



University of Huddersfield Repository

Doyle, Barry M.

The structure of elite power in the early twentieth century city: Norwich 1900-1935

Original Citation

Doyle, Barry M. (1997) The structure of elite power in the early twentieth century city: Norwich 1900-1935. *Urban history*, 24 (2). pp. 179-199. ISSN 0963-9268

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/7006/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

The structure of elite power in the early twentieth-century city: Norwich, 1900–35

BARRY M. DOYLE*

Dept of Economic and Social History, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, EH8 9JY

ABSTRACT: Through a study of middle-class power in Norwich in the first third of the twentieth century, this paper tests a number of hypotheses concerning the behaviour of British urban elites. Analysis of networks (freemasons, business organizations and family) assesses the level of social unification among the middle class; elite involvement in chapel, charities and voluntary organizations addresses the question of social leadership; whilst elite politics is considered through three questions: did they become unified behind a single anti-socialist stance? Did the more important members of the elite leave urban politics? And did they abandon faith in grand civic projects? Its conclusions suggest that the power and involvement of the elite continued into the 1930s, maintaining a positive approach to the scope and function of municipal authority.

In recent years urban historians have done much to increase our understanding of the structure and organization of middle-class power in the nineteenth-century English city.¹ Studies of, among others, Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, Salford, the Lancashire cotton towns, the Black Country, Birmingham, Bristol and Reading have employed a range of methodologies and aims to analyse who exercised power in the nineteenth-century urban arena and the means they utilized to reinforce and perpetuate their authority.² Overall they present an image of slowly

* Versions of this paper were given to the Urban History Group Conference, 'Elites in Urban in History', Edinburgh, March 1995 and the 'Mid-West Conference on British Studies', Ann Arbor, Michigan, November 1995. I am very grateful to the Overseas Conference Grants section of the British Academy, and the Special Staff Travel Fund and the Department of History at the University of Durham for financial assistance towards the completion and presentation of this research.

¹ R. Trainor, 'Urban elites in Victorian Britain', *Urban History Yearbook* (1985), 1–17.

² R.J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party in the Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds 1820–1850* (Manchester, 1990); D. Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester, 1980); A.J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds), *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985); J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1830–80* (Manchester, 1983); P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (London, 1980); R.H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area, 1830–1900* (Oxford, 1993); E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban*

developing and socially diverse elites which by the later nineteenth century had negotiated the incorporation and assimilation of conflicting religious, status and political positions into a unified civic establishment. Furthermore, the predominance of studies from the Lancashire area have left an impression of the elite's growing estrangement from their urban roots,³ and though Trainor has modified this latter impression to some extent – not least by emphasizing the *depth* of elite leadership outside of the company towns of Lancashire and Reading⁴ – the impression remains of a middle class unified in purpose and at least semi-detached from the city by the end of the nineteenth century. Yet few historians have extended the investigation of the urban middle class beyond the First World War,⁵ with research into the society and politics of the city of the first third of the twentieth century concentrating on the development of the working class as the central agents of urban leadership.

This historiographical tradition has generated two assumptions about the nature of urban power in the early twentieth century. The first assumption is that after 1900 the urban elite came together via a variety of social and kinship networks (intermarriage, freemasonry, the volunteers), and business organizations, to override the traditional political differences of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.⁶ In subsequent years this coming together of property owners manifested itself politically in disaffection with the Liberal reforms of 1908–12, in anti-socialist municipal alliances which were increasingly common in the years after 1906, and ultimately in unity in and through the Conservative party.⁷ The

Government (London, 1973); H. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870–1914* (London, 1976); S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London, 1976). For developments in Wales and Scotland see M.J. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff 1870–1914* (Leicester, 1977) and N. Morgan and R.H. Trainor, 'The dominant classes', in W. Hamish Fraser and R.J. Morris (eds), *People and Society in Scotland: Vol. II, 1830–1914* (Edinburgh, 1990).

³ S. Simon, *A Century of City Government: Manchester 1838–1938* (Manchester, 1938); K. Chorley, *Manchester Made Them* (London, 1950); J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, 1963); Garrard, *Leadership and Power*; Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*; M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁴ Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, esp. conclusion.

⁵ G.W. Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Borough Council, 1888–1964* (London, 1969); P. Jones, 'Politics', in D. Nash and D. Reeder (eds), *Leicester in the Twentieth Century* (Stroud, 1993); M. Meadowcroft, 'The years of political transition, 1914–39', in Fraser, *Modern Leeds*, 410–36; F. Carr, 'Municipal socialism: Labour's rise to power', in B. Lancaster and T. Mason (eds), *Life and Labour in the Twentieth Century City: The Experience of Coventry* (Coventry, 1986), 172–203; P.J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1868–1939* (Liverpool, 1981). For Edinburgh see D. McCrone and B. Elliott, *Property and Power in a City: The Sociological Significance of Landlordism* (Basingstoke, 1989).

⁶ In addition to the works cited in note 2 see also, H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780–1880* (London, 1969), 430–7; J.R. Hay, 'Employers and social policy in Britain', *Social History*, 2 (1977); J. Turner (ed.), *Businessmen and Politics: Studies of Business Activity in British Politics, 1900–1945* (London, 1984).

⁷ N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The British General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972); G.R. Searle, 'The Edwardian Liberal party and business', *English Historical*

second assumption, central to the work of Mike Savage, is that from the turn of the century the urban elite withdrew to a privatized lifestyle in the county and outer suburbs. In the process they surrendered their social and political leadership, deserted the churches, charities and council, abandoned their belief in the usefulness of municipal projects to modernize the urban environment and handed control of the city to the working class and the petit bourgeois economizers.⁸ Though undoubtedly based in fact, these assumptions are certainly in need of a degree of qualification and their application to the nation as a whole must be questioned. It is probable that the tendency to concentrate on a few very elite members of the urban community and not the elite as a whole, has exaggerated the degree of cultural assimilation and civic withdrawal which actually took place in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, there is a tendency to assume that the upper middle class always left urban politics voluntarily, an impression sustained by the fact that most of the small body of work on the 1900–39 era is based on analysis of the rise of Labour and the milieu of the working class, leading to a rather naive interpretation of the middle-class social and political world.

The intention of this article is to test these assumptions through a case study of the city of Norwich, challenging the first (cultural assimilation) by a detailed investigation of three aspects of middle-class culture – marriage patterns, freemasonry and business organizations (especially chambers of commerce) – and the second (activism to quietism) by an assessment of the health of religious organizations and charities, and the detail of political activism, concentrating, in particular, on the elite response to the issue of modernization through municipal intervention. In order to achieve these aims it will concentrate on the social, political and cultural world of middle-class political activists, especially the political elite who represented the Liberal and Conservative parties in the various structures of local government and were drawn preponderantly from the middle middle and upper middle classes identified by Trainor.⁹ As such, it will utilize a hybrid methodology drawing on both conventional political sociology and the techniques employed by Trainor

Review, 98 (1983), 28–60; P.F. Clarke, 'The end of laissez-faire and the politics of cotton', *Historical Journal*, 15 (1972), 493–512; C. Cook, 'Labour and the downfall of the Liberal party, 1906–14', in A. Sked and C. Cook (eds), *Crisis and Controversy* (London, 1976); J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902–1940* (London, 1978).

⁸ Savage, *Dynamics of Working Class Politics*; M. Savage, 'Urban history and social class: two paradigms', *Urban History*, 20, 1 (1993), esp. 72–6.

⁹ This study is based on an analysis of approximately 400 Liberal and Conservative mayors, sheriffs, aldermen, councillors, guardians, and unsuccessful candidates for the latter two posts, in the period 1900–39. Evidence was also collected on those who were politically committed but did not seek office, including members of political clubs, attendees at political meetings and officers and activists in ward organizations. For biographical sources see B.M. Doyle, 'Middle class realignment and party politics in Norwich, 1900–1932' (unpublished University of East Anglia Ph.D. thesis, 1990), 90–2 and footnotes. For the middle middle class, see Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, Appendix 1.

and Joyce in their studies of the structure of the wider urban elite, such as marriage, philanthropic and associational involvement.¹⁰

But how typical was Norwich of developments in urban politics in the early twentieth century? At one time England's second city, by 1911 a population of 121,000 placed it around thirtieth in the urban hierarchy, on a par with towns such as Blackburn, Coventry, Derby, Huddersfield and Preston and considerably larger than most of the county towns with which it tends to be associated.¹¹ The post-1850 period witnessed an economic revival based on the products of the developing consumer revolution.¹² The largest single employer in the Edwardian period was Colman's Mustard (2,500 workers), the most important industry footwear, with 10,000 employees, which combined with the city's traditional importance as a market and administrative centre and its developing commercial base in insurance and banking, to produce a diverse and prosperous economy.¹³ Though export markets were lost as a result of the First World War, the Norwich economy remained stable in the 1920s, with unemployment at only 2 per cent in 1927.¹⁴ Early twentieth-century conversions to limited company status did not remove control of the local economy from local hands, and the take-overs which did occur in the immediate post-war era were limited mainly to firms in the older sectors, such as silk.

The expansion of the economy created a new manufacturing, commercial and professional middle class – often migrant, nonconformist and Liberal – who challenged the existing Tory Anglican elite concentrated in the ranks of the professional and commercial classes. This former group was prominent in developing powerful dissenting structures through city centre chapels and by 1900 had come to play an important part both individually and collectively in the philanthropic, social and political structures of the city. Furthermore, as most suburbanization took place within the boundaries of the city, in the walking suburbs of Eaton and Thorpe,¹⁵ most of the middle class remained spatially wedded to the city

¹⁰ Trainor, *Black Country Elites*; Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*. For the 'conventional' approach, see Jones, *Borough Politics*; Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*; and Garrard, *Leadership and Power*. For further discussion of elite recruitment in Norwich, see B.M. Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism and the "lost generation": politics and middle class culture in Norwich, 1900–1935', *Historical Journal*, 38, 3 (1995).

¹¹ Cambridge, Exeter, Chester and Worcester all had populations of less than 50,000; Bath, Oxford, Reading and York less than 100,000. B.R. Mitchell with P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962).

¹² W.H. Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850–1914* (London, 1981).

¹³ C.B. Hawkins, *Norwich: A Social Study* (London, 1910); J.K. Edwards, 'Industrial development of the city, 1800–1900', in C. Barringer (ed.), *Norwich in the Nineteenth Century* (Norwich, 1982); W.L. Sparkes, *The Story of Shoemaking in Norwich* (Northampton, 1949).

¹⁴ P. Cunningham, 'Unemployment in Norwich during the nineteen thirties' (unpublished University of East Anglia Ph.D. thesis, 1990).

¹⁵ S. Muthesius, 'Nineteenth century Norwich houses', in Barringer, *Nineteenth Century Norwich*; and P. Travers, 'The changing pattern of prestige residence in Norwich, 1871–1971: a case study of the geography of segregation' (unpublished University of East Anglia Ph.D. thesis, 1984).

with residents paying city rates, using city services and conducting most of their social, religious and political life in the city centre. Politically Norwich, like Preston, remained an undivided borough until 1949, returning a Liberal at every election between 1904 and 1945 – with the exception of 1923. In municipal politics the Liberals did experience decline, suffering considerable attrition from Labour interventions and entering *ad hoc* alliances with the Tories, interspersed with periods of independence – especially 1926–30.

This brief sketch of the development of Norwich suggests that, though in some ways different from the industrial heartlands of the west midlands and north-west, the city was by no means atypical as a developing urban centre of the early twentieth century. Certainly Norwich was something of a hybrid, with an economy and middle-class elite more diverse than many similar-sized towns, yet considerably smaller than other regional centres such as Manchester, Leeds or Birmingham. Its history of very early economic development meant it possessed an existing Tory urban elite already independent of influence from the county, yet its industrial revival late in the nineteenth century created a new sector of the middle class challenging for political and social power in the Edwardian period. Yet the suburbanization of its middle class close to the city centre did mirror the experience of the west midlands and the smaller towns of the north-west, rather than the dispersal of the middle class observed in Manchester, Leeds and Preston.¹⁶ Nor was the importance of middle-class Liberalism as exceptional as it first appears, for the Liberals maintained a persistent challenge in many middle-class areas, especially in Bradford, and in the smaller towns of the north, like Huddersfield and Sunderland, well into the 1920s.¹⁷ Thus, the experience of its early twentieth-century elite had much in common with other urban elites in the midlands (especially Leicester),¹⁸ and the smaller towns of Lancashire and West Yorkshire where religious conflict, later economic development, the persistence of middle-class Liberalism and spatial segregation within the bounds of the borough remained the norm. Furthermore, its hybrid nature offers some useful insights into the overall pattern of elite power in early twentieth-century England, and in particular the questions of cultural assimilation and the decline of political and social activism.

This section of the paper will analyse three different aspects of middle-class culture in Norwich: marriage, associational life (the freemasons) and business organizations (especially the chamber of commerce) to assess the extent to which a socially unified middle class existed in the

¹⁶ Compare Savage, *Dynamics of Working Class Politics*, 112–15 with Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, 110; D. Cannadine, 'Victorian cities: how different?', *Social History*, 2 (1977); Jones, *Borough Politics*, 207–9; Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, ch. 1.

¹⁷ C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922–29* (London, 1975), 68–70.

¹⁸ Jones, 'Politics'.

1900–35 period. Were cultural assimilation advanced one might expect to see a fair degree of intermarriage between Liberal and Conservative families, the mixing of all sections of the middle class in the Masonic lodges and the business community speaking with one voice through the medium of the developing business organizations of the city. But was this actually the case in early twentieth-century Norwich?

Marriage patterns

The importance of marriage and kinship in the development and consolidation of the urban middle class is now recognized as being as significant and complex as the dynastic alliances of the traditional landed elite.¹⁹ However, though Joyce and Trainor have emphasized the importance of denomination in cementing kinship ties, the tendency of the historiography has been to highlight intermarriage as a means of breaking down boundaries within the middle class. The evidence from Norwich, however, does not support this view. Figure 1 shows the interconnections by marriage of the fifteen leading Liberal families in Norwich. Between 1880 and the end of the Second World War, these families supplied the Liberal party with four Members of Parliament (plus another two by marriage), one parliamentary candidate, nine mayors, four sheriffs, three aldermen and four councillors. Moreover, as these figures count only the most senior office, they underestimate the full impact and influence of these families on the Liberal politics of the period. This was a closed world based around chapel – seven families were Congregationalists, three Baptists, one Plymouth Brethren and four Anglican – and dominated by the industrial, commercial and professional middle class, many of whom were also connected by business and professional partnerships. In the inter-war period there was some inter-generational weakening of the Liberal monopoly, with members of the Jewson family active in the Labour party (including one elected as an MP), whilst the Conservatives had made inroads into the Southall and Curl families by the later 1920s.²⁰ Yet this was still fairly exceptional. There was only one straight defection to the Conservatives from within these families (Russell Colman) and virtually no intermarriage with established Conservative dynasties prior to the 1920s. Fidelity to Liberalism was much more common, and members of eleven of these families continued to play a significant part in the party throughout the 1920s.²¹

¹⁹ For studies which include some discussion of marriage see Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, 15–18; Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, esp. 73 and 121; C. Binfield, *So Down To Prayers* (London, 1977); Benwell Community Project Final Report Series 6, *The Making of a Ruling Class: Two Centuries of Capital Development on Tyneside* (Newcastle, 1978), 38 and Appendix I.

²⁰ For further discussion of these marriage patterns see Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism', 628, and 'Middle class realignment', ch. 6.

²¹ *Eastern Daily Press* [hereafter EDP], 21 May 1929.

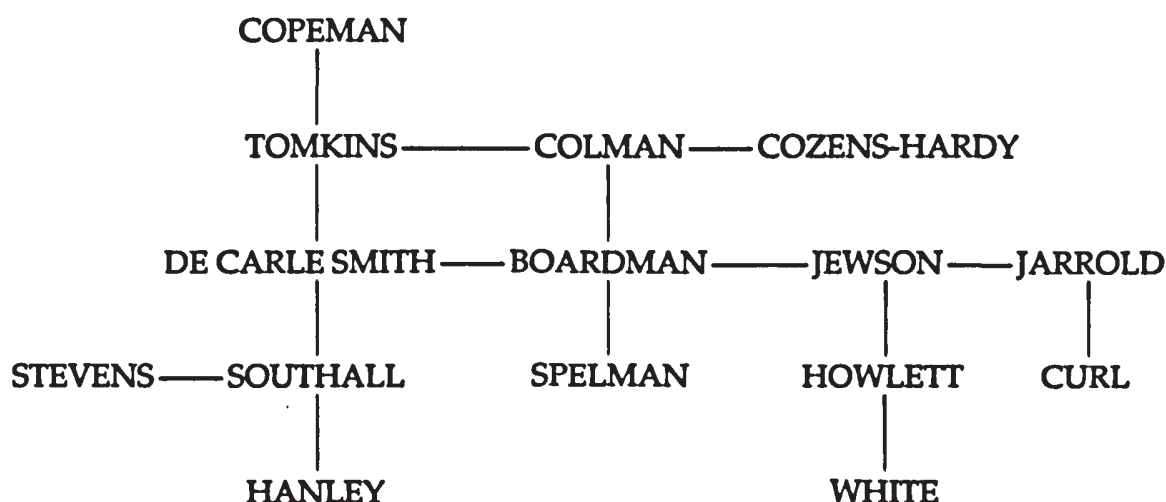


Figure 1: Major Liberal connections by marriage, 1850–1918

Thus the evidence from kinship networks does not suggest any significant coming together of the Liberal and Conservative sections of the Norwich middle class, nor any noticeable weakening in the commitment of these leading nonconformist families to the Liberal party.

Freemasons

If social unity was not facilitated by marriage were connections being forged in that most exclusive arena of provincial sociability, the Masonic lodge? Although some historians have suggested that freemasonry may have been important in bringing the urban middle class together socially and politically, apart from the work of Gerry Finn on Scotland²² we still know little or nothing about who joined the lodges of the early twentieth century or why. Jones has shown that though many of Wolverhampton's Tory councillors were freemasons, very few Liberals are known to have joined. Lee, Joyce and Trainor hint at the possible importance of the lodge, without presenting any concrete evidence of nonconformist Liberals actually joining up, whilst Savage, in emphasizing the importance of freemasons in uniting the middle class, does present more detailed evidence on a specific lodge, but this had only sixty members, most of whom were white-collar workers.²³ Thus the case for freemasonry as a vehicle for middle-class homogeneity remains largely unproven. So what was the situation in Norwich?

By 1918 Norwich had approximately 600 masons in six lodges, of

²² G.P.T. Finn, 'In the grip? A psychological and historical exploration of the social significance of freemasonry in Scotland', in G. Walker and T. Gallagher (eds), *Sermons and Battle Hymns* (Edinburgh, 1990), 160–92.

²³ Jones, *Borough Politics*, 136–7; Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, 37; Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, 78; Lee, *Social Leaders*, 34; Savage, *Dynamics of Working Class Politics*, 114.

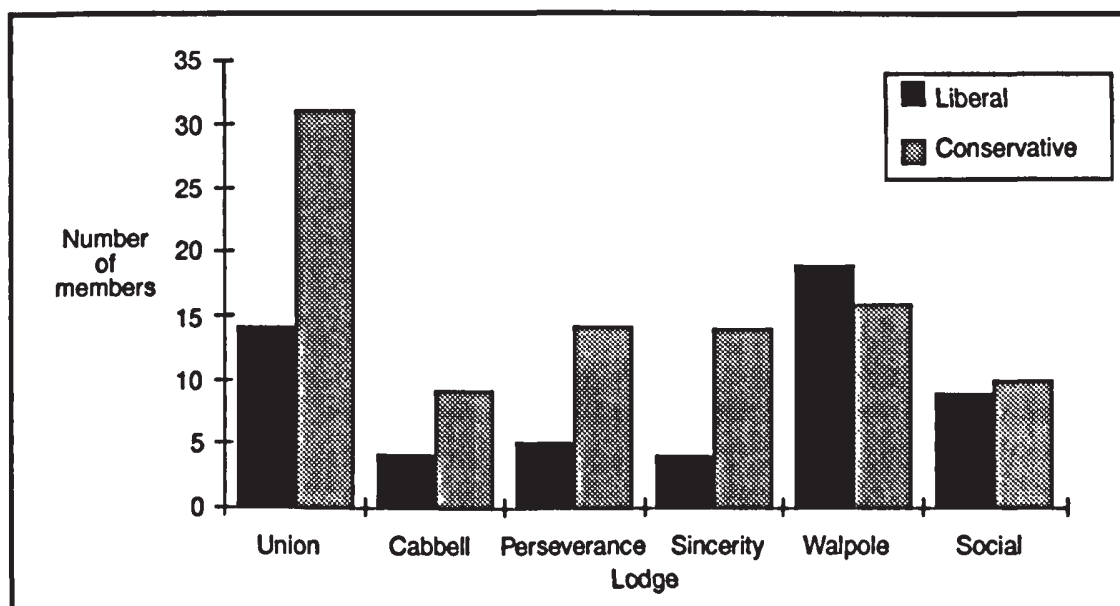


Figure 2: Political affiliation of Norwich freemasons by Lodge, 1900–35

which around 150 are known to have been political activists, dividing two to one in favour of the Conservative party.²⁴ From Figure 2 it is apparent that the Tories were evenly spread across all six lodges (though Union Lodge was the most popular) whilst the much smaller number of Liberals were concentrated in Social Lodge and, to a lesser extent, Union and Walpole. Not surprisingly, each of these lodges had fairly specific characteristics which might help to explain this uneven distribution. Cabbell and Perseverance seem to represent an older type of independent sociability and were dominated by retailers, small businessmen, some professionals and a couple of working-class Tories, many of whom were also Conservative activists in the two main retailing wards of the city centre. Walpole, again predominantly lower middle class, also drew its membership from a specific spatial constituency, centred on the Westwick/Mancroft area of the city centre.²⁵ The rather more select membership of Sincerity was determined by both occupational links (including various professions) and associations formed through the Territorial Army, and though the significant group of Conservative

²⁴ Evidence on membership was collected from biographical dictionaries, obituaries, reports of funerals and the following sources which provided full or partial lists of members. H. Le Strange, *History of Freemasonry in Norfolk, 1724–1895* (Norwich, 1896); Lord Amherst of Hackney and H. Le Strange, *History of the Union Lodge, Norwich No. 52* (Norwich, n.d.[1896]); The Norwich Masonic Association, *Twenty Sixth Annual Report of the Directors* (Norwich, 1906) and *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Directors* (Norwich, 1911) [hereafter *NMA Annual Report*]; 'Records relating to the registration of Lodges of Freemasons in Norfolk: list of members and occupations of members of Walpole Lodge 1500, 1925', Norfolk Records Office [hereafter NRO] C/Scg 7/1/21; 'Union Lodge of Freemasons: register of members 1864–1905', NRO/SO9/26 465X.

²⁵ NRO/C/Scg 7/1/21.

activists included three sheriffs, the very small Liberal contingent was composed of those with only loose connections to the party.

Union, Norfolk's elite lodge, also indicates little evidence of Liberal penetration. Union married city and county, many of its members being drawn from the urban and rural gentry, along with a smattering of aristocrats and even a little royalty – Edward, Prince of Wales was a nominal member.²⁶ Among the Norwich-based political activists the professions predominated (eleven were solicitors), although commercial interests such as insurance and banking were also significantly represented – five of the dozen Liberals having connections with banking. The politically active members were also connected in other ways: fathers and sons, business partners, in-laws and even two Liberals who attended Mill Hill School at the same time. The Conservative activists included no fewer than fourteen men who held elite municipal office (mayor, sheriff or alderman) and another five who were councillors, whilst of the Liberal members most had never represented the party at any level.²⁷ Predominantly members of the Norfolk and Norwich Liberal Club, few were 'normal' Liberals, that is nonconformist businessmen. Rather, most were drawn from occupations dominated by Conservatives (banking and the wine trade), whilst many were already Anglican in religion.

This was not the case with Social Lodge which attracted one-third of all the Liberal masons who have been identified, including eight who held elite office and four who served as councillors. Among the occupations represented in this group were shoe manufacturers, manufacturing chemists, merchants and professionals, whilst other connections included marriage, kinship, religion (Baptist and Congregationalist as well as Anglican) and business. There were obviously a number of Tories, though these were predominantly drawn from the lower middle class, did not generally feature among the party elite (H. Harper Smith excepted), and mostly held office in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the feature which did characterize this lodge, and probably accounts for the mixed political complexion and strong Liberal presence, was its very close links with the building trade. Though men active in construction could be found in all lodges, 20 per cent of *all* Social Lodge members identified were also in the Master Builders Association.²⁸ Furthermore, no fewer than sixteen of those identified as politically active had interests in the construction industry, as suppliers of goods, surveyors and architects or builders – attracted, no doubt, by the fact that the membership of the Edwardian lodge included A.E. Collins, the City Engineer.²⁹ Thus the close relationship between the Liberal party and the construc-

²⁶ Amherst and Le Strange, *Union Lodge*, 134–50; NRO/SO9/26 465X.

²⁷ The Liberal group did include a defector to the Liberal Unionists who subsequently served as an alderman, mayor three times, and chairman of the Unionist Association.

²⁸ Compare *NMA Annual Report*, 1906 and 1911 with membership of the Norwich Master Builders Association reported in *EDP*, 22 March 1902, 24 March 1904 and 23 March 1905.

²⁹ For similar links in Wolverhampton see Jones, *Borough Politics*, 137.

tion industry and the desire to develop business connections, especially the lucrative municipal market, rather than any desire for social climbing, seems to have dictated Liberal Masonic membership, at least in the Edwardian period.

Although the inter-war period saw the development of new lodges which served to blur the distinctions identified above, this brief investigation does suggest that freemasonry was not a simple form of middle-class sociability utilized to replace urban activism or facilitate social climbing. Furthermore, with the exception of Union Lodge, freemasonry in Norwich was a predominantly urban activity, with most of the identified masons living within the boundaries of the city (even in the city centre) and active in a range of other city organizations. Rather, it was but one aspect of urban culture available to the middle class in their pursuit of power. For example, evidence from the Liberal Jewson family – where two brothers were masons and two active in the Baptist church – reinforces the impression that membership of a lodge was part of calculated family strategy designed to extend networks, power and influence rather than some desperate attempt to gain social acceptance. Thus, given that initiates had to be introduced, that the membership was limited, that other members had a right of veto and that membership involved a calculation of benefits, it should come as no surprise that most lodges were composed of like-minded people with existing connections through business, family and social ties, or that Liberals, where they did take up the trowel, would be concentrated in one or two lodges only.

Business organizations

Business organizations in Norwich were not strong prior to 1910. At the level of the single industry, the builders were, as McKenna and Rodger have shown, the most independent and effectively organized of the employers.³⁰ Their organization and independence was replicated, at least in the Edwardian period, by the shoe manufacturers association, a predominantly Liberal organization led by the larger firms and designed to enforce discipline and order on the employers as well as employees. Both of these organizations had been involved in lengthy disputes with their workforces at the turn of the century from which they had emerged triumphant, and by 1910 both were operating arbitration boards to diffuse tension and regularize rates and conditions.³¹ Of the generic

³⁰ J.A. McKenna and R.G. Rodger, 'Control by coercion: employers' associations and the establishment of industrial order in the building industry of England and Wales, 1860–1914', *Business History Review*, 59 (1985), 203–31; Norwich and District Master Builders' Association, *11th Annual Report* (Norwich, 1909).

³¹ S. Cherry, *Doing Different?: Politics and the Labour Movement in Norwich, 1880–1914* (Norwich, 1989), 37–40 and 55–60; Hawkins, *Norwich*, 36–7; Board of Trade, *Directory of Industrial Associations in the United Kingdom in 1907* (London, 1907).

organizations, the Norfolk and Norwich Traders Association – formed in the 1870s – was dominated by retailers, leading J.J. Colman to form a Chamber of Commerce in 1896 to represent the interests of manufacturers and traders not covered by these other organizations.³²

For much of the Edwardian period the Chamber of Commerce, unlike similar organizations elsewhere in Britain,³³ was weak and poorly supported, dominated by the city's decaying industries, such as silk weaving, and overseen by a Secretary with little interest in the organization. However, in 1911 this situation changed when the appointment of a new Secretary coincided with the development of the Liberal government's social policy which increasingly encroached on the business world, both financially and administratively. In this climate, businessmen sought a non-party forum to challenge this interventionist policy and to provide a unified voice in discussions with government and on the committees which proliferated as a result of the legislation. As a result, membership took off for both instrumental and political reasons (Figure 3), passing the Traders Associations in the early 1920s and, as Figure 4 shows, becoming more representative of the Norwich economy as a whole by 1919.³⁴ The Chamber operated as the 'voice' of the local business community from around 1916, and as the 1920s progressed it upped its political profile, attempting to unite the business community in a 'business party' against their allies in the Liberal and Conservative parties. Ultimately this attempt failed as the movement proved incapable of overriding deeply entrenched divisions within the middle class, most of whom continued to view political parties as the most appropriate vehicle for expressing and protecting their diverse social and cultural interests. In this respect the chamber in Norwich was very different from that in Wolverhampton, or the employers' organizations in Coventry, which Jones and Carr both see operating as complementary branches of the middle-class political effort.³⁵

Thus there would appear to be little evidence to sustain the first assumption – that the Norwich middle class were moving together socially and politically through closer social ties – though there is some credence in the claim of joint action through business organizations. What, then, of the second assumption, that the middle class were abandoning the urban arena and their interest and faith in the urban form, for introspective suburban living and political quietism expressed through support for the Tories? In addressing these questions, the first area of study will be the chapel culture of the nonconformists and the

³² B.M. Doyle, 'The development of the Norwich Chamber of Commerce, 1896–1930', *Norfolk Archaeology* (forthcoming, 1998).

³³ Hay, 'Employers and social policy'.

³⁴ Doyle, 'Chamber of Commerce'.

³⁵ Jones, *Borough Politics*, 130–1; Carr, 'Municipal socialism', 173 and 177.

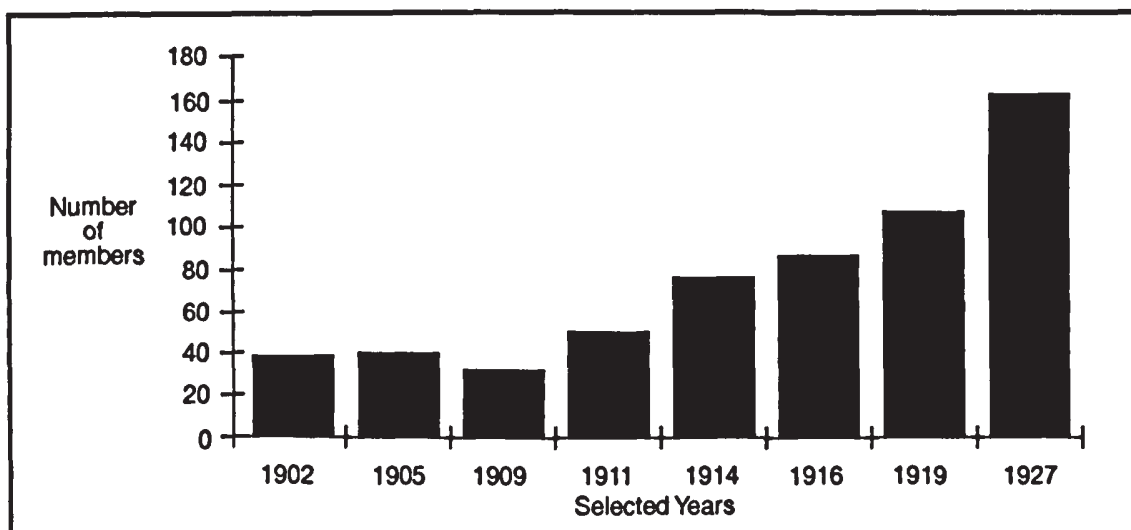


Figure 3: Membership of Norwich Chamber of Commerce, 1902–27
Source: Norwich Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Reports*, 1902, 1905, 1909, 1911, 1914, 1916, 1919 and 1927 (Norwich, 1903–28)

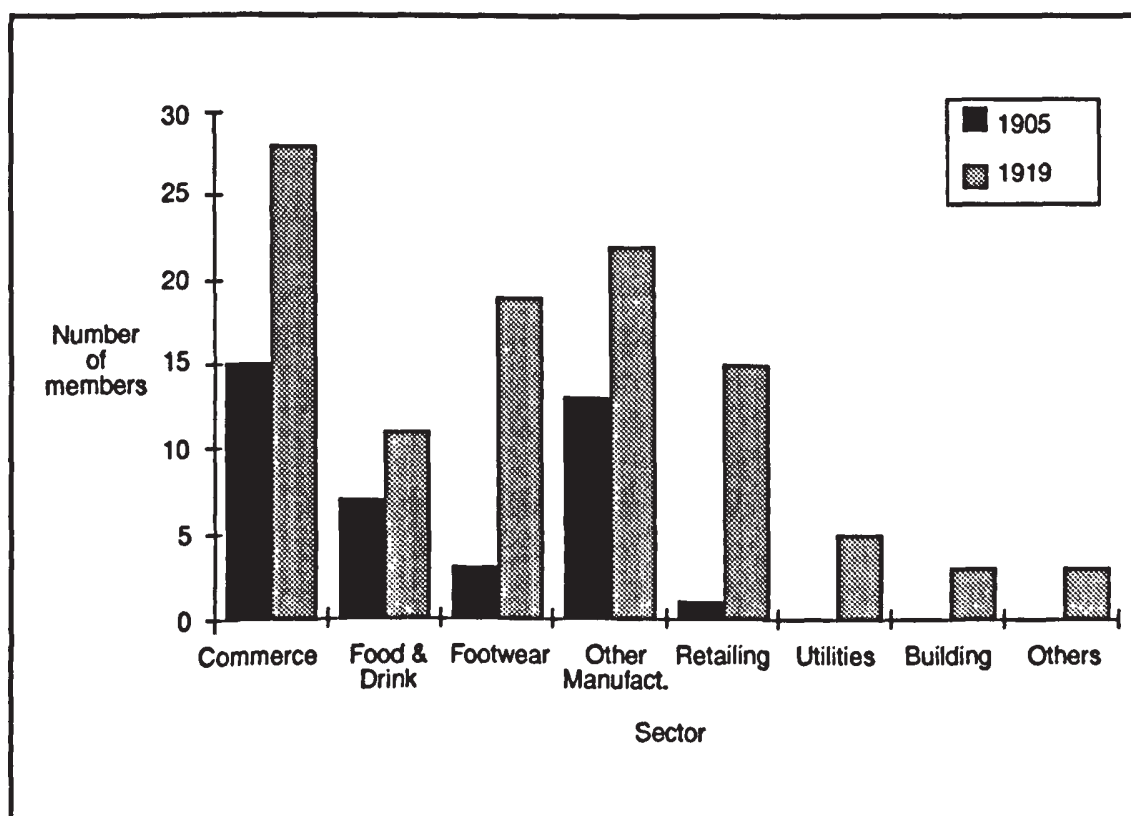


Figure 4: Membership of Norwich Chamber of Commerce by sector, 1905 and 1919
Source: Norwich Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Reports*, 1905 and 1919 (Norwich, 1906 and 1920)

extent of charitable giving, both of which also provide answers to elements of the first question.

Chapel culture and charity

Contrary to the commonly held view that urban dissent experienced a crisis after 1900, fleeing the city for the safety and security of the middle-class suburbs,³⁶ urban chapel culture remained very strong in Norwich for much of the early twentieth century. By 1906, the city had a dissenting membership of around 5,000, equivalent to approximately 6.5 per cent of the population over 15 years of age and slightly higher than Gilbert's national average of 5.5 per cent. In addition, these chapels offered a wide range of associated organizations, including adult schools with around 3,000 members and a Sunday school population of 6,000.³⁷ However, the most important feature of this chapel culture was the refusal of middle-class Baptists and Congregationalists to suburbanize their place of worship, the social leaders of these denominations continuing to worship at the city centre chapels of St Mary's Baptist and Princes Street Congregational until well into the 1930s.³⁸ Furthermore, leading members of both these chapels played an important part in church extensions into new working-class areas in the period 1890–1920,³⁹ developing an organizational structure for working-class congregations which included Sunday schools, adult schools and even medical insurance.⁴⁰ Although this middle-class involvement in working-class churches did pay dividends in terms of electoral success for the Liberal party into the 1920s,⁴¹ from the middle of that decade the system was in decline as religious activists retrenched to their main city centre chapels for the rest of the inter-war period.⁴²

Yet even these city centre chapels continued to maintain a strong social work function, largely through organizations like Dorcas, managed by female members such as Laura Stuart and Helen and Ethel Colman, the

³⁶ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*; A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (London, 1976).

³⁷ Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, Fig. 2.2, 39. The Congregationalists and Baptists were both larger than the national average, the Methodists, especially the Wesleyans, smaller. Doyle, 'Middle class realignment', 37–44 and B.M. Doyle, 'Gender, class and Congregational culture in early twentieth century Norwich', *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 5/6 (1995), 317–35.

³⁸ C.B. Jewson, *The Baptists in Norfolk* (London, 1957); Doyle, 'Congregational culture'. For a similar example of a strong city centre congregation see C. Binfield, 'The building of a town centre church: St. James's Congregational church, Newcastle upon Tyne', *Northern History*, 18 (1982).

³⁹ Doyle, 'Congregational culture', 331–2; Anon., *1910/1960: Fifty Years of Baptist Witness: The Story of Silver Road* (Norwich, 1960).

⁴⁰ Doyle, 'Congregational culture', 326. Compare Savage, 'Two paradigms', 74 and n. 41.

⁴¹ Doyle, 'Middle class realignment', ch. 3.

⁴² Membership figures for the main city centre chapels had returned to pre-war levels by 1929, though some of the working-class churches were experiencing decline: Doyle, 'Middle class realignment', 44.

daughters of J.J. Colman MP. Social leaders in their own right, Laura was a prominent Liberal activist, city councillor and deacon of Princes Street, whilst Ethel was the first woman lord mayor of Norwich and also served as a Liberal councillor for the Lakenham ward, home to many of the Colman Company employees. In addition to their leading role at Princes Street, the sisters also ran the Colman works magazine from its foundation in 1908 until the 1940s.⁴³ This input from the wives, daughters and sisters of the 'public men' has been greatly underestimated in accounts of the functioning of urban middle-class power in the period after 1900, yet it was clearly of substantial social and political significance. Russell Colman, like the younger Palmers of Reading,⁴⁴ may have left Princes Street, Norwich and Liberalism for a life as an Anglican Tory squire,⁴⁵ but his three sisters continued to link the name of Colman with urban civic leadership, service to Congregationalism and commitment to the Liberal party well into the 1930s.

Closely linked to the fate of the chapels in the historiography of the urban middle class of Edwardian England is the decline in the provision of voluntary charity.⁴⁶ Yet this perceived decline has been challenged by Alan Kidd, whose work on Manchester suggests that the first decade of the twentieth century was actually a high point in the history of charitable giving.⁴⁷ This was undoubtedly the case in Norwich, where general and extraordinary giving remained healthy throughout the decade, rising to a peak in 1912 and continuing into the 1920s in the case of special appeals. Certainly there is evidence that the general charities such as the District Visiting Society (DVS) were facing a crisis in the wake of state intervention in social welfare and in particular the introduction of old age pensions. The DVS subscription list peaked in 1902, declining slowly to 1907, stabilizing until 1911 before resuming its decline at a more rapid pace thereafter, whilst donations, including a portion of the Mayor's Unemployment Fund, peaked in 1906, though 1908 also saw a substantial collection.⁴⁸ In 1910 the city's endowed charities were consolidated to allow for a more equitable distribution across the city of the £40,000 concentrated in the old city centre parishes.⁴⁹ In the wake of this change the local branch of the Charity

⁴³ Doyle, 'Congregational culture', 325–7 and 330; P. Palgrave-Moore, *The Mayors and Lord Mayors of Norwich, 1836–1974* (Norwich, 1978).

⁴⁴ Yeo, *Voluntary Organisations*.

⁴⁵ J. Mardle, *R.J. Colman, 1861–1946* (Norwich, 1954).

⁴⁶ Yeo, *Voluntary Organisations*.

⁴⁷ A.J. Kidd, 'Charity organisation and the unemployed in Manchester, c.1870–1914', *Social History*, 9 (1984), 59–60. See also K. Laybourn, 'The Guild of Help and the changing face of Edwardian philanthropy', *Urban History*, 20 (1993), 43–60 and M.J. Moore, 'Social work and social welfare: the organization of philanthropic resources in Britain, 1900–14', *Journal of British Studies* (1977), 85–104.

⁴⁸ Norwich District Visiting Society [hereafter NDVS], *Annual Report*, 1912 (Norwich, 1913).

⁴⁹ H.V. Toynbee and H.A. Kay, *Norwich: Its Endowed and Voluntary Charities* (Norwich, 1909).

Organisation Society, never strongly rooted in Norwich, was wound up and its 'scientific' functions transferred to a proposed Civic League, an idea stimulated by the experience of the 1912 flood and the Guild of Help and due to commence operation in the summer of 1914.⁵⁰ But this crisis in the general charitable sector was not matched by similar problems in either personal/corporate munificence or special giving in response to appeals.

The Mayor's Unemployment Fund, begun in 1904 to cover winter distress, reached a peak in 1908 (though it declined thereafter in response to increasing state involvement),⁵¹ whilst the response of the local community to the flood of 1912 was quite extraordinary. A Lord Mayor's Relief Fund raised £23,000 in total, with a substantial proportion given locally – Colmans, alone, donating £1,000. Furthermore, the provision of emergency food and clothing drew heavily on the local middle class, with shops and firms giving food and clothes, and individuals providing new and used clothing and their own time to the relief effort.⁵² Nor did this charitable impulse end in 1914. Mobilization for the war effort drew heavily on this commitment to civic responsibility, with churches and chapels lending their organizations and resources to support the National Relief Fund, Belgian Refugees, the Red Cross and similar charitable purposes. On a personal level the Colmans donated three of their Norwich homes to the Red Cross whilst Sydney Cozens-Hardy handed over his house in North Norfolk for use by the services.⁵³ In the aftermath of the conflict such philanthropic concerns continued.

The slump of 1920 saw the successful revival of the Lord Mayor's Unemployment Fund; 1927 saw the formation, in Norwich, of the Round Table movement, initiated by a young baker and restaurateur, Louis Marchesi, partly to provide an avenue into both civic action and social networking for younger businessmen excluded from the city's traditional middle-class associations,⁵⁴ whilst corporate giving continued into the 1920s, with Colmans' offer of the land for, and £10,000 towards the cost of building, the new Carrow bridge.⁵⁵ That such charitable benevolence was still expected as late as 1912 is confirmed by the way local businessmen, and especially retailers, accused the multiple stores of

⁵⁰ *Fifteenth and Final Report of the Norwich Charity Organisation Society, 1912–1914* (Norwich, 1914). Norwich did not have a branch of the Guild of Help as implied by Moore, 'Social work', 95 and picked up by Laybourn, 'Guild of Help', 49.

⁵¹ Hawkins, *Norwich*, 160 and 165; NDVS, *Annual Report*, 1908 (Norwich, 1909) and 1909 (Norwich, 1910).

⁵² See collection of news cuttings relating to the flood, NRO/N/ED/11/18, 58–118.

⁵³ P. Kent, 'Norwich 1914–18', in G. Gliddon (ed.), *Norfolk and Suffolk in the Great War* (Norwich, 1988); H.C. Colman, *Sydney Cozens-Hardy: A Memoir* (Norwich, 1944).

⁵⁴ EDP, 12 March 1987. Jones's comments on Rotary and Round Table membership are clearly influenced by their profile post-Second World War and do not cast much light on their place in our period: Jones, *Borough Politics*, 135–6.

⁵⁵ EDP, 15 January 1920.

insufficient involvement in the relief effort in the wake of the flood.⁵⁶ Clearly the private response to urban problems formed in the later Victorian period had not broken down before 1910, with many of the impulses remaining important determinants of middle-class behaviour until the early 1930s.

Politics

So far the evidence gives little credence to arguments for either increasing social unity within the Norwich middle class or a crisis in the city's voluntary sector. Therefore, the rest of this article will be concerned with addressing a number of questions about the structure of middle-class politics in Norwich in the years after 1900 and in particular: to what extent was the middle class unified behind a coherent anti-socialist stance; did the Liberal elite retreat from urban politics; and did the urban elite as a whole lose faith in grand municipal projects?

The extent to which the Edwardian middle class offered a united anti-socialist front remains a highly contested issue.⁵⁷ In national politics, where the Norwich Liberals fought general elections in tandem with Labour, conflict within the middle class was more bitter than it had been for many years. The decade after 1902 witnessed divisions over the Lib/Lab pact, tariffs, education, temperance, the established church, the House of Lords and the Liberal government's social reform policy⁵⁸ – a division emphasized by the fact that Liberals stuck tenaciously to the 'Progressive Alliance' for parliamentary elections.⁵⁹ Yet at the municipal level the situation was very different. Though individuals, such as Sir George White, remained strong advocates of municipal intervention and control, the Liberal party abandoned its Progressive Programme in 1907.⁶⁰ This was followed in 1908 by an anti-socialist pact with the Conservatives for municipal elections which operated in certain working-class wards for the next five years, though without affecting the level of conflict in middle-class areas. Yet these two positions were not necessarily contradictory. For in national politics 'labour' – as represented by the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) – was the natural ally of the Liberals, whilst the Unionists threatened their livelihood and

⁵⁶ See the speech of the Lord Mayor, A.M. Samuel, *EDP*, 5 March 1913. For similar criticisms of the multiples from Marchesi in the later 1920s, *EDP*, 2 March 1928.

⁵⁷ P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971); Clarke, 'End of laissez faire'; Cook, 'Downfall of the Liberal party'; Searle, 'Liberal party and business'; G.L. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the constituencies 1900–1914: three case studies', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), 617–40.

⁵⁸ Doyle, 'Middle class realignment', chs 3 and 8.

⁵⁹ F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885–1918* (London, 1974), 622–3; Doyle, 'Middle class realignment', 52–5.

⁶⁰ *EDP*, 31 October 1901; Bernstein, 'Progressive alliance', 623–4; F. Whitmore, 'The Labour party, municipal politics and municipal elections in Norwich, 1903–1933', *Kent Papers in Politics and International Relations*, ser. 1, 13 (Canterbury, 1992).

offended their separate culture, but locally the municipal socialism and 'offensive' electoral tactics and language of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) posed a real threat to Liberal power at the municipal level, where the party shared an overall commitment to retrenchment with the Tories.⁶¹

However, in the aftermath of the First World War, Liberal/Conservative unity increased markedly, with coalitions in municipal politics between 1920–26 and national politics between the general election of 1918 and 1926 when E.H. Young, the city's Liberal MP, defected to the Tories. Though initially beneficial to the Liberals,⁶² by 1923/24 the Conservatives had recovered sufficiently to assert their dominance, even challenging radical Liberals in middle-class wards.⁶³ But the defection of Young and the changes in the national leadership prompted an independent Liberal revival in Norwich. In common with a number of other towns in Britain, conflict resumed in municipal contests,⁶⁴ especially in middle-class wards, culminating in a Liberal victory in the 1929 general election. But municipal conflict between Liberal and Conservative served only to benefit Labour, and from 1930 the anti-socialist pact was revived, Liberal and Conservative fighting the 1932 elections as the 'Anti-Socialist Party'.⁶⁵ Yet this was only temporary. No joint organizations were set up, party labels were restored in 1933 and vigorous opposition was voiced to the amalgamation of branch organizations⁶⁶ – all suggesting an enduring commitment to separate identities among both Liberals and Conservatives.

This maintenance of separate identities was crucial in limiting the extent to which leading Liberals retreated from urban activism in the early twentieth century. Overall there is little evidence to suggest that, prior to the 1930s, members of the Liberal party's elite were abandoning the city and its politics for the life of the Tory country squire – although a few, like Russell Colman, did follow this route.⁶⁷ But he was exceptional and most disappearances of Liberals from municipal affairs, especially in the mid-1920s, were due to death or electoral defeat. As the twentieth century progressed, access to public office was significantly reduced for Liberal social leaders. From as early as 1900 safe Liberal seats were on

⁶¹ Cherry, *Doing Different?*, 77–82; EDP, 2 November 1910. For an intelligent reading of pre-war pacts see T. Adams, 'Labour and the First World War: economy, politics and the erosion of local peculiarities', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 10 (1990), 23–47.

⁶² EDP, 2 November 1920.

⁶³ Doyle, 'Middle class realignment', ch. 3.

⁶⁴ This was not a uniform response. Leeds saw the revival of a radical Liberal challenge from 1926, as did Nottingham, but in both Leicester and Wolverhampton pacts with the Tories were strengthened. Cook, *Age of Alignment*, ch. 3; Meadowcroft, 'Political transition'; Jones, 'Politics', 99.

⁶⁵ Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism', 632–3.

⁶⁶ For resistance to branch mergers in a middle-class ward, see Minutes of Norwich Conservative Association, June 1935, NRO/SO 122/4.

⁶⁷ Mardle, R. J. Colman.

the decline, whilst anti-socialist pacts limited the number of winnable seats open to potential Liberal candidates. This in turn restricted the number of aldermanic places the Liberals could fill and, from 1927, their access to the mayoralty and shrievalty.⁶⁸ Thus in many cases the death of a Liberal councillor or alderman meant the loss of the seat leading to a decline in the number of Liberals on the council.⁶⁹ Elite Liberals continued to stand for municipal election or high civic office, but the weakness of the party restricted their opportunities for participation in municipal government. A.G. Howlett and E.G. White of Howlett and White, the city's largest footwear manufacturing firm, were both removed from the council by electoral defeat (Howlett by a socialist, White by a Tory shopkeeper) and though both of these men did return as aldermen, others were not so lucky. Thus, it is more accurate to see the decline in middle-class Liberal involvement in municipal politics, not as quietism, but as exclusion enforced by the increased competition for municipal offices generated by Labour intervention.

Nor was there much loss of confidence in the municipal project prior to the early 1930s. Admittedly the belief that the municipal state was a legitimate agent for the efficient modernization of the urban fabric was contested.⁷⁰ The dominance of an economizer mentality meant attempts to municipalize gas and water in 1890s Norwich failed, whilst councillors also passed up the opportunity to run the trams at their inception in 1901. Yet despite these failures, coalitions could be constructed to push through certain projects, such as the take-over of the electricity supply in 1901.⁷¹ But three particular inter-war cases – municipalization of water in 1920, the Rates Economy Campaign of 1926–28 and municipalization of the trams in 1933 – can be utilized to illustrate the changing attitude to local state enterprise amongst the city's middle class and the enduring belief in the municipal project amongst a significant section of that class.

In 1920, the Liberal-Conservative coalition which controlled the city council proposed a buyout of the local water company. Although the council voted almost unanimously in favour of the scheme (a Ratepayers Association representative was the sole opponent) a referendum was secured by a ratepayer opposition who felt their views had been stifled by the unanimity of Conservative, Liberal and Labour members on the council.⁷² The referendum overwhelmingly endorsed the scheme,

⁶⁸ Doyle, 'Middle class realignment', 65–85; EDP, 26 November 1920; Palgrave-Moore, *Mayors and Lord Mayors*.

⁶⁹ See Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism', for evidence of occupational, religious and educational backgrounds during this period, esp. Table 1, 624.

⁷⁰ For the conflict between 'modernizers' and 'economizers' see Daunton, *Coal Metropolis*; McCrone & Elliott, *Property and Power*; L.J. Jones, 'Public pursuit of private profit? Liberal businessmen and municipal politics in Birmingham, 1865–1900', *Business History*, 25 (1983), 240–63; Carr, 'Municipal socialism', 175.

⁷¹ EDP, 31 October 1901.

⁷² See EDP coverage between 15 January 1920 and 2 February 1920.

securing an impressive victory for the modernizers,⁷³ but the ratepayer interest formed in the battle over water began to grow as council expenditure and the rates climbed through the mid-1920s. Increasingly the Chamber of Commerce became the central focus for opposition to municipal spending, and in 1926 formed a subcommittee to keep an eye on corporation finances.⁷⁴ This committee initiated the Rates Economy Campaign, a bi-partisan movement to lobby the council in the interests of the business community as a whole. By 1927 it had a professional organizer, a newsletter and 5,000 members representing 57 per cent of the city ratepayers.⁷⁵ They fielded two candidates in the 1927 council elections and secured a rates investigation, though this found – on the advice of a growing band of permanent officials – that no cuts were possible due to the statutory nature of most expenditure.⁷⁶ The modernizers claimed the report was a whitewash, but the majority of councillors in all three main parties were pleased at the defeat of the rates campaign, for despite their rhetoric about economy, most still believed the council was the best agency for modernizing the urban fabric.⁷⁷

But the coalition of interests which positioned most councillors on the side of municipal intervention broke down in 1933 when the corporation made attempts to purchase the city's private tramway company with a view to replacing it with a bus service. Despite the obvious need to modernize the city centre to cope with an ever increasing volume of traffic,⁷⁸ the purchase of the company – supported by the Labour party, most of the Liberal councillors and a few leading Conservatives⁷⁹ – was opposed by the Ratepayers Association and the majority of Conservatives, co-ordinated by R.P. Braund, organizer of the Chamber of Commerce Rates Campaign.⁸⁰ Essentially a debate about efficiency, modernization and municipal control versus economy and the rights of private property, the opponents of the scheme again forced the issue to a referendum. Though convincingly argued by leading Liberal and Tory businessmen – such as Sir Ernest White and the elderly H.J. Copeman – the case for municipalization was probably damaged in the eyes of the

⁷³ EDP, 2 February 1920.

⁷⁴ NRO/NTC51/15; EDP, 9 October 1926. There are three books of news cuttings relating to the activities of the Chamber of Commerce Rates subcommittee 1926–33, in the library of the Norwich Chamber of Commerce. I am grateful to the Chamber for providing copies of these books and to Sally Japp for her help.

⁷⁵ EDP, 7 October 1926; *Facts*, April 1927.

⁷⁶ NRO/NTC 51/15.

⁷⁷ Norwich Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report*, 1927 (Norwich, 1928); NRO/NTC51/15; EDP, 18 July 1928. For a contrary view which sees the Conservatives and Liberals wedded to the idea of economy see Cunningham, 'Unemployment in Norwich', 127–8.

⁷⁸ EDP, 6 January 1933.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 January 1933.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Braund denied that either the Chamber of Commerce or the Rates Reduction Campaign were involved directly in the opposition. EDP, 30 December 1932.

wider middle class by a Labour party leaflet underlining their ideological commitment to municipal control.⁸¹ In the end, the trams campaign, combined with the pressures of high rates and a severe depression in trade, saw most of the middle class, including the Colman family, reject the municipal project⁸² with the economizers securing a substantial victory at the poll for the *status quo*.⁸³

Conclusions

Thus, from this survey of the Norwich middle-class milieu, it is fair to conclude that an activist middle class have been written off too soon. This generally held view has come about primarily from an emphasis on individuals, whether the prominent figure in a locality seduced by country life (such as the Palmers of Reading) or the radical businessman, such as E.D. Simon, whose views and activities have been labelled exceptional – not least by himself.⁸⁴ Certainly the evidence from Coventry, Wolverhampton and Edinburgh suggests the early triumph of economism and the wholesale defeat of an activist civic Liberalism, but that from Leicester tends to confirm the essential features, if not the interpretation, presented here.⁸⁵

Notwithstanding this variation, it is clear that, in Norwich at least, the middle class, and especially the dissenting middle class, continued to maintain an interest in their community until well into the 1930s. Their enduring commitment to the city and to Liberalism was based on a series of networks centred on kinship but encompassing chapel, the freemasons, business organizations and charities. These networks were sustained and supported by a religious subculture in which 'chapel' continued to reproduce Liberal values long after religion had ceased to be an issue in national politics. They found physical expression in a spatial structure which saw the vast majority of the middle class, and especially the Liberal middle class, resident within the city boundaries, paying city rates and taking part in city centre-based activities such as chapel life. And they were underpinned by the needs of employers for a disciplined workforce and an efficient urban environment which benefited business – a situation for which many were willing to pay. Whether they were exceptional remains open to debate for much work has still to

⁸¹ See copy of the leaflet in *Chamber of Commerce News Cuttings*, vol. 3 and comments by Braund, *Eastern Evening News*, 9 January 1933.

⁸² For an anti-purchase letter signed by Ethel Colman, her brother-in-law, E.T. Boardman, her uncle, Sydney Cozens-Hardy and his business partner, Frank Jewson, see *EDP*, 10 January 1933.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 11 January 1933.

⁸⁴ Yeo, *Voluntary Organisations*; J. Campbell, *Lloyd George: The Goat in the Wilderness* (London, 1977), 187–201.

⁸⁵ Carr, 'Municipal socialism'; Jones, *Borough Politics*; McCrone and Elliott, *Property and Power*; Jones, 'Politics', 92–102.

be done on the urban middle class of the inter-war period. What is certain is that, at least until the slump, sections of the Norwich middle class, and the social leaders in particular, maintained their interest in the urban environment and their faith in the municipal arena as the most effective means of creating and maintaining a modern, efficient city.