanding public body within the town for the promotion of improvement, was only established by outside intervention, as was the case with the School Board. People were attracted to Luton by the opportunities to make money rather than as an appealing place in which to live. It was not until the 1870s that the town acquired the maturity represented by stronger public bodies, public buildings and a diminution in the momentum of growth of the cottage economy. Luton was distinctively a town where "the influx of strangers is really extraordinary. The most unusual and peculiar features are seen in the streets, and shops are opened by people whom nobody knows." An urban monument to hard work and self-help, facilities to aid the quality of life other than, as Wright observed, pub and pulpit, came a poor second to making money. One self-styled 'old Lutonian' lamented in 1850 that visiting buyers "are almost pulled off their coach by touters and deafened by the din of outstanding claims". Brash, brisk and unschematic, Luton rapidly became, to use a modern phrase, a town where people lived to work, rather than worked to live.
Chapter Three. Crime and the Temperance Movement

Luton, in experiencing an evolution in its economy also began to acquire new standards of behaviour which clashed sharply with those of the world being left behind. This was most clearly witnessed in the assault upon crime and drink in the 1860s by the rising middle classes and it is in the respect of class that the issues of alcohol and criminal activity have distinct parallels. "The history of crime" writes Dr. Gatrell "...is largely the history of how better-off people disciplined their inferiors", a summary which may also be applied to the history of the temperance movement. Accounts of the value of drink - as Walvin put it, the "lubricant of the pre-industrial economy" - are well trod ground. Safer than milk or water, alcohol was more than a mere thirst quencher, it was also a medicinal anaesthetic and more importantly for many a social anaesthetic too. Drink was a means of temporary escape from squalor and domestic stress. Much more than today the public house or inn was a centre of a community: within the pre-industrial economy it was a meeting place which could attract all strata of society, a venue for buying and selling (Dunstable's early position in the hat trade has been attributed in part to its coaching inns at which Luton traders sold to travellers), a place of entertainment, and, in pre-railway days, it was a point at which travellers would embark and disembark. As we have seen, the invaluable social function of the public house in Luton was given extra emphasis by the absence of any other competing facility apart from churches. The onset of industrialisation whilst accentuating and reinforcing social exclusiveness between public houses, also provided the working man with his own choice of 'club', a refuge from the worries of the world and, in the better public houses, an oasis of light and comfort to a degree that could be greater than his own home.

In Luton, away from the inns and ancient taverns of the main streets, venues for drinking were erected with seemingly little control in the mid 19th century, appearing as suddenly as the houses alongside which they stood. Broadly speaking these can be grouped into two categories - the public house and the beer house. In 1846 the Bedford Times estimated that there were ninety licensed premises in the town, with William Austin reckoning that by 1869 there were a total of 228 - one licensed premise to every forty-eight people over the age of thirteen. Of these approximately 100 were public houses, the rest beerhouses - the group which in Luton, as elsewhere had expanded rapidly since the 1830 Beer Act. The beer shops comprised a wide range of premises ranging from tenanted, named houses owned by established local brewers such as Fordham, Bennett or McMullin, to converted front (or back) rooms carrying neither sign nor name. Given the obscure nature of these places it is indeed possible that there were more beerhouses than those accounted for by Austin, some even operating in a shadowy, unlicensed manner. Austin's assessment may have been a calculation made after the cull on beershops which took place in 1869, therefore leaving the peak figure at higher than 228. Control over the beershops presented a particular problem: many gained a license by being built as more substantial establishments where, upon completion, a stud wall was erected dividing the building into two halves, one was let out as a cottage whilst the other half served as a considerably reduced hostelry,
The distribution of public houses around the town appears to be in accordance with the density of population. The high level of inter-mixing between the dwellings of different social groups renders discussion of the physical distribution of public house and beer shop as virtually impossible. By no means was the public house exclusively the domain of the lower middle-class and labourers, a fact temperance lecturers were very willing to emphasise.  

There were, however, great differences between the clientele of individual public houses, and there were a sufficient number of very bad licensed premises which offered conspicuous targets for what Bradley so aptly describes as the "censorial" elements within Luton Society. For such people, drawn mainly from the middle-classes the issue was simple: "the chief hindrances to all attempts made to improve the habits and condition of the working classes, is to be found in the demoralising influence of the public house". For such people, the public house served as the most constant antitheses to their own values of sobriety, punctuality, self-control and family life. Again, we must be aware of the danger of simplistically imputing motives. Those who felt that "something must be done" about the myriad problems which seemed to find a common bond in the public bar, did so through a variety, more probably a combination of motives. There was, of course, fear: fear that the lawless hordes would issue forth from the festering slums to violate the sanctuaries of respectable citizens. An eighteen month depression in the hat trade coupled with high bread prices culminated in November 1854 in an assembled crowd of between three and four thousand roaming central Luton in an orgy of window breaking. George Street hat factories, baker's shops and Wellington Street homes all received systematic treatment. Within a fortnight a Relief Committee had been formed and was distributing cheap soup and bread to the poor of the town. In an age when crime and poverty were both regarded as moral diseases there was a desire to suppress their contagious effects and to treat their causes. There was also straightforward christian compassion, often extended into attempts to provide the means by which the poor could escape the crushing embrace of their poverty and ignorance. No doubt there were those who then, as now, became involved in good works for simply appearances sake, or from a sense of guilt, or, as we have already witnessed acted with the best of motives but in a patronising and naive manner. The intertwining of middle-class and working-class streets ensured that there was no possibility of Luton's social problems associated with poverty being isolated within ghettos, entirely out of sight and out of mind.  

What was not so apparent then, but can be seen today is the stark clash of values between the Victorian non-conformist middle-class on the one hand, and the obverse of their world - not just a class of humanity, but a set of institutions from a previous way of life. By no means was the public house the only body which raised the respectable ire. Luton's fairs, in particular the Statute, or 'Stattie' fair held in September of each year, became a target for criticism for attracting all sorts of ne'er do wells. "They form a nucleus for the assembling together . . . of the lowest orders; they seduce by their excitement and glitter, hundreds of the lowly born from a regular and honest course of living: they are the means of organising systematic robberies and fraud from the same class; and they bring with them pollution and vice wherever they are suffered to take place." The Fox-fair, which took place annually near to the inn of the same name, disappeared in the early nineteenth century and there was an April fair, which was a
smaller, somewhat motley event compared with the orgiastic 'Stattie': "tall men, fat women, peep shows, ginger bread, and oysters . . . conjurers, pugilists and negro methodists. We regret to say . . . that the 'light fingered gentry' were very busy in their avocations and reaped a rich harvest."

The fairs, therefore, especially the 'Stattie' jarred sensibilities on a number of levels. Its gaudy gaiety offended the puritanical, its assemblage of rowdy plebians aroused fears of riot and it became the focal point for public perpetration of a number of crimes - fighting, drunkenness (known colloquially as a "regular stone-blinder"), prostitution and petty theft. The 'Stattie' was also an anathema to non-conformist liberal values at another level - the 'slave-dealing custom' of the hiring of servants and labourers, a hangover from a fading era. For human beings to publicly tout their labour was thought by many to be degrading: far better to be done cap in hand in a builder's yard or hat factory back door. Luton's evolving economic structure rendered the annual hiring obsolete and the number of labourers dwindled away to just a handful of boys by the late 1850s. Curtailment by the Board of Health working in close co-operation with the police reduced it in size and suffocated the potential for crime. The 'Stattie' was eventually suppressed by order of the Home office (following a local petition) on 21st December 1880. The content and name of the fair, bereft of its labour hiring purpose, switched to the surviving April date where it continued (still with livestock) until 1929 when the Borough Council could no longer tolerate this chaotic anachronism to completely block the main street of an expanding engineering town. To the end it appears to have retained the traditional 'Stattie' character, as Aubrey Darby recalled:

In daylight the Stattie was obscene, with nightfall it seemed like Dante's inferno, flickering lights from kerosene flares haloed in smoke made an unearthly glow, inanimate objects came to life and the faces of the revellers appeared like the gargoyles of Notre Dame. In this setting the appearance of "Quasimodo" would have evoked no surprise. Away from the glare, whores entertained any male with fourpence to spare, plagued at times by peeping toms seeking a cheap thrill. Syphilis was common but none cared on Stattie night. The raucous din of machine-made music muffled the whimperings of tiny tots being dragged around by wretched mothers bent on escaping from reality. Tomorrow they would account for the squandering of previous wealth on sideshows, to-night they laughed and squealed with ecstasy, whilst grown men emptied water squirts down their breasts. All inhibitions were gone, young virgins satisfied their curiosity and 'knees up old Ma Brown' was an excuse for matrons to expose a gartered thigh.

Towards the last hour drunks spewed from the pubs, finale to the hectic day and like the titbit left on the plate until last, how we savoured this morsel. Fights broke out everywhere and we scurried here and there alert for overturned stalls. Diving into the wreckage we grapped all we could lay our hands on before departing into the shadows with the loot. The appearance of the bobbies, the frogmarch of the drunks to the lock-up was of little interest to us. We could see all this on any Saturday night.

November 5th, Guy Fawkes Night, was not celebrated in any organised sense. The occasion in many parts of England was well supported by the lower middle class, as well as labourers and artisans, and has been regarded as a regular manifestation of "Street Toryism". It was often well organised, flourishing in particular in market towns, the organisation being to such a degree that local people who had in some way courted unpopularity with the mob could find themselves hanged and burnt in effigy. No such example of this exists as having taken place in
mid 19th century Luton, the worst occasion being the attempt to burn down the wooden
structure serving as a temporary Corn Exchange in 1868. That is not to say the 5th November
was an event uncelebrated: an estimated two thousand people assembled in George Street to
watch the fireworks being let off in 1862.\textsuperscript{66} The event, however, always appears to have been a
spontaneous, rather than co-ordinated celebration, making a less conspicuous target for the
disapproving. "Street Toryism" was absent in Luton and the crimes associated with it were petty
- pickpocketing, drunk and disorderly and so on - although the fireworks were naturally a hazard;
several minor fires were caused by fireworks in 1858.\textsuperscript{67} Luton was also ceasing to be a market
town, but perhaps the principal reason that Guy Fawkes' Night was not so vigorously attacked
was that at heart it was a patriotic, anti-catholic celebration. Certainly the Luton Times and
Luton News, mouthpieces of liberal non-conformity did not criticise the November 5th event in
the way that they went for the September 'Stattie'. Visiting fairs and circuses also caused
occasional tremors of concern. The arrival of Wombwell's Managerie in September, 1868
attracted a curious crowd - "... the roughest of the backslums of Luton were in full force ..."
commented the Bedford Times.\textsuperscript{68}

Assessing Luton's Crime

The fairs, and events such as Guy Fawkes Night were essentially one-off occasions, the
"demoralising" sale of alcohol however, remained constant. Remove all the fairs and individual
celebrations from Luton's social calendar and drunkenness, poverty, vice and crime would still be
there as the public house was still there to spawn them and in the eyes of many, it was the public
house that was the root of most that was evil. Luton's unstable economy, providing a glut of
money for one period and then none at all for another, poor housing, the dearth of alternative
facilities for recreation, a whole range of contributory factors were given relatively scant
consideration. Remove the excesses of the drink trade and it was possible to remove all the ills
associated with it.

The extent of the association between crime and alcohol is difficult to establish. To use
crime figures as a basis for argument is to walk on thin ice where certainties and theories can
suddenly shatter underneath the tread of the unwary: it is tempting not to try and cross at all
and the sheer unreliability of crime figures make clear assessment virtually impossible. First,
they are an accumulation of crimes recorded, rather than crimes committed and are, therefore,
open to initial distortion through factors such as the efficiency of local policing (not to mention the
efficiency of local criminals) and the degree of alienation which some communities feel they have
from the administration of justice: in practise whether an individual sees any point in reporting a
crime. The definition of what represents criminal activity alters as a result of national legislation
and there can often be local initiatives which suddenly focus upon individual misdemeanours
resulting in a rash of offences brought before Magistrates: Luton police periodically pursued a
crackdown on dangerous driving or stray dogs. Petty, juvenile crime could be accompanied by a
high turnover in offenders - frequent light sentences and subsequent re-appearances before
courts when offences are re-committed. The discrepancy in the definition of crime can be seen
clearly in the type of offences brought before a Bench and the sentences handed down. Luton's Magistrates' Court was presided over by country gentry and clergy with no representative from the urban area itself. The deliberations and decisions of the Magistrates' Court therefore represented rural Bedfordshire values, not Luton's. Few Lutonians would lose much sleep over the activities of poachers stealthily going about their business on the estates and farms surrounding the town. They would be more concerned by carts driven by drunks, suspicious looking vagrants and crimes of petty theft and violence. Yet crimes related to poaching remain prominent in the number of cases brought before the Luton Bench in the mid-nineteenth century. Returns from the Magistrates' Court and the Court of Quarter Sessions provide only a sketch as to the degree and extent of criminal activity and are not reliable as a guide for drawing firm conclusions.

At the time, as well as now, there was debate and disagreement amongst historians, criminologists, sociologists, politicians, police and a whole gamut of interested parties (which includes just about everyone, such is the fascination with crime) about what are the causes of criminal activity. Education, the trade cycle, the price of basic provisions, employment, displacement, imitation, alcohol, housing, sheer sinfulness, poor policing, resentment, desperation, hunger, ignorance - all have a part to play. The fact that such motivation is a personal feeling, perhaps not even acknowledged in Court, the secretive nature of crime and unreliability of statistics, make firm conclusions in this area also very hard to come by. Technical change can provide new stimulus and variations on crime. The arrival of the railway to Luton brought with it large numbers of navvies to lay the line and with it a resurgence of the fear of 'outsiders' coming to the town and bringing offensive behaviour with them. Once established this fear again manifested itself in the dread of the mobile criminal: a rash of burglaries in 1860 was attributed to thieves arriving in Luton by train, committing the crime and escaping the same way. There was also a spate of vandalism (damage to cars, stones on the line, etc) which coincided with the novelty of the railway.69

Acknowledging all these influences, there is nonetheless some broad agreement regarding the general trend in crime during the nineteenth century. Growing towns, with an unstable, youthful population are acknowledged as being particularly prone to higher levels of crime, evidence to which is given by the surge in prosecutions and court cases in the early nineteenth century and a changing attitude toward crime as a threat to the social order, not merely to the individual. Britain's biggest cities were regarded as being able to support areas populated by a class of people designated "criminal". Nationally, the levels of crime rose after 1815 until the 1850s when a combination of criminal and social legislation, together with greater social stability brought the rate down. Crimes became less violent and committed less frequently by juveniles from this period, Tobias putting this in perspective by stating "we are not concerned to argue that all was well in England after 1850, but that things were a little better than they had been."70

Turning to Luton then one would expect the rate of crime to increase proportionally with the town's rapid urbanisation. This took place at a swift overall rate throughout the period in question, a little later than the nation as a whole. Regrettably, the available data is not up to the
questions which are posed. There are only comprehensive and reliable returns from Luton's Police Court for the years 1855-1863 and 1866 onward. Most studies of provincial crime tend to focus upon the big cities and Luton is not in this league. It was not a town with a definable "criminal class", rookeries which were impervious to the law, containing a network of "flash-houses". Luton's crime was mostly small, if frequent, petty theft, poaching, drunk and disorderly, etc. Certain individuals appear again and again before the Bench - Obadiah Worsley, William Adams and John Day ("one of the worst characters in the town") - are three examples of men who were frequently involved in some sort of trouble, including theft, assault and riot. Levi Welch made a considerable personal contribution to Luton's criminal statistics in a career which developed from poaching through to assault, shooting and finally murder, avoiding the rope only by turning Queen's evidence against a confederate, William Worsley, thereby condemning this man to the gallows. Solomon King was another "old offender" who re-appeared before Luton's Police Court usually as a result of being the worse for wear for drink, although theft and assault were also amongst his sins. Even when thrown into the workhouse King, who had a family in Houghton Regis, could not avoid trouble: in 1851 he was sentenced to twenty-one days in gaol for scaling the wall to the women's section of the workhouse where he spent two happy hours before capture. Solomon King was an exception in being someone seemingly incapable of employment. Even the likes of Adams and Day, notorious individuals that they were, at worst were semi-criminal, that is to say labourers who got into trouble a lot. Their sheer notoriety indicates that such men were rare and that there was in reality, whatever the fears of the timid, no criminal class in Luton. Most who appeared before the Bench were able to give some occupation reinforcing a point already made by David Jones that the bulk of crime was committed by people in casual or full-time employment. Certain streets became known for trouble, Chase Street, perhaps being the outstanding example of this type. There, the application of the law was consistently flouted and occasionally resisted: an attempt by P.C. Taylor to break up a cacophony on 'rough music' in July 1867 resulted in a minor riot in which Taylor was seriously injured. Bad though elements within it undoubtedly were, there is no evidence that the local constabulary regarded it as wholly impenetrable to the officers of the law, and their beat was able to cover it both by day and night.

From another perspective Luton's crime rate rose out of proportion to its population in the country as a whole. The fastest growing town in the region, with a fluid population, Luton acquired the hallmarks of an immature, unstable, society. Bedfordshire's period of greatest social upheaval came in the twenty years after Waterloo with an intense depression in agriculture characterised by low wages, migration and riot. By 1840 affairs became more settled in the county whilst in contrast Luton's accelerating growth was just commencing. For the respectable, law abiding inhabitants of the town this sudden social upheaval was viewed with great alarm - a familiar, national and age-old feeling. In 1846 "An Old Inhabitant" wrote to the Bedford Times complaining about the darkness of streets and absence of police: "... lazy fellows fill up the pavements, and annoy all passengers whom they think they can insult with impunity. It has long been a fact that no lady dares walk the streets alone after dark..." Molestation by the hoi polloi touched a deep middle-class dread: "idle young men" it was alleged, gathered in groups
(especially in George Street) and would then "behave themselves in such a manner as to be disgusting". Both the above allegations were made toward the latter part of the busy season when unemployment would be minimal. Once again the arrival of the railway provided a new angle: April 1869 saw letters arriving in the local press concerning gangs of youths lurking under one of the newly constructed Midland Railway bridges. Whether their intentions were nefarious is irrelevant, their very presence being sufficient to induce fear.

One has to conclude that the middle class fear of crime far exceeded the reality. Although 'crime' as defined by Statute was usually committed by those in employment it was also usually committed by and to the working class, taking the form of neighbourhood quarrels, drunken brawls and acts of theft from market stalls. Riot, an offence which could be directed specifically at middle class targets was rare. There was one instance in 1847 when scandalmongers spread rumours concerning the relationship between Dr. E. O. Woakes and his niece who died from taking poison. An excited mob assembled outside his house in Wellington Street and Special Constables were sworn in to disperse them. Besides the 1854 riot there were a further series of street brawls surrounding the General Election in May 1859. Obadiah Worsley, who otherwise showed no inclination of political activity, was in the thick of it. Mob violence was so remote from the experience of middle-class Lutonians that the Luton Times actually went so far as to condone the practise of 'rough music', an activity which could very easily degenerate into a mini riot.

Burglary at the homes of the better-off was also very rare, a series occurring in 1855, 1860 and 1862. Most theft, other than poaching, comprised very minor cases, involving activities such as the stealing of straw plait or turnip tops. Murder, manslaughter, and the more serious cases of assault were also exceedingly uncommon. The body of a murdered baby was found in the Lea in 1860 but the culprit was never traced, neither was the attacker of George Wing and his wife (who subsequently died). This assault took place whilst they were walking in daylight in Chapel Street. Besides these cases there were just nine indictments of murder or manslaughter between 1855 and 1875. A policemen guarding a prisoner, John Congreve (accused of embezzling money as Assistant Overseer) was stabbed in February, 1872. Five months earlier an attempt was made to poison an open-air bible reader (Miss Wand) on Market Hill by offering her a piece of cake laced with aconite. Although seriously ill, Miss Wand survived. Once again most crimes of violence involved the labouring classes but they aroused middle-class concern on occasions: such as a vicious assault upon a sewer, Mabel Gray, "a woman not of good character", by two men, Henry Holyoak and William Waller. This attack received much attention in the local press as it took place in broad daylight watched by a large crowd from which only one person attempted to intervene. The concern was particularly addressed at the fact that it took the police three quarters of an hour to arrive to rescue the girl.

The copycat crime was of more serious concern to all. The murder of his wife in 1859 by Joseph Castle gave rise to imitative attacks by husbands upon their wives: one stabbing and several assaults, one with a bottle. During a period of high bread prices arson attacks were made upon the granary of Quaker William Drewett and almost immediately after of the corn store at Turners Hall Farm.
It was highly unlikely for a man to be successfully prosecuted for rape or sexual assault. Women were understandably reluctant to come forward in the face of an unsympathetic system and Magistrates and police preferred not to become involved in domestic disputes. This was a feature which Luton shared with other the rest of the country but to what extent Luton women, with greater degrees of economic self-reliance, were able to escape the attentions of drunken, cruel and violent husbands, is difficult to gauge. Only when the case went as far as blatant murder, as with the Castles, was there any real chance of official redress. In May 1855 Ann Bush died after her husband, Thomas, a jobbing carpenter, had repeatedly assaulted her, flinging her against a cupboard on the final occasion. Presented with this evidence the inquest jury found, however, that death was accelerated by depression and anxiety following the sale of her house. In February, 1871 Joseph Andrews of New Town Street was indicted for the manslaughter of his wife for which he received six months in gaol. He had repeatedly beaten her, the last assault proving fatal. Discrepancies in sentencing in which attacks on property were clearly rated as more serious than attacks on people (especially poor, female ones), caused the odd tremor of disquiet to emanate from the Luton Times. The principal concern of the liberal leading citizens of the town lay more in the local control and efficiency of the administration of justice, issues with political ramifications.

There appears to be a high incidence of juvenile crime, a factor commensurate with Luton's levels of growth and social immaturity. The precise proportion of this is difficult to ascertain not least of all because some culprits would lie about their ages and their true names. Then, as now, the principle of working parents, in this instance in the straw plait and hat trade, was thought by some to be harmful to the morals of children, especially because mothers did not devote sufficient attention to their care and discipline: "We fear the bonnet-work engrosses more attention than the necessary attendance of their children" frowned the Luton Times in 1861. There is however, no decisive evidence which can be supplied to support the contention that the hat industry specifically contributed to juvenile crime through its labour structure. Certainly a disproportionately high number of Luton's children were inadequately educated but any argument that being deprived of schooling leads to a propensity for criminal activity could be countered by the fact that the denial of education was due to the demand for the labour in domestic industry, a demand which would absorb much of the waking hours, not to say energies of a child, certainly keeping him or her off the streets. Whether a different economic structure would help Thomas Fleckney is open to question. Described by a court reporter as one of "Les Miserables" of Luton, he was often in trouble, being convicted in 1875 of theft. William Fleckney (not known whether he was related) was convicted of murdering another youth in a fight in 1868 when he was sixteen. Twelve year old Alfred Eames presented a pathetic spectacle when he appeared before the Bench charged with the theft of toys in November 1862. In mitigation Superintendent Pope said that the boy was "appallingly" treated by his parents and turned out on to the streets to make a living "as best he could". Eames received one month in prison and four months in a reformatory, the Magistrates clearly feeling that he was in better care there than at
home. Luton, a fast growing town was also a youthful town, with a high proportion of young people provided with few recreational outlets and little else other than their own imagination for stimulation.  

The Police

The position of the police was again dominated by the issue of local control with difficulties which arose from the construction of the new police station in Dunstable Place epitomising the problem (see Part Four). This issue again ran over into the field of politics. There were sporadic accusations levelled at the police - that they were in cahoots with local criminals (unsubstantiated) and that they were absent where they were thought to be needed most. One criticism was that the constabulary neglected to police High Town Road "where the most disreputable scum of Donkey Hall" congregated causing a nuisance by throwing stones and committing acts of petty vandalism. There was one published complaint concerning the officiousness and calibre of the police, the example in this case was of a P.C. who threatened to lock up a tradesman he saw standing talking on "at least seven foot of open path" who refused to move on. The complainant concluded "I regret to say what is too generally known in this town, that the staff of policemen ... are men entirely ignorant of not only their duty as men and officers, but of common civility." Criticisms of the performance of the police were so few, so occasional, that one can only conclude that in the opinion of the middle-classes at least, there was not great dissatisfaction with their efforts and Superintendent Pope seems to have been especially well thought of. In this case, as in other cases, the attitudes and views of the poorest sectors of society are not documented.

The strength of the police force rose steadily. Two police constables were appointed to cover the whole of the Luton Parish following central government legislation empowering the Quarter Sessions to do so. This in fact weakened the provision of police already in Luton and therefore following petition two police were assigned to the township alone plus a Superintendent with four other constables covering the remainder of the Parish. Four more for the Parish were added in 1855 and following a petition, the strength stood at thirteen constables and two sergeants under a Superintendent. A further petition was received signed by Col. Ames and one hundred inhabitants of Luton at the Easter Quarter Sessions appealing for more policemen to cover the urban core specifically. By 1864 the balance in the complement of men lay at fifteen constables for the township of Luton plus a further six for the hamlets, hardly proportionate to the relative populations and again reflecting county values, not Luton's.

Crime and the economic cycle

Hindsight affords little benefit in assessing Luton's crime given the anomalies and qualifications made above. It is nonetheless clear that there is an escalating incidence of criminal cases in certain categories brought before the Luton Bench in the 1860s (See graph 3.1). Seasonal, in particular monthly, variations are open to distortion: the absence of sufficient
Magistrates for the dispensation of justice for a two week period could lead to a backlog of cases which would then exaggerate the number of cases heard the following month. Temporary surges such as this occur frequently. A breakdown of offences over the period 1855-1875 made on a monthly basis show an even spread of offences brought before the Bench. On a seasonal basis the late summer/autumn period accounts for the highest proportion of recorded crimes, a period when the town was beginning to fill with migrants seeking work and lodgings. This period also included the "Stattie" and Guy Fawkes night. The peak of the busy season, from December through to March, was a time when levels of recorded crime dropped appreciably although Luton's population was at its peak. Taking all factors into consideration the tentative conclusion that can be made is that Luton's incidence of crime fell slightly during periods of most intense economic activity rising (with the puzzling exception of July) during the subsequent lull and during the unsettling period when the town began to swell in numbers. Overall, however, there is a striking consistency between the months.

The period 1855-1875 as shown in graph 3.1 presents a different picture. The absence of sufficient returns to compile totals for 1864 and 1865 leave an awkward void but the patchy returns which are available indicate that the crime levels were steadily rising in these years, at a time when the hat industry was active. There appears to be an initial contradiction between the evidence of the monthly returns and that of the yearly figures depicted in graph 3.1. The numbers of crime rose during periods of greatest economic activity, falling away during the depression of 1867-71 and rising again once the staple trade had pulled out of the trough. It must

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**Graph 3.1: Crime in Luton**

*Total number of individual crimes in specified categories*

*Key to column shadings*

- **Active hat trade**
- **Depressed hat trade**

*No data available for the years 1864 & 1865*
be appreciated that these are actual returns, not percentages based upon Luton's population. This was rising also in this period (ten thousand in 1851, fifteen thousand in 1861 and seventeen thousand in 1871), although the base population may have remained static, and possibly even fell during the late 1860's. Luton's police force, strengthening belatedly in this decade would presumably also have contributed to the number of persons who were apprehended.

The demon drink

Surviving mid-nineteenth century opinions as to the causes of crime come overwhelmingly from one sector of society. There was, however, an impressive unanimity between contemporaries as to where the main cause of criminal activity in Luton lay. Economic factors did not enter into the reckoning. Lodging houses, which in a town with such a large transient population might have been expected to be a major area of concern receive some attention. Three in particular were noted for being "crowded" with beggars and one owner was brought before the Magistrates accused of allowing different sexes to sleep in the same room. For the most part, however, lodging houses were regarded as a public health problem rather than one associated with crime and morals, their control lying with an inspector of the local Board of Health. The dread of outsiders entering the town and committing offences, another fear which one might expect to be prominently articulated in a town with such a strong reliance upon seasonal employment, is only infrequently referred to in the period as a whole: for example, a large number of tramps were reported to be wandering around the Luton and Dunstable district in the autumn and winter of 1862. Recurring though this particular fear may have been, it was the public house above any other factor which, in the minds of many in Luton, was associated with crime. Many indeed had very bad reputations: a couple were ancient inns situated in the heart of town such as the White Hart where landlord James Burgess was prosecuted in 1848 for keeping a disorderly house. In 1856 a succeeding landlord was convicted of keeping the White Hart open beyond licensing hours, the police planting a plain clothes officer in the pub to circumnavigate the landlord's system of look-outs.

Most problem beer houses and public houses however, lay beyond the central area in the new streets within New Town and High Town. Most offences directly connected with licensed premises were of disorderly conduct or opening beyond licensing hours. Some houses, however, were recognised by the police as being little more than fronts for criminal activity such as The Wrestlers in Wellington Street which appeared to be no more than a brothel with public bar attached. In August 1863 two burglars were followed straight to a back room of the Wrestlers with their booty. The Freeholder, Mother Redcap, Eagle, Stag, Masons Arms, Fortune of War, Rising Sun and Robin Hood all appeared before the Luton Magistrates in the late 1850s for varying offences, those of the latter two being serious enough to warrant a three month suspension of licence. The Nelson in Duke Street was recognised as "a regular resort for thieves, prostitutes and other bad characters," and the Roebuck Inn in Albert Road had its problems with clientele exacerbated by the violent conduct of the former landlord toward his estranged wife who had retained the tenancy. In addition to cases such as these, there was a
steady stream of offences committed after drinking (vandalism, assault, threatening behaviour, drunk and disorderly, dangerous driving etc) which, although the landlord could not be directly held to be responsible, further tarnished the image of the public house. To repeat Austin’s estimate, there were a staggering 226 licensed premises by 1809.

Running parallel with the rise in the numbers of the public house, and soon to converge with it, was the burgeoning temperance movement. When this first became established in the town is not known. A Temperance Society was in existence by 1846 with William Willis as one of its leading lights, and "Sign the Pledge" meetings were being held by 1849. It did not immediately find sympathy from the non conformist churches: John Everitt was an early convert (in 1853) but was obliged to resign his membership from Park Street Old Meeting a year later because of his refusal to partake of the communion wine which then contained alcohol.

The early years of the Temperance Movement in Luton were marked by an evangelical, campaigning style. Until the late 1850s lectures, rallies, tea meetings, galas and letters to the press were the order of the day. The first recorded gala, the forerunner to the excursion and holiday which were to be organised later in the century, was in August 1853. A procession went to Park Meadow (Popes Meadow) where in the afternoon there were games followed by speeches, fireworks and an illuminated balloon in the evening. A temperance tea meeting attracted 250 in 1854 and 2,000 braved bad weather to attend the annual temperance gala in 1856. How many of those who attended the galas were serious sympathisers with the cause is open to question, as is the resolution of those who attended the meetings and signed the pledge. At this point the movement was concentrated upon moral persuasion and the attraction of social events rather than political activity. Willis and Everitt apart, Robert How and Hiram Higgins were the leading figures at this time but interestingly there were no local ministers prominent. No amount of galas and tea meetings, however, could halt the relentless increase in the number of licensed premises which were springing up all over the town. Unlike the Temperance movement they could offer attractions on a daily (and nightly) basis.

Lacking records of the local movement, its constituency is not known. Examples of Harrison’s archetypal working class supporter - family orientated, Liberal, smart, self-educated, Mechanics Institute supporting, chapel attending - were numerous in the town, a group which merged with the lower middle-class in Luton’s case. The schisms which afflicted the national movement between the moderate British and Foreign Temperance Society and the more radical teetotal movement did not affect the Luton organisation which remained a broad church incorporating many strands of opinion, even those who had nothing else in common. Compared with another market town, Banbury, Luton’s temperance campaigners were able to avoid a number of pitfalls which could crucially weaken its impact. Never, during the mid-nineteenth century did it veer toward teetotalism, although there were strong teetotallers within its ranks. The sabbatarianism element that was prominent in Banbury and which narrowed the movements appeal there was not at all prominent in Luton, and at the latter place, where the aristocracy and working class were marginalised, (and there was in any case fluid social mobility), inter-class strife did not cause damaging internal divisions. The Luton temperance movement did not
contemplate fielding a candidate in local elections to the Board of Health, an avoidance of action which whilst it could have provided a platform for publicising the movement's aims, could just as easily have demonstrated its lack of popular base amongst the enfranchised sector of society.100

Luton was a politically neutered town, controlled (nominally at least) by county government and isolated from the national debates. If the Luton temperance movement was to make any impression it would have to do so on a local basis. Comprising men who were used to finding their own solutions to problems the local movement demonstrated a degree of sharp political awareness. The Board of Health was the nearest which Luton possessed to a local authority and yet the Temperance movement astutely eschewed this for the best reason - the Board did not have the capability to deal adequately with the problem. The temperance movement needed to strike at the heart of the matter.

The first sign of a change in tactics came in 1857. A meeting at the Town Hall heard a speaker estimate that Luton spent £24,637.10.0. annually on "intoxicating liquor" and for the first time Luton heard a platform advocation of the prohibitive Maine Law which, according to the speaker, would mean that instead of money being wasted upon drink would be able to buy (amongst other things) 500 women's shawls, ten almshouses, 4,000 loaves and wedding portions for twenty-five women of good repute who had been teetotal Sunday School teachers for seven years!101 From this point the strategy followed a distinctive course, uniting all manner and shades of opinion and stifling any potential opposition. A meeting in September 1857 passed a resolution calling for Magistrates to reduce the number of public houses in the town and the following autumn a memorial was submitted to the Luton Bench, at that time considering the licence application of a number of premises. Part of it read "... this rising town being very seriously compromised and corrupted by a torrent of vice and ungodliness, let loose on it not least through the operation of its lower class of public houses...".102 As a result of this application, the Bedford Arms in Stuart Street, by no means the worst public house in the town, had its licence temporarily suspended. The local architect of this tactic is unknown but this memorial attracted the signatures not only of the usual radical supporters but also of the Rev. Peile of St. Mary's plus a number of the main non-conformist ministers in the town.

The tea meetings and festivals continued, attracting attendances measured in hundreds but now with non-conformist ministers to the fore standing upon a broad denominational base. A meeting held at the Town Hall in January 1860 attracted 400 persons including Rev. J. Phillips of High Town Primitive Methodist Church, Rev T. Hands of Park Street Old Meeting, Gustavus Jordan a leading Wesleyan, and Henry Brown. The Luton Times, in carrying a report of the proceedings noted that the greater portion being from the middle class of society.103 Whether this was a true reflection of temperance support in Luton, or simply those who attended this and other meetings, cannot be known. The meeting was held at the height of the busy season and it was therefore possible that many working people were unable to attend. Had the Primitive Methodist Church been the venue then it is possible that the social mix would have been different. Aimed especially at the children of the working class, and also the illiterate, was the magic lantern. The first recorded example of these being used for temperance purposes was in
April 1862 at the Ceylon Baptist Church, Wellington Street. There, the wondrous show treated its audience to a tale depicting a "drunkard's progress" (presumably downward). In adopting this approach the class divisions once again became evident as Aubrey Darby's perceptive, if slightly jaundiced eye, bears witness:

The Methodist Church on top of the hill overlooking the railway sidings stood four square, no spike, no ornamental masonry, symbolising a narrowness personified from within that only the poor needed saving the rich being blessed by the Lord.

Inside the hall, gaslit and shabby, sat rows of children gazing at a white screen from which light and colour would soon emerge. As the minutes ticked by from a large clock on the wall, a restlessness became apparent breaking out into loud cheers with the appearance of the Pastor on the platform. Did he know our cheers were for the imminent showing of the pictures heralded by his entry, if not we left him in no doubt when halfway through his address, the cry, "Show the pictures", led to the exit of a chastened cleric.

The hall darkened and the first slide appeared upside down, accompanied by screams of laughter and catcalls. There was Mafeking everywhere. Right way up the picture, in magnificent colour, depicted a filthy attic, the occupants a repulsive woman in rags and two scarecrows, barefoot, almost naked, presumably her children, peering at a crust of bread reposing on the rickety table, the scene highlighted by a candle stuck in a beer bottle, seemed to us who had experience of this kind of illumination remarkably bright, for every detail of the sordid room stood out clearly.

The story teller interpreting the scene told us the family were waiting for the father to come home with his pay, but the demon strong drink had waylaid him. The slide changed showing the drunken father, red choker round his neck, in the act of bashing the wife, whilst the kids cowered in a corner. The compere, warming up to his job, carried the cackle a bit too far, so we shouted for the next picture, the excitement of the imminent bashing fired our imagination, the plight of the victims worried us not. So the story unfolded, the droning voice of the story-teller lulling many of us to sleep, some even lost interest in something all so true to life in this age of pub and pulpit. Those who watched to the bitter end, saw the drunken swine repent, but only after his only son had been knocked over by a runaway horse and cart. The final scene, a beautiful room, the son between snow-white sheets, well-dressed father, wife and daughter smiling down upon the happy boy and in the background the pastor kneeling in act of prayer. In some strange way we wondered why the runaway horse received no credit for the happy ending.

In our world of reality, neither the magic lantern nor the religious man convinced us that strong drink or total abstinence would change our existence. Religion was alien to our environment, for what purpose we lived no one cared. Living was enough, mysticism had no abode in our attics. We had no education and believed those who craved after it were cranks. Nevertheless after the Lantern Show we were content, the herd instinct of being together, a free bun, a warm hall, and the joy of the upside down picture had satisfied our expectations. Our fathers would still visit the pubs and for this fact we said "Amen".

Homeward bound, more subdued with the cold night than the Magic Lantern, we passed some of the 90 pubs in the town. Tonight the soft murmur of voices, denoted peace in the pubs. There were no raucous brawls and we wondered who could have done this thing. We looked into the starlit sky, shivered, and scampered home.

The main thrust of the movement, however, formally known as the Luton Temperance Society by 1870, was now focused upon the Magistrates Bench. The 1858 memorial was followed up the following autumn (on 5th September) by a 600 name petition: "... your memorialists feel assured that intemperance is the principal cause of misery, crime, prostitution and pauperism that exists in the town of Luton ...". Once again, the Rising Sun, Freeholder and the Robin
Hood fell foul and received licence suspensions, as did the Oxford Arms and the Railway Hotel. The latter had been associated with a recent assault case and, although it was often the haunt of prostitutes seeking travelling clients, the suspension could be viewed as somewhat harsh since the landlord was not directly culpable. This decision points to a spontaneous, knee-jerk response by the Magistrates when confronted by delegation from the temperance movement. There is little evidence of genuine empathy between the Bench and the memorialists, rather a desire on the part of the former to appease the temperance campaigners whilst appreciating in general terms that they had a good point. Luton's Magistrates needed pressure applied at licensing time before they would take action. And so this tactic progressed throughout the 1860s, the emphasis of the temperance movement being the general one of the morally corruptive powers of the public house. This shrewd approach, concentrating the attack on the association between drink and the evils of crime and poverty, meant that it was not necessary to be an ardent advocate of temperance let alone teetotaller, to support this attack. The town's brewers, outflanked by a campaign that was directed at vices associated with some of their houses rather than the brewery itself, kept their profile low, making no attempt to counter the onslaught. Pressure being applied via the courts began to tell upon the landlords: offences connected with refusal to leave a public house became a notable feature of the petty Sessions reports from the mid 1860s.

The high point of temperance influence came in 1869 when the attack upon the public houses reached a crescendo. This coincided with the first fruits of parliamentary pressure upon the Liberal Government resulting in legislation which began to reverse the free trade spirit which had produced the 1830 Beer Act. Tighter control over the operation of beershops was to be exercised by local Magistrates, a move which some in Luton may have regarded as literally a godsend. "The pruning knife is to be applied without favour or affection, to the beershops . . . its end draws nigh" gloated the Luton Times, an enthusiastic supporter of the assault upon them. In persuading the Magistrates to apply the "pruning knife" the temperance movement appear to have co-ordinated their action with Superintendent Pope and the local police who saw this movement as an opportunity to rid his area of jurisdiction of some of the worst concentrations of trouble. The emphasis also underwent subtle change: no longer was the case presented in moral terms. Instead, by linking with the police they presented the licensed premises, in particular the beershops, as sources of specific criminal activity. The association between the public house and the activities of the poacher, guaranteed to concentrate the minds of Luton's rural estate based Magistrates, was repeatedly made. The autumn hearing took two sessions at the beginning of which a memorial headed by all the Anglican and non-conformist ministers was heard, their target being conspicuously the beer houses. For every licence application, Superintendent Pope rose to make an objection: the Dudley Arms (recently convicted for keeping a brothel), the Black Boy, Burr Street (landlord a "bad character"), the Tiger (thieves and poachers), the Blockers Arms, the George IV (three small cottages - a haunt of prostitutes), Lord Nelson (poachers and thieves the "principal class of customers"), World End, New Town (thieves and poachers), Noah's Ark, Church Street, Elephant and Castle (Inspector James 'had never seen a respectable person in it'), Railway Hotel (thieves and prostitutes), Fortune of War, Kings Arms,
(High Town), Oxford Arms and the Pheasant. All of these premises had their applications for licence renewal refused; only the Butchers Arms, Welcome Stranger and Duke of Cambridge got through. Although the occasional public house was refused a licence in the years which followed, 1869 was the most intense period of pressure upon the licensed premises in Luton.

Almost immediately after the 1869 Licensing Sessions, temperance supporters were claiming a drop in crime which was directly attributable to this move. In February 1872 Luton Magistrates, Rev Smyth and Col. Ames presented a report to the Bedfordshire (Michaelmas) Quarter Sessions claiming a 75 per cent drop in criminal activity in Luton: whereas the twelve cells at Luton police station were regularly filled in the late 1860s, only three were needed now. A thousand copies of this report were printed and interest claimed to be shown from local authorities in Brighton, Scarborough, Gloucester and Lancashire - Austin went as far as to claim that this was known as the 'Luton System'. For Superintendent Pope this parallel decrease in public houses and crime in Luton represented a rewarding end to his working career. He retired in October 1875 with the praises of the local press and Magistrates ringing in his ears. With the attack on beer houses seeming to have had their effect, the local consensus broke up leaving the temperance movement to once again pursue its particular goals of suppressing and curbing the partaking of alcohol. By 1874 the U.K. Alliance were meeting at the Plait Hall to hear Hon. Gen. Neal Dow of Maine explain the working of the Maine Law. Representations were made toward the Licensing Bench but these were notably smaller and ineffective. The Luton Temperance Society continued to fight the good fight into the twentieth century, sometimes attracting huge crowds for magic lantern shows, but they were never so effective again as they had been in 1869.

Assessing the effectiveness of the temperance movement

There is no doubt that the incidence of crime dropped in the period coinciding with the local campaign against the beer houses. Certainly these places were a refuge and source of criminal activity with some run by equally disreputable landlords. It would be misleading however to attribute the fall in crime entirely to this beer shop cull and to portray them as a sole source of evil to the neglect of other factors. The crime rate was already ebbing in the months before September 1869, a factor probably attributable to the deepening recession in the hat industry which was de-populating the town. This would have most affected the migratory, labouring classes who, forming the poorest sector of society were particularly prone to fall foul of certain aspects of the law - drunkenness, vagrancy, petty theft, assault, etc. It is also noticeable that there was a coincidental temporary recovery in the crime rate when the hat industry began to pull out of its depression. The worst of Luton's criminals were not going to reform overnight and join a chapel just because their regular haunt was now closed to them. They would seek other outlets. Public houses were by no means the only venue for the disposal of stolen goods and in November 1870, the Luton Bench warned marine store dealers not to deal in items which were suspect.
The report produced by Smythe and Ames for the Bedfordshire Quarter Sessions in 1872 estimated that there were 226 licensed houses in 1870 and 188 in 1871. By September 1872, according to official statistics, this figure stood at 132, with beerhouses appearing to be the main casualty; just thirty-eight were left in the town. This is a puzzling return: had there been a major reduction in the number of beershops after 1869 then this surely would have been reported: it is inconceivable that vast numbers operated without a licence but possible that Smyth and Ames were over estimating the numbers involved. No list of licensed premises exists before 1872 but in 1873 there were 129, 1874 there were 134 and in 1875 the total was 136. The opposite to the Temperance Movement's assertions was taking place: the number of licensed premises was actually increasing whilst the crime rate was falling.

The turnover of alehouses became very slow again after 1869. There were just five refusals in the years between 1871 and 1875 with a similar number not renewing their licenses (the fee was 8/6d for alehouses and 6/- for beerhouses). There were, however, a number of new licenses given and old ones reinstated. Of those that went down in 1869, four - The Tiger, the Blockers Arms, the Railway Hotel and the Dudley Arms - had all resumed business by 1875. The George IV re-opened some time afterwards and after several changes of name still operates. Other public houses which had been suspended were soon operating again - The Freeholder, Gardeners Call, Mother Redcap, The Grapes, The Fortune of War (re-named The Britannia), the Harrow and The Bedford Arms. Many of the above premises are still (1991) open for business.

The public house referred to as The King's Arms, High Town (in 1869) was probably, in fact, The King's Head (there was a King's Arms in Chapel Street, probably a transfer of licence from the Middle Row establishment of the same name), and this re-appeared as The King Henry VIII. The Magistrates also demonstrated a willingness to grant a limited number of new licences to beer shops which carried no name - fourteen between 1873 and 1875. Most identifiable public houses in the 1860s were still operating in the 1870s and it is difficult to believe that more than fifty nameless beerhouses would close between 1871 and 1872 when it was obvious that the pressure from their tormenters was easing. The only possible explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the licensed returns and the Smyth/Ames estimate could be that the latter incorporated off-licenses in their figures (the World's End re-emerged as one). Whatever the precise figure the era of the beer house or beer shop was passing and overall their numbers were to steadily decline. This was more a matter of economics and changing patterns of leisure with the slow evolution of other, competing outlets for people's spare time in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, rather than due to sustained pressure from temperance campaigners. An irony of these changes was the strengthening of the larger breweries. In the Luton area this meant that Thomas Sworder and J. W. Green were able to increase their empires of tied houses, adding licensed premises as the independent landlords and victuallers sold up.

None of the above qualifications and queries is in any way an attempt to decry the efforts of those who genuinely desired to halt an apparently inexorable rise in social misery, and who believed after 1869 that they had effectively blunted it. Contemporary perceptions, however, need to be qualified by the small advantage that is afforded by hindsight and although the available data is extremely patchy it is still worth re-emphasising that the causes of criminal
activity are many. Whilst few Lutonians in the 1860s would be so foolish as to believe that the love of alcohol was absolutely the cause of all sinfulness, the pre-occupation with the pursuit of the beer houses led to a failure to adequately acknowledge that the rising crime could be influenced by other factors. Consequently, they did not perceive that the fall in crime after 1868 could also be attributable to other influences. The decline and subsequent disappearance of the "Stattie", the greater control over the 5th November celebrations, improved street lighting, local control over the police and administration of justice after 1876, the development of large engineering firms (Hayward Tyler and Balmforths were amongst the first) providing more secure male employment and consequently improved standards of living, the improvement in housing and the diminution of slums, the expansion of alternative outlets for leisure such as swimming and cycling, the development of mass audience entertainment (bands, choirs, the Grand Theatre which was opened in 1898, Luton Town Football Club formed in 1885). All of these contributed in varying degrees to the decrease in crime, as well as to the attractiveness of the public house and the churches. The contribution made by one other factor, education, to reduction of squalor, poverty, disease and anti-social behaviour has been questioned. There were undoubtedly people in Luton, who set great store by its benefits.
"Such a town as Luton, cannot be expected to boast of much literature" jibed Sir Richard Phillips, with justification, in 1828. Had he returned to the much enlarged town forty-five years later, he would not have needed to revise his original indictment. W. B. Stephen's excellent chapter on literacy in the South Midlands succinctly described the region as a whole: "The picture of the area in mid-century is of a predominantly poor rural working class culture, inward looking, often resentful, and . . . lacking a substantial middle- and upper-class leavening. And change was very slow . . . . The reasons for this state of backwardness were many: early marriage, a high proportion of women and children in domestic industry, surplus male labour, low wages, poor communications, few resident gentry and those who were there, such as the clergy, not active supporters of education. There was an especially high concentration of illiteracy in the lace and straw plait areas. These, of course, concentrated in Bedfordshire, the worst county in a backward area. Within Bedfordshire, Stephen's noted that Luton, the fastest growing town in the region, shared a number of features with other towns which were dominated by the cottage economy: a reliance upon the Sunday School to provide education and a particularly poor education for girls - there was no national school for girls in Luton, Dunstable or Leighton Buzzard.

Given these factors it is, therefore, not difficult to see why Luton's standard of literacy was so low. Many, perhaps the majority, of those migrating to Luton were those who were seeking success and employment - rural labourers, plait sewers, the unemployed - those who were moving because they had not attained a level of achievement in the locality from whence they came. Luton's middle-class, the best at which a level of educational provision could be supported, remained small, and for those who had "made-it" - owners of small workshops, shopkeepers and the like - the prevailing ethos in the town to a significant degree mitigated against philanthropic gestures. Independent methods of production may generate independent thought but it can also lead to selfish motivation. "Fortunes were made by the people who had no education or culture" recalled one local Methodist. Such people might well reason that they had made their "fortunes" without the benefits of schooling, and what had been good enough for them would be good enough for others. Such people would not present their philosophy in the correspondence columns of the local press, nor would they articulate their prejudices in the form of handbills or pamphlets. They would, however, remain hostile to any local initiative that would cost them money, and some (as was the case with the 1848 Health of Towns Act) would seek to subvert national legislation which was pressed upon them. This was to be Luton's experience, with attempts to promote literacy and education being restricted to small-scale examples of middle-class patronage and philanthropy.

Luton, in the mid-century was a town which displayed at times chronic levels of illiteracy and ignorance. H. O. Williams recalled that the warehouses in George Street contained notices with "very incorrect spelling" and a letter to the Bedford Times in 1847 complained that "bad grammar, bad rhyme and bad taste are simultaneously perpetrated" upon Luton's gravestones. For the literate middle-class there existed a tiny fringe of educational and
literacy provision beyond their own homes. A Literary Institute founded in October 1847 but was revived the following spring. It possibly had originated as an attempt to promote literacy amongst the working class but lost what working men it had as members to the Mechanics Institute. It was regarded by some as elitist. The revived body was comprised entirely of the upper echelons of Luton's middle-class with all other ranks above and below excluded: John Jones, Alfred Meale, C. S. Benning, John Waller (Bute Street), Henry and Kitt Tomson, E. C. Williamson, Charles Waller, C. A. and T. S. Austin, Richard Vyse, James Muir, William Phillips, Rev. T. Sikes, Thomas Sworder, William Bigg, Frederick Brown, William Willis and E. O. Williams. The patronage of Leigh, Crawley and Ames was sought but if they agreed they never extended this in any active way within the Society, and the Society never pushed for their involvement within its affairs. The above men were principal subscribers and the books purchased reflected their interests - mainly history and travel, but with some literature and biography. There were also a range of periodicals and newspapers - Illustrated London News, Punch, Edinburgh Review, Quarterly Review, Morning News and The Times amongst others. These were periodically sold off to subscribers. The Institution's female counterpart was the Women's Literary Institution formed in March 1859. This Organisation also held lecture evenings and by 1862 had fifty members. William Biggs' daughter, Louisa, was one of the leading members.

The smallness of Luton's bourgeoisie and the proximity of the Bedford public schools in particular, mitigated against the need for the establishment of private schools in the town. The former home of William Hunt in New Bedford Road was converted into the Villa School run by a Mr. E. Parsons around the latter part of 1848. Upon his death in 1856 this passed into the hands of Henry Wright who had run the New Hall Academy (probably located in Stuart Street) alongside another private school, for ladies, in Upper Wellington Street. The New Hall Academy included evening classes for adults on Tuesday and Friday at 8.00 p.m. but details of the curriculum and the students are not known. During the 1840s and 1850s there were a small number of other minor, often short lived, schools around the town, many of them in the vicinity of middle-class Wellington Street. The Luton Academy in Church Street was run by a Mr. Newland, and next door to Henry Wright's Wellington Street school was another "Ladies' School". Here, in a schoolroom claimed to be capable of accommodating sixty, a pupil received a basic education in writing, arithmetic and needlework. At the same time there also existed Alliance House (run by Madame Villenoxe) and the Misses Beeby's private school for ladies "conducted on principals calculated to lay the foundation of a sound moral and religious character".

From 1841, Rev Henry Burgess and his wife ran the Luton Grammar School from his home at The Bury. Here, there were three resident masters, one being a Professor of French, German and Italian' and the education administered there covered 'Every branch of learning except Music and Drawing'. In 1848 fees ranged from thirty pounds per annum for boarders down to eight pounds for day scholars. The main schoolroom was nearly sixty feet in length and at January 1847 there were between thirty and forty pupils. Naturally, Burgess stamped his own
personality upon the place: in advertisements he stressed that he and his wife treated pupils as
their own sons adding that "experience of five years has taught that corporal punishment is not
necessary". The Grammar School disappeared with Rev. Burgess in 1848.124

Rev. Henry Burgess was also the key figure in the early days of the local Mechanics Institute. Self help for the working class did not exist in the field of education and in this sphere in Luton, as elsewhere, dedicated commitment on the part of members of the middle-class was required, without which, educational projects were unsustainable.125 The Luton Mechanics Institute was imbued with a middle-class character but for a while at least seems to have run successfully. In 1846 there were claimed to be 200 members with its own reading room taking in The Times and The Sun. Vice-President to Burgess was James Waller with John Wiseman the Secretary and Robert Marsh the Treasurer. One "soiree" held in that year featured a small choir and "a series of dissolving views exhibited in a first rate style".126 A series of lectures were given by Henry Vincent each "to a large and highly respectable audience" with proceeds going toward the establishment of a library. The proportion of working class members in this "highly respectable" audience would be interesting to know. Even more overtly middle-class was a tea meeting held in the Victoria Rooms to raise funds for the Mechanics Institute. Burgess, William Willis, Henry Brown, John Everitt, Rev. Robert Robinson were all present at a ticket only meeting at which 500 "ladies and gentlemen of all political and religious parties" were in attendance. Many more were turned away.127

The strength of the working-class component within the Mechanics Institute is not precisely known but it is apparent that in the first flush of enthusiasm a number were attracted whose attitudes challenged those of Rev. Burgess. At the 1847 Annual General Meeting he warned against the "levelling tone" in some of the speeches which had been heard from the platform reminding members that rank and degrees of wealth and intellect were of "divine appointment".128 An attempt to assert control over the Institute, based upon such attitudes would inevitably have alienated many in a town such as Luton. Burgess was to quit in any case within two years, and for either of these reasons, perhaps a little of both, the Mechanics Institute began to run out of steam. Tea meetings, soirees and concerts were periodically held at the Town Hall to raise money for the Institute's library but although they were successful social events in themselves few 'mechanics' actually attended them.129

William Bigg became the driving force in the 1850s and the Mechanics Institute instigated a series of "popular lectures" in imitation of the revived Harmonic Societies' "People's Concerts". In 1857 an "Exhibition of articles of vertu and curiosities of art and nature" was organised. The seven man exhibition committee comprised Henry Wright, Henry Brown, John Wiseman, William Alford, Joseph Hawkes (wheelwright and victualler), John Merrit (carpenter) and William Faunch (shopkeeper). The successful exhibition, Luton's first foretaste of a museum, attracted 2,230 adults and 660 children in two days. These visitors viewed paintings loaned by Cumberland, Ames, Austin, Williamson, Rev. Bartlett, Mrs. Burr and gas meters lent by William Phillips on behalf of The Luton Gas Company. There were also two aquariums, books, medals, insects, minerals, stuffed birds, seaweed, a printing press and archaeological specimens lent by Dr. Nicholson of St. Albans.130 The Exhibition raised £51.10.3d. The Mechanics
Institute was run at this time by a committee of eighteen men to whom thirteen can be attributed an occupation with a fair degree of certainty. These thirteen men comprised one bank manager, one carpenter, one wheelwright and victualler, two who ran hat factories, one who owned a warehouse and seven who were shopkeepers. It was the bank manager, William Bigg, who was the leading light on this unwieldly, lower middle-class committee. The reading room and library was situated in the Town hall taking evening papers and periodicals in addition to the dailies. The charge for use was 2s 6d per quarter for daily readers and 1s 6d for evening readers. Women were admitted at 1s per quarter. The library of 500 volumes received 600 issues per annum.

The problem for the Mechanics Institute was that its support did not penetrate far into the working class. Lectures on general themes such as "Anatomy" or "French" (topography not politics) would attract reasonable audiences, but something aimed specifically at enlightening the working class, such as E. C. Williamson's 'The Art of Reading' received only "scanty support". By 1861 expenditure was exceeding income by £12 per annum. The library was clearly under utilised and was castigated as being "shockingly bad . . . (it) consists of books that do not add anything to the majority of the members". Armed with a library which was just a repository for useless books which no-one had the heart to throw away, the active support of just one member of the bourgeoisie and no popular base amongst the working class, the Mechanics Institute limped on until it lapsed completely some time after 1872.

The Mechanics Institute's revival in 1875 was at the initiative of a group of High Town workmen. At the inaugural meeting repeated reference was made to the cause of past failures. Although it was acknowledged that the irregular, often late working hours of many would weaken commitment, the fundamental reason for failure - lack of support from the working men of the town was also emphasised. Nonetheless, once again the well-intentioned of the middle class took control: Elliot Howard, a manager of Hayward Tyler, William Bigg, Henry Wright, A. T. Webber, Revs. Adams, Tuckwell and Billian. Once again the inaugural meetings were tea meetings and soirees held not in working class districts, but within the middle-class architecture of the Town Hall. Once again it failed. After initial enthusiasm (there were 130 members in December 1875), attendances at support meetings dropped dramatically and the Mechanics Institute made few inroads into the working class.

It is useless to speculate whether the Mechanics Institute would have fared better or worse with a greater control exercised by working men. It may have possessed greater credibility and relevance, but less resources and time on the part of those who would have had to shoulder the administration and programmes. With hindsight it seems more than a little arrogant, as well as naive, for members of Luton's middle-class to meddle with the aspirations of those of whom they had little understanding. Without such a gift it is easy, if erroneous, to attribute one's material success to certain virtues and to therefore assume that those who go without are lacking in the necessary personal attributes. If one then has any sense of public duty and humankindness it is then logical to approach the less fortunate and tell them what they need rather than ask them what they want. Many working people would feel alienated in such company not by pure class antagonism, but for example, by feelings of embarrassment that they
were unable to read or write. Reluctant to admit their own deficiencies, they would simply stay away. "What is needed in Luton . . . is a sincere desire on the part of the well-educated and thoughtful to raise the mental status of those beneath them" wrote one observer. There was much more to this than simply providing reading matter. Since this was merely "an instrument or vehicle of wisdom and nothing more". Education was about persuading the working class to adopt middle-class modes of behaviour. In Luton, as in most Victorian towns and cities this was epitomised by the tea meeting: "The most popular form of entertainment in Luton is probably that which commences in a social cup of tea and finishes with a song, the intervals being well filled up with brief addresses." If the results of their attempts at patronage were disappointing, and they usually were, failure could be attributed to the lack of support from one's peers or any number of defects from those below. This in no way is intended to denigrate the efforts of those who became involved in attempts to promote popular education. After all, at least they tried and usually did so with genuine altruism. The problem was that they simply had no understanding of those who they were trying to help.

The most serious indictment against middle-class forays into the field of education, however, was not the dubious philosophical base upon which they were established. Rather it was precisely because they were voluntary they relied too often upon the commitment of a small number of individuals and that consequently the venture stood or fell with those persons. Other attempts were simply half-hearted and shortlived leaving for many, therefore, the Sunday School organisation as the main outlet for philanthropic work. Each non-conformist church possessed its own Sunday School which combined a mixture of basic secular education with religious instruction. The standard of teaching varied enormously, Joseph Hawkes, an active Methodist, later recalling that the small number of day school scholars were more than a match for their teachers. There is also no doubt that secular education was provided out of a sense of obligation, Hawkes describing it as a "drudgery" which was relieved by compulsory school attendance in the 1870s. Nonetheless, for up to a fifth of Luton's children (18% in the 1851 census) the Sunday School was the nearest that they received to any form of instruction, this applying especially so for girls. It also provided them with other benefits - teas, outings and in general a social life which removed them from the streets. Just 8% attended day school.

Although Rev Robert Robinson of the Union Chapel withdrew from active participation in the Mechanics Institute he did develop his own lecture series which were aimed at young people. The subjects included "On Animal Instinct", "The Philosphy of Common Things", "On the Importance and Means of Advancement in Knowledge". In 1851, his Sunday School contained 810 persons (the age range is unknown), a massive burden upon those who possessed teaching abilities amongst the 330 members, leading to enormous pressure upon individuals to go straight into teaching once one's own education was complete, no matter how rudimentary that happened to be. A case study is provided by Frederick Thurston, the outstanding photographer in Bedfordshire and north Hertfordshire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The only son of a widowed straw plaiter he was raised in poverty in a street close to the Union Chapel. It is possible that he attended the nearby British Langley Street School, but more probable that he received the bulk of his education from Sunday School of the Union Chapel, a
church at which he became a full member at the age of fifteen in 1869. Either way his education would have been at best elementary and one which he augmented by attending "Arts and Sciences' classes (at which he studied art) once he had gained full-time employment. It appears that Thurston graduated straight from the status of Sunday School pupil to Sunday School teacher. By the time he was twenty-four he was the Superintendent of the Sunday School at the village branch church in Caddington. The speed of his elevation due as much to stretched personnel resources at Union as to any teaching gifts of his own.\footnote{139}

The Sunday Schools and the various other educational programmes mounted by the churches were vehicles which aimed to maintain what A. A. Maclaren defined as a "church connection" with the working class. It is stretching the point however, to claim that educational ventures promoted by the middle class, whether from religious or secular origins, were means of exerting social control over the sectors of society beneath them. Naturally, education was used to impart virtues which some members of the middle-classes regarded as their exclusive reserve. To issue propaganda, even to meddle in other people's lives, is not necessarily to control, an action which necessitates greater efficiency than was shown in Luton. Does "..the Importance and Means of Advancement in Knowledge" really lie squarely with social control? Did the Victorian middle-classes as a unit really believe that it was not possible for a labourer to be thrifty, punctual, sober, religious, family orientated, and still remain a labourer? Luton at least provides no evidence that control was the purpose which motivated those who promoted education for all children. If the aim of the middle-classes was to define the parameters of working class behaviour, to suppress, to manipulate, then surely something a little more co-ordinated, even co-ercive, would have been forthcoming than the jumble of only partially successful ventures which Luton experienced until the 1870s. Indeed, one could cynically argue that if social control was a primary motive of the middle classes they might not have bothered to attempt to impart the power of knowledge at all: better to keep the plebeians ignorant, cowed, deferential and consequently poor.\footnote{140}

Until the advent of compulsory education the Sunday Schools were the most comprehensive, firmly founded and consistently financed institutions for the provision of education in Luton. Beyond them lay the philanthropic efforts of the middle-class at initiating self-improvement amongst children and adults. The Gaitskell Terrace Evening School, situated in High Town, was one such effort. Formed in 1857 this establishment was presided over by Rev. J. J. Davies and included the familiar roll call of public spirited Lutonians amongst its committee and funders - Stalker (a fellow Baptist and the publisher of the Luton News), Sworder, Bigg, C. Austin, the Burrs, the Browns, Tansley, Wooton. The first year's intake totalled 130 admissions with an average attendance of forty. Of the first batch ten could read but not write and forty-three could manage neither. The same number had not received any Sunday School instruction indicating that in creating the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School its promoters were aware of a constituency which was immune to the lure of the churches. The inevitable library was established (140 volumes after twelve months) of books which the organisers thought would be good for the students. A penny bank was also established but the thirty-nine deposits totalling £6.1s.0d was thought to be a "disappointing" response by the authorities.\footnote{141} The age and sex
ratio of the pupils are not revealed but with its President dying shortly after the first AGM the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School slips into obscurity. There is little doubt that the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School was a venture promoted from the Baptist Old Meeting by Rev. J. J. Davies as a form of evangelism in High Town, an area in which they had no real presence, relying upon Davies' leadership for its continuation. It ran at the same time as the Mechanics Institute, an unnecessary duplication of limited resources typifying the unco-ordinated nature of middle-class effort. The absence of a local authority to act as a forum for debate and decision making, pushing all the required initiative and commitment into the lap of a small number of individuals. This much was recognised by William Bigg who called in 1861 for Luton not to try and run numerous feeble self help/educational institutions (the Mechanics Institute was struggling at this time) but just one strong one.142

Having made this observation Bigg was then guilty of perpetuating the same error. The Luton Society of Friends, choosing to ignore Sunday School development, attempted to imitate the work of William White and Joseph Sturges in Birmingham by establishing an Adult School in March 1862. The aim of the school was "the giving of instruction to young men and women of the more neglected class in Reading, Writing and the Holy Scripture".143 To establish this school they made one major investment by purchasing the defunct National School in Church Street. In the schoolroom measuring fifty-four feet, seven inches by thirty-seven feet, six inches they erected wooden shutters with men on one side and women on the other. Scholars (no-one under the age of sixteen) were admitted upon recommendation after "due enquiry" by the teacher. Initially two lessons were run between nine and ten-fifteen in the morning, with the first half hour devoted to reading and writing and the latter part to scripture. The school was run by a Superintendent (William Bigg probably fulfilled this role from the outset) and a General Committee which met quarterly. Yet another library was established with 215 volumes by 1864 including seventy-three purchased from the Pure Literature Society.

The Quakers, with their keen eye for business, were aware of past failure and consequently did not regard the school as a bottomless pit in which to pour their money. Income during the intial period at least was raised almost entirely from subscriptions. Later plans for expansion through purchasing buildings in Melson Street to the rear of the school were abandoned as only £150 of the £600 necessary was raised - the Quakers' caution was well founded. Although the General Committee had agreed that the maximum membership should not exceed forty of each sex, only three men turned up on the first day to be greeted by five teachers - Bigg, Richard and William Henry Brown, Benjamin Seebohm and Robert Marsh. Average attendances during 1862/3 was very low - approximately fourteen of each sex - a total of thirty-two men and forty-two women.

After a difficult first year matters improved, especially when evening classes were introduced in the late 1860's. William White was brought down to inspire at the annual tea meeting in 1863 and a Mutual Improvement Society, a Cottage Garden Society, Sick Benefit Club and Savings Bank were all formed during the first ten years. "In the reading and writing of the scholars generally an advance is perceptible. There is an increase of sympathy and attachment between the teachers and the taught, and the teachers are not without hope that some moral and
religious benefit is derived. By 1883 there were 165 men, with an average attendance of seventy-one, plus forty-nine women also attending. Between the opening and this time 1,968 men and 1,504 women had registered at the school although the number of long term pupils is not known.

On a far less successful scale other self-help societies were formed or were spawned by churches. The Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Society began at King Street Congregational Church (at which there was already a meeting of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon) although after a disagreement with the diaconate they began to meet at the Town Hall. There was also an Elocution Society and in 1873 "evenings of instruction" for sewers at the Corn Exchange. As many as sixty apparently attended for needlework, singing, reading etc.

Libraries

As with education generally, the provision of libraries depended upon individual promoters in the absence of collective organisation and popular support. Again, such ventures were short lived. Wiseman operated a circulating library, although that presumably dissolved with his bankruptcy in April 1861. Joseph Tearle established a free reading room for the working class in Wellington Street (possibly in the same premises as his straw plait warehouse) in 1859. There was also a Workmen’s Reading Room which closed down in 1873 due to lack of support - the subscriptions did not even pay for the newspapers. It was William Bigg who again attempted to promote a Luton Library. On 29th January 1866 a soiree was held at the Town Hall to pursue this end. The core of the library was to be the three thousand volumes bequested by E. C. Williamson for this purpose (Williamson had been dead for nearly three years). The proposals foundered upon the question of money. Bigg suggested that shares be issued to raise the approximately £2,500 needed to erect a building. "The proceedings were not very enthusiastic" commented the Bedfordshire Times. Bigg had tried again in 1872 and a public meeting was held at the Corn Exchange with a view to establishing a Free Library. Sadly, the meeting became over-run with drunks and degenerated into a minor riot. With other educational matters to concern himself with, Bigg let the matter drop until after Incorporation.

The evolution of public education

It is no surprise that in such a highly individualistic town such as Luton there should be so little co-ordinated educational provision. The haphazard altruism of the local bourgeoisie, however laudable on an individual basis produced no overall improvement in the standard of education for the majority of Luton’s children. The nature of the local economy, and the prevailing ethos which resulted from it, mitigated against a popular groundswell in favour of the building of schools. "... the duty of the people of Luton is no longer to leave the education of the poor in the irresponsible hands of sects and parties, but to take the management of the business in their own hands ..." declared the Luton Times. The people of Luton, however, showed no inclination to take matters of education into their hands in the way that the Luton Times would
have wished. As we have seen there were not even many, if any, Plait Schools, in a town where few adults would have received more than a most rudimentary education and parents in all probability decided that their children could manage well enough on what they had received. People who were poor valued greatly even to the extent of reliance, the little extra income with which children could augment the domestic economy. The accumulation of homes and streets called Luton were not bound together by a powerful sense of collective identity. The cogent rejoinder to the attitude articulated by such as the Luton Times and William Bigg came from Frederick Davis, a more typical Lutonian than the Quaker Bank Manager: "... the industrious man ... who by their industry and the sweat of their brow have acquired a little money - they have invested it in freehold property - upon that property are put all local rates ...". Davis was opposing the proposals to establish a School Board and the inevitable rate which would follow and this attitude struck a chord in a sizeable part of Luton's Burgesses on almost any issue which required collective financial responsibility. The whole philosophy of the town was, and arguably remains, centred upon the individual and their home as a centre of security and happiness, as a symbol of liberty and personal achievement. The opinions of the classes below Davis, the labourers who rented more humble dwellings, the migrant workers who crammed into lodgings, were never consulted, considered or recorded. Stephen's conclusion that only the compulsion of central legislation and decline of domestic industry would improve the standard of literacy in the South Midlands as a whole, applied especially to Luton. The town's level of illiteracy fell slightly (from 44% in 1856 to 32% in 1871) but its relative position compared with other registration districts within this backward region actually deteriorates from a ranking of forty-six down to sixty out of sixty-eight between the above dates. Slower growing towns such as Newmarket, St. Albans and Ely all supersede Luton in the fifteen year span. The position of schooling for girls was particularly abysmal with an estimated 36% being illiterate in 1871. Those, therefore, who advocated a decent basic education for Luton's children faced formidable obstacles.

Accounts of educational developments in Luton have been covered already by J. G. Dony and others. Outlining developments briefly, however, a school based upon Lancasterian principals operated on Park Square from 1809 and a Ragged School also existed in Park Street. The compromise between the non-conformists and Church of England which allowed the Lancasterian School to run disintegrated over the provision of grant, thereupon the two sides commenced school building which was to be affiliated to their respective denominations. The issue of grant was really the catalyst for change which was being brought about by a deepening division between them. The non-conformists in Luton were no doubt becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the no more than nominal contact with the successor body to the Royal Lancasterian Association, the British and Foreign School Society. The Luton Lancasterian School had succeeded the former Church School and remained largely in Anglican control. Once the split became imminent the two sides moved swiftly. The Managers of the Lancasterian School applied to affiliate to the National Society taking up the grant from the Treasury (which was specifically for the construction of a new school) raising the rest through subscription. The Marquess of Bute provided the land plus more than £100 toward the £592. 18s 4d needed to
build the first National School in Church Street in June 1835. Fourteen months later the non-conformists affiliated to the British Society were able to provide day education for between 200 and 300 boys with some girls being allowed to attend in the evening. In addition to this the Wesleyans established their own day school for between 250 and 300 children adjacent to their Church in Chapel Street and the Crown and Anchor School at the rear of the public house of that name in New Bedford Road. The National School in Church Street accommodated approximately 140 boys in what must have been extremely cramped conditions. Whereas the non-conformists could augment the minimal day school education with the Sunday Schools, the Church, lacking the corresponding education provision on the Sabbath, needed to improve upon the tiny National School.

In attempting to do this the Anglicans were hampered by a lack of money from local sources to match central grants. The non-conformists had thwarted attempts by the Church to levy a Church Rate for school building in 1835 and so this option was no longer open. The departure of the Marguess of Bute deprived them of a valuable source of support which J. S. Leigh did not show any inclination to replace. The Crawley's were notable omissions from the list of subscribers toward the first National School and remained that way, although they did give generous support to the building of schools on their estates in Stopsley and probably Biscot. Powerful Anglican families diminished as farmers such as Clarke or Kidman left central Luton, and other supporters such as the Burrs and Chases departed. The manners of James O'Neill could not have helped. Church Street, therefore, was sold (becoming in time the Friends Adult School) in order to build a new one in Queen's Square. This was still too small to meet the need.

By 1870 the picture in Luton was of a disorganised assortment of educational facilities - sectarian, voluntary, charitable and private. Most were woefully inadequate for the pupils who attended and the majority of children remained untouched by them. The position was bad enough for boys but worse for girls - "It is notorious how badly the female children of Luton have been educated in the past" complained the Luton Times. A pedigree of foiled educational ventures and an inadequate British and National School system had left in Henry Blundell's estimate around 1200 children receiving no education at all.

As Stephens correctly observed it was national legislation, namely Forster's Education Act of 1870 which provided the opportunity for real improvement. Within the small bourgeoisie there were a majority in favour of the establishment of a Luton School Board to replace the voluntary system. These supporters included the usual phalanx of non-conformists plus the Liberal Vicar of Biscot, Rev. E. R. Adams, and also J. S. Crawley. Opposed to this were naturally the other Anglican ministers and some of the Wesleyans such as Charles Mees, Gustavus Jordon and Rev. P. Budd who remained committed to the separate Wesleyan system. Amongst the ratepaying middle-class in general, however, there was never any doubt that the School Board supporters were in a minority.

As J. G. Dony has shown, the school building programme subsequently undertaken by the established church was little more than a cynical attempt to negate the need for a School Board to which it would have to surrender all its powers. Here at least we see an example of a desire to exert a form of social control through education: Rev. O'Neill clearly wished to have the
dominant say in what went into the minds of Luton children, although the established Church's lacklustre record to date gives scant indication that it rated education's varied benefits very highly.

Echoes of the fight for a Board of Health thirty years before were heard again, a fight which was held within the middle-class male population. A meeting billed in February 1871 as a Working Men's Meeting against the proposed School Board attracted well-known labourers and mechanics such as Thomas Sworder, Frederick Davis and T. C. Johnson on to the platform. Frederick Brown was also present to deny rumours that his firm would dismiss any worker who opposed the idea of a School Board. All speakers, for and against, were from the middle-classes. A second working class meeting a week later at the National School in Queen Square attracted between three and four hundred men, women and children. The instigation for this came from Rev. J. J. Lee and William Cammell, the owner of a small engineering factory in York Street. Mass Vestry meetings, with up to 3,000 people, settled nothing, the second gathering generating into "the most disgraceful meeting ever held in the town". Hecklers kept up a constant barrage against supporters of the School Board, unrestrained by O'Neill. Following the meeting Dr. Woakes demanded a poll of the parish. The colours of yellow (pro-Board) and blue (anti-Board) were dusted off for a poll which had to be organised by the Department of Education. On 7th February 1871, Luton's male ratepayers voted not to pay more rates by an overwhelming majority (1796 against a school Board, 493 for). Apparently 500 of those endorsing the status quo were unable to sign their own names at the poll. On the day numbers of "rough lads" lolled around in George Street intimidating "blue" voters.

All of this, whilst increasing personal animosities, was irrelevant to the forces now at work. The School Board issue was to make it apparent to many that Luton was not a town with any control over its own destiny. In the eyes of central authority school provision in Luton was inadequate. Successive memorandums, rowdy meetings, protests and frantic attempts at school building by the Church, made no difference to the outcome. Inspectors from the Education Department, had made the visits and recommendations and as J. G. Dony records, the order for the formation of a School Board was finalized by the Department with crushing simplicity - "Done 27/1/74".

As in 1850, those who opposed the formation of a local authority under compulsion from central government, then sought to subvert its aims when faced with its inevitability. There, the parallels end. O'Neill, the leader of the anti-Board faction (to be known as the Prayer Book Five) was not a Brickwood or a Chase. He wasted time and resources in trying to prevent the inevitable election from taking place whilst the pro-Board faction, known as the Bible Five, prepared the ground. There were nine places on the Board and so whichever side could get five members on would gain control. The Bible Five, demonstrating political shrewdness, chose their candidates with deliberate care, presenting a broad coalition in order to maximise their appeal: a Quaker bank manager (William Bigg), an Anglican vicar (E. R. Adams), a Baptist shopkeeper (Peter Wootton), a Congregationalist straw hat manufacturer (Charles Robinson) and a Wesleyan shopkeeper. This was Henry Blundell who owned Luton's leading store. Supporters of the
Wesleyan Schools were fielding two candidates and, therefore, Blundell’s candidature served also to attract some votes away from them. The remaining votes for the Wesleyan Schools were sure to split the anti School Board vote.

The election was the first to be held under the secret ballot, voting taking place on 17th February 1874. There were many procedural difficulties. Only half who were entitled to vote did so and there were complaints by some that they were not allowed to vote due to lack of time. It was no surprise to see O’Neill at the top of the Poll, nor to see the Prayer Book Five secure more votes (but not many more) than the Bible Five. The result, however, came as a shock:-

ELECTED
James O’Neill, Prayer Book Five 2,485
William Bigg, Bible Five 2,073
Henry Blundell, Bible Five 1,848
A. P. Welch, Prayer Book Five 1,682
John Higgins, Prayer Book Five 1,678
E. H. Adams, Bible Five 1,601
Thomas Sworder, Prayer Book Five 1,522
Peter Wootton, Bible Five 1,443
Charles Robinson, Bible Five 1,425

NOT ELECTED
John F. Kershaw, Prayer Book Five 1,325
Charles Mees, Wesleyan Voluntary Schools 1,322
C.C.G. Lockhart, Independent 467
John Webdale, Independent 341
William Shepheard, Independent 196
Gustavus Jordon, Wesleyan Voluntary Schools 192

Total Bible Five votes 8,390

Total Prayer Book Five votes 8,792

What would have happened if Mees in particular had withdrawn his candidature can only be speculation. The Bible Five had gone about the campaign with a sense of evangelistic zeal, carrying memories of past 'clean' party battles with them. Anticipating the bad weather which came they gave thought to the logistics of election day, taking the electors from Leagrave to the polls in a wagon yielded 105 votes throughout the day. At a celebratory victory meeting at the Town Hall an exultant Adams, who had faced most personal criticism, declared "We have won it, gentlemen, in the face of ignorance; we have won it in the face of prejudice . . .". There was also a
measure of surprise, Henry Blundell confessing "I little thought when I started from home, sir, this morning to see the ballot boxes opened and the papers the papers counted, that I should have tonight the honour of standing next to my esteemed friend, Mr. William Bigg".159

After failing to get the election declared null and void, O'Neill and the other elected Prayer Book Five members attended the first meeting of the Board only to vote against Bigg and Robinson as Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively, to hand in protests at the conduct of the election and thereupon to quit. Thomas Sworder was subsequently to play a more active part than his erstwhile allies, attending meetings more frequently. Of the others O'Neill attended rarely, concentrating his efforts upon different tactics. The School Board itself made an active start with Adams naturally spearheading the development of schools in the hamlets. Of greater significance was the decision to pass a bye-law making school attendance compulsory up to the age of thirteen. This delivered a blow to the continuation of child labour, which, although straw plaiting itself was in terminal decline, still continued throughout Luton in numerous workshops and domestic premises.160 A full-time visiting officer was appointed in June 1874 and parents who persistently refused to comply with the bye-law were brought before the local Magistrates, the first case occurring in June 1875 and a second later in that year. Concern was expressed that the Magistrates were less than supportive in assisting the School Board clampdown. Featuring amongst the conservative Magistrates were Col. Ames, who had opposed the School Board and Prayer Book Five member A. P. Welch.

O'Neill meanwhile was busy raising a petition against the School Board plans for a much needed programme of school building in the town. He was successful in raising one of 2,040 names, the validity of which is open to question, and the proportion of those who were actually ratepayers is unknown.161 In the face of this the Luton School Board turned to the Education Department for advice who, rather weakly suggested a "conference" between the Board and the petitioners. Uncertain as to their popular support within the town the Board agreed at first to go along with what they should have known would be a pointless charade. Perhaps it was fortunate for the Board that they could not even agree with O'Neill upon how the meeting should be conducted. The vicar attempted to constitute a majority of petitioners over Board members at the Conference and, therefore, give himself the Chairmanship. Bigg, who rightly had no faith whatsoever in O'Neill's impartiality and integrity, refused.162 The meeting did not take place, the school building programme continued and the Bible Five retained control at the 1877 elections. "When the history of the first School Board for Luton shall be written, we fear there will be some passages which the faithful chronicler will have to record that will not shed much lustre upon certain members constituting the minority of the Board" concluded the Luton Times.163

A young man in his twenties, who migrated to Luton in, say 1842, could have established himself in a shop and perhaps bought a couple of cottages. He could marry, have children, and be a member of a local chapel. He would feel a bond of affinity with his fellow worshippers, his fellow shopkeepers in the same line of business, his local public house if he was a drinking man, and, of course, his family and home. There does, however, seem to be a marked lack of collective
spirit within the town as a whole: people came to Luton for the opportunities which it provided through work and although local society evolved and matured it retained a powerful sense of individualism. Improvements to the town, the hallmarks of a civilisation were brought about by a small minority riding upon the backs of central legislation. Schools, public health, cemeteries - all came this way whilst most Lutonians remained either intransigent or indifferent. It was this same minority which were to decide upon the capping of these achievements through the acquisition of greater self-control and the symbols of self-government, whilst their fellow citizens, those who had really stamped the distinctive feature of the town, stood by and watched.
NOTES

(1) Letter under the heading 'Luton - Its Polemics' Beds Times 19.1.1850


(4) P.R.O. Kew, HO 129 184. There does not appear to have been great opposition to this census in Luton, or comment about it.

St. Mary's

The return made by Rev. T. Sikes noted that the evening service was a recent innovation. He stressed that recent average attendances were between 1300 and 1400 and that no attempt had been made to boost the figures for the purpose of the census.

Old Wesleyan, Church Street

The returns were supplied by John Waller.

Primitive Methodist Church, High Town

The average congregation was a little less than half the general congregation. Return by Henry Pope, Minister.

Society of Friends

The returns were made by Henry Brown, junior.

Old Meeting, Park Street

The returns were supplied by Robert How, Deacon. He remarked that the absence of an afternoon service and the lower than average overall figure was due to the anniversary service at Union Chapel.
Union Baptist Church

"Large numbers connected with the Sabbath schools are adults who after teaching are mixed
with the general congregation".

Ebenezer Baptist Church

This church contrived to make two, contradictory returns - one each from deacons James Morris
and Joseph Booth. The discrepancy between the two providing the clearest example of how often
the returns were an approximation. The Ebenezer figures were really an average for the year. A
remark was made concerning the low turnout in the evening - "The Minister resides at a distance.
.. Not any preaching in the evening consequently the attendance is less than other parts of the
day".

An overall account of the religious census can be found in Ambler, R. W. The 1851 census of
Religious Worship. The Local Historian Vol II, No. 7, 1975 pp 375 = 381 and also in a chapter by
Drake M. The Census 1801 = 1891 in Wigley E.A. Nineteenth Century Society. Essays in the
use of Quantitive Methods for the Study of Social Data.

(5) Cobbe, Henry. Luton Church. Historical and Descriptive. (George Bell and Sons 1899)

(6) Ibid p 245

(7) Bedford Times July 1849

(8) O'Neill was in trouble soon after commencing his duties. In July 1863 he appeared
before The Arches Court to answer allegations of indecent assault upon a sixteen year old female
pupil teacher whilst a curate at Blandford. Although the case was dismissed there was a strong
hint of an improper relationship between the two which O'Neill tried to hush up.

(9) Luton Times 1.6 1867 and 23.11 1867.

(10) Ibid 8.6.1867

(11) Beds Times 28.7.1867 and 27.4.1867.


(18) *Luton Times* 1.4.1876.

(19) Ibid 10.4.1875.

(20) *Luton's First Circuit.* *The Christian Messenger,* no. 400, April 1899. Extract in LM.

(21) *Beds Times* 1.5.1847.


(23) Longhurst, Liz op cit. Godber, Joyce. *Friends in Bedfordshire and West Hertfordshire.* (Published by the author, 1875).


(27) *Luton Times* 17.11.1855.

(28) Following a lecture by Henry Vincent on 'Civil and Religious Liberty' James Waller called for the formation of an Anti-State Church Association by local dissenters. This idea never gained support. *Beds Times.* 16.5.1846. In 1869 a Luton Protestant Association commenced meeting (Photographer Samuel Debenham was Secretary) but this too gained little ground. *Luton Times* 11.9.1869.

(30) **Beds Times** 23.9.1854. See also 11.2.1854; 29.7.1854.

(31) **Luton Times** 3.9.1859

(32) For an account of the timeless nature of these fears see Pearson, G. *Hooligan. A History of Respectable Fears*. (Macmillan 1983).

(33) 'A Journal of Home Mission Work in connection with the Congregational Church, Luton'. **LM M820.** This Journal commences on 4th April 1872 and ends abruptly in January 1874.

(34) **Luton Times** 17.7.1875.


(38) **Luton’s First Circuit** op cit. Spedding, Robert: "The Hill of the Lord..." **High Town Primitive Methodist Church 1838-1932.** (1932).


(41) **Beds Times** 10.9.1853; **Luton Times** 16.7.1859.

(42) **Luton Times** 20.4.1861.

(43) Ibid 7.7.1860, 18.8.1860, **Luton News** 8.2.1862.

(44) **Luton Times** 24.12.1859, 19.12.1859,
(45) Allegation in letter to Luton News 17.8.1861.

(46) Beds Times 23.9.1854, 15.2.1851. The Soaksters Club met weekly at The Dog Public house having apparently been formed in the early 19th Century.

(47) Beds Times 20.5.1848, 21.6.1851, 6.11.1852; Luton Times 3.11.1855, 29.11.1856.


(49) Beds Times 12.7.1851. The attractively dressed Luton girls apparently turned a number of heads.

(50) Allen, M.D. 'World's End . . . The Story of Chase Street.' Unpublished typescript.

(52) Beds Times 27.6.1846. Luton News 20.7.1862. Luton Times 24.4.1869, Beds Times 14.6.1873, Luton Times 25.7.1874. See also Board of Health chapter.

(53) Luton Times 6.11.1875.

(54) Beds Times 29.8.1846.

(55) Ibid 16.2.1850.


(58) 'Sewing and Sowing' was a popular lantern slide show written and presented by T. G. Hobbs in the 1890s. It illustrated the downfall (and eventual death), through drink, of 'Smyth' a relatively well-off straw hat manufacturer. It was set in the town of 'Strawopolis'.


(60) Luton Times editorial. 3.9.1859.
(61) **Beds Times** 25.11.1854, 2.12.1854, 9.12.1854.

(62) **Luton Times** 2.10.1858.

(63) **Beds Times** 23.9.1850.

(64) Darby, Aubrey op cit pp 27-30.

(65) Storch, Robert D. 'Please to Remember the Fifth of November; Conflict, Stability, Solidarity and Public Order in Southern England 1815-1900' in Storch, Robert D. (ed.) op cit.

(66) **Beds Times** 11.11.1862.

(67) **Luton Times** 13.11.1858.

(68) **Beds Times** 15.9.1868.


(71) **Beds Times**. 28.6.1851. Solomon King's portrait graces the frontispiece to Brian Harrison's *Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*. (Faber and Faber, 1971)

(72) Jones, David op cit.

(73) **Luton Times** 27.7.1867.

(74) Bedfordshire Quarter Sessions 1840-1866. Beds. C.R.O., Q.S.M 33-66. These figures are drawn from the list of indictments (one individual equals one indictment for which origin of prisoner can be made. Convictions filed, those referred to Assize and private cases (mostly poaching but including some assault, damage and drunkenness) are not included as they do not give the address of the defendant. From the late 1850s few locations are given, and from the mid 1860s so few are given as to make the data unreliable.

(75) **Beds Times** 28.3.1846.
Ibid 25.3.1848.

Luton Times 24.4.1869


Beds Times 13.1.1855, Luton Times 15.8.1860

Luton Times 31.3.1860, Beds Times 7.1865, Luton Times 2.9.1871, 17.2.1872.

Luton Times 30.4.1870.

Petty Sessions reports in Luton Times 8.1859.

Luton Times 29.11.1856. William Drewett believed he knew the culprit claiming that he acted out of malice after being refused employment. He declined to prosecute. See Longhurst, Liz op cit.

Beds Times 26.5.1855, Luton Times 18.2.1871.

Luton Petty Sessions reports, 23.3.1875, 17.11.1862. As ever there were complaints about the behaviour of young people and the crazes with which they were temporarily infatuated. Letters appeared in the Luton Times from those with nothing better to do complaining about slingstones and "hoop-trundlers" (i.e. 14.12.1858). In April 1861 there came a warning from the Magistrates Bench concerning the dangers of catapults.

Luton Times 28.7.1855, Beds Times 4.5.1867; Luton Times 1.11.1856.

There was one case of assault brought against P.C. Taylor in 1870 but the case was dismissed.


The crime returns are a compilation of offences brought before Luton's Court of Petty Session (whether found guilty or not) in certain specified categories which remain fairly consistent throughout the year and the decades. Consequently, the result of periodic police
clampdowns - deficient weights and measures, stray dogs, rate defaulters, poor control over horse
drawn carts etc. are not included. The sources for these statistics are the Court of Petty Sessions
Minutes at Bedfordshire County Record Office and the Luton newspapers.

The specified categories (in no particular order) are as follows:

(a) **Murder/Manslaughter**

(b) **Assault.** This broad category covers stabbing, wounding, shooting, some sexual
offences (sometimes categorised under aggravated assault) as well as what today
would be defined as mugging.

(c) **Threatening behaviour**

(d) **Rape/Sexual Offence.** Some within this category would have been counted
under assault. This will also include homosexual offences.

(e) **Vagrancy.** This covers a multitude of sins ranging from sleeping in
unauthorised places to prostitution.

(f) **Theft.** Includes attempted robbery and burglary, pickpocketing, petty theft
(turnip tops etc)

(g) **Criminal damage.** Vandalism, graffiti.

(h) **Bastardy**

(i) **Drunk/disorderly.** Includes fighting (frequently alcohol induced), breach of
peace, and from 1871, actions against those who refused to quit public houses.

(j) **Embezzlement.** Fraud, counterfeiting

(k) **Poaching.** This will include trespass as there is a problem with differentiation
here; in endeavouring to convict poachers the police would often use the more
easily proved offence.

(l) **Licensing offence.** (Including disorderly house, opening beyond statutory hours,
using a public house for unlawful purposes.)
A large number of offences are therefore not included in the crime returns including riot, misbehaving servant, unlicensed theatre/show, arson, highway offence, receiving (very difficult to prove), bye-law offences, loitering with intent to commit a crime, attempted suicide, neglecting/deserting family, failure to comply with certain legislation i.e. Factory Act, Vaccination Act, Education Act.


(91) Beds. Times 4.11.1862.

(92) Beds Times 30.9.1848. Burgess pleaded with the Bench that refusal to renew his Licence would drive him and his family into the workhouse. There was a new landlord by 1850.

(93) Luton Petty Session report 13.10.1856

(94) Ibid September 1857, 2.11.1857, April-May 1858, 10.1858, (Robin Hood suspension), 8.1863.

(95) For example see ibid 5.9.1859, 12.12.1859, Luton Times 17.3.1860.

(96) Beds Times 2.5.1846 and 16.11.1850.

(97) Fisher, J. op cit p.60.

(98) Beds Times 6.8.1853.


(100) Harrison, Brian op cit. This working class support was a crucial component of the temperance movement according to Harrison. Harrison, Brian and Trinder, Barrie Drink and Sobriety in an Early Victorian Town: Banbury 1830-1860. The English Historical Review, Supplement 4 (1969).

(101) Luton Times 9.5.1857


(103) Ibid 7.1.1860.

(105) Luton Times 10.9.1859.


(107) Luton Times 25.9.1869, 2.10.1869

(108) Luton Times 20.11.1869


(111) Ibid 5.11.1870.

(112) Beds C.R.O. PSL S/1. Register of Alehouse Licences.

(113) See Tobias, J. J. op cit.


(117) Luton News 10.7.1930. Beds Times 19.6.1847. In the same year a rumour spread through "certain classes" that the Queen had ordered all children under the age of five to be put to death "if the scarcity of provisions continued . . ." A bemused Beds Times correspondent noted " . . . the march of intellect has left millions behind in its career".

(118) Beds Times 16.10.1847 and 1.4.1847.

(119) Minute Book of the Luton Literary Institution L. M. 295/32.

(120) Luton Times 5.3.1859.


(123) Luton Times 7.7.1858, 27.12.1856, Beds Times 17.1.1846.

(124) Beds Times 21.3.1846. 18.7.1846, 30.1.1847, 16.11.1847, 14.10.1848.


(126) Beds Times 21.2.1846.

(127) Ibid 18.4.1846, 25.4.1846, 9.5.1846.

(128) Ibid 23.1.1847. The library contained 500 volumes and the Institute had organised nineteen lectures in the previous year.

(129) Ibid 12.11.1853, 21.4.1853.

(130) Luton Times 23.2.1856, 15.11.1856, 17.1.1857. The printing press was presumably lent by Wiseman.

(131) Ibid 21.2.1857, 6.2.1858.

(132) Ibid 30.5.1857, 20.11.1858, 25.6.1859, 11.2.1860. An excursion to Woburn was also organised in 1859.

(133) Luton News 17.8.1861, 13.9.1862.

(134) Luton Times 27.2.1875, 8.5.1875, 12.6.1875, 16.10.1875, 30.10.1875, 18.4.1876. The headquarters was 20 Park Street, Luton.

(135) Beds Times 13.2.1847.

(136) Mechanics Institute soiree at the Plait Hall, Luton Times 8.5.1875.

(137) Hawkes, Joseph. The Rise and Progress of Luton's Wesleyan Sunday Schools. (1885).

(138) Collings, H. op cit.
Bunker, Stephen. North Chiltem Camera 1863-1954. The Thurston Collection in Luton Museum. (The Book Castle, Dunstable). Luton Times 2.11.1872. It is not known under whose auspices the 'Arts and Sciences' classes were run. They seem to have been fairly short lived.


Luton Times 7.3.1857, 20.2.1858. The Secretary's name was Wardill, the local directories listing just one such surname, William Wardill a plumber, painter and decorator from Market Hill.

Luton News 17.8.1861.


Luton Times 30.1.1869, 11.9.1869. The advertised aim of the Luton Mutual Improvement Society was "...to provide the people, especially the young men and women of this town, with pleasant and harmless recreation, combined with instruction, and at such a price that all classes may be able to avail themselves of it". The Society met on Tuesday evening with subscriptions at 1s per quarter. The secretary in 1869 was W. T. Coates, a Park Street draper.


Beds Times 13.1.1866, 3.2.1866.


Luton Times 4.2.1871.

Ibid 28.1.1871.


The exact location of the Ragged School as well as its operation are not known. It had not been long established when the *Beds Times* carried a report of it on 30.11.1850.


Ibid 4.2.1871, 11.2.1871.

*Beds Times* 31.1.1871.


*Luton Times* 7.2.1874. At the selection meeting only two men supported Rev. Tuckwell's and Rev. Genders' opposition to Adams' candidature. Tuckwell wanted Henry Brown junior instead but the latter emphatically refused, supporting Adams. Frank C. Scargill said the forthcoming election was a battle between modernity and old style conservatism.

*Luton Times* 21.2.1874.

Minute Book of the School Board of the United School District of Luton. LM. M.216.

*Luton Times* 6.11.1875.

Ibid a. a. 1876. Bigg had experience of O'Neill's protection as Chairman of a meeting. During the debates on whether Luton should adopt a School Board in February 1874 a public meeting degenerated into what the *Luton Times* described as "rampant rowdyism", with Bigg, Blundell and Rev. Adams all shouted down by hecklers from the anti-Board majority. O'Neill made no attempt to intervene.

Ibid 19.2.1876.
PART 4. POLITICS, POWER and SELF-DETERMINATION

...I believe the heterogenous character of the new streets of Luton, arose out of a dogged, pugnacious spirit of independence. The fact is, Luton is a complete nest of freeholders, as canvassing candidates find to their cost before an election.¹

Summarising the influence of various controllers of estates in England and Wales, David Cannadine wrote that "...generalizing about Victorian landowners is almost as hazardous as generalizing about Victorian cities: there is a constant need to do full justice to the local, the particular, the individual and the idiosyncratic".² In Luton, a town shorn of the influence of concentrated estate and economic interests, the significance of the individual, even the idiosyncratic, was given sharper focus. No group, or class controlled the town and consideration of the various factors which influenced Luton's internal politics must always be aware of the absence of a manifested awareness of collective identity. Only in relations with the county of Bedfordshire, as represented by the Russells, and the influence of the county through the magistracy, was there any sign of a desire to assert a collective, specifically Lutonian will, and even here there is doubt as to how far beyond the confines of the upper middle class this motivation really went. The primary influence over the successive drives for borough status appears not to be a desire for Luton to assert itself positively as a distinctive entity, nor even a desire on the part of its bourgeoisie to assume control over the town, but instead negative feelings - dissatisfaction with the grip which Bedfordshire still held onto a town with which it increasingly had little in common, and displeasure at the performance of the assortment of local Boards which administered some aspects of Luton's affairs.
Chapter 1. Internal Relations

The failure of institutions

The character, economy and social composition of the early market town had been obliterated by a phenomenal transformation yet, by the mid 1870s, many of the excesses of that period - unregulated property development, insanitary living conditions, crime ridden beershops, child labour, unco-ordinated and poor provision of education - had been curbed to varying degrees. Still however, Luton remained in many respects an immature society, one which had passed the pangs of adolescence but had not yet come of age: recreational facilities were few, independent societies for personal development and social intercourse puny and short lived, and the town in general betrayed few signs of a developed sense of self-awareness or community. An ordinary market town until the urban explosion, few of the new Lutonians had any feeling for the town's heritage, such as it was. There was little to bind Lutonians together, and their lives were governed by a mixture of public utility companies un-elected Magistrates and local Boards.

This latter group, the nearest which Luton possessed to self government, did not command deep respect and the School Board apart, had ceased to be an attractive forum for public service for the town's social and economic elite. "The Poor Law is little else than a mockery in Luton" dismissed the Luton Times in 1867: independent relief funds were capable of alleviating suffering more effectively and swiftly, a reflection on the lack of confidence in the Guardians ability. Charles Maffey, the Relieving Officer, faced successive votes of censure for what the Secretary of the Board described as his "harsh and oppresive treatment of the poor". He finally resigned in 1870 but the disdainful manner in which he held out against his employers further damaged their credibility. The Board of Guardians did not possess men with the necessary calibre to conduct its affairs properly. In the absence of anyone else the seventy-two year old Henry Brown remained on in 1869, although he had ceased to be an active member, and there were additional complaints about the inadequacy of Luton's representation (seven out of twenty) even though the town contributed half the expenditure. There were no cases of hotly contested elections, nor of alleged ballot rigging - no-one appeared to greatly care. The relative lack of importance which the Board of Guardians had in Luton's political life was also due to the unwieldy nature of the Luton Union: the Poor Law Amendment Act had created this out of no less than fifteen parishes, including Dunstable. The Luton component was thus diluted and the Guardians never became a focal point for parochial political machinations.

The Board of Health had similarly been abandoned, by 1876 its business degenerating into petty personal squabbles between individual members and the clerk, George Bailey, with one complaining to him "This Board has been overridden by you for too long". It is hard to imagine Bigg, Scargill or Sworder ever finding themselves in a position to make this complaint. The Board was held in particularly low esteem by the local press which expressed a degree of disillusionment which may have been commonly shared when in 1875 it wrote:
It appears to be the fate of all public bodies to be afflicted with bores... Luton glories in rather more of them than most towns. Or the School Board, when Mr. Adams is not present, she can fall back on half-a-dozen others who will calmly prose over a box of slate pencils for half-an-hour and then adjourn it to the next meeting. But on the Board of Health the public bore rises to a pitch of absolute perfection....

A suitable venue for the Board's meetings concluded the Luton Times, was "The Mansion at Arlesey" (The Three Counties Asylum).^7

The Vestry continued to operate, still the forum for public debate and as such a nominal decision making body, but it had inevitably declined from a position in the mid 1840s when most of the leading citizens of the town regarded it as necessary to attend its business. The deliberations of the Board of Health detracted much of its secular concerns so that by the 1870s its meetings were limited to little other than ecclesiastical affairs such as the appointment of church wardens and overseers. O'Neill rarely attended its infrequent meetings (there were, for example, none held between April 1876 and March 1877) leaving the chair to be often taken by men such as Peter Wootton and Frederick Davis, neither of whom were Anglicans.° Vestry decisions could still be overturned by the Justices of the Peace at Quarter Sessions and although in 1845 it had adopted the Lighting and Watching Act, appointing a Board of Inspectors which in turn appointed a police superintendent plus a number of paid constables formal appointment still had to be made by the Justices. Since the Vestry still controlled aspects of the work of the Guardians it was therefore vulnerable to raids by vested interests. In 1845 Edwin Brickwood opposed the appointment of an assistant overseer and, although he lost the vote at the meeting was able to demand a poll of the parish. The fact that he lost this also (496 votes to thirty nine) did not detract from the Vestry's unsuitability as an administrative body, a fact highlighted by Luton's growing sanitary problems.^

The office of Churchwarden was still coveted despite O'Neill's temporary devaluation of it in 1867 with the replacement of Samuel Oliver by Thomas Dunne. John Cumberland, George Bailey, Hugh Gunn and H. O. Williams were amongst later holders of this office. At no time during the nineteenth century was the office of church warden the subject of political in-fighting, nor indeed of personal rivalry. This was partly because the Church Rate, the main responsibility of the post holder, had been the ground upon which the political struggle had been resolved. According to Austin, an attempt to build the National School by levying a Church Rate was thwarted by the nonconformists who organised a "public demonstration" and who presumably refused to pay. Although no details are known this was successful to the degree that the Anglicans were unable to levy this rate, and made no attempt to levy any other.° Thus, at this early stage was Luton's nonconformist business elite able to successfully flex its political muscle, forcing the Anglican and market town hierarchy into a retreat which financially, they were not well placed to afford. The cemetery dispute of the 1850s (see Part Two) was another example of the stand off between the two sides but O'Neill wasted few opportunities, great and small to try to assert Church of England control and marginalise all other elements. The School Board battle was the most vivid example of this but there were others: in April 1864 a vote of censure was passed against J. G. Shepherd, O'Neill's malleable Churchwarden, for selling a set of standard
weights presented by the Marquess of Bute to the vicar and churchwardens. Although technically allowed to do so, the meeting was crowded with dissenters objecting to the use of the money - restoration of the fabric of St. Mary's. Many of the nonconformists present, in particular Rev. Thomas Hands, wished to know why the distribution of coal tickets for the poor had been kept exclusively in the hands of Anglican ministers, breaking the traditional trans-denominational issue, and why dissenting ladies (including Mrs Hands) had been removed from the District Visiting Society without even notification. The School Board aside, most clashes were minor spats which merely served to highlight the limitations of Church power, despite its aggressive Vicar. There were undoubtably those in the town however, who were not happy with the levers of power being pulled by those appointed to represent the "parish".

A middle class town

"Historians of the middle class lack the guidance and assurance which the labourist tradition has supplied to historians of the working class...Its historians have neither the excitement, guidance or distortions of any sense of historical mission". It is with R. J. Morris' rather depressing warning that we come to look at the role of the various classes of society within Luton's politics. The town, by the middle of the 1870s was in a curious position with a plethora of authoritative bodies amounting to, with the exception of the School Board, a vaccuum of concentrated power. From its overall economic buoyancy there derived a curious class structure, distinctively a town of the petty bourgeoisie, wrapped around an unskilled labouring core and coated with a thin layer of professionals and large manufacturers. Just as the town's social functions and ethics reflected its economic base so too did its politics. The fact that Luton grew as a decisively Liberal and nonconformist stronghold can obscure the very real divisions between the middle-classes. Fraser wrote that the "predominant endemic political rivalry in early Victorian cities was not the potentially explosive conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat but a struggle for supremacy within the middle-class itself". This, however, tells only part of the story in Luton. It was true that the fight to wield effective power was held within the middle class, with the arisocracy absent and working class interest, precluded from organisation by the small workshop, building site world of casual employment, unable to make any impact and as has been seen in Part Three, organisations such as the Mechanics Institute and various lodges had distinctly middle-class overtones in the leadership at least (although one must be aware that middle class individuals are more readily identifiable to a historian with limited sources). There is no example of working class political organisation in this period.

The middle-class hegemony, overtly Liberal and nonconformist though it may have been, carried fluid divisions not only between bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, but also within their respective ranks. These divisions were revealed most clearly in the fights for control of the Board of Health and the School Board. In the former case Luton underwent in general terms what Hennock identified as the all too common experience for many towns. Essentially a high spending, "improving" interest, probably dominated by a professional and business elite, would be confronted by a ratepaying "protection" interest, drawn predominantly from the petty
bourgeoisie, the latter group would often gain control at local elections with a consequent decrease in both expenditure and quality of performance. Luton's experience as with Birmingham Corporation, was that this was a cyclical movement in which years of poor financial management on the part of those who advocated financial stringency would give way to a return of businessmen and professionals. The reason for this was always due not merely to a pro-improving surge amongst the electorale but also to other factors inherent within the lower middle classes which will be considered below.14

Even this view however is simplifying matters. The upper levels of the middle class were not a homogenous unit, dividing amongst themselves on each issue. United more or less on concerns such as the necessity of a Board of Health (although solicitors Chase and Brickwood led the opposition) they demonstrated a marked lack of cohesion during 1840s and 1850s over the considerations of a railway for Luton, divided slightly on the issue of swimming baths in the early 1870s and divided to a great extent over the School Board question, denominational allegiance splitting former 'clean' party colleagues Sworder and Bigg, and over Incorporation, with Scargill, Cumberland and Gunn representing hostility, indifference and enthusiasm toward this matter respectively. Even when united the political position of the bourgeoisie was not one of strength: Fraser wrote "the pace and direction of urban government would be determined by local tradition and practise and not by general legislation" with Briggs adding "Many, indeed most, of the necessary improvements in a rapidly changing economy and society were made voluntarily in those times". This needs some qualification. Proponents of improvement invariably did so without a firm popular base and were therefore dependent upon legislation from Westminster to provide the weight required to overcome opposition from a majority of ratepayers. The Board of Health and School Board issues are clear examples of this but so too, in different ways, were the suppression of the "Stattie" and the curtailment of beer houses.15

Middle-class reformers were also weakened by Luton's unincorporated status, being shackled by legislation into a reliance upon rates based upon fixed property as a source of finance for improvement. They were not able to undertake enterprising schemes in order to diversify the revenue base as Birmingham Corporation was able to do by acquiring the local Gas Company. As Fraser pointed out, a "thick skin" was required by those in local office to withstand the slings and arrows which continuously were pelted at them. Many of Luton bourgeoisie were not able to endure this for long. If not quite transient, many in the upper levels of the middle-classes moved away from Luton having made their money there: Vyse, Brickwood, Everitt, Chase and Burr all quit the town before their death, and Scargill was one of those who abandoned public life relatively early, pursuing a social life centred upon his estate at Bramingham Shott. Naturally, nonconformist ministers, especially Methodists regularly move to other pulpits. Luton compares with Portsmouth (although for different reasons) in possessing a middle-class who conspicuously were not able to exert any social control through the market place. Whereas Portsmouth, like Luton, isolated from other principal urban centres, had an economy dictated not by market forces but by central government expenditure, Luton's few large manufacturers found that the structure of the town's staple trade made them as dependent upon the workers as the workers were upon them. The inability of the big factory owners to force their operatives to start work
early was frequently commented upon, being encapsulated in the Children's Employment Commission Report of 1862: "the usual hours in factories, warehouses and sewing rooms are from 8 or 9 in the morning till 9 in the evening, or in the busy three months, till 10. But the workers are paid by the piece, and the demand for labour being great, and wages good, they are said to be very independent, both as to the hour of coming or going to or from work, and the time which they take for meals." William Willis concurred: "From 9 till 9 may be called their day: perhaps half are here by 9.30 a.m. but they do not like coming early in the morning and would prefer coming from 10 till 10: Whilst workers in the small manufacturing units could be kept at it until midnight, those in the larger factories would not normally stay until after 10 p.m. in the busy season, 10.30 at the latest." The owners view was reinforced by Charles Lutes, a blockmaker at Vyse's who had also worked at Gregory and Cubitt's: "The females work by the piece and go to meals as they please . . . If they do not like one place they can easily go to another." As with Portsmouth, the fact that Luton's upper middle-class was small, lacking political or economic dominance and amongst some at least, a lifetime of commitment to the town, reflected itself in a paucity of amenities and a dullness of architecture: a two-storey hat factory was a building of note in Luton.16

The limited power of the bourgeoisie was revealed in another sphere. Because this is largely a study of a society rather than its economy, and because Luton's pre-eminence as the centre of the straw hat trade did not depend upon the early establishment of a railway line, the impact of the railway has been omitted as this would be to wander down paths far removed from this thesis. The reasons for the late arrival of a line for Luton however, was influenced in part by the social, political and economic structure of the town. There had been numerous abortive attempts from the 1840s which were not to see success until 1858 - later than smaller towns such as Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard or Hemel Hempstead. The reasons for failure in each instance were varied - opposition from the second Marquess of Bute to a railway line crossing his estate, failure of Luton and Dunstable businessmen over which town should have the principal station and which town should be the branch in a scheme promoted by Robert Stephenson, inability amongst Luton businessmen to agree upon a suitable site for the station, inability within the town to agree on whether to dissect the Moor with a proposed line.17 Even the scheme which finally proved sucessful, the formation of the Luton, Dunstable and Welwyn Junction Railway Company, was fraught with difficulty: at a shareholders meeting in November 1855 it was reported that 3,500 shares had not been sold and there was insufficient capital to fully carry out the undertaking. Had it not been for the commitment of the local bank branches of which Lucas and Bigg were managers, there is serious doubt as to whether the work would have further progressed. Successive mergers were eventually deemed necessary with the line swiftly being absorbed into the Great Northern.18 All this serves to illustrate that although Luton was built upon an almost obsessive commitment to free enterprise, it is noticable that that the small-scale nature of individual economic activity provided few men within the town with the necessary capital and breadth of vision who were in a position to invest in and promote a railway.
undertaking. The fits and starts by which a railway line was acquired by Luton in many ways fittingly places the power of the bourgeoisie in its proper perspective, illustrating that many of Luton's social and business elite were not much more than big fish in a small pond.

Despite their greater numbers and their economic/property owning position, Luton's petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers, small landlords, small manufacturers and masters were politically no stronger than those immediately above them in the social order. Application of their collective power was used only in a negative manner on occasional issues more vulnerable financially than the bourgeoisie, their attitudes were primarily influenced by short-term monetary considerations. For example, the Small Tenements Act of 1850 which increased both the size of electorate and the political influence of the small property landlord, was prevented from being applied to Luton by precisely this same group of people at a vestry meeting. The grounds were simple enough, to prevent compounding between the overseers and the landlords for the payment of rates instead of the occupier, but essentially they were choosing to sacrifice the potential for collective political power in preference for personal financial protection.19

This event revealed the specific weakness of what Cobden dubbed "the shopocracy". Larger and more diverse than the higher echelons of the middle-classes, the petty bourgeoisie possessed no real sense of self-awareness and, therefore, cohesion. In the words of Crossick it "lacked . . . a vision of its past and an analysis of its future."20 Virtually all of Luton's small businessmen would regard themselves as "self-made men". Collectiveness was, therefore, alien to their experience, and to the very ethos which had made them successful independent commercial operators. Unsuited to the level of decision making required of a senior public figure, the petty bourgeoisie was only "pushed" as Hennock put it, into local politics by reactionary motives born of a fear financial self-preservation. Time and time again this self preservation came back to property, with the Luton Ratepayers Association being the most blatant example. As such there was no positive role for it to play, deriving no long-term benefit. Their greatest success, notably in 1850, was when in coalition with farmers, still powerful within the town (a fact reflected in the disproportionate numbers of Yellow candidates from the farming interest) and led by two articulate and well organised solicitors. On the School Board issue the leading activists on all sides were drawn mainly from large manufacturers, professionals, clergy and the gentry. Left to their own resources to exercise political influence, the efforts of the petty bourgeoisie were negative, disorganised, fractious, occasionally comic and arguably quite damaging. More mundane factors beside general principles of collective awareness inhibited the lower middle classes: two hundred and fifty-two out of the seven hundred and seventy three voting papers (32%) at the annual Board of Health elections in March 1862 were declared invalid because of omitted signature or other basic literacy errors. Illiteracy diminishes both confidence and influence.21

The most telling comment upon the degree of cohesiveness within the petty bourgeoisie is the very fact that professionals and manufacturers with a recognised propensity for expenditure could all succeed at various times in obtaining seats upon Luton's public institutions. The upper middle-class alone could not furnish enough votes to secure them a place. Electoral
support from part of the petty bourgeoisie, as well as an absence of hostility or interest from a
greater part of it, were both significant factors. The degree of support for improvement
programmes from sections of the petty bourgeoisie were evidence of a virtual absence of
sustained class antagonism in Luton. Here, arguably more than any other town, Luton's class
system least resembled a rigid caste, its openness and fluidity defusing potential for class conflict.
There are numerous examples of the degrees of social mobility (both up and down) which were
perfectly possible and the disappearance of the town's old elite dissolved the hurdle of social
advancement. With the hat trade only starting to become mechanised during the 1860s and
1870s Luton's small masters had not yet become squeezed by the fixed capital factory orientated
production that became more of a feature of the industry at the turn of the century. Luton's
class structure contrasts sharply with that of Birmingham in the early nineteenth century where
the small masters were being driven by mechanisation either to copy bourgeois modes of
production and the labour organisation and discipline that went with it, or to remain artisans.
Whilst upward social mobility, according to Behagg, was becoming increasingly difficult in
Birmingham, this was not yet the case in Luton where small workshops and seasonal piecework
continued to dominate the main industry.\footnote{22}

This is not to paint a picture of cosy class harmony: many of those who migrated to Luton
would have experienced the unhappy class relationships of the 1820s and 1830s in the rural areas
especially. These memories and experiences would have been brought with them. Luton was not
a parvenu's paradise as there were few opportunities for the type of fortunes to be made which
allowed for ostentatious displays of wealth, but with luck it was possible for many to achieve
varying degrees of comfortable affluence. Whilst aspirations for advancement could be sustained
there was no incentive for hostility from the petty bourgeoisie which could only serve to harden
barriers between the classes. Lacking control of the property market the bourgeoisie did not
possess the ability, even if it possessed the will, to build social barricades through special
differentiation. The building of villas on land in New Bedford Road is the only clear example of
this occurring in the mid nineteenth century, and the impetus for this came from the Bute estate.
To repeat the observation made in Part One, at this time there remained many, such as Bigg and
Willis, within the higher levels of the middle-classes who were content to live in the heart of town.

Women

The political strength of women within Luton during the mid nineteenth century is,
dissappointingly, the most difficult to quantify. By the time of the first Borough Council elections
in 1876, 650 of the 3960 ratepayers (16.41\%) were women, this group being allowed to articulate
its preference through the ballot box for the first time. This occurrence prompted little comment
in Luton other than "that the female portion of the constituency (the West Ward) polled a very
large proportion of its number, thus disposing of one argument urged against the more extensive
bestowal of women's suffrage, namely that if the extended franchise was given they would not
avail themselves of it."\footnote{23}
Overt campaigning for the enfranchisement of women was politely received. Lectures by Mrs Tracey in November 1851 on what was described as "bloomerism" attracted a good attendance on successive evenings and according to a patronising Bedford Times "afforded much amusement". More to the point was a meeting addressed by Miss Beedy M.A. at the Town Hall twenty-one years later. Chaired by William Bigg it passed a resolution in favour of the enfranchisement of women with Bigg and Miss Beedy supported by (amongst others) Rev. Adams, J. J. Willis, James Drewett, Henry Wright, A. T. Webster and John Cumberland.

There was, however, no sustained organisation which pursued formal political recognition for women, and for all their various roles as independent producers, accumulators and investors of capital, landlords, ratepayers and ultimately voters, women remained beyond the confines of administrative power in Luton. This should come as little surprise if one accepts Patricia Hollis' assertion that early feminism and public life for women originated as being a sphere of service (other than a governess) for "surplus" middle class females. Whilst undoubtably there were local examples of such women, serving on various philanthropic committees and other social organisations, their numbers within a town containing such a social structure as Luton's were bound to be very small, fewer still if one subtracts the wives and daughters of Luton's all too transitory clergymen. Even within the Liberal dissenting churches the role of Deaconess could be a short lived affair (see Part Three). The extent to which bourgeoise women were content to fill this formal void through other spheres of influence within the chapels is extremely difficult to accurately assess given the absence of data. Similarly, it is almost impossible to penetrate the homes and minds of those women who through the economic opportunities afforded by the hat trade were able to obtain a degree of financial independence, even in production units which were nominally controlled by their husbands. To what degree this was regarded as a satisfactory, even superior alternative to a formal political role at a time when there was simply no opportunity is impossible to tell since, sadly, Luton's women were even more prone to anonymity than the men.

Liberalism

Urban Liberalism was the predominant political force in Luton until after the First World War. Rooted in a commitment to free trade, it was therefore most attractive to the vast majority of Luton's tradesmen dependent as they were upon imports (such as drapers, grocers, bakers or millers), and those who depended upon both imports and exports, most notably those involved in the straw hat trade. Engaged in a mutually supportive relationship with the nonconformist churches, the imbalance between it and any other political force, was due not only to the dominance of a middle-class free trade economy. The withdrawal of the landed and farming interest from Luton greatly weakened the power of Tory patronage, and the absence of organised labour not only stunted the development of Socialism, but also held the petty bourgeoisie within the Liberal camp for much longer than elsewhere in Britain where, in the face of organised labour, they began to drift into the waiting embrace of the Conservative Party.
There were a number of distinctive features to Lutonian Liberalism in the mid-nineteenth century. Firstly, the town within which it was predominant was itself politically impotent, a factor which served to blunt the edge of political competitiveness because neither party stood, in any real sense, to "win" Luton. This also served to weaken the commitment to Liberalism as a party political vehicle by bringing other elements into play, chiefly the desire for Luton to assert itself, to be represented at Parliament as a town in its own right, not as a constituent part of a rural county returning two M.P.s. frequently at uncontested elections. The split within the ranks of the middle classes on many issues was given a further dimension by the schism in ideology and temperament between Luton's urban Liberals and the Whigs who dominated the County in the form of the Dukes of Bedford at Woburn. When Cobden referred to the Russells and others as the "plundering aristocracy" there would have been many in Luton who would have nodded in affirmation. As will be seen in chapter two, underlying all this was Luton's dissatisfaction at being under the thumb of County administration and its desire to establish a degree of self-determination.

There was a strong radical seam running through Luton's Liberalism, a letter to the Bedford Times in February 1859 deplored this state of affairs:

Luton is a very peculiar town. It confessedly has no aristocracy, and there are very few persons competent by education to edify their neighbour's by making a speech. It thus happens that only three or four persons volunteer to get on platforms, and they are always there, and always speak in the same strain. To rail against the aristocracy, to belabour a bishop. To exalt Richard Cobden and decry Lord Brougham; to survey Dissent with a telescope for the purpose of getting rid of its angularities and defects, and the Church with a microscope for the purpose of discovering them: these are the stock topics of our public meetings, and these are operating to bring together the lower classes and keep more respectable people away.

The correspondent had known Luton for twenty-five years, an experience which he felt entitled him to refer to himself as an 'Old Lutonian'. It was almost inevitable that one of the "three or four persons' always to be found on Luton's platforms was William Willis, an irrepressible windbag and the most politically active within the town. Others who were frequently alongside Willis were John Everitt, E. C. Williamson and the Browns. Although perceptive in many respects the letter misses one essential point. Luton's most radical and high profile liberals were drawn from its upper middle-class. Perhaps the "lower classes" which the letter alluded to were less interested in the town's affairs. Certainly the petty bourgeoisie were not in the vanguard of local radical Liberalism but whether this was due to personal philosophy or unconfident reticence at public gatherings is not easy to say.

Regrettably, there were no local newspapers to cover the effect that Chartism and the movement which culminated in the repeal of the Corn Laws had upon Luton, or indeed its contribution to it. The "shopocracy", prominent in the national Chartist movement was only beginning to become a significant part of Luton's population at this time. It appears that Chartism had little impact upon a town where the traditional class structure was beginning to disintegrate. Again, without data it is difficult to establish clearly what was the personal
philosophy of a class who as a whole were not distinguished by their literary output. Nonetheless, it is fair to assume that for the bulk of Luton's burgesses political ideology stemmed from personal, or specifically economic experience, essentially a commitment to free trade and a desire for a high degree of individual autonomy: the principles which had brought them to their present situation in life. The aristocracy was an alien entity for most Lutonians and the backbone of urban liberalism, the independent manufacturers and retailers were especially prominent in Luton. It was this group, in particular the manufacturers, who delivered the Liberal votes. The petty bourgeoisie also provided the bulk of the Tory vote, but in much fewer numbers than for the Liberal Party.

Fig. 4.1. 1857 Parliamentary Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Votes</th>
<th>Luton Votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hastings Russell (Whig)</td>
<td>1568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col. R. T. Gilpin (Con)</td>
<td>1379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col. W. B. Higgins (Whig)</td>
<td>1337</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt W. Stuart (Con)</td>
<td>1253</td>
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Fig. 4.2. 1859 Parliamentary election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Votes</th>
<th>Luton Resident Votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Col. R. T. Gilpin (Con)</td>
<td>2027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. C. H. Russell (Whig)</td>
<td>1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col. W. B. Higgins (Whig)</td>
<td>1583</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luton Resident Votes %</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whig</td>
<td>73.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>26.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identifiable Occupational Breakdown Amongst Luton Voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whig</th>
<th>Con</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gentry</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Manufacturers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small/medium manufacturers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Trade</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailers</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicans</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 4.3 1872 Parliamentary Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Vote</th>
<th>Luton Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F. Bassett (Lib)</td>
<td>2450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Stuart (Con)</td>
<td>2250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are a number of points to be made about the voting patterns of various occupational groups in the mid-nineteenth century. Both in 1859 and 1872 the various professionals in the town split with only a slightly greater number supporting the Whigs/Liberals. The surgeons Woakes, Beale and Kit Tomson all voted Tory. Of the other smaller groups the farmers form a diminishing presence within the township itself. Publicans become increasingly associated with the Conservative cause from a fairly even split in the 1850s. This was probably as much a reaction to the temperance cause associated with the nonconformist churches and the Liberal Party as a reflection of their brewers' beliefs. Whilst Thomas Sworder was a lifelong Tory, J. W. Green had not yet completely abandoned his roots and was still voting Liberal in the 1870s.

As is becoming clear with the above examples issues of public improvement and reform in no way was reflected in the Party political divide which had no influence upon these issues. Of the gentry J. S. Crawley, a supporter of the proposals for a School Board was a Tory, whilst Col. Ames, an opponent of it voted Whig in 1857 and 1859. Determined advocates of "economy" such as Frederick Davis, Samuel Toyer and Joseph Bailey could be consistently found upon the Liberal list alongside the consistent advocates of public works such as A. J. Tansley, Peter Wootton and John Everitt. William Phillips always voted Tory as did one of the Quaker Browns, Richard Marks Brown of The Brache, at a time when virtually all his Quaker contemporaries were voting Whig/Liberal. As the pendulum swung nationally between the two main political forces so too were several men prepared to switch allegiance on at least one occasion. These included Samuel Oliver, Henry and Joseph King Blundell and Gustavus Jordan.

The petty bourgeoisie were the decisive difference. In 1841, during the first pangs of Luton's development and in a period of Conservative ascendancy, two Tories were returned unopposed for the county, Viscount Alford and William Astell. With an election anticipated however, the poll book drawn up shows the voting intentions of the electorate. Of those resident in Luton seventy declared support for the Whigs and fifty-four for the Tories. By 1857 the gap between the two stood at three to one in favour of the Liberals and two years later 215 Luton voters declared for the Whig candidates Russell and Higgins with just seventy-nine for the lone
Tory, Col. Gilpin. Like 1841, 1859 marked a high tide of Tory support nationally, as was the case in 1872 when locally other factors came into consideration which further eroded Liberal support, finishing at less than two to one in Luton. These reasons will be examined later in detail.

Overall, however, the Liberal Party enjoyed a political dominance which evolved with the town. The bitter party strife which was fought around control of the Board of Guardians, its appointees and the post of church warden in Leeds and Manchester were not seen in Luton, even before the spiking of the Church Rate in 1835. The old Tory elite physically moved from the town rather than were removed in a political battle. As new political institutions were acquired men who were Liberals immediately assumed a predominant position upon them. Contests were not, however, markedly party political: there was little point in Tories making them so as this would invite certain defeat. Liberal dominance was, therefore, assumed, allowing parochial issues to come to the fore. This also meant a preponderance of middle-class Liberals on public bodies. Many self-styled "working men", even those who today would be regarded as integral parts of the petty bourgeoisie - clerks, small manufacturers, publicans and the "shopocracy" would be excluded from civic duties by the sheer mechanics of its business. The service was unpaid and frequently meetings would be held in the day time or early evening. Many men simply could not afford or spare the time to be away from their work, and it is noticeable that attendance at meetings of the Board of Health was poorest when it possessed a strong petty bourgeoisie element upon it.

Formal party organisation in the town came late in the day, coinciding with the introduction of the secret ballot. Lacking parliamentary status there was little impetus for organisation, the Liberals in particular were uncertain as to their purpose and for all their greater numbers were beaten off the mark by the Conservatives in forming a local Party structure. A Conservative Association meeting was held in November 1874 (at which reporters from the Liberal Luton Times were excluded) a few weeks ahead of the Liberals who formed their Association at a meeting at the Town Hall. An unwieldy executive committee was formed (forty men!) and the next vital step for each Party was to hold a banquet, the Conservatives again organising theirs first. The Liberals were caught between the two issues which had dominated the town's politics for the previous thirty-five years: were they in existence to promote the cause of Liberalism generally (Scargill's view), return Liberal candidates for the County, or promote Luton in particular, preferably through Parliamentary status returning a Luton Liberal? Failing that, getting a Luton Liberal elected at County level was regarded as the next best thing by some (Bigg and Rev. Adams notably). The first quarterly meeting, which was not well attended, failed to resolve this with Scargill sniping at Bigg, with whom he was already divided over the issue of Incorporation. The meeting was adjourned to the following week, when only forty turned up, and still nothing was decided other than resolving to link up with the Bedford Liberal Association. The cynic might be forgiven for believing that this was so that Luton could receive some sense of direction. The problem for the Liberals was caused by the town's lack of political independence which some felt that they, as the dominant party within the town, ought to attempt to address. This was an uncertainty that was not shared by the Conservatives where there was no great desire expressed for Luton to become a separate Parliamentary constituency, being no doubt
aware that were it to be so then they stood to lose every election for the foreseeable future. They would be correct in drawing this conclusion - no Conservative won any Parliamentary election in Luton until 1922.
Chapter 2. External Relations

As referred to already there were deeper currents which ran through Luton's politics. Nineteenth century Liberalism best suited the prevailing spirit which was building Luton, but it was merely one manifestation of that spirit rather than its begetter. Running beneath all of Luton's political activities was a desire, regularly articulated by some, for the town to be able to establish itself as a distinctive entity. This desire was often undefined and when exposed was in many respects the antithesis of the busy spirit of individualism which in turn had beget the belief that authority should be kept to the (cheapest) minimum. Running parallel with this was a deep dissatisfaction with Luton's affairs being controlled to the degree that they were by outsiders from rural, sleepy Bedfordshire. Lurking just beneath the surface these feelings were so strong that, in the early 1870s, they very nearly overturned the Liberal hegemony in the town.

Luton and the County

The issue of self-determination, the all too evidence absence of which led to great frustration in Luton, focused upon the critical relationship with the rural County within which it was growing like a cuckoo in an alien nest, increasingly outweighing its siblings and growing disproportionately to the nest itself. Unlike the cuckoo, however, Luton served notice very early in its development that it also could do without motherly help as well. In 1820 thirty-eight of Luton's leading citizens sent a petition to the Quarter Sessions appealing against the County Rate. Rates were a vexatious issue at any time, but as Joyce Godber correctly surmised this was not merely protest at the level of rates, but rather an early example of muscle flexing on the part of the town. Complaining that they were "excessively aggrieved by the enormous County Rates that have been levied in the last three years" the petitioners specified a "Bridewell" which they asserted had been paid for by the town but "ought to have been defrayed out of County Rates" as well as general complaints about the level of taxation, poor relief and the agricultural depression. Expressing the hope that there would be no "further bother" the petition ended with the hint of a threat that they were "fully convinced that if the present Rates should be continued, we shall in the present exigences of the Times be quite unable to meet them".

Of all the problems which affected Luton's relations with the County, highlighting its subservience in the process, it was the administration of law and order and the dispensation of justice which caused most difficulties. The "Bridewell" referred to in the petition was, in fact, a lock-up in Park Street - "a genuine English cage, so marked with the spirit of liberty that a strong man could easily make his exit...". In a state of perpetual disrepair it was eventually replaced in 1849 by a police station and cottage on the corner of Peel Street and Dunstable Place. Immediately it showed itself to be inadequate:

The Police Station House at Luton is unfit for occupation. The stench from the main sewer, and two privies, (which are both four yards from the house door) is so great as to be injurious to health. The Superintendent's family are now lying ill with fever caused no doubt by the above. The wet penetrates through the walls,
and daylight is visible beneath the window frames of the bedroom. The water from the well is unfit for drinking, caused by the cesspools in the neighbourhood drawing into it.36

Whilst entirely consistent with the prevailing building standards in Luton at the time, another building was necessary. By 1856 Jackson, the County Surveyor was inviting tenders for a new Court House and Station, the latter containing six cells, each with basin and W.C., this to be built on the corner of Dunstable Place and Stuart Street.37 This also proved to have been constructed with inherent problems: there were allegations made of "scamping" directed at the work and undertaken by the contractors chosen by the Surveyor, Freshwater of Bedford, and Haynes of Sandy, the appointment of whom would no doubt have been to the chagrin of Luton builders who did not need outsiders to show them how to throw up a bad building.

Superintendent Pope complained to the Magistrates who ordered E. O. Williams to inspect the station. The dispute was carried to the Autumn Quarter Sessions where allegations of "serious fraud" with the brickwork and cavities "stuffed with rubbish" were made by Jackson who himself was being criticised in Luton for failing to properly monitor the work.38 The new Court House, opened in 1858, proved to be a very uncomfortable sitting for all: by December 1859 rain was getting into every part of the building with not only walls but seats also being saturated.39 The heart of the criticism was not merely that the building was so poor in quality, but rather that the whole manner in which it was constructed served as an analogy for the way that Luton was mis-administered by the County.

The Magistracy itself, responsible for more than dealing with alleged criminals, presented a rancorous problem and one which the Luton Times described as "degrading" for the town. A. P. Welch became the first Magistrate resident within the town - in 1868. His fellow Justices of the Peace (with their dates of qualification) comprised Daniel Goodson Adey of The Cell, Markyate (1830), Rev Miles Bland by then residing at Ramsgate (1839), Col. Lionel Ames of The Hyde (1845), Richard Oakley of Lawrence End (1851), J. S. Crawley of Stockwood (1851), Arthur Macnamara of Caddington (1853), Rev. T. W. Adey, also of Markyate Cell (1851), J. G. Leigh of Luton Hoo (1856), Rev. Hugh Blagg Smyth of Houghton Regis (1858) Gerard Wolf Lydekker of Harpenden Lodge (1859) and Capt. Francis William Sullivan of Kempton Vicarage (1865). Of the above only Ames was a regular attender and he alone seems to have been regarded with any degree of respect within Luton. Most on the Magistrates' list rarely attended, some having duties as Justices of the Peace elsewhere within the area, and at least one (J. G. Leigh) never did. The preponderance of gentry against the absence of Lutonians caused considerable irritation, the inadequacy of the system being thrown into sharper relief when, as regularly occurred, only one Magistrate attended and the sitting had to be suspended. From the late 1850's the Luton Times was suggesting the introduction of a stipend for Magistrates in order to ensure a more professional commitment and to weed out those who were not prepared to fulfil their duties.40 The issue, however, was not really a philosophical one of undemocratic administration, or simply dissatisfaction with irresponsible absenteees in positions of authority - the local Board of Health
regularly had very poor attendances for which it received no censure in editorials of the local Press. Rather, it was that Luton resented being subject to County control, and the failure of the system only served to intensify this resentment.

The reasons for this displeasure with County control lay at a number of levels. Upon one it was simply that a number of Lutonians believed that they possessed sufficient wisdom and ability within the town to be able to assume control of its day to day functions such as basic dispensation of justice, roads, licensing of places of recreation and so on. At another there was a genuine dissatisfaction at the undemocratic nature of County administration as represented by the Magistracy and the Quarter Sessions, as well as the perceived failure of its officers. There was also a frequently articulated dissatisfaction with the feeble institutions which Luton did possess. At a deeper level lay a class antagonism imported from the rural districts by migrants seeking to escape harsh economic circumstances and even political oppression. Having achieved a measure of success in Luton which they could never have hoped to see from whence they came, such people understandably did not relish interference from members of the same class who embodied the very antithesis of all that had helped to make Lutonians what they were - freedom of trade, of opinion, of religion, hard work and adaptability. The feeling of not wholly belonging to the rest of the county was a reciprocal one: during the cholera crisis of November 1853, a Dunstable member on the Board of Guardians registered his objection that his town was obliged to pay for Luton's self-inflicted disease.

Luton and the Russells

Given their massive influence within Bedfordshire, the Russell family, Dukes of Bedford, with their seat at Woburn in the west of the county, remained the dominant force in Bedfordshire politics throughout most of the nineteenth century. Their land holdings and economic influence did not extend into the Luton environs however, and there was decreasing common cause between the Whig landed estate and the Liberal manufacturing centre. Enthusiasm for the Russells had never been great in Luton, Hastings Russell reciprocating by rarely visiting the town, even to canvas votes. In 1859 the second Whig candidate, Higgins, polled just one vote less than Russell at Luton, proportionately his best showing in the whole of the County, when he usually trailed his successful colleague on average by approximately fifty votes.

When Hastings Russell failed to support Luton's attempt to become a Parliamentary Borough under Disraeli's Reform Bill in 1867 it vented its frustration not on any of the vested interests which had scuppered the move on the floor of the House, nor on any of the horsetrading which went on behind the scenes, but on Hastings and the House of Russell to which, however unenthusiastically, Luton had delivered up a sizeable proportion of their total vote. Comparing Hastings unfavourably with Colonel Gilpin, who as a Conservative M.P. had even less common ground with Luton but at least did his duty by his constituency, the Luton Times dismissed him as a "weak kneed Liberal" as the enormity of the gulf between the urban Liberals and rural Whigs became apparent. "For ourselves" snorted the Luton Times, "Liberal though we be, we would infinitely prefer a gentleman of Col. Gilpin's political creed with Col. Gilpin's fidelity and pluck
than a member of the house of Russell who could sit until 4 o'clock in the morning to vote in
favour of the game laws which are a disgrace to the Nation, but could not find it convenient to be
in his place to give his vote when the interests of Luton and Dunstable were under consideration
in connection with the Reform Bill of 1867." The Reform Act added 419 voters to the electoral
list in Luton and there was clearly a desire on the part of the Luton electorate for another Liberal
in addition to, or preferably instead of a Russell. At a public meeting William Willis had to defend
his decision to support Hastings Russell at the 1868 hustings (where there was again an
uncontested election) as the only way to prevent the return of two Conservatives.

Until Luton and district were to receive separate Parliamentary status its Liberal
Association could only play a limited role and until that time it would continue to have a Russell
foisted upon it. When Francis Bassett resigned as M.P. in 1875, the Marquess of Tavistock was
selected to take his place. Although elected unopposed on 28th April there were a number of
Luton Liberals who were not satisfied with him. Of his speech at the selection meeting the Luton
Times wrote "It is absolutely colourless . . . Liberals had a right to expect an honest statement of
intentions instead of the amiable enunciation of a set of trite truisms." This assessment was
supported by a correspondent who was at the meeting and who was similarly sceptical about the
Marquess' abilities and commitment - "he might as well stay at home". The Marquess of
Tavistock paid a visit to Frank Scargill's offices and, in case that he was in any doubt as to what
was expected of him, received a temperance delegation from William Drewett, Rev. Gray (of
Wellington Street Baptist Church), Johnson Willis and Matthew Judge.

Self determination: The Second Reform Act, 1867.

"The town of Luton is something more than a collection of cottages, owned in part by men whose
object in life is to make money" asserted the Luton Times in 1874, specifically referring to the
issue of whether Luton's new swimming baths should be a profit making enterprise (or
abandoned), or whether they should be regarded as an adornment to a mature, orderly town
replete with the facilities needed to enjoy a civilised life. One could also observe that the writer
was acknowledging what Luton in fact was, even if he desired something quite different.

Although there were manifestly varying perceptions and aspirations between Luton and
Bedfordshire, and Luton and the Russells, the very different experiences and outlook within
Luton's middle class meant that only ever existed a unified sense of what sort of town Luton had
become, and what it aspired to, on the narrowest of parochial grounds, i.e. when it regarded itself
as inadequately represented within and by the County, or felt slighted by outsiders. When one
assesses the representations made to the County, and to Parliament, by Luton's upper middle
class on behalf of the town one must seriously doubt how widely felt was their desire to assert
Luton's distinctive identity within the region. One can go as far as to say that it was largely for
negative reasons that Luton became a borough.
Luton's closest parallel with the Political Unions of bigger cities such as Birmingham and Leeds, The Luton Reform Association was meeting as early as March 1849, with William Willis, A. J. Tansley, James Waller, Robert How, James Muir and John Everitt featuring amongst its members.\(^47\) The Association was more than just a parlour debating society. Four hundred people attended a meeting at the Town Hall which passed the following resolution in May 1849.

That believing the House of Commons does not at present represent the mind and industry of the country, and that the unequal and exorbitant burdens imposed by the present system of taxation may be regarded as effects of class legislation, this meeting is of an opinion that such an extension of the franchise as will secure a full and fair representation of the people in the Commons House of Parliament is necessary, both for the vindication of justice and the attainment of economy in the regulation of public expenditure.

This resolution was supporting a criticism of the taxation system which was deemed to be in the favour of the farming interest. It also was specifically encapsulating a call, repeatedly made at the meeting, for Luton to somehow seek representation in Parliament. This drew support from Edwin Brickwood (who served as solicitor to the Bedfordshire Conservative Association) who expressed dissatisfaction with Lord Alford, one of the County's sitting M.P.s, who he felt was not representing "their interest".\(^48\)

The Luton Reform Association, although acting as a vehicle for promoting Luton's aspirations was, on paper at least, a branch of the Bedfordshire Reform and Registration Association, its aim being for "advancing the Liberal interest", partly by ensuring that every possible Liberal voter was registered. The revision of this in Luton regularly showing a greater number of additions to the Liberal list than the Conservative. The chief target for the Luton Liberals was Col. R. J. Gilpin, Conservative M.P. for Bedfordshire from 1851 until his retirement in 1874. With the nomination of any Russell who chose to stand virtually assured, Luton Liberals saw no reason why he should not be accompanied to the House by one who more closely represented their interests, and Col. Gilpin, in the early years of his tenure as M.P. most certainly did not. At the nomination of M.P.s on the hustings outside Bedford's Shire Hall in 1852 Gilpin found himself under fire from the Luton radicals, notably Willis and Everitt on his attitudes toward taxation and protection. There were a number from Luton present clearly hoping that a second Liberal candidate (in addition to Russell) would declare himself thereby forcing an election but they were to be disappointed as Russell and Gilpin were elected unopposed. In 1857 they were successful in obtaining a contested election but the heavy Luton Liberal vote narrowly failed to unseat Gilpin. Aware of the source of the pressure Gilpin blamed a coalition of radicals and aristocrats in his acceptance speech, naming Willis, Everitt and Samuel Whitbread, for having caused the trouble of a contested election.\(^49\) The National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association published a weekly record of the attendance of the Bedfordshire M.P.s in the local papers, revealing that Gilpin was not particularly assiduous in this respect.\(^50\)

This remained very much the pattern for the 1850s with successive meetings at the Town Hall calling for an extension of the franchise as the means by which Lutonians would obtain greater electoral power, and ultimately achieve direct Parliamentary representation. The 1859
attempt to return two Liberals failed badly in Bedfordshire against a national swing to the Tories. Gilpin topped the County poll which in Luton saw brawling around the polling booth in Park Square and the windows of the Conservative Committee's meeting place at the George Hotel were smashed. It was perhaps due to a growing awareness of Luton's impotence that, by 1865 the meetings had fizzled out and little canvassing was reported at the election which Gilpin and Russell were elected unopposed.51

It was early in Luton's process of industrialisation that the town slowly began to visibly articulate its self-assertion. In April 1851 a crowded meeting in the Town hall (at which temporary galleries were erected) was held to pursue a dual purpose - to promote the Freehold Land Society and to explore ways of increasing a better representation for Luton voters. John Bright addressed the meeting although Richard Cobden was prevented from attending by his wife's illness. It was in the latter's written apology (read by Bright) that he described Luton as "the Manchester of Bedfordshire", a centre of industry which ought not to need to go "cap in hand" to the gentry and aristocracy in order to wield political power. William Willis also addressed the meeting claiming that because of the snug electoral arrangement between the Whigs and the Tories which protected each other from total loss, in twenty years as an elector he had never had a chance to register his vote at a Parliamentary election. In fact, two months earlier he would have had the opportunity at the by-election which sent Col. Gilpin to the House to take the place of the recently deceased Viscount Alford. Prior to that there had not been a contested election since 1832. Richard Vyse also criticised the "rotten" electoral system in Bedfordshire claiming that there remained five hundred deceased people with their names still upon the Register. The purpose of the Freehold Land Society was not merely to promote property development, it was also hoped to provide a vote for the would-be investor. As we have seen, however, (in Part One) the Society also opened the door to those who were already enfranchised property speculators and never realised the hopes of its planners.52 By 1858 the Luton Times was advocating borough status, at the same time publishing letters calling for Luton to return its own M.P.53

Thus it was that the Reform Bill drafted in 1866 by the Derby administration excited a level of expectancy in Luton since it appeared that the town would benefit not only from an extension of the franchise, but also confer the status upon it of parliamentary constituency. Indeed as late as 4th June 1867 this remained a possibility. A Committee of enquiry was formed (chaired by Willis), a public meeting called, which in the absence of Everitt through illness, was chaired by W. T. Pledge of the Board of Health which, as the principal local authority were involved from the outset. Local clergymen, Rev. J. R. Stephenson and Rev. Thomas Hands attended this meeting in support (they at this stage did not hold the vote). The public meeting also attracted a large number of "working men" one of whom (Parker) proposed a motion, seconded by Rev. Stephenson, stating that the Bill, whilst falling short of their requirements for full enfranchisement, was at least a step in the right direction. This was duly carried.54 In May 1866 the Board of Health sent a Petition to Earl Russell stating Luton's claims for Parliamentary representation. Its eight point case rested upon her growing size and the extent of her hat trade
- 60,000 people were claimed to be involved in a manufacture which amounted to £1,500,000 per annum. Point six emphasised the town's sense of detachment from the rest of Bedfordshire - "... the claim of Luton to direct representation is also based on the fact that it is purely a Manufacturing District, having little identity of interest with the greater part of the County". A Luton branch of the Reform League was duly formed with William Willis as President and Henry Brown (junior) as Vice-President.55

As Disraeli piloted the Bill through the Commons, expectancy rose in Luton transcending far beyond the usual minority of male middle-class political activists. Charles Badlaugh came to speak, increasing still further the feeling that Luton was a town which was acquiring national recognition, although the Luton branch of the Reform League was disappointed in being unable to acquire a cheap excursion train from the Great Northern Railway to carry between one and two hundred people to a major demonstration in London. By the beginning of June the excitement had reached a pitch with Everitt or Ames being suggested as Luton's first member for Parliament.56

The sense of deflation was, therefore, massive when Disraeli accepted an Amendment passed on 4th June which had been moved by T. B. Horsfall, a commercial and political contemporary of John Shaw Leigh from Liverpool, and at that time a Conservative M.P. for that city. Horsfall's Amendment gave one extra M.P. to Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds sacrificing in the process the proposed conferring of an M.P. for the towns of Keighly, St. Helens, Barnsley and Luton. Bright opposed this Amendment, suggesting that four of the smallest Boroughs should be the ones to lose an M.P. instead of the above. Col. Gilpin spoke for Luton describing it as "one of the largest and most improving towns in the South of England, and reminded the House that this was not the first time that Luton had been considered for having Parliamentary status conferred upon it; during the Aberdeen administration Earl Russell had proposed that a third M.P. be granted to Bedfordshire "on account of the various interests to be represented."57

With Horsfall's Amendment accepted, Gilpin gave notice of his intention to move his own. This was debated on 8th July when Gilpin moved "that the four Parliamentary Boroughs next above ten thousand inhabitants, according to the Census of 1861 now returning two members each, shall only return one member, and that Luton, Keighley, Barnsley and St. Helens shall each return one Member to serve". The four towns in question - Tiverton, Tamworth, Barnstaple and Warwick all had lesser populations than those above but naturally enough their M.Ps came out fighting a in debate which divided party colleagues along constituency lines, Stuart and Whitbread, the Bedford M.Ps both supporting Gilpin.58 Whilst A. W. Peel, M.P. for threatened Warwick moved that instead Arundel, Ashburton, Honiton and Lyme Regis (all constituencies with fewer than four thousand people at the time of the 1861 Census) should be completely disenfranchised, something which had already been agreed would not occur, it was left to his nephew, Sir Robert Peel, M.P. for Tamworth to pour invective upon the respective towns: of Luton he mockingly declared:
I venture to say that there are not twenty people in this House who have ever heard of the town of Luton. I understand it is in the County of Bedford. I have seen straw bonnets which have been made there, but to tell me that Luton is worthy to return a Member to this House is what no one can understand but the Hon. and gallant Gentleman opposite (Col. Gilpin).

Furthermore, according to Sir Robert, the very fact that there were more women than men in Luton devalued its claim, as in all likelihood the morals of the place would not be that commensurate with the standards expected of a Parliamentary constituency. When reference was made to the number of new houses built within the town, Peel heckled that they were "all built of straw". Although Gladstone also spoke in favour of Gilpin's Amendment, stating that the Government should stand by its original proposals, the proposed clause was defeated 195 votes to 224. Having been pushed aside in favour of the big cities, ridiculed and rejected, Luton was finally patted on the head and told to run along: referring to Gilpin's assuredness of great disappointment being expressed in the town Disraeli concluded: "I trust, therefore, that the philosophic temperament of the people of Luton will lead them to forbear from meditating any such assault on the Constitution or the tranquility of the Empire."

The motives and conduct of Col. Gilpin are very interesting. Although a Conservative, he clearly did not have a high regard for Disraeli and was quite prepared to vote against the Government referring to himself as an "independent". Naturally, the creation of a separate Luton constituency would remove a sizeable slice of the Liberal vote thereby strengthening his own position in the rest of the County, but to assert that political opportunism was his guiding motive is to do him less justice than he deserves. At the time of the passing of the Reform Act Gilpin had not faced a contested election for eight years and it had been ten years since he had been in any serious threat of defeat. In the meantime he had assiduously cultivated the Luton part of his constituency, and now in his sixties was nearing the end of his political career. Gilpin's home was at Hockliffe, near Dunstable, a village which would be close to the edge of the proposed Luton Parliamentary Constituency. The early Luton Liberal hostility to him had largely evaporated by the mid 1860s, and Gilpin was increasingly able to draw upon a personal support which transcended party lines.

Self determination: the threat to the Liberal hegemony.

The elevation of Hastings Russell to the House of Lords necessitated a by-election which the Conservatives decided to contest, hoping to give their Party a second M.P. to serve alongside Col. Gilpin. By this stage Gilpin was able to rely upon considerable personal popularity in Luton, not to mention more Conservative areas in the county, in order to maintain his seat. This posed a dilemma for the local Liberals, particularly in Luton, as with one of the County seats securely Gilpin's, the competition had effectively been reduced for just one seat. Nationally the Liberal Party was facing difficulties on a number of fronts and in Bedfordshire it became apparent that the choice of candidate for each party would be decisive. A fortnight before the election it suddenly became possible that Luton's voters would have the choice between a Russell (for the Liberals) and a Luton candidate (for the Conservatives). The County Liberals were proposing to
approach Hastings' brother, Arthur, the current M.P. for the Russells' seat at Tavistock, to become the candidate for the Bedfordshire seat. At the same time it grew increasingly possible that John Gerard Leigh, a man who had hitherto played no active part in public life, would be nominated as the Conservative candidate. There was no doubt that should these two men have been the prospective candidates then Luton would take the opportunity to take revenge on the Russells by dumping Arthur in favour of the nearest that they could achieve to a Luton M.P. Parochial self-assertion was clearly outweighing party allegiance and perhaps, economic interest.

As it transpired the Conservatives wasted their opportunity. J. G. Leigh travelled to the Party's selection meeting at Bedford only to be rejected in favour of Captain Stuart. This was a rebuff not only for Leigh, but for Luton also, and at the hands of the county. Meanwhile, the County's Liberals, to the almost audible relief of their Luton colleagues selected Francis Bassett, a Quaker bank manager from Leighton Buzzard, whose candidature carried the support of the Whitbreads and the Russells. Francis Bassett was a reluctant candidate but it enabled Luton to thus retain loyalty to the Liberals as represented by a candidate of sympathetic background, whilst venting their displeasure at being snubbed upon the traditional foe, who was being represented by a relative of the Marquess of Bute.®®

The result of the election, held on the 25th June 1872 and the last open election before the introduction of the secret ballot, was very close. Bassett received 2446 votes against Stuart's 2248, a majority in the County of just 198 votes. Luton's result was most interesting with Bassett gaining 626 (65.89%) and Stuart 324 (34.11%) The township figures being Bassett 581 (65.43%) and Stuart 307 (34.57%) Although the Liberal vote was very nearly twice as great as the Conservative, it was still proportionately well down on the level of support recorded in the late 1850s at a time when nearly half its electorate were voting for the first time. Conservative canvassing was criticised as being ineffectual which should have been a cause of great regret for them since it required a further switch of Luton votes to their candidate from the Liberals on only a modest scale, for Stuart to have been successful. Had J. G. Leigh been the candidate there is little doubt that the Luton result would have been different, even if the Liberals had still nominated Bassett. By losing Luton, the Conservatives lost the County.®®

**Self determination: borough status**

Having failed with his Amendment to the Representation of the People Act, Col. Gilpin gave Luton a prod. At his instigation a committee was formed following a meeting at the Board of Health offices to pursue Parliamentary Borough status. Another vast committee was formed under the Presidency of William Bigg which spanned all shades of the political spectrum. At Gilpin's suggestion approaches were made to Dunstable as he felt that Luton would stand a greater chance of success if a joint application covering both towns (and the village of Houghton Regis) was submitted.®® The Mayor of Dunstable expressed his support and to Luton's thirty-one strong committee added just two men - Alderman Gutteridge and E. Lockhart.®®
The movement carried overwhelming support within the town, at least amongst those whose opinions were taken note of. So strong was the conviction in Luton that the cause was a right one and that success was assured that the town felt that it could ignore Gilpin’s advice and dispense with its smaller neighbours. At a public meeting (Chaired by Bigg) at the Plait Hall in June 1870, A. P. Welch proposed, and W. Jardine seconded the following motion: "The towns of Luton and Dunstable, and the Districts of the Straw Hat and Bonnet Manufacture are entitled, from their population and commercial importance, to direct representation in the Commons House of Parliament." At this George Gilder rose, and to "loud cheering" moved that Dunstable and district be omitted from the Resolution. Seconded by Henry Wright this was carried by an overwhelming majority with only a few (including Rev. T. R. Stevenson) standing out against this. With Gilpin absent it was left to Cook, the Houghton Regis representative, to remind the meeting to no avail that it would tactically be better to submit an application on behalf of the entire district. The Dunstable representatives then left the platform and the town sent a separate application (for Dunstable, Luton and District).

Cook’s warning proved correct. Bigg was not happy with the decision to leave out Dunstable (but said it was too late to change) neither was F. C. Scargill and Frederick Davis. Henry Wright appears to have also changed his mind, feeling that rival claims would damage Luton’s chances and the movement began to founder with Toyer already squabbling over expenses. Hastings Russell informed the Board of Health that he was willing to introduce a delegation to Gladstone. Details of events after a committee meeting in early July however, are unknown. No delegation appears to have approached Gladstone and no proposals, from either Luton or Dunstable ever reached the floor of the House.

It was in the disappointing context of failure to achieve national recognition for its economic progress that Luton hesitatingly moved toward accepting second best - Incorporation as a Borough but minus Parliamentary status. It was William Bigg and William Shepheard who promoted a movement which this time remained confined during the crucial stages to the upper ranks of the middle class. Practical considerations were subservient to collective dignity and assertion, in particular a desire to free itself from a county from which it considered it had grown away. The Luton Times, ever the mouthpiece for urban middle class Liberalism stated the case: "... for a great overgrown young man to be clinging to the apron strings of his foster mother is not more absurd or degrading than for a town of twenty thousand inhabitants to be dependent for the administration of its public business on two or three county gentlemen and clergymen residing in more or less distant villages."

By circulating leading citizens of the town Bigg and Shepheard were able to gather together an initial meeting at the Town Hall, chaired by the former. Echoing the sentiment of the Luton Times Bigg declared that Incorporation was a logical consequence of the economic and physical growth of the town. It was "due to our dignity and to our manhood ... we should rely upon ourselves to do the duties which become us as citizens". Bigg was supported by A. T. Webster, Frederick Brown, Henry Wren, Henry Wright, Gustavus Jordan, Rev. Adams and, less enthusiastically, John Cumberland. F. C. Scargill came out in opposition stating that Luton would gain nothing by Incorporation. On a practical level Scargill had a point as other than freeing
Luton from the embrace of county judiciary, there were few discernible benefits. The Board of Guardians and the School Board would remain outside borough control and the Gas and Water Companies would continue to undertake their functions; there was no suggestion that these should fall under borough control should Incorporation be achieved. The Council, therefore, would be little more than a beefed-up Board of Health, which itself would give way to the new body. Subjection to the Bedfordshire judiciary might be irksome, but in reality it was rarely seen to meddle in Luton's affairs. Few people present supported Scargill, but ominously a third of those at the meeting did not vote at all. The majority (the hall was full) resolved to form a committee to prepare preliminary costings for Incorporation. Like Scargill, Robert How remained unconvinced of the need to seek Incorporation when, in his view the town had progressed satisfactorily to date without a Charter and could continue to do so. There was not, in his view, any need for a Council with all its accompanying pomp and pride. It was How's opinion that "At Luton Jack was as good as his master" and would not care to be lorded over by a Mayor. He was, however, missing the essential point - "Jack" was not being asked for his opinion.  

The committee did its homework and reported back to a meeting three months later that the estimated total annual salaries bill would be £1370 and the cost of running a borough police force approximately £1400 - Luton at the time was contributing £1580 toward the maintenance of the Bedfordshire Police. Scargill cast doubt upon the accuracy of these figures asking what precisely St. Albans and Dunstable had gained from Incorporation - in his view, nothing. John Higgins suggested to the meeting that the debate should now be widened to a public meeting to which Bigg agreed. It is possible that Higgins, who was moving to a position opposing the necessity for a Council, was calculating that the majority of townsmen, fearing consequential additional rates, would oppose the idea en masse, just as they attempted to suffocate past measures at reform. Bigg could hardly refuse Higgins' request but was possibly confident that with the crucial support of the majority of his peers, it would take a vast army of well-organised protestors to prevent what was in effect a private petition, albeit on behalf of the town.  

Before the petition was sent the potential obstacle of a public meeting still had to be surmounted, the meeting to be held in the Plait Hall in December 1874. The danger, however, was limited by the fact that most at the meeting (E. O. Williams estimated that there were approximately five hundred present) appeared to accept that the consequences of Incorporation was not going to include a greatly increased financial burden. With the argument therefore resting upon such nebulous concepts as "dignity" and "progress", the opposition was extremely muted. Rev. O'Neill was swiftly to his feet to question the necessity of a Council since the Board of Health was doing an excellent job and the magistracy was respected "throughout the Kingdom" (a reference to the beer house cull). Supported by Joseph Cox, O'Neill challenged William Bigg, as the architect of the movement, to state precisely why he supposed that Luton would benefit from borough status. Hugh Gunn had already put the resolution "that this meeting considers it desirable that a petition be presented to the Queen in Council for a Charter of Incorporation for the town of Luton" (seconded by Shepheard) when Bigg rose to speak.
Picking his way through the minefield, Bigg made a long diplomatic speech that was worthy of a man soon to become Mayor, being careful not to offend anyone. Citing municipal government as "one of the most valuable principles of this country and at the very base of our Constitution" he evoked Trafalgar, German "Fatherland", English "fair play" and the fact that little Dunstable had already been Incorporated to support his case. Bigg echoed O'Neill's praise of the Board of Health claiming that its success was attributable to the fact that its members were elected by the town, a principle which should apply in other areas. Pointedly reminding the meeting of past humiliations and failures Bigg emphasised that if Luton was to again approach Disraeli (now Prime Minister) desiring a status as a Parliamentary borough it would greatly assist the case if it could do so by representations being made by a town council, responsible for many aspects of Luton life, instead of a hotch-potch of private citizens, chairmen of local Boards and ad hoc committee members. Incorporation he concluded, was necessary for the "interest and dignity" of Luton, helping to "increase the prosperity and promote the honour of the town".

There was much in the last point which in fact was an honest statement of intent. One of Bigg's actions as Mayor in 1877 was to initiate the creation of the Chamber of Commerce, which by the end of the century was to act jointly with the Council in establishing the New Industries Committee, a deliberate attempt to diversify Luton's industrial base which was to be the progenitor of twentieth century expansion.

All this was unforeseen to those who sat listening to Bigg in the Plait Hall. Against his lofty rhetoric there was little precise argument that could be made. Thomas Huckle made a silly, pointless speech and Higgins characteristically queried the cost, but it was left to F. C. Scargill to settle the matter in favour of Incorporation with a sneering, personal attack upon Bigg. For reasons which are unknown Scargill appears to have developed a personal animosity toward a man whom he referred to in his speech as a "retired bank clerk". Bigg's speech was "ingenious bunkem", the election of mayor was bad because "it would be an encouragement for the holding of public meetings, which he did not believe in, as the oratory of the young men of Luton was not good". This was greeted by hisses but Scargill went on to remind the hall that his position as Clerk to the Justices "was secured to him by law" and that he was "absolutely immovable" unless compensated out of borough funds. He was forced to sit down amidst "continued uproar". Henry Wright weighed in to support Bigg, accusing Scargill of using his position for one of personal profit and claiming that Incorporation would benefit all Luton's ratepayers by reducing their County obligations which he felt were iniquitous: he compared the assessment for Woburn Abbey, amounting to £26.14s whilst from his "comparatively insignificant residence the sum of £6. 20s. was extracted". No more than fifty people supported Robert How's amendment to adjourn the matter for six months, and the original amendment was carried with "only a few dissidents making a show of hands". Lastly, the Chairman informed the meeting that the expenses toward Incorporation would be covered by subscription to be reimbursed from the first borough rate. Under the clauses of the 1835 Municipal Corporation Act (by which the application was being made) the costs of the process would fall upon the petitioners, so William's statement reveals a confidence in the degree of support which Luton's ratepayers had in the movement for Incorporation.
The original committee (minus Higgins and Scargill who were replaced by Peter Wootton and Henry Wren) then submitted an application for Incorporation on behalf of the Inhabitant Householders of the Town of Luton, 1427 men lending their names to the petition. This was dealt with by the Sciences and Art Department which announced its intention to hold a public enquiry under the Chairmanship of Major Donnelly R.E. on 24th June 1875, the enquiry to be held at the Corn Exchange.69

The enquiry presented Frank Scargill with a last, forlorn chance to articulate the grounds upon which he opposed Incorporation. It was clearly a hopeless struggle, as it became apparent that there was a depth of support for Incorporation which went beyond the ranks of the petitioners, A.T. Webster being one who supported the move but had not been a signatory to the petition. In his opinion most of the large manufacturers felt as he did. George Bailey revealed that a whole section of Luton's ratepayers had not yet been canvassed for the support. Had he known that it was advisable he would have approached the 650 female ratepayers and expected that all but one hundred of them would have been prepared to sign the petition. Most of the evidence submitted in favour of Luton's care for borough status followed the well-trod path of economic development and how this status would assist further growth. Marshalling what forces he possessed, Scargill declared he was representing Thomas Sworder, Rev. James O'Neill, Robert Smith, A. P. Welch, Dr. Woakes, Dr. Hale, William Clarke, Thomas Smith and William Drewett. A difficult task was made harder by the poor acoustics of the hall and the evident lack of sympathy with which the audiences viewed Scargill's cause, Major Donnelly several times having to call for order. The arguments against were a long way short of convincing. After protesting against the short notice allowed for preparing this case and following the equally well-trod path of heaping praise upon the Board of Health (which was never in its history so praised as when it was about to be extinguished) and the Magistracy, Scargill turned his attention to the character of Luton, "a town of very peculiar description, its trade being of a very fluctuating kind". He compared it with the County town - "Bedford . . . a quiet town, populated with quiet well-to-do people who came there for the sake of the schools while Luton was a town inhabited by a different sort of people altogether". Scargill did not specify what this "different sort" were but essentially he was saying that Lutonians were less amenable to social control than Bedfordians, and, therefore, ought not to be entrusted with self-government. Incorporation, Scargill declared, would be to the benefit only of the middle classes (which was highly debatable) and that would serve only to sow discord between them and the working classes (which it did not). Those who were brought along by Scargill to give evidence did the case little good. Chief Constable Warner of the Bedfordshire Constabulary and Superintendent Pope both felt that a separately controlled Luton police force would prove to be less efficient in fighting crime, a statement derided by counsel for the Petitioners. Pope had little else that he could add except to recall that when he first arrived in what he also described as "a very peculiar town" in 1854, "the population was very rough" and Luton "was then a notorious place for rioting" a counter-productive exaggeration as it carried with it the message that the lately civilised town was ready to wear the mantle of Borough. Robert Smith was so decrepit that he barely could be understood. Robert How
contradicted himself in his evidence and was laughed out and Gustavus Jordan had "primed himself for an hour's speech on the Constitution of England" and even Scargill had to ask him to retire.

With the absence of effective opposition laid bare, it remained just for the Privy Council to announce draft notice of approval of Incorporation in October. Approaches had been made by George Bailey (to become the first Town Clerk) to other towns and cities and it was arranged that Luton would be divided into three, roughly equal electoral wards returning eighteen Councillors from which six aldermen would be chosen, their vacancies as Councillors being filled initially by an immediate bye-election.

Although it was true that most of Luton's ratepayers supported Incorporation and were probably pushed further into this support by Scargill's language, the depth of support did not go far beyond thinking that in general terms, borough status was a good thing to have. There were few stirrings of interest in the town as a whole. Upon hearing the notification of approval, a working men's meeting was organised, the venue being the New Hall in Wellington Street and the objective being to gather together "those interested in obtaining a proper representation of the working class interest in the new municipality of the town of Luton ..." A committee was formed to pursue this but as ever, there were few labouring men or artisans amongst it - the "shopocracy" being very much to the fore. This body metamorphasised into the Luton Working Men's Representation Association which subsequently adopted the rather self-defeating aim of obtaining councillors "irrespective of class or position ... to act as Representatives of their wants and interest." The licensed Victuallers Association were also preparing for the election: the recently bankrupted T. C. Johnson leading the call for the Association to ensure that it was represented in some form upon the new Corporation.

The reason behind the lack of euphoria and excitement at the approval granted by the Privy Council was that Incorporation did not mark the opening of the floodgates which brought a Liberal/dissenting economic elite additional political power. There was no build up of pressure upon old institutions and concentrated battle for power which acted as a benchmark for a new era. Luton had developed new institutions piecemeal as it evolved, allowing the economic elite (which spanned the entire middle class) to acquire a degree of dominance long before the creation of the Council. This new Council was not replacing a corrupt Corporation as could be found earlier in the century in larger towns and cities in the Midlands and the north such as Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle and Leicester. As such there was no need for anyone in Luton to adopt the role of a Cobden or an Attwood, no rallying cry, no barricades to storm. The town had evolved from market town to manufacturing centre barely pausing for breath and the old ways, old ethics and old institutions had either disappeared or fallen into irrelevance. Hennock assessed the changing administrative structure in Leeds as a means by which outsiders got in on to the inside. In Luton they were there from the outset.

Thus it was that the Charter of Incorporation marked the formalising of a process of evolving social change. The Charter itself, dated 25th February 1876 was proclaimed at a meeting at the Town Hall on 2nd March 1876. George Bailey read out the Charter to the
assembled gathering and Austin records that he was so nervous that he "dropped the document, 
smashing the great seal". The brief celebrations over, there then followed a long embarrassed 
silence which stretched all the way to the first elections scheduled for 18th May, 1876. It was one 
thing to create a Council for the "dignity" and "honour" of the town, but besides superceding the 
Board of Health, controlling a tiny police force and appointing a handful of Magistrates the 
question remained of what were Councillors to do that was not being done by the Board of 
Health, a body which had long ceased to attract Luton's business and social elite. Furthermore, 
who were Councillors representing - localities, political parties or interest groups?

This element of uncertainty led to an absence of interest which pervaded the period of 
election. It was not until 23rd March that the first ward meeting was organised by Thomas 
Huckle to clarify the above dilemma. The North Ward was predominantly High Town but also 
covered the hat manufacturing district on the south eastern side of George Street, the villas 
strung out along the New Bedford Road and the rural hamlet of Round Green on its eastern 
edge. The meeting chaired by Charles Worboys had a distinctly petty bourgeois character about 
it. Huckle's view, which carried considerable support was that two candidates ought to be 
selected for the North Ward who were distinctively High Town men and who would represent the 
interests of that district. He coupled this with a warning against approaches from "some George 
Street gentlemen of the most philanthropic character and full of good promises" who might offer 
to stand in the Ward. "Past experience, however, had taught them that the less they had to do 
with George Street gentlemen the better", this latter observation being greeted by a chorus of 
approval. All other considerations were consciously excluded - "it was nothing to do with either 
Church or Chapel or politics, for they were all at union on town matters". High Town was 
seeking more than just "mud and rates" from Incorporation, an indication of what many believed 
that it had so far received from twenty-five years of the Board of Health. This parochialism went 
as far as to force the resignation of Matthew Judge from the Committee formed to co-ordinate 
the selection of candidates, as he did not come from the North Ward.

High Town was a distinctive community cut off from the rest of the town by the railway 
lines, and with a high proportion of poor housing it is no surprise that a sense of locality should be 
so powerful in that Ward where churches were few and political organisation in its infancy. 
Elsewhere in the town, without even this collective sense of locality, attempts at selecting 
candidates stuttered. A Selection Committee was assembled for the East Ward, an area which 
covered south and east Luton including those streets between Castle Street and Park Street 
(including those formerly within Hyde parish, known as Brown Brick), Park Square, the 
eastern side of Church Street and Hitchin Road, and Hart Hill. At most only twenty people 
attended the third attempt to convene a general meeting at the Town Hall.

An attempt to hold a similar meeting on 9th April for the West Ward was made by a 
relatively unknown figure, Cuthbertson. The venue to be the New Hall, Wellington Street. Just 
six people turned up, even after Cuthbertson had stood on a chair outside the hall and proceeded 
to "harangue a small gathering". This meeting fell through but a second West Ward meeting (the 
Ward was the most populous with over seven thousand inhabitants covering New Town north of 
Castle Street, Stuart Street and the area either side of Dunstable Road) two days later was more
successful "but at no time was it (the New Hall) anything like filled and the proceedings were almost devoid of enthusiasm". Thirteen men were nominated for the Ward at the meeting with again an underlying tone of parochialism; the nomination of Peter Wootton by Johnson Willis found no seconder, the chief objection being that he neither resided nor did business in that Ward which was the case with all candidates who were nominated in the West and North Wards.

Summarising this the Luton Reporter concluded that "there is a larger amount of mutual suspicion in Luton than is desirable..." the East Ward was the last to secure a list of candidates. 75

The only issue which excited any debate during the whole of the campaign was instigated by William Bigg. He was clearly dubious as to the contribution of the local police in the recent decrease in reported crimes in Luton, and one suspects, dubious as to the extent of the correlation between that and the reduction in beerhouses. Bigg's view, expressed at the Incorporation enquiry at the Corn Exchange was that this was due to an increase in trade and an "advance in civilisation". However vague and inaccurate that view may be, Bigg went further - not only were the County controlled police not particularly efficient but they were also under "a temptation... to wink at crime". In other words, a less than conscientious police force was making little real effort to apprehend wrong-doers and bring them before the Bench, ironically, therefore, helping to reduce the criminal statistics. Bigg stopped just short of accusing the police of colluding with criminals. This touched a raw nerve with the Conservative Luton Reporter and two Magistrates, A. P. Welch and Rev. H. B. Smyth, taking this as not only a criticism of the police but also as a "slur" upon the local judiciary as a whole. Bigg wasted no opportunity to cite occasions when Magistrates failed to attend, but provided no evidence to back up his allegations. Despite this, few came forward to criticise him and evidently there were a number who sympathised with some, if not all, of his allegations. 76

Other than this spat there was nothing apart from personal motivation and rivalry which animated the election. Those who were had advocated Incorporation, including Bigg, failing to inspire the electorate in any way. "The bashfulness shown by aspirants to municipal honours in Luton may be creditable, but it is scarcely fair to those whom they intend to be their constituents..." noted the Luton Reporter. 77 Eventually, a total of thirty-seven candidates allowed themselves to be nominated, twelve each for the North and West wards and thirteen for the East. All the members of the Board of Health and five of the six Luton Guardians were amongst those who stood. There were also some notable omissions from the list; no Brown could be induced to stand, neither on the list were William Phillips, Kit Tomson, Dr. Woakes, Thomas Sworder, J. W. Green (although he was elected in November), A. P. Welch, Alfred Toyer, J. J. Kershaw or Gustavus Jordan. Of the thirty-seven candidates, John Higgins was the only identifiable opponent of Incorporation. Eleven were associated with the hat trade. E. O. Williams was to be the Returning Officer. 78

The election itself, like the campaign as a whole was an extremely muted affair with only 1,700 out of 3,700 voters choosing to exercise their right, some not bothering to go to the polls "even when offered a carriage to ride in" by a Candidate. The Luton Reporter concluded that "apathy... reigned supreme throughout the day" and the candidates themselves were accused of
going about the business of seeking election in a "half-hearted manner". In the North Ward seven candidates did not address election meetings, the six unsuccessful men all coming from that number.\textsuperscript{79} A second round of voting was required on 6th June by the election of six aldermen at the first Council Meeting at which William Bigg was unanimously elected as Mayor.\textsuperscript{80}

Overall the results of the election (see Appendix) produced a Council which represented a broad cross-section of the various religious, political and occupational background of Luton's male, middle class ratepayers. Generally speaking those candidates with good organisation who produced the most publicity greatly increased their chances of success in the face of a largely indifferent electorate. "The results prove, beyond question, that owing to the apathy and carelessness of the burgesses, almost any candidate with good organisation might win a place on the Council" noted the Luton Advertiser. George Wilcox Gilder was one such candidate who, backed by an enthusiastic support committee topped the poll in West Ward leaving more experienced public servants, A. T. Webster, John Higgins and William Bigg, in his wake. The top five candidates came within thirty-five votes of each other.\textsuperscript{81} The East Ward, where the Working Men's Representation Association had apparently concentrated their greatest efforts saw the return of two candidates sympathetic to their cause, Peter Wootton and Charles Mees, although neither could remotely be described as working class and possibly would have been elected in any case. Another Association candidate, Henry Wren, failed in that Ward. Similarly, Henry Wright, long associated with the welfare of the working classes, was successful in the North Ward.

Localism was the most potent factor in a low key contest. The runaway success of William Clarke, the "kindly" farmer at the Brache can be attributed to the desire on the part of the voters of Brown Brick to ensure that their district was properly represented on the town's governing forum. In the North Ward the two 'High Town' candidates were spectacularly successful, their organisation being very thorough and the overall turnout, six hundred out of eleven hundred being the best out of the three Wards. Peter Wootton who narrowly squeezed home in sixth place in the East Ward had his lowly position attributed not only to the fact that he was a member of the School Board, but specifically that he did not reside in the Ward. His saving grace apparently being his work with Park Street Baptist Church in the heart of the Ward.\textsuperscript{82}

Two of the three Board of Health candidates in the North Ward were defeated, although one of them, W. Shepheard, the original co-promoter of the movement which led to Incorporation was successful at the subsequent June election. Board member George Chambers finished at the bottom of North Ward poll, a full 330 votes behind the winner, a verdict perhaps from High Town on its "mud and rates" experience. William Drewett, the other Board of Health member and Hugh Gunn, whom Thomas Huckle might have described as a "New Bedford Road gentleman", both obtained places on the Council but polled a long way behind Wright, the two 'High Town' candidates Huckle and Conisbee and William Farr, landlord of the North Star in Dudley Street and representing the interests of the Licensed Victuallers Association. Elsewhere, amongst those who were not elected were the Smart brothers, Henry Blundell (who did not canvass for votes, failed again in June but became Mayor ten years later) and William Thompson Pledge who with
forty-eight votes came bottom of the West Ward poll. The latter served as town postmaster and his vote may have been a reflection on the efficiency of the local post office which was not held in high regard in Luton.

By June, eight out of the nine Board of Health members had secured election to the Town Council, as had all those from the Board of Guardians who chose to place themselves before the electorate. To stand as a serving member of the School Board, however, was seemingly no commendation in the eyes of the Luton voters. Of the twenty-four Councillors and Aldermen, ten had voted at least once for a Conservative candidate at previous Parliamentary elections, a high figure although one must appreciate that party allegiance played no part in the elections. Two "gentleman" were elected plus two who were retired. A quarter of Council members were involved in the hat trade and a further five in retail or wholesale. There were two Thomas Smiths.

It was entirely apposite that the results of Luton's first Borough Council election should produce a group of Councillors so varied in experience of public office, occupation and ability - but all drawn from the ranks of the middle class. At face value no political, religious, occupational or social group was therefore in a position to dominate the Council, something which had been a feature of Luton's political life as a whole for the previous forty years. This Council was possibly the most representative of the population of Luton as a whole that the town was to experience until after the first World War and the sudden impact of the Labour Party: the first meeting of the Council however, carried the first sign of what was to change. At the election of Aldermen, which was carried out by the full Council, the High Town candidates, most overtly parochial, petty bourgeoisie and sympathetic to working men were frozen out with the other Councillors voting to select the Aldermen for each ward not purely from those elected for that ward, but from the Council as a whole. Despite the protests of Wright and Conisbee, only Hugh Gunn from the North Ward was elected to serve as an Alderman with both the former unsuccessful. Wright described it as a "conspiracy".

Similarly, the composition of the most powerful of the Council Committees, Finance was dominated by the bourgeoisie (see appendix). The formation of a Council had been promoted by men from the higher echelons of the bourgeoisie, and however uncertain they were as to its intended function, they were not about to surrender its control to the likes of Huckle. The dominance of the upper middle class would not become apparent until the latter quarter of the nineteenth century as gradually the "shopocracy" and dead wood which had comprised a substantial part of the old Boards of the town were whittled away. These people had been able to take advantage of the hesitancy of others to successfully jump ship. The gradual diminishing of men such as Conisbee, Farr, Dawson and the Smiths during the 1880s and 1890s represented the change in the socio-economic structure of Luton with the gradual increase in the number of larger factories, engineering as well as hats, and the concentration from then on of the Mayoralty and key council positions in the hands of the bigger businessmen - Hucklesby, Wilkinson, Warren, H. O. Williams, the Oakley brothers and Staddon: few of the petty bourgeoisie could spare the time, or bear the personal costs of the office of Mayor. Some of these men were radical in their
politics, sympathetic to, even popular, with the working class. 1876 however, marked a watershed in Luton's political and social life - from then on the petty bourgeoisie, the class which more than any other had provided Luton with its distinctive characteristics, would be squeezed from power as class divisions became more rigid and opportunities for social advancement more curtailed.
NOTES

(1) Letter from "Edward" to "Tom", Beds Times 23.9.1848.

(2) Cannadine, David (ed.) Patricians, power and politics in nineteenth century towns. (Leicester University Press, 1982).

Luton Times
\[\sqrt{30.11.1867}\]


(6) Luton Times 20.5.1876. This complaint was made by Lockhart.

(7) Ibid 8.5.1875, 27.11.1875.


(11) Supplement to the Luton Times, 2.4.1864.


(17) For some of the various schemes see *Beds Times* 18.10.1845, 14.2.1846 - this featured a 130 name petition to parliament signed by "the principal persons resident in the Town and neighbourhood" to be part of the London to Manchester railway; 7.3.1846, 21.3.1846, 16.5.1856, 4.7.1846, 14.11.1846, 12.6.1847, 2.10.1847. Other records relating to the railway at Luton are held at the Public Record Office, Kew. For the Stephenson debacle see Austin, William Op Cit Vol II, p 142. Dyer, J. and Dony, J. G. *The Story of Luton* p. 123. *Beds Times 8.7.1848* copy of a letter sent to Robert Stephenson from Rev. Henry Burgess.


(19) Austin, W. op cit p. 157. The resistance was led by Brickwood and Robert How, and according to Austin the Act remained "a dead letter" until 1868.

(20) Crossick, Geoffrey. 'Urban Society and the Petty Bourgeoisie in Nineteenth Century Britain' in Fraser, Derek and Sutcliffe, Anthony (eds.) *The Pursuit of Urban History* (Arnold, 1983).


(23) *Luton Reporter* 20.5.1876.

(24) *Beds Times* 8.11.1851 and *Luton Times* 30.11.1872

Letter from 'Q in the Corner'. Beds Times 16.2.1850. The letter was refuted the following week.


Beds. C. R. O. RV 25, 1859 Poll Book, Luton Times 7.5.1859. The Luton returns omit these voters who are identifiable as not being resident in Luton. The division between "major" and "small/medium" manufacturers is entirely subjective. As such I am aware that I may be doing a certain injustice in downgrading the scale of operation of one or two businessmen. This also applies to the 1872 returns in Fig 1.3.

Beds C.R.O. RV 26, 1872 Poll Book.

Beds C. R. O. RV 903, 1841 Poll Book. This election was the only case of two candidates from the same party being returned unopposed although this was balanced upon the death of Astell in 1847 with Lord Charles Russell being returned unopposed for the Whigs.


Luton Times 14.11.1874, 5.12.1874, 30.1.1874, 6.2.1875.

Ibid 6.3.1875, 13.3.1875, "We are not sure the Luton Liberal Association really knows what it wants" concluded the Luton Times.


Letter from "Edward" to the Beds Times 16.9.1848.


Luton Times 20.9.1856.

Ibid 17.10.1857, 31.10.1857. Q.E.E.1/1 Miscellaneous papers re The Courthouse at Luton, Beds C.R.O.
In October 1874 for example only one magistrate (Welch) turned up, and he was late. Someone was sent into Hertfordshire to try and find one.

Other Luton Liberals who went to Bedford (including Gilder and Wootton) declared themselves satisfied with the Marquess.

This meeting featured a debate on the subject of who paid the greater proportion of taxes, the working classes (Willis), or the aristocracy (How), the result of which is not known. A. J. Tansley was Secretary of the Association.

For example see Beds Times 7.5.1853, The Associations weekly tally was published regularly at this time.
(57) Hansards Parliamentary Debates 30 & 31 Victoria, 1867 Vol. CLXXXVII
6.5.1867-17.6.1867.


(60) Ibid 1.6.1872, 8.6.1872, 15.6.1872, 29.6.1872, 6.7.1872. 1872 Poll Book RV 26, Beds C.R.O. J. G. Leigh slipped back into as much anonymity as his ownership of Luton Hoo would allow. His death in February 1875 elicited only a brief notice in the Luton Times.


(62) Ibid 28.5.1870.


(64) Luton Advertiser 9.7.1870.

(65) Luton Times 10.10.1874.


(68) Luton Advertiser 12.12.1874. The meeting was Chaired by E. O. Williams.

(70) Luton Times 9.10.1875. A Committee was formed comprising Henry Wren, Henry Wright, Frederick Lawford, G. Long, Samuel Tutt, Matthew Judge and Messrs Johnson, Chamberlain, Dixon, Gailer and Cox.

(71) Ibid 13.11.1875.

(72) Ibid 22.1.1876.

(73) Austin, W. op cit p 189. Luton Times 4.3.1876.

(74) Luton Advertiser 25.3.1876.

(75) Luton Times 15.4.1876, Luton Reporter 15.4.1876, Luton Advertiser 22.4.1876.

(76) Luton Advertiser 26.7.1875, 22.4.1876, Luton Times 6.5.1876, Luton Reporter 29.4.1876.

(77) Luton Reporter 1.4.1876.

(78) Ibid 13.5.1876. Luton Times 13.5.1876.

(79) Luton Times 20.5.1876. Luton Advertiser 26.5.1876.

(80) Luton Advertiser 27.5.1876.

(81) At the May election this Ward also saw a tie for sixth and last place between William Walsh and Edward Taylor, both receiving 213 votes. Taylor's magnanimous decision to withdraw in favour of Walsh saved E.O. Williams the onerous task of declaring a casting vote. Taylor was deservedly elected in the subsequent June election.

(82) Luton Advertiser 26.5.1876.

(83) Ibid.
Appendix. Luton's first Borough Council, at 31st December, 1876.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Councillor</th>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bigg, Wm</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>School Board, Guardians, Water Co., Magistrate, Gas Co., All C'tees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conisbee, Fdk</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>High Town candidate, Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, Hy,</td>
<td>Headmaster</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Working Men's Rep. Assoc., Highways &amp; Lighting C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckle, Thos</td>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>High Town candidate, Highways &amp; Lighting C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drewett, Wm</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Board of Health, Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee, Sanitary &amp; Deodorising C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Gunn, Hugh</td>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Guardians, Finance C'tee, Sanitary &amp; Deodorising C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Clarke, Wm</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Highways &amp; Lighting C'tee, Sanitary &amp; Deodorising C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Thos</td>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Board of Health, GP &amp; Fire Brigade C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mees, Chas</td>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Board of Health, Working Mens Rep. Assoc., Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee, GP &amp; Fire Brigade C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Cumberland, Jn</td>
<td>Estate Agent</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Highways &amp; Lighting C'tee, GP &amp; Fire Brigade C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Thos</td>
<td>&quot;gentleman&quot;</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Guardian, Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee, Highways &amp; Lighting C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilder, G. W.</td>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee, Finance C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster, A. T.</td>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Guardians, Finance C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Higgins, Jn</td>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>School Board, Finance C'tee, Board of Health, Sanitary &amp; Deodorising C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Interests</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Cotchin, Jn</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Finance C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walsh, Wm</td>
<td>Hat trade</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Finance C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(elected in June)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pudephat, Thos</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GP &amp; Fire Brigade C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepheard, Wm</td>
<td>&quot;gentleman&quot;</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Board of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver, S.</td>
<td>retailer</td>
<td>Lib/Con</td>
<td>Highways &amp; Lighting C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(retired)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sanitary &amp; Deodorising C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockhart, C. G.</td>
<td>Coal merchant</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Board of Health</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finance C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawson, Jn</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Sanitary &amp; Deodorising C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GP &amp; Fire Brigade C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Edw</td>
<td>Undertaker</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Board of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolls &amp; Municipal Buildings C'tee</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GP &amp; Fire Brigade C'tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(elected in November)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, J. W.</td>
<td>Brewer</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Finance C'tee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes Alderman
CONCLUSION

There is little point in the repetition and condensation of the observations and conclusions made in Parts One to Four but overall, what are we to make of Luton? In many respects, when compared with the limited number of studies of urban centres which are available, this "nest of freeholders" appears to be a peculiar place. The nature of the development of the town's economy was fundamentally due to the virtual absence, one could almost say abandonment, of estate control by the Marquess of Bute and his Trustees. Few enough towns would experience virtually no relationship with the aristocracy and gentry, fewer still would combine this with a feeble, mute and in measure transient working class. For those in the middle, for the most part distinctively at the petit end of the bourgeoisie, although they had shaped what character it possessed there was a discernible lack of commitment to and affection for the town. Although a futile hope, it would be interesting to know how many, or how few of those who migrated to Luton did so in the intention of staying there until their death.

Luton's development, built upon an abundance of land and freedom of trade (and belief) resulted in a precarious dependence upon one industry as far as the town was concerned, but numerous economic opportunities for its individuals. The town's experience was the progenitor of a second stage of growth which accelerated in the early years of the twentieth century. The co-ordination and organisation which was manifest in the efforts of the bourgeoisie in its formation of an agency, the New Industries Committee, specifically created to remove the dominance of hat manufacture, and of numerous land syndicates to make available land for industrial and domestic settlement, contrasts sharply with the haphazard, statute dependent manner in which the higher ranks of the middle class went about things in the mid-nineteenth century. The reasons for this change appear to lie in the evolving structure of the increasingly mechanised hat trade itself, the concentration of production into factories at the expense of the small manufacturer and the consequent effects this had upon Luton's class structure. The town would remain a Mecca of opportunity offering jobs, higher wages and cheaper homes, but the class structure becomes noticeably less fluid, and this is reflected in the political sphere with the middle class nonconformist Liberalism of the independent producer becoming crushed between the conflicting demands of labour and capital.

This thesis was originally intended to cover the period between 1876 and 1914, to analyse this deliberate alteration of the local economy and its effect upon society. This remains an area of rich potential for historical research not least because there are a greater number of sources stemming from the formal bureaucracies in a larger, more mechanised and more literate town. The date range became pushed back when the need to develop the background set in the middle of the nineteenth century revealed an enormous void in which the people and events of that time, the pillars upon which modern Luton came to be built, lay virtually unrecorded and forgotten. This thesis therefore, has been an attempt to account for the construction of those pillars, why
Luton developed in the peculiar manner in which it did, what were the social and political consequences of its economic development, and I trust to give an initial understanding of why Luton became the kind of town that it subsequently did.

Last of all, I again stress the need for further research into development of the small towns of England in which so many lived and with which so many of the rural population had contact. As individual studies they fill pieces of the national jigsaw, collectively they can enrich our understanding of the processes of industrialisation and the nature of society, its organisation, attitudes and ethics, which were created as a consequence.
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ADAMS, Rev. Edward Richards. Vicar of Biscot from 1869 until 1875 after which he went to live in Great Yarmouth. Liberal, Bible Five member of the first School Board, Freemason, supporter of the Mechanics Institute and Gymnastic Society.

ADAMS, James. Frequent offender, twice branded with a "D".

ADAMS, William. Regular offender, not known if related to the above.

ALFORD, Walter. George St grocer, also owned a beer house. Supporter of the Mechanics Institute and a Freemason.

ALLEN, Joseph or James. George St draper, developed sewing machine capable of 600 stitches per minute in 1856. Liberal, Vice-President of the Mechanics Institute in the 1850s and member of the Luton Reform Registration Association.

AMES, Col. Lionel. 1809 - 1873. Lived at the Hyde, to the south-west of Luton. Liberal and according to the Luton Times, "a model magistrate". Backer of the proposed Water Company in 1850, promoter of the railways in the 1840s and 1850s and opponent of the plans for a School Board.

ANSTEE, Joseph. Registrar of Births and Deaths and Relieving Officer for the Luton district of the Luton Union. Official of the Luton Reform Registration Association and owner of property in Spring Place and New Street.


ATTWOOD, William H. Father of above. Builder and owner of a number of cottages in High Town. Occasionally fell foul of the Board of Health and went bankrupt with debts and liabilities of £2,572 in 1865.


AUSTIN, Charles Addington. Son of above, solicitor, Liberal, Freemason, member of Oddfellows and Literary Institute. Gave financial assistance to Gaitskell Terrace Evening School. Supporter of the railway propositions in the 1840s.

AUSTIN, Thomas Erskine. Clerk to the Board of Guardians, Freemason, Literary Institute. Secretary to the Luton, Dunstable and Welwyn Junction Railway Company and also Secretary to Stephenson's abortive scheme in the 1840s. Freemason, member of the Literary Institute and backer of proposed Water Company, 1860.

BAILEY, C. Member of Luton Co-operative Company.

BAILEY, George. Solicitor. His mother died from cholera in 1854 and George Bailey served his articles with Frederick Chase. Speculated in property through Luton Freehold Land Society, owning several cottages in Albert Road. Clerk to the Board of Health 1851 - 1876 and subsequently the first Town Clerk of Luton. Founder member of Luton Liberal Association.
BAILEY, Joseph. "Farmer and manufacturer". Elected to Board of Health in 1858 but was unsuccessful when he stood as a "Yellow" candidate in 1872. Liberal. Owned several properties in Wellington Street.

BAISLEY, Edmund. Director of South Beds and North Herts Permanent Building Society, 1850s. Appointed toll collector by Board of Health in 1866 at a salary of £40 per annum.

BARRETT, Alfred. Director of South Beds and North Herts Permanent Building Society, 1850s.


BEALE, Dr. Conservative. Gave evidence to Cresy.

BELL, G.A. Shopkeeper and member of Co-op Company.

BENSON, Dr. Patrick. d. 1872. Surgeon, Wellington Street. Freemason, Conservative.

BERRY, Rev. Robert. Minister of Congregational Church appointed in August, 1874. Temperance supporter and a "simple, forceful" speaker.


BIGG, William. 1814 - 1878. Born Swansea. Manager of the London and County Bank at Whitney, Oxfordshire and transferred to Luton branch c. 1848, becoming the manager soon after. Member of Society of Friends but would also attend the services of other denominations. Used his position as bank manager to promote various schemes in the town. Elected to Board of Health in 1853 and was the first Chairman of the School Board. Promoter of the Water Company, of which became a Director and shareholder, and was also on the Board of the Gas Company. Promoted the railway developments of the 1850s, was on the committee of the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School, the leader of the Mechanics Institute, the Superintendent of the Friends Adult School and a member of the Literary Institute. Liberal. Elected to the first Town Council and was unanimously elected Mayor to serve for 1876 and 1877. A keen walker, he would often stroll from his home in Castle Street to the General Cemetery which was apparently laid out by his nephew, a Mr Atkins. He chose the plot in which he wished to be buried which was situated in an unobtrusive corner of the cemetery. He was still in office as Mayor when he died. His long funeral cortege commenced from the Corn Exchange and the shops in Luton remained closed out of a mark of respect.

BLUNDELL, Hemy. Draper, by the 1870s being the leading retailer in the town. Son of J.K.Blundell. Liberal, Bible Five member of the School Board, Wesleyan Methodist. Unsuccessful in seeking election to the Town Council in 1876 but was later elected serving as Mayor in 1886.

BLUNDELL, Joseph King. Hat manufacturer, father of Henry. Promoted railway development in the 1850s, served on the Board of Guardians and was an unsuccessful "Blue" candidate in the Board of Health elections in 1850. Wesleyan Methodist and Conservative.

BOUTWOOD, J. 1821 - 1873. Wesleyan and officer of the Mechanics Institute, 1850s.
BRETT, John. Tenant farmer of the Marquess of Bute in George Street until his farm was demolished in 1818 to make way for Wellington Street. Removed to the Bury Farm. Board of Guardians, Board of Health and Churchwarden 1814 - 1829, 1845 - 1850, 1853 - 1857. Liberal.

BRICKWOOD, Edwin Lathom. Solicitor, "keen -witted....waspish". Solicitor to the Beds Conservative Association. Owned Bull Court hovels. Appointed Clerk to the Board of Health in 1851 but moved to Putney in the same year.

BROWN, Daniel. Quaker, miller. One of the richest men in the town, he financed the British School built in Langley Street in 1835.


BROWN, Henry. 1797 - 1880. Cousin of Richard Marks Brown. Timber merchant, a business which he established on the corner of Chapel Street in 1820. Unsuccessful "Blue" candidate for the Board of Health in 1850 but was elected in 1852 on the same ticket. Member of the Board of Guardians, promoter of the Water Company and financial supporter of the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School. Quaker, but would attend services at Baptist and Primitive Methodist chapels. A convert to the temperance movement he discharged several men from his timber yard, ostensibly because of their drinking, although he had just purchased an 8 h.p. machine to cut timber.

BROWN, Henry (jun.) 1823 - 1892. Son of Henry, cousin of Frederick. Quaker, Liberal, miller. Chairied public meeting in April 1864 that called for the building of a corn exchange and market hall. Liberal, financial supporter of the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School, supporter of the Mechanics Institute and later Chairman of the School Board. Became a J.P. but according to Samuel Drewett "he rather failed in the expectation we had of him in that position. Whether it was he got mixed up with County families or what, I can't say but he had not back bone enough to stand up for the oppressed". Lived Highfield House.

BROWN, J.R. Builder. Son of New Town St. grocer who also bought additional property. Owned 29 properties in 1869. Director of the South Beds and North Herts Permanent Building Society, 1850s.


BROWN, Richard Marks. d.1858. A small man, married three times and father of Frederick. Miller at the Brache who got on well with the Marquess of Bute, but less well with John Shaw Leigh. Member of Board of Guardians from 1835 and into the 1840s. Quaker, Tory.

BROWN, Robert J. Builder, brother of J.R. Married daughter of John Cumberland. Built also in Harpenden to which he moved in later years, living with his unmarried daughter in "increasing parsimony and discomfort". Kept a pet pig which followed him to the railway station before he embarked on his various journeys. Father of Henry Cumberland Brown who was a solicitor and became a manager of Balmforth's engineering works in Luton.

BURGE, James. Publican, member of Board of Health. Member of Luton Fire Brigade, 1858.

BURGESS, Rev. Henry. A near disastrous minister of Park Street Baptist Meeting House (see chapter 3), 1830 - 1848. Closely involved with the campaign for a railway line in the 1840s. Ran Luton Grammar School and published a monthly newspaper.

Burr, Charles. 1806 - 1892. Partner in family brewery which he sold to Thomas Sworder in 1857 but still retained property in Park Square area. Financial supporter of the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School and promoter of railway line in the 1850s. Living in Paddington at the time of his death.

BURR, Frederick. 1811 - 1856. Land owner and senior member of family brewing business. Lived Park Square. Supported Luton Horticultural Society, Church of England, Church Schools and Church Cemetery. Churchwarden 1838 - 1841 and member of the first Board of Guardians, 1835.


BUTTERFIELD, Francis. Farmer, Board of Health.

CAMMELL, William Henry. Engineer and kitchen range manufacturer, York Street. Opponent of the School Board.


CHAMBERS, George Henry. Market Hill shopkeeper. Board of Health members but failed to secure seat on Council in 1876, polling just 34 votes.

CHASE, Edward. b. 1792. Landowner, brother of Frederick.

CHASE, Frederick. b. 1797. Solicitor and landowner. Brother of Edward. Successfully master-minded "Yellow" control of Board of Health serving as its clerk from August 1850 until March 1851 when he left the district. Conservative.

CLARK, John. Farmer, "Yellow" Board of Health member, elected in 1850.

CLARKE, Dr. Frederick J. Surgeon, Park St. Served as Medical Officer to the Board of Health and Treasurer of Gaitskell Terrace Evening School. Member of Oddfellows.

CLARKE, Joseph. Director of South Beds and North Herts Permanent Building Society.

CLARKE, William. There were two, or possibly three William Clarke's which frustratingly are most difficult to tell apart. Landlord (and owner ?) of the Cock Inn from which he ran a coach service to London. Successful "Yellow" candidate, 1850. "Kindly" farmer at the Brache. Churchwarden, 1833 - 1852. Owned a number of cottages around the southern side of town. Member of the Board of Health and was successful in obtaining a seat on the first Town Council. At least one William Clarke was a Conservative.

COATES, W.T. Park Street draper. Congregationalist, Secretary of Luton Mutual Improvement Society.
COLLINGDON, Thomas. 1791 - 1884. Steward of Luton Hoo from 1834. Officially resided there but was often away in London.

CONGREVE, John. Assistant Overseer who was captured by police in 1872 after embezzling £12 and £15.9s.

CONISBEE, Frederick. Shopkeeper and owner of three properties in Burr Street. Elected to Town Council, 1876 and retired 1878. Conservative.


COOK(E), James. Maltster, brewer and member of Board of Health. Fire Brigade member, 1858.


COTCHIN, R. Shopkeeper, Liberal and supporter of the Mechanics Institute.

COX, Joseph. Coal merchant, Wesleyan Methodist and member of the Board of Health.

CRAWLEY, John Sambrook. 1823 - 1895. Inherited Stockwood estate in 1852 which he enlarged and improved. Member of Board of Health, 1853, magistrate (although he rarely attended), churchwarden, 1864 - 1866 but became involved in rows with O'Neill. Supported the School Board and gave financial support to Church Schools, parish churches in Stopsley, Biscot and West Hyde, and the cottage hospital. President of the South Beds Conservative Association.


CUMBERLAND, John. Surveyor and auctioneer. Conservative, Freemason and owner of small number of cottages in New Town. Member of the Board of Health and successful "Blue" candidate, 1872. Lukewarm toward incorporation but was elected to the first Town Council and succeeded Bigg as Mayor in 1877. Churchwarden 1858, 1868 - 1874.

CUTHBERTSON, Adam. Member of Mechanics Institute and co-promoter of Working Men's Representation Association.

DANCER, Joseph. Butcher and farmer, Park St. Member of Luton Fire Brigade, 1858. Owned 35 properties in New Town and High Town by 1871.

DANCER, Matthew. Butcher, Park St. Ally of Brickwood in opposing reform.

DANCER, William. 1793 - 1863. Successful shopkeeper in Stuart Street but committed suicide soon after retirement in 1863.

DANIELS, Samuel. Unsuccessful "Blue" candidate, 1850.


DAVIS, Frederick. d. 1874. Market Hill shoemaker. Born and educated in Luton and then in Towcester. Apprenticed to a draper for eleven years. Lived Stuart Street, married but many of his children died when still young. Liberal, Churchwarden and member of the Board of Health, being first elected in 1859 and serving a total of twelve years. Speculated in property in mid 1840s and owned several around the town. Methodist lay preacher and amateur historian, publishing a "History of Luton" in thirteen parts in 1855, and re-publishing this in 1874. Opposed the School Board. Of his public service the Luton Times wrote "He was always ready to spring up to move a resolution which a majority supported.....lacking originality, he has been put forward by men who are in the background....through a long public career we cannot call to mind one single project originated by him; he is not a leader, never was, but always a follower".

DAWSON, John. Shopkeeper, Liberal, unsuccessful candidate for Town Council in May 1876, but was elected in June. Mayor in 1882.

DAY, John. "One of the worst characters in this town".

DEBENHAM, Samuel. Photographer, King St. Secretary of Luton Protestant Association.

DORRINGTON, William. Fire Brigade member, 1858.

DREWETT, William. 1834 - 1900. Miller at the Biscot Mill, Quaker and Liberal. Opposed incorporation but was elected to the Town Council in May 1876.

DUNN, Thomas. Gardener to James O'Neill and appointed by him to post of churchwarden in 1867.

EVERITT, John. Straw hat manufacturer. An energetic man with a high sense of public duty. Worked for Edmund Waller in early career. Served on both the Board of Health and Board of Guardians during the 1850s, distinguishing himself during the cholera epidemic. Active as a Liberal and as a member of Park Street Baptist Meeting House at which he suggested the office of deaconess, which was adopted by Davies and was involved with young people. An early convert to teetotalism he was forced to resign from Park St by his refusal to partake of the (alcoholic) wine at Communion. Speculated (successfully) in land in King Street in the early 1860s, promoted the various railway schemes, and the water company in 1860 and 1865. Member of the Luton Reform Association, 1840s. Everitt later moved to London.

ELLIS, Charles. Saddler and harness maker, Manchester St. A member of the Oddfellows.

FARR, William. Landlord in Dudley Street and owner of cottages in Windmill Lane. High Town. Representing the interests of the Licensed Victuallers Association Farr was elected to the Town Council in May 1876.


FOSTER, John. d. 8.3.1864. Quaker minister, small, wiry man. Very careful in business earning the nickname "old pinch-plum".

FOSTER, Thomas. Cooper and seedsman in Chapel Street where he also owned a number of cottages, plus others in a yard bearing his name in Upper George Street. Member of the Fire Brigade in 1858.


GARDNER, William. Master of the Workhouse with his wife Elizabeth as Matron. Died from an outbreak of fever in the workhouse in 1847.
GARDNER, Joseph. Church Street grocer. Speculated in property through the Luton Freehold Land Society.

GEE, Frederick. Hat manufacturer. Speculating in property during the mid 1840s.

GENDERS, Rev. John William. Minister of Park Street Baptist Church, 1870 - 1876. Left for Portsea due to ill-health of his family. Supported School Board.


GODWIN, John. Director of the South Beds and North Herts Permanent Building Society.


GRAY, John. Owner of Crown and Anchor brewery in New Bedford Road which he sold to Thomas Sworder in 1849 at the same time also disposing of land and property in Wellington St. Afterwards Gray was described as one of the 'many spirited builders' building the Eagle Tavern in Wellington St. The Eagle statue on top of the public house was vandalised by someone who climbed up Gray's scaffolding and knocked its head off!


GREEN, J.W. Brewer, acquiring the businesses of amongst others, Pearman and Sworder (in 1897). Dominant brewer in the area by the 20th century. Freemason, Quaker but later Church of England, Liberal but later Conservative.

GREEN, Samuel. Liberal. Board of Health.


GREGORY, George. Husband or son of Elizabeth. Operated brick kiln in Dunstable Lane late 1840s, early 1850s. Lived in Dunstable St. Owned property in Old Bedford Road and financially supported the Mechanics Institute.

GUNN, Hugh. Hat manufacturer, Liberal, Congregationalist and Freemason. Member of the Co-operative and elected to the first Town Council in 1876. Mayor, 1879.

GUTTERIDGE, James. The last prominent member of a family which established itself in the Luton area in the 16th century and which had built up a considerable stock of land. Baptist, with a volcanic temper - "He had many good qualities, but he was a man of war" was the recollection of one contemporary. Obliged his workmen from Sundon village to walk the several miles round journey each Sunday to Eaton Green in order to collect their wages. John Waller was one of the executors of his estate.

GUTTERIDGE, Richard. Member of the Board of Guardians, 1840s.
HANDS, Rev. Thomas. 1818 - 1870. Successful minister at Park Street Baptist Meeting House. Liberal - "an ardent friend of the true elevation of the people and of Liberalism and of true reform" (his funeral address). Rev. Hands did not extend this ardour to the role of women in the church, suppressing their right to vote and abolishing the office of deaconess.


HEALE, Dr. Alfred. Surgeon. Gave evidence to Cresy. Member of the Literary Institute. Opposed the School Board and incorporation.

HIGGINS, James. Hat trade, Freemason and conservative. Opponent of School Board.

HIGGINS, John. Painter and Plumber. Conservative and opponent of incorporation. Member of the first Town Council, the School Board (Prayer Book Five), the Board of Health and the Board of Guardians.

HIGGINS, Walter. Temperance sympathiser and Liberal.


HOPKINS, Builder. Liberal.

HORNE, Frederick E. Plait dealer. Promoter of waterworks, 1864-65.

HOW, Robert. Hat dealer. Baptist, Liberal, member of Luton Reform and Registration Association and temperance supporter. Unsuccessful "Blue" candidate, 1850. Opposed incorporation. Built Bramingham Villa which he then sold to Scargill.

HOW, Thomas. Opponent of the proposed Board of Health. Liberal.

HOWARD, Eliot. Owner and manager of Hayward Tyler. Quaker and Liberal.


HUNT, John. Officer of Mechanics Institute, 1850s. Hat trade.

HUNT, William. Solicitor, Stuart Street. Originally from Leeds. Lived at the Villa in New Bedford Road but quit in 1847 and appears to have gone bankrupt - his home contents were auctioned. Solicitor to the New Building Society, 1851. Cricketer - took all ten wickets in an innings in August 1858. Freemason and Conservative. William Austin wrote "His alcoholic joviality was notorious and notwithstanding that he was the subject of many a practical joke, his manners never degenerated into vulgarity or quarrelling. Many still recall the pomposity of manner, the faultlessness of dress, the spotless linen and glossy hat of 'Squire' Hunt."

HUBBARD. Secretary of New Building Society, 1851.

JAMES, Inspector. Luton Police. Left in 1870 to be Superintendent at Ampthill.

JAQUEST, David. 1831 - 1901. First Chief Constable of Luton Police, 1876.

JOHNSON, G.M. Grocer. Officer of the Mechanics Institute, 1850s. Deacon of Congregational Church and Liberal.

JOHNSON, J.J. Hat manufacturer, Liberal. Successful "Yellow" candidate, 1850 and member of Board of Guardians.

JOHNSON, T.C. Wine and spirit merchant, owning at least one public house. Freemason and Member of Board of Health. School Board opponent. Went bankrupt in 1875 but still was a leading figure in the Licensed Victuallers Association in preparation for the Town Council elections of 1876.

JORDAN, Gustavus. Draper, Wesleyan and temperance supporter. Elected to the Board of Health in 1859. Opposed the School Board (and was an unsuccessful candidate) and opposed incorporation.


JORDAN, J.J. Joint manager (with above) of Luton Savings Bank.

JUDGE, Matthew. Manchester St watchmaker. Liberal.

KEELING, John. Director of South Beds and North Herts Permanent Building Society. Owned a number of properties, including twelve in Park Street West.


KIDMAN, James. Successful "Yellow" candidate, 1850. Tenant farmer of the Crawley's at Biscot and owned land in the Chapel Street area. Conservative.

KING, Solomon. An "old offender" whose home was apparently in Houghton Regis, but who spent much of his time in various gaols and workhouses.
LANE, Samuel. There were two, possibly three men living in Luton with this name. One was a butcher and another a builder (and wheelwright). One served on the Board of Health.

LAWFORD, Charles. Director of the South Beds and North Herts Permanent Building Society.


LAWFORD, Samuel. Plait dealer who went bankrupt in 1847 having traded "heedlessly and recklessly".

LEE, Rev. T.J. Vicar of Christ Church from 1857 until his death in 1875. Opponent of School Board.


LOCKHART, G.C.H. Coal merchant. Conservative, member of the Board of Health and unsuccessful School Board candidate. Failing to get elected to the Town Council in May 1876, he was successful in June.

LONG, G. Basket maker.


MACDOUALL, Canon William. Vicar of St. Mary's from 1827 until 1849 and occasionally preached there.

MAFFEY, Charles. Relieving Officer, resigned in 1870 after vote of censure by Guardians because of his "harsh and oppressive treatment of the poor".

MAKEPEACE, Rev. J. Minister of Union Chapel 1855 - 1863. Organised mission work in town.


MAYES, G. Member of fire brigade, 1858.


MEAD, Joseph. Grocer, Park Street. Board of Health.

MEES, Charles. George Street hat manufacturer. Opposed School Board and was an unsuccessful candidate. Elected to the first Town Council, his candidature being supported by the Working Mens Representation Association.

MERRITT, Jessee. Carpenter. Officer of the Mechanics Institute, 1850s.

MORTON, S.H. Temperance supporter.

MUGGLETON, Store manager of Co-op Co. on Market Hill. Baptist.

MUIR, James. Hat manufacturer. Unsuccessful "Blue" candidate, 1850. Member of Luton Reform Association, Literary Institute.

NEWLAND, Robert Henry. Ran Luton Academy in Church St, 1850s.


O'NEILL, Rev. James. Pugnacious Vicar of Luton, 1862 - 1897. Member of the Prayer Book Five faction on the School Board, and later its chairman, although he rarely attended.

ORDISH, C. Used Luton Freehold Land Society in order to speculate in property.

PADBURY, Vice-President of New Building Society, 1851.


PARKES, Thomas. Solicitor.

PARSONS, E. Operated Villa School in New Bedford Road from at least 1849 until his death in 1856. School was then taken over by Henry Wright.

PARTRIDGE, Thomas. Tenant farmer of Sir Edward Filmer at Leagrave. Member of Board of Guardians from 1835.


PEARMAN, Henry. Succeeded father in 1857 but proved to be a poor businessman - expanded business 'regardless of expense' and was swallowed up by J.W.Green. Liberal. Quaker, but later Church of England.


POPE, Superintendent. Head of Luton Police (officially Deputy Chief Constable of Bedfordshire) from 1850s.

POULTER, Thomas. Liberal, Congregationalist.

PRESSEY, J.W. Secretary of the Luton Improved Building Society. Accused of embezzlement, 1859.

PRIMETT, T. Shopkeeper, Co-operative Co.

PUDDEPHAT, Thomas. Shopkeeper, Liberal. Unsuccessful in May elections, 1876, but successful in June, 1876.

RABAN. Speculated in property through Luton Freehold Land Society.

RANDALL, A. Co-operative Co.

READ, William. Hat manufacturer, Co-operative Company.

ROBINSON, Charles. 1824 - 1877. Hat manufacturer and business partner of Tansley. Member of the Board of Health and the School Board (Bible Five). Liberal, Congregationalist, supporter of the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School and promoter of the Water Company, 1865.


SANDOE, William. Member of Gloucester family firm of estate agents. Board of Health Surveyor, 1861 - 1869; leaving dinner described in Luton Times 3.4.1869. Highly regarded by his employers. Married to Alice Mayes (member of Stuart St coach building family) and therefore, also to Hobbs family - brother in law to T.G. Hobbs. Congregationalist.

SCARGILL, Frank Chapman. Solicitor, with a practice in King Street. Built Bramingham Shott (later renamed Wardown and now present home of Luton Museum) in two stages 1867 - 1877. Clerk to the Justices, Liberal and successful "Blue" candidate for the Board of Health. Owned "Luton Advertiser" (which he purchased in 1874) and small number of beerhouses. Supporter of School Board and leading opponent of incorporation. Freemason. Keen cricketer, having his own team "Scargill's XI" which played occasional friendlies at Bramingham Shott. Purchased Biscot Mill from the Drewett's.

SEEBOHM, Benjamin. Secretary of Friends Adult School. Quaker, Liberal.


SHEPHERD, J.G. A leading promoter of the campaign which culminated in incorporation. Churchwarden, 1863.

SIBLEY, Henry. Farmer and slum landlord. Lived Union Street. "Yellow" Board of Health member, 1850-51.
SIKES, Rev. Thomas. Vicar of Luton, 1850 - 1854, and Curate, 1828 -1850. Married daughter of William Burr, therefore he was brother- in-law to Frederick and Charles. Member of the Literary Institute, Conservative.


SMITH, H. Warehouseman. Officer of the Mechanics Institute, 1876.

SMITH, Robert. Born at the end of the 18th century and claiming in 1875 to have lived in Luton for over eighty years. Initially furniture dealer and builder, concentrating upon the latter from the 1840s. Leased brickfields from Bute. Substantial property owner, George Bailey jibing "he has got alot old cottages about". Board of Health and opponent of incorporation.

SMITH, Thomas. Successful "Yellow" candidate, 1850. Shopkeeper.


SMITH, Thomas. Park St "gentleman". Liberal, elected to Town Council, May 1876.

SMYTH, Rev. H.B. Magistrate, Liberal, Vicar at Houghton Regis.

SOLE, George. 1811 - 1878. Shopkeeper. Owner of cottages in High Town as well as the Tower Hill slums. Elected to the Board of Health, 1858.

SQUIRES, Dr. Henry Augustus. "Gentleman", theologian and Baptist living in Liverpool Road, having moved there in 1866 buying "considerable amount of property" in that road. Board of Health.


STANION, Rev. Minister of Wellington Street Baptist Church. Left in 1857, possibly under something of a cloud. Still on committee of Gaitskell Terrace Evening School, 1858.

STEVENSON, Rev J.R. Minister of Union Chapel, 1864 - 1871. Liberal, supporter of School Board.

STRANGE, George. Lived and ran shop in Wellington Street. Also owned three (1871) houses in Farley Road. Liberal, Baptist.

STUART, John Crichton, 2nd Marquess of Bute. 1793 - 1848. Owner of Luton Hoo and Lord of the Manor but played little direct role in the affairs of the town. Sold Hoo to C.T.Warde, before it was acquired by Leigh. First Chairman of the Board of Guardians.

SWORDER, Charles. Brother of Thomas. Appears to have been running the affairs of the brewery at the time of its financial difficulties in 1862.
SWORDER, Robert. Partner of his brother, Thomas, in the brewery.

SWORDER, Thomas. 1823-1910. Solicitor, from Herts, came to Luton c. 1848 and married the eldest daughter of Richard Vyse in 1851. Became brewer out of "necessity" not choice by purchasing businesses in Luton; purchased Crown and Anchor Brewery in Manchester Street in 1849, Burr's Brewery in 1857 and Burr and Crab in 1860. Sold out to J.W.Green in 1897 for 139,000. Conservative, Anglican. Gained election to the Board of Health as "Blue" candidate in 1850s after being unsuccessful in 1850. Churchwarden, 1851 - 1853, backer of railway schemes, promoter of proposed Water Company, financial supporter of the Gaitskell Terrace Evening School, member of the Literary Institute and Prayer Book Five member of first School Board. Organised Luton Industrial Exhibition and Bazaar in 1861, which he held at his brewery buildings. A great friend of T. J Lee and James O'Neill, Sworder was a "reserved" man and live awhile at the Bury before moving to Holly Lodge, where he lived until his death.


TAYLOR, Edward. 1836 - 1890. Undertaker, Conservative? Served on Board of Health. Promoter of incorporation. Tied for sixth (and last) place in May Council elections in 1876, magnanimously withdrew and was rewarded with election in June.

TEARLE, J. Operated a free reading room in Wellington Street, 1859.

TOMALIN, Charles. Congregationalist deacon and baker in Park St. Owned several cottages in Lea Rd.

TOMSON, Charles. Sundon farmer, vice-chairman of the Board of Guardians in the 1840s. Father of Kit.

TOMSON, Henry. Promoted railway in the 1840s and 1850s. Member of the Literary Institute. Owner of property in Bute Street.

TOMSON, Dr. Kit. 1823 - 1891. Son of Charles, Medical Officer to the Board of Guardians and served a similar, temporary role for the Board of Health. Founder member of the Luton Liberal Association and member of the Literary Institute. Owner of five (1871) properties scattered around Luton.

TOYER, Alfred. Born in 1830 at Kinsbourne Green between Luton and Harpenden. Educated at plait school, never receiving any formal schooling and moved to Luton when in early teens. Oilman and bleacher, High Town. Committee member of Owners and Ratepayers Protection Association, formed in 1871. At the time he owned seven cottages in Duke Street and one property in Brunswick Street. Liberal, Baptist. Mayor of Luton in 1890-1.

TOYER, Samuel. 1806 - 1874. Builder, member of the Board of Health. Founder and President of Owners and Ratepayers Protection Association. President of the New Building Society (1850). Owned twenty two properties around Luton (1871), eighteen of which were in Wellington Street. Liberal, promoter of Water Company in 1864, and member of Wellington Street Baptist Church. Moved to Ramsgate. Opposed the building of the Plait Halls and probably just about every improvement to the town. Toyer received just one kind notice from the Luton Times - his obituary.

TUCKWELL, Rev. J. Baptist Minister of Union Church. Supporter of School Board.

TRANTER, William. Member of the Mechanics Institute.

TWELLS, Rev. Minister of Waller Street Methodist Church until 1874.

UNDERWOOD, John. Shopkeeper, Wesleyan, involved with the Sunday School. Member of the Mechanics Institute.


VYSE, Richard. d. 13.7.1855. Hat manufacturer originating from London who opened a Luton branch in 1826, employing between three hundred and five hundred men and women. Promoter of improvement and reform: member of Board of Guardians, campaigned for a Board of Health. Promoter of railway in 1840s. Liberal, Freemason, Anglican but also supported dissenting causes. Lived in Castle Street where he was recalled as a "prince of hospitable entertainment" although also possessing a "somewhat shy and retiring disposition". Member of the Literary Institute and Horticultural Society. Keen cricketer and enjoyed shooting. Father-in-law of Thomas Sworder. Died at Herne Hill.

VYSE, Richard. Son of above. d. 1867.

WADSWORTH, William. Hotelier at the George Hotel. Freemason.

WALLER, Edmund. 1783 - 1845. Pioneer hat manufacturer and draper, George Street. Brother of Thomas, Robert, James and John. Associated with Baptists from 1812, providing the financial prop for the church during Burgess' ministry. Leading opponent of the Church Rate. Promoter of railway schemes in 1840s and also the Gas Company. Member of first Board of Guardians. Buying ground from 1806 from Gutteridge. Liberal. Joseph Hawkes recalled him as "a very remarkable individual - personally tall and of a fine physical build, strong, energetic, doing with his might whatsoever his hand found to do. Mr Waller dressed in black, with pantaloons and hessian boots and tassels. his commercial walking pace was not less than four and half miles an hour. He was of very quick perception, and equally prompt in decision. When his judgment was once formed it was not easily changed..."

WALLER, James. Brother of John, son of Thomas. Member of the Board of Health in 1851. Vice-President of the Mechanics Institute. Member of the Luton Reform and Registration Association and Freehold Land Society. Liberal. Promoter of the railway line, 1850s. Hat manufacturer, George Street and succeeded father in the business.


WALLER, John. 1792 - 1859. Brother of Edmund, Thomas, James and Robert. Woolstapler, draper, successful "Yellow" candidate, 1850. Wesleyan lay preacher, Liberal. Purchased Gutteridge's house in George Street with extensive gardens stretching down to the River Lea. These gardens were built upon after his death.

WALLER, John. Son of Thomas and brother of James. Hat manufacturer, working with his father. Lived Wellington Street.

WALLER, Robert. Brother of Thomas, Edmund, James and John. Hat manufacturer, but also employed by Edmund to operate around England as commercial traveller.
WALLER, Thomas. 1795 - 1845. Pioneering hat manufacturer, developing the trade, concentrating in particular in the method of production of the plait and travelling to Tuscany in the process. "The intercourse of Mr Thomas Waller with the world, renders his house a very tasteful establishment, and he possesses a few good pictures" wrote Sir Richard Phillips in 1828. Brother of Edmund, James, Robert and John. Son of James (not above) and father to James and John. Backer of railway in the 1840s. Liberal. Died apparently from a "visitation of God".

WALLER, Dr. Thomas. Originated from Yorkshire. Surgeon on Market Hill, freemason.


WARDILL, Secretary to Gaitskell Terrace Evening School.

WARR, James. 1792 - 1853. Farmer, member of the Board of Health in 1851.

WARDE, C.T. Living in Warwickshire, purchased Luton Hoo from Marquess of Bute whilst separating from his wife. Either was not able to complete the purchase or could not hold the property for long and it soon was purchased by Leigh.

WEBDALE, John. 1817 - 1887. Warehouseman and retailer. Owned twenty properties around the town (1871). Liberal, Congregationalist, successful "Blue" candidate to the Board of Health in 1872 and unsuccessful School Board candidate, 1874. Elected to Town Council, 1877 and Mayor of Luton in 1881.

WEBSTER, A.T. 1818 - 1895. Hat manufacturer employing approximately 150 in 1875. Liberal, Congregationalist deacon, supporter of the Mechanics Institute and incorporation, serving upon the first Council. Unsuccessful "Blue" candidate in 1850 but was later to serve upon the Board of Health. Promoter of the Water Company in 1864. Mayor, 1878.

WEBSTER, R.T. Member of Luton Reform and Registration Association. (No R.T. Webster appears in any directory and this could well have been a printing error leaving R.T. to be the above).

WELCH, A.P. Liberal, hat manufacturer. First Luton magistrate, 1868. Backer of the proposed water company, 1860 and Director of Water Company established in 1865. Financial supporter of the Mechanics Institute and the Prayer Book Five member of the School Board. Moved to the south coast but retained contact with Luton through the Children's Hospital built in London Road in 1894 due to his financial support.

WELCH, Levi. Pursued an escalating criminal career which culminated in his trial for murder in 1868. Escaped the gallows by turning Queen's evidence.

WILLIAMS, Evan Owen. d. 1886. Luton builder, architect and surveyor. Son of John, father of Herbert Owen. Carried out much of the building on the north-eastern side of George Street. Freemason, Conservative, Anglican, Churchwarden in 1859, and member of the Literary Institute. Served upon the Board of Health and performed the duty of Returning Officer at the first Council elections, after which he was appointed a J.P. Owned relatively few properties (eleven in 1871) for one in such an advantageous position.

WILLIAMS, John. d.1851. Corn merchant and builder, relinquishing the former trade from the 1840s in favour of the latter. Father of E.O. Owned/leased brickfields.

WILLIAMSON, Edward Chilwell. 1786 - 1863. Moved to Luton c.1803. Solicitor, partner in Williamson and Austin. Very generous man and involved in many aspects of public life. Clerk to the Board of Guardians, promoter of attempt to acquire Improvement Bill in 1847, unsuccessful
"Blue" candidate, 1850, Registrar of the County Court and member of the Literary Institute, leaving three thousand volumes for the foundation of a town library. Promoter of railway in the 1840s and 1850s, Liberal, Freemason.

WILLIS, T.J. Hat manufacturer, Liberal, Baptist and temperance campaigner.

WILLIS, William. Hat manufacturer. Member of Luton Reform and Registration Association, Liberal, temperance campaigner. Involved with all campaigns for improvement and reform but possessed an unfortunate propensity for long-windedness. Involved with the Freehold Land Society and the various railway schemes. Served upon the Board of Health and was a member of the Literary Institute.

WISEMAN, John. "Printer, Book and Music Seller, Bookbinder, Stationer and News Agent. Dealer in Patent Medicines and Perfumery etc etc", 43, George Street. Secretary to Mechanics Institute (1846) and operated a circulating library (1856). Published the Luton Miscellany (monthly) and then the Luton Times from 7th July, 1855. Went bankrupt in March 1861 and was forced to sell the newspaper, but was able to start up again (in the same business) by 1862 in Bute Street.

WOAKES, Dr. E.O. Lived in Wellington Street in the 1840s. After the death of his niece (who was living in his house) in mysterious circumstances in January, 1847, a mob had to be cleared from in front of his house by special police. Conservative, Freemason, supporter of sanitary reform, supporter of the School Board and opponent of incorporation.


WORSLEY, Obadiah. Frequently bought before the magistrates bench for various breaches of the peace. Also landlord of houses in Inkerman Street and High Town.

WOOTON, Peter. Baptist, chemist in George Street. An enterprising man who was interested in educational developments; Superintendent of the Park St Sunday School, committee of Gaitskell Terrace Evening School, Bible Five member of the School Board. Elected to first Council, his candidature being supported by the Working Mens Representation Association.

WREN, Henry. Liberal, hat manufacturer. Mechanics Institute official in the 1850s. Supporter of incorporation but was unsuccessful in two attempts to be elected in 1876, finally succeeding in 1877.


WRIGHT, James. Coal merchant. Member of the Co-operative Co.

James Adams
John Cumberland

John Webdale
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Name</th>
<th>Modern Name of Street/Area or Nearest Equivalent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide Terrace</td>
<td>Eastern side of George St</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird End</td>
<td>In New Town St</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackwater Lane</td>
<td>Lea Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briden’s Passage</td>
<td>Adjacent to New Town St</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Brick/Brache</td>
<td>Park Town near to Park St</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Cabbage St&quot;</td>
<td>Strathmore Ave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cemetery Road</td>
<td>Rothesay Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Road</td>
<td>Early name for undeveloped end of New Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coney Hall</td>
<td>Old Bedford Road near to junction with Bridge Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Hill</td>
<td>Site of Town Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davis Field</td>
<td>Chase St/New Town St area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donkey Hall</td>
<td>High Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drop Short</td>
<td>New Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dove Cottages</td>
<td>In High Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunstable Lane</td>
<td>Upper George Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaitskell Terrace</td>
<td>High Town/Hitchin Rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gibb Square
(also Jebb Square)

High Street
(abandoned in early 19th century)

Hog Lane
(abandoned in early 19th century)

Jebb Square
(also Gibb Square)

Langley Road

Long Pond
(abandoned in early 19th century)

Kings Road

Mayes Lane

Mount Pleasant

North Street

Park Meadow

Park Road West

Pepper Hill

Pondwicks Gardens

In High Town

George Street

Chapel Street

In High Town

Latimer Road

Park Square

Kingsland Road

Stuart St

In High Town

George Street

Popes Meadow

Strathmore Ave

Peoples Park

Land close to Crawley Green Road and present railway line
Prospect Place  Chase St & New Town St

Saffron Gardens  Sold 1859. Near Pondwicks

Seven Acres  Guildford St vicinity

Sheep Street  Park Street/Road
(abandoned in early 19th century)

South End  Park Street/Road
(abandoned in early 19th century)

Tingewicke Cottages  Chase St/New Town St area

Tower Hill  Manchester Street

Townrow Close  Near to Chapel St

Worlds End  Chase Street/New Town Street

Wren's Yard  Eastern side of George St.
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Rev. Henry Burgess may have been responsible for the publication of the first newspaper produced in Luton. This was a monthly newsheet and was possibly The Wreath to which the Beds Times refers to on 28.8.1846.

The Luton Times was first published by John Wiseman on 7.7.1855. This followed the Luton Miscellany a monthly newspaper published by Wiseman since 1854. A bastion of upper middle-class urban Liberalism it highlighted social evils, including individual cases of hardship and injustice, was pro-reform and advocated maximum intervention on the part of the Board of Health. The town's chapels received extensive and sympathetic coverage. Wiseman continued to publish the Luton Times until his bankruptcy in March, 1861.

Reference was made on 28.7.1855 to a rival to the Luton Times, the Luton Recorder but very little is known of this newspaper except that it appears to have been short lived.

The first edition of the Luton News appeared in January 1861. Like the Luton Times this was published in Wellington Street, the proprietor being William Stalker. The Luton News was a little more conservative than Wiseman's paper. Stalker was a Baptist and his newspaper gave prominence to events at the local churches from this denomination. The Luton News bears no relation to the current paper of the same name which was first published in 1891.

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