

**Birmingham Exceptionalism, Joseph Chamberlain and
the 1906 General Election**

by

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Abstract

The 1906 General Election marked the end of a prolonged period of Unionist government. The Liberal Party inflicted the heaviest defeat on its opponents in a century. Explanations for, and the implications of, these national results have been exhaustively debated. One area stood apart, Birmingham and its hinterland, for here the Unionists preserved their monopoly of power. This thesis seeks to explain that extraordinary immunity from a country-wide Unionist malaise.

It assesses the elements which for long had set Birmingham apart, and goes on to examine the contribution of its most famous son, Joseph Chamberlain; it seeks to establish the nature of the symbiotic relationship between them, and to understand how a unique local electoral bastion came to be built in this part of the West Midlands, a fortress of a durability and impregnability without parallel in modern British political history.

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Abbreviations used in the text

BDG Birmingham Daily Gazette

BDM Birmingham Daily Mail

BDP Birmingham Daily Post

BLA Birmingham Liberal Association

BLUA Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association

ITC Imperial Tariff Committee

LRC Labour Representation Committee

Lib/Lab Liberal/Labour Electoral Pact 1903

NEL National Education League

NLF National Liberal Federation

NRU National Radical Union

NUCCA National Union of Conservative Constituency Associations

TRL Tariff Reform League

TUTRA Trade Union Tariff Reform Association

WMLUA West Midlands Liberal Unionist Association

WUTRA Women's Unionist Tariff Reform Association

Birmingham Exceptionalism, Joseph Chamberlain and the 1906 General Election

Introduction

A handful of areas resisted the dramatic swing to the Liberals and their Labour allies in the 1906 General Election, and Birmingham, and its immediate environs, was both the most significant and the most remarked.¹ In the eleven seats - Birmingham's seven plus Aston Manor, Worcestershire East, Warwickshire Tamworth and Staffordshire Handsworth - collectively known as the Duchy - the Unionist share of the vote only slipped below 60% in one instance, that of Birmingham East. In Edgbaston, Birmingham North, Aston Manor and Birmingham West the majorities were crushing, with Unionists garnering between 70 and 80% of votes cast. Yet in the Midlands constituencies surrounding the Duchy there was a different story.² In twelve of the nineteen seats in Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Staffordshire, Liberals or Lib/Lab candidates made gains, though in two cases Unionists had been returned unopposed in 1900.

¹ See Appendix 1 page 103 for the election results in 1906 (compared to 1900) for the 11 constituencies comprising Chamberlain's Duchy.

² See Appendix 2 page 104 for the election results in 1906 (compared to 1900) for the 19 Midlands constituencies surrounding the Duchy.

But even here there are signs of regional difference; in a number of cases the results were close-run: in Warwick and Leamington, Wolverhampton West, Dudley, Stratford-on-Avon, and Droitwich, the margin of victory was but a few percentage points. Black Country seats were notable for the small size of the swing since 1900 compared to the national average.³ It appears that the further away from Birmingham, the Unionist heartland, the more convincing the Liberal victory – in addition to the landslides achieved in London (where Liberals gained 31 seats) and Lancashire (33 Liberal gains), even a hitherto impregnable Unionist centre like Liverpool, where the Liberals won two seats, Abercrombie and Exchange, succumbed to the progressive surge.

Explaining the phenomenon of the unevenness of results across the country is not straightforward, for much of what was in voters' minds is unknowable; we can read the ballot box results, but have no access to retrospective exit polling to help divine that hierarchy of issues which shaped the casting of Birmingham's votes. Nationally, as will be explored in Chapter 1, Free Trade, Chinese Labour, Taff Vale and the Balfour Education Act all resonated, and help explain the Liberal victory, but evidently not in Birmingham, where all seats remained Unionist; why did these issues not gain sufficient traction here?

Equally, we need to understand which of the Unionist messages were effective.

The most articulate advocate of the Unionist case in Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain, focused his appeal on a powerful campaign for Tariff Reform,

³ Pelling, H., *Social Geography of British Elections*, (London, Macmillan, 1967), p.187. See Appendix 2 below.

tariffs to protect industry and jobs, and to confer on the Empire preferential treatment, so binding that entity closer together. How do we measure, as we must, that 'reception', 'the relative purchase of different political discourses'?⁴ In the case of Birmingham there is a nagging suspicion that, such was the reverence for, and loyalty to, Chamberlain by 1906 – akin to the blind support of the football supporter for his beloved team – it would have mattered little what the issue provided it was endorsed by the great man.

Nevertheless, it is important to try to establish why certain messages had a particular appeal in the Birmingham area, and to try and assess the extent to which the city's particular economic, religious and political evolution shaped attitudes to issues like Empire and Free Trade, which coincided with the interests and policies of Birmingham Unionists in 1906; that is the focus of Chapter 2. Finally, a central part of the investigation (Chapter 3) is to assess the way that Joseph Chamberlain both learnt from, and educated, his adopted home, developing a set of Radical policies which gave hope and inspiration to Birmingham working-class voters over a thirty-year period, culminating in a successful invocation in the General Election of 1906.

What are the sources for such an investigation, and what are their limitations? Newspapers, national and local, have been an important resource for their full reports of political speeches, and their reception; for the evidence there of editorial partiality (especially from 1903 to 1906 in Birmingham as the Press

⁴ Lawrence, J., 'Political History', in *Writing History – Theory and Practice*, ed. Berger, S., Feldner, H., Passmore, K., (London, Bloomsbury, 2010), p.223.

rallied to Tariff Reform); for reports of parliamentary debates and of local Birmingham Liberal Unionist meetings; for information on electoral behaviour and, in Birmingham, for the strength of enthusiasm for Unionist, and for Imperial, causes; and for records of music hall, street party and municipal junketing which suggest Birmingham remained more jingoistic than critics of Empire have allowed.⁵ The Chamberlain papers reveal, through correspondence to and from the Chamberlain family over many years, the rationale for political actions, the things that were deemed important and worth fighting for, and further they illustrate Joseph Chamberlain's sheer relentless energy, his unremitting focus on politics, his unquenchable appetite for the fray and the arguments he used to win his case, especially over tariffs and employment.⁶ Other contemporary diaries and biographies provide insight into contemporary voter attitudes and reactions especially to Chamberlain and his policies. All require the reader to understand the authorial standpoint, and know something already of their relationship to Chamberlain or to his fiscal policy which divided the country. The voluminous materials surrounding the Tariff Reform debate from 1903 to 1906 testify both to the organisational genius of that nexus of close Birmingham allies Chamberlain created, and to the way that the argument was shaped to meet the needs and desires of Birmingham manufacturers.

It is not easy to prove that the bombardment of consumers and electors with Imperialist literature, advertising and packaging in the decades before 1914 ever

⁵ See Chapter 2 below – The appeal of Imperialism to the Birmingham working-classes.

⁶ The Chamberlain Papers are located in Special Collections, the University of Birmingham.

truly had an effect, and this has given rise to vigorous historical argument.⁷ Nor is it wholly convincing to refer to ubiquitous evidence of Imperialist adverts and jingles in newspapers and on hoardings, or even to rely on working-class memoirs – as with Robert Roberts, or Fred Willis or V.W. Garratt - which may have been coloured retrospectively, though they do help.⁸ However, local school records provide evidence of official and curricular endorsement for the promotion of Imperial values, and newspaper reports of continuing popular enthusiasm in Birmingham for Imperial events, or issues, right through to 1906, are suggestive of a local immunity to what - it has been argued nationally – was a retreat from jingo after 1902.

We can chart the force of Imperial and Tariff Reform advocacy in sequent speeches by Chamberlain, and others, but visual sources are also valuable – the posters and postcards of the Tariff Reform League which flooded Birmingham from local presses distill and simplify the debate in repetitive images of John Bull, Uncle Sam and Herr Dumper, Big and Little Loaves, and assume an understanding on the part of the electorate of the underlying arguments as well as educating them in primary colours, both literally and metaphorically. We have to deduce the effectiveness of the impact, but evidence of support in the enthusiasm shown at Unionist public meetings (or –by contrast – in the vigour

⁷ Mackenzie, J., *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, (Manchester, MUP, 1986), Thompson, A.S., *Imperial Britain – the Empire in British Politics c.1880-1932*, (London, Longman, 2000) both argue for the significance of Imperialist influence on Britain;

Porter, B., *Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford, OUP, 2004) and Rose, J., *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (USA, Yale, 2001) argue against that thesis.

⁸ Willis, F., *Peace and Dripping Toast*, (London 1950); Garratt, V.W., *A Man in the Street*, (London, 1939); Roberts, R., *The Classic Slum*, (Manchester, MUP, 1971).

shown in breaking up pro-Boer meetings), recorded in newspaper reports, is indicative. So too is the use of visual symbols – most especially the flag of Union, the Union Jack – by Chamberlain and the Birmingham Liberal Unionists. One by-product of a postmodernist approach to nineteenth century British history has been a focus on cultural symbols as a valuable historical source, and, for example, the Radical and Chartist use of Orator Hunt's characteristic hat, of the cap of Liberty and of the tricolor, has been closely examined.⁹ There is a parallel in the Unionist adoption of the Union Jack as a visual association with subliminal messages of a United Kingdom (after 1886 and the threat of Home Rule) and of a united Empire, Chamberlain's aspiration from the 1890s and a constant theme (in the shape of Imperial Preference) of the Tariff Reform debate from 1903. Again, newspaper reports of political meetings and of unofficial, spontaneous Birmingham alley parties, provide evidence of the utility, and the power, of this image, and suggest that here at least an Imperial message was both received and internalised by substantial numbers of the working-class.¹⁰

This study of a general election, deemed by contemporaries and later historians to have been a watershed, inevitably engages with a number of important historical debates. If 1906 marks that moment at which the politics of class replaces that of special interests like religious allegiance, as P.F. Clarke suggests;

⁹ Pickering, P., 'Class without words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past and Present* 112 (1986); Epstein, J., *Radical Expression – Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England 1790-1850*, (Oxford, OUP, 1994).

¹⁰ For school reports and curricula, MS S4 – 21, Birmingham Council, Board and Church of England Schools minutes and accounts; for visual images *Political and Tariff Reform Posters* LSE Digital Library and collection of Chamberlain postcards and ephemera, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, and author's personal collection of political postcards 1903-6.

or if, as many Labour historians have argued, it is the new Labour Party's advance to first base, prior to an inexorable climb to the summit of power; then somehow Birmingham's imperviousness to the onset of class politics, its weakling independent labour movement, and its corollary, the manifest support for Unionism evidenced by the working class in the 1906 General Election, even in the poorest constituencies like Birmingham East, needs explaining.¹¹

If, as the consensus of historians writing on the period agree, the disappointments of the Boer War (military incompetence; proof of manifold inefficiencies in the war machine; financial overstretch; the immorality of concentration camps and imported Chinese labour) pricked a jingo bubble and rendered Imperialism an electoral millstone by 1906, why did that mood not impact on Birmingham?¹² Perhaps, as J. Mackenzie has argued, that consensus is misguided, and a passion for things Imperial prevails right up to 1914, to survive into the Inter-War period.¹³

Birmingham had been a bastion of Nonconformity in the nineteenth century, its civic gospel shaped by dissenting ministers like Robert Dale.¹⁴ To what extent did it retain political potency in 1906? Historians have differed over the impact

¹¹ Clarke, P.F., *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1974); for an example of the pro-Labour case, McKibbin, R., *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910 – 1924*, (Oxford, OUP, 1974).

¹² For one example of the orthodox interpretation see Arnstein, W., 'Edwardian Politics: Turbulent Spring or Indian Summer', in *The Edwardian Age – Conflict and Stability*, ed. O'Day, A., London, Macmillan, 1979, pp.60-78.

¹³ Mackenzie, J., *op.cit.* p.5

¹⁴ Jones, L., 'Public Pursuit of Private Profit?', *Liberal Businessmen and Municipal Politics in Birmingham, 1865-1900*, *Business History*, November 1983, pp.240-259.

of revived Dissent in the wake of Balfour's controversial Education Act, and this study engages with that debate. Perhaps more combative still was the ongoing discussion surrounding Britain's economic policy. Pessimists at the turn of the century forecast her inevitable decline in the face of tough American and German competition, and campaigned increasingly vigorously against a Free Trade doctrine which left the country unprotected from, and vulnerable to, the pillaging of dumpers, foreign firms undercutting domestic manufactures. Cobdenites, disciples of Richard Cobden's Manchester Free Trade school which had held sway from the late 1840s, rejected the diagnosis, and cleaved to the true faith with quasi-religious devotion, arguing for the moral superiority of a creed based on international trust, on openness and on an optimistic prescription for Britain's international competitiveness.¹⁵ The argument reverberates still, a hundred years on (as seen in the Bennite prescriptions of siege economy in the 1980s), although the protectionist school has had to retreat in the face of initiatives to dismantle trade barriers, especially in Europe. An understanding of the arguments, of the way they evolved, and of Chamberlain's central place in their articulation, as well as an appreciation of the relative strength of these two diametrically opposed analyses among electors, is essential for any interpretation of the 1906 General Election.

A key factor in 1906, as for all general elections since 1867 when a significant popular electorate was enfranchised, was that of party organisation. It has been important to try to determine the strength and the importance of the revival of Liberal party organisation after 1900, the establishment of new local trade

¹⁵ See the detailed debate in chapter 2, with bibliographic references.

union/Labour parties and by contrast, the decline - after Salisbury's retirement in 1902 - of the Unionists. How significant in the final result was it and how important was Chamberlain in the dramatic contrast in party electoral fortunes between Birmingham's strong Unionist showing and the, sometimes shocking, decline elsewhere round the country?

A more developed assessment of the secondary literature and the debates reflected there will be found in the body of the work, below, Chapters 1 to 3.

At the heart of this thesis is a major historical issue, that of the role of the individual, of human agency, in fashioning events. Chapter 2 is concerned to identify structural explanations for Birmingham's aberrant electoral behaviour, especially in the realm of class collaboration, municipal character, the West Midlands espousal of Fair Trade and an apparent local predilection for Empire. An attempt is being made here to identify the behaviour of classes, or members of an interest group, such as the followers of a particular religious persuasion, in the voting booth. Chapter 3, however, examines the attraction of a charismatic politician who gives the lie to simple theories of class determination. As Jon Lawrence concludes 'for all the innovations in political communication...it remained the platform and the soapbox that dominated electioneering before 1914.'¹⁶ There is much contemporary evidence attesting to the power of one man, Joseph Chamberlain, both to repel and – most importantly for his Birmingham base – to magnetise. Both extreme reactions are evident in 1906; in

¹⁶ Lawrence, J., *Electing our Masters: The Hustings from Hogarth to Blair*, (Oxford, OUP, 2009), p.88.

much of industrial England and Wales, Chamberlain was for most an arch-heretic for his espousal of Tariff Reform, a rampant jingoist for his expensive Imperial adventures and a traitor to the working-class both by his association (however unfair) with South African importation of Chinese workers, and by his failure to implement Old Age pensions. Yet in Birmingham, a large majority of voters saw a different man: loyal to his adopted city; consistently Radical in his promotion of reforms for the working man to reduce the impact of unemployment or work place injury, and to increase the prospects of a basic education, of decent housing and an allotment; an articulate advocate for Birmingham's besieged metal-working industry and for an Empire which promised new markets. Here he demonstrated the gamut of political skills, from a genius for organization, an eye for political packaging in all its forms, to a gift for clear, compelling and stirring oratory, which wooed his audience.

For all the extensive and justifiable historical analysis of long term trends and their impact on electoral fortunes – the shift to class from 'interest' voting, for example – an event, initiated by an individual, created such an earthquake as to rock the foundations of Edwardian politics. Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham speech of May 15th 1903, calling for a review of the country's fiscal arrangements, did just that. Even allowing for his familial Tariff Reform sympathies, biographer Julian Amery wrote portentously enough that, 'we can say of it, as of few other speeches, that after it the world was never the same again', and, 'no speech in British history has ever caused such a sensation, or led

to such momentous consequences.¹⁷ It fatally divided his party, it revived the Liberal guardians of Free Trade, it fuelled an already impassioned debate on Britain's economic prospects, and the recent inefficiencies revealed by relative military failure in the Boer War, and it raised issues of the financing of social reform which would tear Edwardian England apart. Here was the impact of one man - driven, articulate, relentless - perfectly illustrating, by this incendiary call to arms, the appropriateness of those words attributed to Harold Macmillan that what was to be feared in politics were 'events, dear boy, events.'¹⁸ For the 'event' of Chamberlain's open avowal of protection shaped the debate from 1903 onwards, and it had a profound effect on the fortunes of individual politicians in these years culminating in the election. In truth an entire generation was to be afflicted; Stanley Baldwin, when newly Prime Minister, found to his cost in 1923 that the endorsement of Tariff Reform - while enthusiastically supported in Birmingham and his own West Midlands, Bewdley, constituency- was toxic in the country at large. Not till 1932, when Neville Chamberlain was Chancellor and in a position to act in filial piety, were tariffs enacted as government policy. One might fairly ask what might have happened in a 1906/7 General Election had Chamberlain not felt miffed at his defeat in cabinet over Ritchie's corn duty repeal in March 1903, kept his counsel, refrained from playing the tariff card, and stayed to play right-hand man in Balfour's cabinet. Was it inevitable that the

¹⁷ Amery, J., *Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform Campaign - The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, volume 5 1901-3*, (London, Macmillan, 1969) pp.192, 195. Julian Amery was the son of Leo Amery, senior Unionist politician in the early twentieth century, and a powerful advocate of Tariff Reform.

¹⁸ Discussed by Harris, R., in 'As Macmillan never said', *The Telegraph*, June 4th 2002; it has never been clear when he said this - to President Kennedy, or in an aside after the Profumo affair, or in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis - but the remark has been energetically recycled since his premiership ended in 1963.

government's education policy and the disappointments of South Africa would sentence the Unionists to electoral oblivion, or would a united cabinet presiding over economic expansion in the early twentieth century have rebuilt and seen off what might still have been a divided and disheartened Liberal Party? We can only surmise, but what is clear is that the choice he made, the ambition of a restless visionary, sealed the Unionists' fate.

This thesis then is an attempt proportionately to ascribe responsibility for the exceptional performance of Birmingham and its immediate environs as between the unique historical character of the place and, on the other hand, the extraordinary personal magnetism of the era's most charismatic politician and statesman, Joseph Chamberlain.

Chapter One: The National Result

In a study of Birmingham's exceptionalism, it is important to establish the norm against which the city's results are to be compared. This chapter will examine the overall results of the General Election of 1906 and assess the debate ever since as to why those results were extraordinary.

Joseph Chamberlain was unequivocal when evaluating those 1906 election results in the Commons a month later: 'the record of this election is absolutely, I think, without parallel...and to find anything like it one has to go back to the defeat of the Fox-North Coalition of 1784'.¹⁹ It had been a Liberal landslide, their representation up from 186 to 400 seats, and with the support of the new Labour Party and the Irish, boasting now a majority of 356 over the Unionists, who were reduced to 157 seats. For them there were few mitigating circumstances. It was some consolation that the voting system distorted the Liberal advantage: 2.75 million votes (49% of votes cast) translated into 400 seats, while 2.45 million Unionist votes (43.6% of the poll) garnered just 157 MPs.²⁰ The *Pall Mall Gazette* also observed that the peculiarities of a poll taken across a fortnight aided the Liberals; 'since success and failure at the polls are

¹⁹ *Hansard*, February 19th 1906.

²⁰ Russell, A.K. *Liberal Landslide*, (Newton Abbott, David and Charles, 1973), p.164.

infectious, Saturday (the coruscating early results from Manchester) may very likely prove to have been the first day of the deluge'.²¹ And a new register ('about as new as it can be') with working-class removals of the previous year properly recorded, undoubtedly helped the Liberals and Labour.²² For the Unionists there were rare rays of sunshine after the early results were in and long before the end on January 29th the scale of the shipwreck was evident.

The columns of *The Times* bore witness to the search for an explanation. Sir Henry Seton-Karr, until 1906 MP for St Helen's, averred that 'we were beaten by a socialist labour caucus organised through Trade Union clubs...strengthened by Chinese labour falsehoods. A spirit of industrial discontent has been sedulously fostered by the LRC with the tyranny of capital as its text'.²³ Walter Palmer, defeated Unionist candidate at Salisbury, argued that it was 'almost entirely due to the grievances against the Education Act felt by Nonconformists, computed to be half the electorate'.²⁴ And a few days later Gerald Fiennes, a North Bucks Unionist election worker, wrote that 'no candidate and no amount of hard work could have held the seat against the dear loaf cry, with Chinese slavery superadded'.²⁵ A *Times* leader on the Manchester result had agreed, quoting victorious Mr. Horridge that 'his constituents loathe Chinese labour not only for the moral disgrace to the country but because it is unfair competition with

²¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 15th 1906.

²² *Birmingham Daily Mail*, January 8th 1906.

²³ *The Times*, January 19th 1906; the LRC was the Labour Representation Committee, forerunner of the Labour Party, founded in 1900.

²⁴ *Op.cit*

²⁵ *The Times*, January 24th 1906.

British labour'.²⁶ In letters to Austen Chamberlain, correspondents, unsurprisingly, were careful not to blame the results on the Chamberlains' personal crusade for Tariff Reform: Balfour, humiliatingly defeated in Manchester, was strategic, writing, 'it is obvious that we are dealing with a more general movement of which we see the most violent manifestations in Continental politics', while Lord Stanley, swept away in Lancashire, observed that 'the fiscal case was hardly mentioned by my opponents, but they harped on about Chinese slavery and the Taff Vale decision'. But he continued, 'people do not understand the half way policy'.²⁷

For *The Tribune* the issue was Imperial:

it (has been) possible to utilise our resources to enrich the mining magnates or lords of finance, to enslave more backward races, carry fire and sword against smaller peoples, paint the map red, swell the national consciousness with the pride of victory purchased at the price of a people impoverished, ill-housed, ill-fed, and half employed.²⁸

They had Joseph Chamberlain and his colonial war firmly in their sights. He though, saw it as a question of foul play. He argued repeatedly in the Commons in the aftermath that the unfair poster depiction of Unionists as slavers degrading Chinese workers cost 'scores of our friends their seats on this great party cry of Chinese slavery'.²⁹

²⁶ *The Times*, January 15th 1906.

²⁷ AC 7/2/1; the 'half way policy' alluded to was Balfour's mediatory position of retaliation in the Unionists' debate over Imperial Preference and Protection.

²⁸ *The Tribune*, January 15th 1906.

²⁹ *Hansard*, February 23rd 1906.

Recent historians reflect the disparate nature of these contemporary analyses. There has, for example, been a fierce debate over the extent to which the results did reflect disillusionment with Empire. Where Richard Price derides the idea of a working-class attachment to Empire at the turn of the century, Paul Readman tellingly quotes the *Liberal Agent* that in 1901 'the tide of jingo passion was so overwhelming that all minor issues were submerged'.³⁰ Was it dissipated after a Boer War which went on too long, cost too much and exposed the alarming inefficiencies of the military and of the human stock emerging from Britain's cities? For John Mackenzie, citing the wealth of Imperial allusions in which society, and children's education, was marinated, the end of the Boer War may have seen the British move on 'to apprehensively defensive Imperialism, but that surely need not suggest that popular Imperialism was at an end?'³¹ Yet for Bernard Porter all the jingoistic ephemera of packaging and maps, of patriotic songs and ceremonies, proves little beyond a temporal and superficial working class enjoyment of something different, exciting and exotic.³² P.F. Clarke certainly thought that the election commented (critically) on Chamberlain's Imperial policy; 'it was Chamberlain's War and Chamberlain's election'.³³ The truth would seem to be that on this, as on other issues, a disillusionment with Empire and things patriotic varied according to the strength of other local concerns.

³⁰ Price, R., *An Imperial War and the British Working Class*, (London, Routledge, 1973); Readman, P., 'The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900', *Journal of British Studies* vol. 40 no.1 Jan 2001, pp. 107-145.

³¹ Mackenzie, J., *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, (Manchester, MUP, 1986), p.5

³² Porter, B., *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford, OUP, 2004)

³³ Clarke, P.F., *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1971), p.346

Chamberlain had anticipated a Nonconformist backlash: 'the greatest blow struck at Liberal Unionist influence,' he wrote to Devonshire in 1903, 'has been, as I warned you it would be, the introduction of the Education Act, for which you were in a special degree responsible, which has driven from our ranks many of our most energetic supporters.'³⁴

Certainly, in Yorkshire where Liberalism and Nonconformity had historically close links, and in Wales, where Evan Roberts' revival was in full flood, Balfour's Act catalysed a strong religious reaction.³⁵ Of London in 1906, Paul Thompson concludes that the active support of middle class Nonconformists, enraged by the 1902 Education Act, brought money and organisation to the Liberal cause as local Free Church councils published manifestos in support of the party, though Pelling writes of 1906 that 'the larger the town the weaker the Nonconformity'.³⁶ D.W. Bebbington and M. Ostrogorski would agree that outside the old dissenting fastnesses religious revival may be overplayed by 1906. Bebbington asserts that middle-class Nonconformists were moving to the right in the Edwardian period and that Methodists especially were repelled by a Liberalism which embraced redistribution, allied with trade unionists and, most seriously, endorsed a Home

³⁴ JC 18/18/48, Chamberlain letter to Duke of Devonshire, Oct 26th 1903. He conveniently overlooks his own responsibility for striking a great blow at Liberal Unionist influence in that his speeches on Tariff Reform and his later Cabinet resignation in 1903 had polarised party opinion.

The Education Act had been controversial because it abolished school boards and put church schools on the rates, an outrage for nonconformists.

³⁵ Pelling, H., *Social Geography*, op.cit., pp.314-5; Morgan, K., *The Age of Lloyd George*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1974). Evan Roberts was a Welsh revivalist preacher, exhorting Welsh Nonconformists to protest against the iniquities of the Anglican Establishment.

³⁶ Thompson, P., *Socialists, Liberals and Labour. The Struggle for London 1885-1914*. (London, Routledge, 1967), chapter VIII; Pelling, H., op.cit. p.433.

Rule which handed power to Roman Catholicism and the distrusted Irish priesthood.³⁷ Ostrogorski back in 1902 had opined that religious enthusiasm had shrunk – ‘tolerance and religious indifference (have grown)...the passions and jealousies of the churches have lost a great deal of acuteness...this robs Dissent of its social cohesion’.³⁸ But this may be to overstate the case; it seems probable that even if the election was not fought on religious issues, the row over school boards and subsidies for Anglican schooling had galvanised Nonconformists into activity in the Liberal cause in the 1906 election and ‘the effect the wrath of Dissent had on Liberal morale and enthusiasm’ was marked.³⁹

For some historians the really telling issue was the Lib/Lab pact and the mobilisation of labour. Many working men (some 70 – 80% of the electorate) were alienated by the Taff Vale judgement’s assault on trade unionism, and a Chinese labour policy which denied British working men job opportunities in South Africa. *The Times* had early seen its significance, observing - ‘Labour is cooperating with Liberalism in every constituency for the overthrow of the common enemy’.⁴⁰ Pelling saw it in tactical terms: the Liberals were most willing to allow LRC candidates in, in parts of the country they were weakest, for example in Lancashire, where the Unionists had once been so strong, and the Lib/Lab alliance had a stronger grip on the working-class vote in 1906 than ever

³⁷ Bebbington, D.W., ‘Nonconformity and Electoral Sociology 1867-1918’, *Historical Journal* 27, 1984, pp.630-654.

³⁸ Ostrogorski, M., *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties*, trans. F. Clarke, (London, Macmillan, 1902).

³⁹ Russell, A.K., *op.cit.*, p.200.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, January 9th, 1906.

had the Liberal Party.⁴¹ Clarke goes further; this election was a staging post for Victorian special interest voting to give place to class politics: 'To call 1906 a great Free Trade victory does not do justice to its novel aspects. The cooperation between Liberalism and Labour was the chief factor in securing an unprecedented electoral triumph.'⁴²

Yet, for most, the fundamental truth of the election was that it was fought on the rival prospectuses of Free Trade and Tariff Reform. When Joseph Chamberlain launched his crusade against Cobdenism in May 1903 he was traducing the true faith. Free Trade – so the narrative went - promoted trust and toleration at home and harmony, not greed, competition or exploitation, overseas. To tax food would be to drive those on the margins out of civilisation and into barbarism and social anarchy, to resurrect the blight of the Hungry Forties of popular memory. Free Trade was associated with purity in politics and with having the interests of the consumer at heart; Tariff Reform would empower the 'looters' (Lloyd George's epithet) thought Frank Trentmann, for businessmen would flourish, even though (as David Thackeray argues) tariff reformers worked hard to win the housewife, the consumer, to the cause.⁴³ Chamberlain had touched a sensitive nerve. Julian Amery, his biographer, quoted the *Economist* of December 1843 to illustrate the antiquity and sacramentalism of the beliefs he had challenged: 'Free Trade is a good, like virtue, holiness and righteousness, to be

⁴¹ Pelling, H., *op.cit.*, p.434.

⁴² Clarke, *op.cit.*, p.376.

⁴³ Trentmann, F., *Free Trade Nation*, (Oxford, OUP, 2008); Thackeray, D., 'Rethinking the Edwardian Crisis of Conservatism', *Historical Journal*, 54, vol.1, (2011) p.197; Thackeray, D., *Conservatism for the Democratic Age*, (Manchester, MUP, 2013) pp. 36-37.

loved, admired and honoured.⁴⁴ Small wonder that 98% of Liberal candidates' election addresses focused on Free Trade, by some margin the most popular theme.⁴⁵ The prospect of food taxes (which Chamberlain conceded on the floor of the house - 'there, I make the hon. gentlemen opposite a present of it') was in places electorally disastrous.⁴⁶ Although Chamberlain quartered industrial Britain between 1903 and 1905 speaking on Tariff Reform, with the exception of Liverpool all those major cities voted solidly against it in 1906.⁴⁷ Winston Churchill in Manchester North West summoned up past deities and played to local partisanship: 'you will be proud to say that we held Lancashire for Free Trade against a Birmingham attack and...were true to the old cause of Cobden and Peel.'⁴⁸ Three days later the Manchester Guardian reflected on Lancashire's sweeping Liberal victory: 'A candidate only had to be a Free Trader to get in, whether he was known or unknown, semi-Unionist or thorough Home Ruler, Protestant or Roman Catholic, entertaining or dull. He had only to be a Protectionist to lose all chance of getting in, though he spoke with the tongues of men and angels...'⁴⁹

The impact of this fiscal division was felt within the Unionist party. Though hoping to profit from Liberal disunity – Liberal Imperialists v. Little Englanders – Balfour had to admit that 'the (Unionist) Government had been too distracted by

⁴⁴ Amery, J., *Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform Campaign – the Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol.5 1901-3, p. 210.

⁴⁵ Russell, A.K., *op.cit.*, p.65

⁴⁶ *Hansard*, May 28th 1903

⁴⁷ Russell, A.K., *op.cit.*, p.181.

⁴⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, January 12th 1906.

⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, January 15th 1906.

internal controversies to go on'.⁵⁰ Such were the Unionist divisions that some, like Churchill, had crossed the floor of the House; remaining Free Traders like Robert Cecil faced a determined attempt by Chamberlain to oust him from his (East Marylebone) seat. Unionist Free Traders were confronted with being driven out of the party. It did not make for a united front against the Liberal foe. Even the press reflected this; where the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* were Balfourite, the *Standard* and the *Morning Post* espoused Chamberlain. This clearly impacted on party organisation; gone were the days of Middleton's professional mastery at election time.⁵¹ *The Times* thought that 'sheer bad management, neglect of the constituencies by their representatives and slackness of organisation and resulting apathy' explained the defeat.⁵² For once the contrast with the Liberals, so long in disarray, was embarrassing. Jon Lawrence shows how the Liberals in Wolverhampton after 1900 learnt 'that politicians must address electors as they are, not as they would like them to be'; they forsook Victorian Nonconformist strictures to embrace issues relevant to the local working class.⁵³ Thompson reveals how in London Herbert Gladstone reinvigorated his party organisation by ruthless means, forming a London Liberal Federation, interviewing and recommending candidates, with power to give financial assistance where needed, subsidising moribund local constituency

⁵⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, December 11th 1905.

⁵¹ Roberts, A., *Salisbury – Victorian Titan*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), p. 566 on the 'wire-pulling', fund-raising, intelligence gathering talents of one of 'the most formidable operators in Tory history,' Colonel Middleton, Conservative Principal Agent 1885 to 1903.

⁵² *The Times*, January 15th 1906.

⁵³ Lawrence, J., *Speaking for the People – Party, Language and Popular Politics in England 1867-1914*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1998).

parties, paying for registration work and employing agents.⁵⁴ Gladstone applied the same determination to executing the Lib/Lab pact, ensuring where necessary that local committees supported Labour candidatures.

Cooke and Vincent averred of nineteenth century Britain 'that there existed purely regional political patterns in which national politics could hardly get a foothold'.⁵⁵ And certainly some issues were more important than others to the individual regions. The Conservative *Quarterly Review* believed that at root they all melded into one: 'the attack on Chinese Labour, on Protection, and on the Taff Vale judgement all formed part of an accusation of a plutocratic conspiracy. Even the Education Act was represented as a victory for privilege, and so fell in with the general charge that the Unionists were the party of the rich and selfish who were ready to degrade the British Empire in South Africa by gathering gold through the slaves'.⁵⁶ Nearly every part of Unionist Britain succumbed to this narrative, except North West Lancashire, Sheffield, and – most significantly in electoral terms – the Chamberlain Duchy of the West Midlands. In this latter case, all 11 seats in Birmingham, and its immediate environs, were successfully defended by the Unionists. The burden of the rest of this dissertation is to seek to explain that Birmingham exceptionalism.

⁵⁴ Thompson, *op.cit.*, chapter VIII.

⁵⁵ A.B.Cooke and J.Vincent, *The Governing Passion*, Hassocks, Harvester, 1974, quoted by Cawood, I., *The Liberal Unionist Party*, (London, I.B.Tauris, 2012), p.125.

⁵⁶ *Quarterly Review*, April 1906.

Chapter Two: Birmingham Exceptionalism

Birmingham's anomalous character was of long standing. Ian Cawood points out that effectively the 1886 election was won for the Unionists by the strength of Chamberlain's NRU (Radical) showing in the West Midlands where 18 out of 26 seats were won.⁵⁷ Of the 1892 results, Balfour wrote to Chamberlain: 'you do know how to manage things in Birmingham! I never saw such smashing results'.⁵⁸ And Pelling observed of the Birmingham District that from 1892 to 1906 'in none of the borough contests was the Unionist vote less than 60% of the total' (except for Birmingham East in 1906).⁵⁹ But the 'unique' feature was 'the existence of continuous working-class support for Unionist candidates' across the whole period: 'Aston Manor, Bordesley, North, South and West divisions of Birmingham, all predominantly working-class, constantly produced enormous Unionist majorities.'⁶⁰ Although, as Lawrence has argued, it is impossible to know with certitude why individuals placed their crosses where they did in the

⁵⁷ Cawood, I., *The Liberal Unionist Party – A History*, (London, I.B.Tauris, 2012), p.163.

⁵⁸ JC 5/14/48.

⁵⁹ Pelling, H., *op.cit.* p.182.

⁶⁰ Pelling, H., *op.cit.* pp.182-3.

privacy of the ballot box and so how politicians' policies were received - 'much will remain unknown' - it seems fair to conclude that the reasons for this strong Unionist allegiance in the country's leading industrial city will be found in Birmingham's economic, political, religious and municipal character.⁶¹

Class collaboration

John Bright, one of the city's Liberal MPs, had written in 1867 that 'in Birmingham, I believe, the middle class is ready to work heartily with the working-class'.⁶² His Anti-Corn Law League partner Richard Cobden had identified a structural reason for this: 'the social and political state of (Birmingham) is far more healthy than that of Manchester; and it arises from the fact that the industry of the hardware district is carried on by small manufacturers, employing a few men and boys each...whilst the great capitalists of Manchester form an aristocracy.'⁶³ The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* claimed in 1872 that 'there existed a natural basis for industrial alliances between employers and workmen and for class cooperation in matters of common interest'.⁶⁴ And on the basis of evidence like this Asa Briggs, in a sequence of works, expounded the notion of Birmingham's unique industrial character, where diversification of economic activity both reduced the chances of mass unemployment, and explained the weakness of organised trades unionism, and where proximity of master to men in small workshops made for close working

⁶¹ Lawrence, J., *Speaking for the People*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1998), p.67.

⁶² Langford, J.A., *Modern Birmingham and its Institutions, vol.ii*, (Birmingham, 1867).

⁶³ From Ward, R., *City-State and Nation*, (Chichester, Phillimore, 2005) p.9, quoting Trevelyan, G.M., *Life of John Bright*, 1913.

⁶⁴ *Birmingham Gazette*, April 11th 1872.

relationships and an identity of interest.⁶⁵ The analysis did not go unchallenged, and Clive Behagg in a series of books and articles disputed this cosy image of harmonious relations, by showing that small workshops were – in some places – giving way to larger factories, and asserting that the first half of the nineteenth century was in truth a prolonged struggle of capital against labour.⁶⁶ However, the dominant narrative remains that there was something exceptional in Birmingham’s class relationships. The collaboration in Birmingham was epitomised by W.J. Davis, founder of the National Society of Amalgamated Brassworkers – the largest and most powerful of Birmingham’s trade unions – who spoke of TUC conciliation and arbitration as the way to resolve disputes : ‘we represent a community of interests. The employers find the capital, business capacity and enterprise. We find the technical skill and the muscle’. Writing on collaborative relationships in Birmingham, D. Smith shows that industrial cooperation spilled over into municipal mutuality, writing that ‘the involvement of working class families in Birmingham in political and welfare organisations alongside leading businessmen and politicians gave artisan inhabitants a sense of participation in the management of social reform’.⁶⁷

The trade alliances in Birmingham were indeed important, and different from relations elsewhere; Elie Halevy noted that worker-employer partnership over

⁶⁵ Briggs, A., *Victorian Cities*, (London, Odhams,1963); Briggs, A., *History of Birmingham*,vol. ii (Oxford, OUP, 1952), ch.3 ‘Workshop of the World’, pp31-86.

⁶⁶ Behagg, C., *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century*, (London, Routledge 1990); Custom, Class and Change: the Trade Societies of Birmingham, *Social History*, vol. 4(3) October 1979,pp. 455-480; Myths of Cohesion: Capital and Compromise in the Historiography of Nineteenth Century Birmingham, *Social History* vol. 11(3), October 1986, pp.375-385.

⁶⁷ Smith, D.,*Conflict and Compromise – Class Formation in English Society*, (London, Routledge, 1982) pp.229 passim.

wages and prices had already triumphed in Birmingham in the form of the industrial alliances of the 1890s where elsewhere in the country relations were generally more fractious in the aftermath to the New Unionism of the late 1880s.⁶⁸ An 1898 Trades Council report observed that in Birmingham there 'had been an entire absence of serious labour disputes; the spirit of conciliation prevailed by reasoning and reciprocity.'⁶⁹ The adoption of those industrial alliances may have been a reaction by respectable employers and organised workers struggling with the adverse effects of competition.⁷⁰ This cooperation had many manifestations; we have seen it influencing municipal reform. J. Cornford sees it explaining political allegiance: 'the willingness of the caucus to follow Chamberlain's lead must be explained and the strength of the traditional philosophy of class cooperation may have played its part, for middle-class Radicals in Birmingham regarded themselves, not as representatives of their class, but of their community.'⁷¹ This may explain the fact that the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce was an articulate and influential exponent, with government, of the need for social legislation (campaigning successfully in 1905 for action on unemployment) because 'the pattern of relationships was not of two sets of parallel interests but of one single graduated hierarchy...of actual alliances'.⁷² And the report in the *Birmingham Daily Post* in 1905 quoting a brass worker, Mr. Best, on a visit as part of a trade union delegation to Germany, points

⁶⁸ Halevy, E., *Imperialism and the Rise of Labour* (London, E.Benn, 1929) p.129.

⁶⁹ Briggs, A., *History of Birmingham* vol. ii op.cit. p.61.

⁷⁰ Hooper, A., 'From Liberal-Radicalism to Conservative Corporatism: the pursuit of Radical business in Tory livery' in *Victorian Liberalism*, ed. Bellamy, R., (London, Routledge, 1990) p.200.

⁷¹ Cornford, J., 'The Transformation of Conservatism in the late Nineteenth Century' *Victorian Studies* 7 September 1963, p. 35-66

⁷² Hay, J.R., 'Employers and Social Policy in Britain' *Social History* vol.2 (4), 1977, p.443.

up the link to Birmingham's unusually strong cross-class support for Tariff Reform: 'the brass workers, and the industrial workers generally, of Germany appear to have their interests better cared for under the tariff system than the workers in this country' he said.⁷³ Where labour and trade union organisations nationally in Britain rejected tariffs, a sizeable section of the working-class in Birmingham - judging by the force of public demonstrations, the tenor of letters in the press, and of course the electoral evidence in 1906 - supported Chamberlain's tariff policy initiative.

The importance of Fair Trade

One compelling reason for this was Birmingham's long advocacy of Fair Trade, a movement for protection from foreign competition, which had gained strength in the Conservative Party in the early 1880s – indeed some, looking back to Disraeli and beyond, would say it had never really gone away since the days of the Conservative hiatus over Sir Robert Peel's Corn Law Repeal in 1846.

Chamberlain had commented on this in 1885, when still an avowed Free Trader: 'Fair Trade – you have no idea what a hold it has on the artisans.'⁷⁴ And on some employers, judging by the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce's reply to questions from the 1885 Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade: 'Q. What measures could be adapted to improve the condition of trade?'

⁷³ *Birmingham Daily Post (BDP)*, December 28th 1905.

⁷⁴ Garvin. J.L., *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol.ii (London, 1932), p.121.

'A. The imposition of an import duty on foreign manufactured goods in all cases where the same classes of goods are manufactured in this country.'⁷⁵

Roger Ward demonstrates that in the last years of the nineteenth century the Chamber became less the province of small and middle-ranking businessmen, broadening out to include the larger Birmingham manufacturers.⁷⁶ Fair Trade's popularity reflected the pessimism of West Midlands industry from the years of the Great Depression onwards, increasingly challenged by German and American metal goods. The pages of G.H. Wright's chronicle of the Chamber record an almost annual lament: for example, in 1894 the minute book rants about foreign cheap labour, long hours and prison-made goods undercutting Birmingham's products. It highlights the competition from 'alien labour employed in London and Leeds unfairly competing with our artisans.'⁷⁷

All seven Conservative candidates in the General Election in Birmingham in 1885 stood on a Fair Trade prospectus. It was Birmingham's Fair Trade enthusiasm that converted Chamberlain. Having fastidiously dismissed an invitation to be President of the Chamber in 1887 (when he needed to burnish his Liberal – and therefore Free Trade – credentials in the perilous months after the Liberal split in Birmingham) with the words ...'the Chamber has recently adopted a resolution in favour of Fair Trade and, as I am opposed to protection in any shape or form, I could not with propriety accept', he had by 1895, when Colonial Secretary, seen the potential for imperial preference and so, selective, tariffs, for

⁷⁵ Wright, G.H., *Chronicles of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce AD 1813-1913* (Birmingham 1913), pp. 308-11.

⁷⁶ Ward, R., *City, State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830-1940* (Chichester, Phillimore, 2005), p.132.

⁷⁷ Wright, G.H., *op.cit.* p.380.

himself.⁷⁸ Once he had come out and embraced protection publicly in 1903 the Chamber rushed to endorse him and at a meeting in September two resolutions were adopted 'by an overwhelming majority', the key one being that 'this Chamber is prepared to support the imposition of moderate customs duties on products and manufactures of foreign countries...with preference given to products and manufactures from the colonies'.⁷⁹ Here was the conjunction of Chamber and Chamberlain, going some way to explaining the fact that Birmingham was capital of tariffs by 1906.

Working men, too, showed their support, according to the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*. 'A protectionist petition had evoked a wonderful response from the working men of Birmingham' it averred.⁸⁰ Although TUTRA, the Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, cut little ice nationally, it was - in Birmingham - of greater significance. Here trades union leaders like Eades (secretary of the Birmingham Trades Council) and Jephcott (leader of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers), joined TUTRA. Unions like the Glassworkers, Nut and Bolt Makers, and the Bedstead Makers endorsed it. W.J. Davis, the Brassworkers' leader, was an ardent advocate of Tariff Reform. Their followers seemed susceptible to these views: in November 1905 a pro-tariff working man's manifesto was published in the *Birmingham Daily Post* with 1500 signatures.⁸¹ During the election campaign in December 1905 the *Birmingham Daily Mail* commented almost in passing that 'the jewellers are practically at one with Mr. Chamberlain, whose fiscal policy,

⁷⁸ Wright, G.H., *op.cit.*, p.328.

⁷⁹ Wright, G.H., *op.cit.* p. 444.

⁸⁰ *BDG*, March 6th 1902.

⁸¹ Ward, R.,p.169.

they believe, would materially benefit the industry.'⁸² By the end of 1905 TUTRA was 'apparently thriving, particularly in the Midlands'.⁸³ Nor was that appeal confined to Birmingham; in Pelling's view

it is clear that Tariff Reform found many converts (in the Black Country) among the working men of the district and that this issue provided a more effective bridge between Black Country Conservatism and Chamberlain than had existed previously.⁸⁴

It may help account for the smaller swing to Liberalism there than in any other part of the country apart from Birmingham itself although Trainor also argues that 'the Tories' advanced views...their considerable social progressivism.... helped them to make credible appeals for working-class votes.'⁸⁵

When, in the aftermath of the election results in January 1906, Chamberlain published a postcard celebrating Birmingham's winners ('We Are Seven') and congratulating the victorious Liberal Unionists, it was headed Fair Trade v. Free Trade.⁸⁶ In choosing the historic term 'Fair Trade' he acknowledged a long, vigorous and collaborative protectionist tradition in Birmingham forged by citizens of all classes.

The weakness of separate labour organisation

⁸² *Birmingham Daily Mail (BDM)*, December 11th 1905.

⁸³ Brown, K.D., 'Trade Union Tariff Reform Association 1904-1913', *Journal of British Studies*, vol.9 (2), 1970, p. 145.

⁸⁴ Pelling, H., *op.cit.*, p.187.

⁸⁵ Trainor, R., *Black Country Elites: the Exercise of Authority in an Industrial Area 1830-1900* (Oxford, OUP, 1992) p.223.

⁸⁶ Cawood, I., *op.cit* p.239. See illustration below, p.92.

As we have seen, Richard Cobden had contrasted his own Manchester with John Bright's adopted home, Birmingham. Where Lancashire rallied to endangered Free Trade in 1906, Birmingham rendered signal loyalty to the leaders of Tariff Reform. There was another sharp contrast, too. In 1906 Lancashire elected 13 Labour Party MPs, Birmingham, none, although there had been a close call in Birmingham East. Here, in January 1906, in a heavy industry constituency of railway plant manufacture and gas making, an area of high mortality and large-scale unemployment, the trade union organizer and Labour Representation Committee candidate, James Holmes, gave the complacent sitting Unionist MP Sir Benjamin Stone, a fright. He proposed solving unemployment by nationalizing the railways, reforming land law, abolishing mining royalties; and he excoriated the Unionists for abuse of Chinese labour. But even an anti-Unionist swing of 11.2%, by a long way the largest in the Birmingham area, was insufficient to win what would be eminently winnable in Lancashire.⁸⁷ Holmes worked hard to link local employers and businessmen to the exploitation of 'coolie' labour, but though it must have had some impact, the effect was transient as Liberal Unionist canvassers and workers flooded the constituency on the eve of the poll.

The weakness of Labour politically was regularly noted; it persisted from the late nineteenth century well into the inter-war years. In 1910 the record of the Labour Party Executive Minutes, Transport House, London, attributed the failure to win Birmingham East to 'the Birmingham spirit.' 'The tradition of small-scale industrial enterprise and the highly localised and, on the whole, family industrial

⁸⁷ Roberts, S., 'Politics and the Birmingham working-class: the General Elections of 1900 and 1906 in East Birmingham', *West Midlands Studies*, (1982).

relations that this fostered, stood in the way of the assimilation of the West Midlands to the national pattern of political evolution.’⁸⁸ Nor had A.R. Jephcott, former trade unionist president of the Birmingham Trades Council, read that determinist script which assumed the inevitable ‘evolution’ of a socialist party to represent working-men; he instead signed up to the Birmingham adage of ‘no politics for trade unions’, and sat as a Conservative trade unionist MP for Yardley in Birmingham from 1919-1929.⁸⁹ The *Birmingham Daily Mail* reported on the the General Election in 1900 that the local trades council in the St Mary’s ward advised workers to vote for the Unionist postman, W. Lovesy.⁹⁰ For George Barnsby the answer was regrettable but simple: ‘the cross the Birmingham movement carried, in contrast to the rest of the country, was the baneful Chamberlain interest which held back Labour control of the City Council and any labour representation until 1945.’⁹¹

Back in the 1870s and early 1880s the working class had no serious independent socialist or labour organisation in Birmingham with which to tempt them away from the dominant Liberal caucus. But Birmingham working-class political allegiance followed a tortuous path from the late 1870s. Municipal socialism, which had brought benefits when associated with gas supplies, was less attractive to working men when slum clearance for a city central improvement scheme proved expensive, created new shops and municipal palaces, but

⁸⁸ Quoted by Pelling, H., *op.cit*, p.201.

⁸⁹ Hastings, R.P., ‘Birmingham Labour Movement 1918-1945’, *Midland History*, vol.v 1979-80.

⁹⁰ *BDM*, October 30th 1900.

⁹¹ Barnsby, G.J., *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939*, (Wolverhampton, Integrated Publishing Services, 1998).

neglected to re-build their housing stock. Many working men in the badly depressed central wards started then to vote Conservative. Even before the destructive Liberal split of 1886 the working class was questioning Gladstonian Liberalism.⁹² Then by a remarkable sleight of hand unparalleled in British political history, Chamberlain and his Liberal Unionists allied with those Conservative beneficiaries, shrugged off any disadvantageous association with Liberal municipal socialism, and forged an unbeatable political alliance in Birmingham of Liberal and Conservative, united around the one big cause of the Union of the United Kingdom. The essential truth was that first the National Radical Union created by Chamberlain from the rubble of Birmingham's post Home Rule Bill landscape in 1887, then its metamorphosis, the Midland Liberal Unionist Association, won the support of Birmingham's working-men. The electoral statistics already cited – a Unionist share of the vote never slipping below 60% between 1892 and 1906 with that one East Birmingham exception – illustrate the strength of the loyalty engendered.

The appeal of Unionism to the working-class

Part of the explanation lies in what Unionism was not. Historians from Jon Lawrence onwards have emphasised how Gladstonian Liberalism, with its unappealing moral strictures, repelled many working class voters by the early 1890s. Lawrence focuses on neighbouring Black Country Wolverhampton, where he finds Tories prospering electorally by 'claiming to stand for the pleasures of

⁹² Green, C., 'Birmingham Politics 1873-1891: the local basis of change', *Midland History* 2:2 (1973).

the people', championing 'cakes and ale', reviving summer festivities, promoting the races, sponsoring local Wolverhampton Wanderers, and generally shaping a compelling critique of 'radical, nonconforming political dissenters' who were more focused on 'reforming the habits of individuals, rather than the social and economic circumstances of their lives.'⁹³ Paul Readman quotes the *Pall Mall Gazette* of July 1895 saying of election issues that 'if they (the working classes) do not support the Unionists, the faddists would close the music halls, stop horse racing and would gladly put a veto on football matches.'⁹⁴ *The Times* that month reported Balfour commenting on the Liberals' recent Local Veto Bill:

the poor man of moderate means, who gets his glass of beer – and surely he has a perfect right to a glass of beer – at the public house, will be prevented from doing so while the rich man will be entirely outside the provisions of the bill.⁹⁵

In 1900 the Unionists made the same pitch: 'they were keen to present such male activities as going to the pub, the races, and the football match as being threatened by the 'grandmotherly legislation' of a censorious and killjoy party.'⁹⁶ The Birmingham Liberal part of the Unionist coalition experienced intermittent tensions over this Tory sympathy for the real interests of the working-class voter – Chamberlain's ingenuity was tested more than once over his brother Arthur's

⁹³ Lawrence, J., *op.cit.*, pp.106-108.

⁹⁴ Readman, P., 'The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Late Victorian England', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999) p.479.

⁹⁵ *The Times*, July 10th 1895. The Local Veto Bill 1895 proposed to allow local councils to veto licensing applications; the Unionists made much play of the fact that working men would suffer from pub closures while the well-off, with restaurants, hotels, wine merchants and railway station waiting rooms all exempt from the bill's provisions, would not.

⁹⁶ Readman, P., 'The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics: the case of the General Election of 1900', *Journal of British Studies*, vol.40, 1, January 2001, p.121.

occasionally vociferous espousal of local veto – but in general Joseph Chamberlain’s MLUA took its lead from him and did not emulate its former, Gladstonian, puritanical Liberal, colleagues.

In some senses this was a negative appeal – Unionism not trying to interfere in individuals’ lives and pleasures. But as important was its popular attraction, the power of its message. Liberal Unionism had several facets, mimicking the wings of the old Gladstonian Liberal party: the Whigs under Lord Hartington had balked at Gladstone’s threatened sundering of the United Kingdom and whilst founder members of the new Liberal Unionism, their message was essentially negative, based on adamant resistance to Home Rule. The Radicals under Chamberlain, with his organisation, the NRU, centred on Birmingham, supplied Unionism with an altogether more positive, socially constructive message. For Pelling ‘the existence of continuous working-class support for Unionist candidates was the distinctive feature of Birmingham politics’ ... ‘Chamberlain and his colleagues had convinced the electorate that Liberal Unionism was a creed which had something to offer all classes.’⁹⁷ Right back at the initiation of the Liberal Unionist party a local branch secretary had written that ‘it is necessary that the working man be got to see that the working man who also becomes a Liberal Unionist will not be called upon to renounce or in anyway modify his Radical opinions.’⁹⁸ The Birmingham Radicals, now Liberal Unionists in the MLUA, took the lead in realising this aspiration, for many of them saw

⁹⁷ Pelling, H., *op.cit.* p.182.

⁹⁸ Bird, R., *Liberal Unionist* 12, June 15th 1887, cited by Cawood, I., *op.cit.*, p. 174.

themselves as Radicals and as such, strange bedfellows for their recent adversaries, the representatives of an aristocratic, Anglican establishment.

So, Chamberlain, beleaguered in Birmingham as head of a handful of NRU MPs in 1887, saw his route to greater security through staking out a political position as constructive enabler, firstly by campaigning for an Eight Hours Bill, and then promoting an Act for Free Elementary Education, as well as a new Local Government Act in 1888 (a logical development for a politician who made his name acting in the municipality for the social and environmental good of the citizenry and who had fought unavailingly for Home Rule 'all round' in 1885). Later he could claim credit for the Small Agricultural Holdings Act of 1892, the Employers' Liability Act of 1897, and the Unemployed Workmen Act of 1905. He also supported initiatives like his friend Jesse Collings' Rural Labourers' League – founded in Birmingham in 1888 – to promote issues such as compulsory allotment purchase.⁹⁹ In the tortuous choreography of Unionist relations between Salisbury's Conservatives and Hartington's Liberal Unionists, it was Chamberlain and his Radicals in Birmingham, Hartington's junior partner, who produced the positive electoral prospectus and the political edge. Cawood argues that Chamberlain and his Radicals were inspired at least in part by reading the work of D.G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference* (1891), which advocated broadening the role of the state to remove obstacles to individuals' life chances; Hartington would have been deeply uncomfortable with this, Salisbury accepted

⁹⁹ Shannon, R., *The Age of Salisbury, 1881-1902*, (London, Longman, 1996), chapters 8 and 9 passim.

that some such legislation was inevitable, but the Radical Unionist element of the coalition embraced it.

Their lead was enthusiastically taken up by Liberal Unionists from Birmingham, Glasgow, Cornwall – and by the Women’s Liberal Unionist Association – in the run-up to the 1892 General Election.¹⁰⁰ That appeal to the working-class voter was equally evident in 1894/5. Then Chamberlain was advocating labour conciliation boards, legislation on employers’ liability, restriction of alien paupers, help for working-class house purchase and Old Age pensions. In 1906 the mantra of Liberal Unionism was ‘employment’, a central plank of the argument for protection from unfair foreign competition – again, Chamberlain would argue, with the interests of the worker at heart.

The appeal of Unionism to the working-class – Imperialism and patriotism

The attraction of Unionism was therefore both in what it was not – illiberal and coercive – and what it promised – an amelioration of the worst side-effects of life in an advanced industrial society. Yet, there was another element to Unionism which had a deep appeal to the late Victorian and Edwardian electorate – that of patriotism and Imperialism. A central and distinguishing argument of this thesis is that the influence of Imperialism remained stronger in the Birmingham of 1906 than in much of the rest of the country. In a sense the unity of Empire was the quiddity of the Liberal Unionist party. The issue dissevering it from Gladstone and his followers was the integrity of the United Kingdom and the

¹⁰⁰ Cawood, I., *op. cit.*, p.71.

threat of the dissolution of the British Empire if Ireland was granted Home Rule. Hartington had encapsulated it in the Home Rule debate: 'MPs should unite as one man for the maintenance of this great Empire...compact and complete.'¹⁰¹ One of the almost heroic features of the Birmingham Liberal Unionist saga is its gradual conversion of local liberals and working class voters, so that what appeared a barely relevant issue, that of Irish Home Rule, should become totemic, the core of a wider advocacy for the unity – and the expansion – of the British Empire.

Imperialism was in one sense a calculated Conservative policy from Disraeli and Lord Randolph Churchill onwards, 'a cross-class appeal to national solidarity' so that the working-class would 'put loyalty to country and Empire above loyalty to class.'¹⁰² In another sense it was a deliberate campaign from the early 1880s onwards, of *bien-pensants* who had realised England was the 'reluctant' guardian of an Empire assembled in a fit of absence of mind, the product of economic and trading competition, and who now sought to give it meaning.¹⁰³ The process of habituating the English to their accidental legacy and cultivating in them a race proud and aware of its Imperial legacy started at school. History texts for school and adults, from the 1870s on, promoted Imperialism as a central theme and propagated the idea that Empire was essential to modernising and civilising non-

¹⁰¹ *Hansard*, April 9th, 1886.

¹⁰² Green, E.H.H. *The Crisis of Conservatism*, (London, Routledge, 1995), p.68.

¹⁰³ Porter, B., *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford, OUP, 2004) p.19

Europeans.¹⁰⁴ By 1900 history was taught in a quarter of primary schools.¹⁰⁵ However, Peter Yeandle points out that 'history lessons and historical learning were not the same.' History textbooks were nowhere near as important as materials used to help children to read, where the subliminal messages of Imperial patriotism were woven into the texts. Longman's *'Ship Historical Readers'* sold 115,000 copies between 1891-1902, twenty times the sales of Oman's popular *'History of England.'* These books used the determiner 'our' and the pronoun 'we' to identify the children with their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, whose superior morality and fighting qualities had colonised new territories and acted as a force for good.¹⁰⁶ Henty's children's sagas, heroic tales of derring-do, reinforced the message. Geography, too – considered more important than history in politicising the curriculum – was used from the early 1860s to shape a view of the ascendancy of British culture, values and morality. W. Marsden quotes Tate in 1860 contrasting the Protestant workshop of the world, its perfect political institutions, and flourishing global colonies, 'with Catholic Spain's inability to produce manufactured goods, its civil discords, its dismembered colonies.' Prominent officers of the Royal Geographical Society like Hector Mackinder were clear 'that our teaching must be from the British standpoint so that we finally see the world as a theatre of British activity.'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Aldrich, 'Imperialism in the study and teaching of history' in Richard Aldrich, *Lessons from the History of Education: the Selected Works of Richard Aldrich* (London, Routledge, 2006) pp. 173-183.

¹⁰⁵ Porter, B., *op.cit.* p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ Yeandle, P., 'Empire, Englishness and Elementary School History Education' 1880-1914 (<https://centres.exeter.ac.uk/history/resource/journal5/Yeandle>).

¹⁰⁷ Marsden, W., 'All in a good cause': geography, history and the politicisation of the curriculum in nineteenth and twentieth century England', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 1989, 21 (6), pp. 511-12.

Birmingham schools followed suit. Indeed Susannah Wright shows that it was the second borough (after Burton on Trent) to timetable discrete moral values lessons (two a week) in 1879 which, aside from teaching work discipline, promoted, according to Blanch, 'quasi-nationalistic and imperialistic morals, including the importance of loyalty, patriotism, duty, courage, honour and justice to other people.'¹⁰⁸ A lesson observation recorded by a L.A. Strudwick, a tutor at Saltley College in Birmingham, alma mater for many of Birmingham's primary school heads, illustrates the dominance of the Imperial mindset: in a lesson on 'the loss of the Birkenhead' the teacher was criticised not for grammatical infelicities (which there were) but for failing to make more of the heroism of the soldiers, the nobility of their deaths, the example of their sense of duty, Imperial virtues all.¹⁰⁹ Even the language of adult technical education disseminated this message: the Municipal Technical School for the sons of skilled workers exhorted its students to embrace 'truth, honour, grit, industry''to do the nailing to the mast with the hammer of true British determination. No hauling down the flag, no truckling to the enemy.'¹¹⁰

The Imperial propaganda machine was remorseless from the early 1890s - the Imperial Federation League, the British Empire League, the League of the Empire, the Navy League, the National Service League, all sought to catalyse

¹⁰⁸ Wright, S., 'The Struggle for Moral Education in English Elementary Schools 1879-1918, (unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Oxford Brookes, 2006), p.156. Blanch, M., 'Nation, Empire and the Birmingham Working-Class, 1899-1914', (unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975).

¹⁰⁹ 'Criticism of lessons, visits and observations and Educational Essays 1910/11', MSS BRL, cited by Blanch, *op.cit.*, p.74.

¹¹⁰ Birmingham Municipal Technical School magazine vol. iii, May 1909 no. 31, cited by Blanch *op.cit.*, p.58.

patriotic enthusiasm; Maurice Western's contemporary account of an Empire Day in Erdington, Birmingham in May 1905, this the recent product of the Empire Day Movement's campaign for official recognition, catches the mood:

The schoolroom was decorated with flags. Each teacher gave a lesson on the growth and development of the British Empire. Afterwards all the children gave a rendering of patriotic songs and recitations. The Revd. E.A. Anthony gave an address urging the children to make the most of their opportunities in order that in the future they take their places in maintaining and extending the glorious Empire. A large number of parents attended the celebrations.¹¹¹

In 1906 he records how over 1500 children marched with flags and banners flying to Erdington Park where massed choirs sang the National Anthem.

What is so difficult to assess is the impact on the children of this remorseless Imperial campaign. Robert Roberts records that 'we drew Union Jacks, hung classrooms with flags of the dominions and gazed with pride as teachers pointed out those massed areas of red on the world map. "This, this and this belong to us."¹¹² But he wrote of Salford. A Birmingham man, Fred Willis remembered that 'we tried to mould ourselves to this formula – courageous, honourable, chivalrous...and we thought British people the salt of the earth.'¹¹³ And V.W. Garratt recalled in Birmingham the genuineness of the Mafeking celebrations

¹¹¹ Western, M., *Diary of an Edwardian School*, (Studley, HIP, 2008) – the school was Slade School, Erdington.

¹¹² Roberts, R., *Classic Slum*, (Manchester, MUP, 1971), p.141.

¹¹³ Willis, F., *Peace and Dripping Toast*, (London, 1950), pp. 56-57.

and the emotion generated by the return of the city volunteers in October 1900.¹¹⁴ Mackenzie quotes Stephen Humphries' exercise in oral history in which interviews reveal that working-class children were generally more responsive to lessons and activities inspired by Imperialism....and the ideology of Imperialism made a direct appeal to working-class youth because it reflected and reinforced the cultural tradition of the street gangs, and their concern with territorial rivalry and the assertion of masculinity.¹¹⁵ This is, of course, only the testimony of an articulate few, and this subject is very controversial. David Cannadine cites differing views of the teaching of Imperial history in Edwardian England, from C.P. Lucas's lament that '9 out of 10 working-men were ignorant about the history of the British Empire' to E.O. Lewis's survey of 1913 which found 'history a subject appealing greatly to our pupils', especially proto-Imperial heroes like Raleigh and Frobisher. Still, he concludes that nationally history teaching's impact on patriotism in 1914 paled besides the impact of youth organization and Empire Days.¹¹⁶ Jonathan Rose concluded that the working-class 'frame' was so circumscribed by local outlook – their immediate streets – that to imagine the Empire was impossible, though his conclusion that 'few working-class people were Imperialists' seems based on samples indiscriminately from the 1870s to the 1930s.¹¹⁷ To establish the truth,

¹¹⁴ Garratt, V.W., *A Man in the Street*, (London 1939), p.64.

¹¹⁵ Humphries, S., *Hooligans or Rebels*, Oxford 1981 quoted by Mackenzie, J., *op.cit.*, p.5

¹¹⁶ Cannadine, D., Keating, J., Sheldon, N., *The Right Kind of History – Teaching the Past in Twentieth Century England*, (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) pp. 54 passim.

¹¹⁷ Rose, J., *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, (USA, Yale, 2001) pp. 321-338.

the behaviour of their fellow citizens may provide more substantial clues as to the purchase of Imperialist thinking on working-class minds.

Birmingham's adults had their own entertainments. The music halls from the 1870s had established a reputation as the 'fount of patriotism'; 'by jingo' was coined to celebrate popular approbation of Disraeli's more bellicose foreign policy, and through the 1880s and 1890s the notions of an English speaking race against the rest of the world, of backward natives to be coerced under the authority of the 'Great White Mother', and the overarching goal of exporting English freedom to an uncivilised world, were stock in trade for the music halls' lyricists.¹¹⁸ Working-class leisure embraced the music halls in Birmingham, the cinema (showings of the Tariff Reform film 'John Bull's Hearth' were popular in 1903),¹¹⁹ but also home grown initiatives; the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, for example, reported on several alley entertainments in August 1898:

there were dozens of streamers and in the centre of the yard a large framed portrait of Her Majesty the Queen was displayed, surmounted by a prettily designed coronet and the national flags... and there were displayed the portraits of eminent statesmen and distinguished naval and military leaders.¹²⁰

Up to 2000 people attended a concert of sentimental and comic and patriotic songs, which go down very well....(with their) stirring energetic refrains...the

¹¹⁸ Summerfield, P., 'Patriotism and Empire', in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. Mackenzie, J., *op.cit.*, p.17-42.

¹¹⁹ *John Bull's Hearth*, a film made by G.A.Smith in 1903 and viewable at the British Film Institute's *Screenonline*.

¹²⁰ *BDM*, August 1st 1898.

people swaying to and fro in sympathy with the strong movement.¹²¹ What is significant about this is that working people have here adopted for themselves the patriotic iconography propagated at school – Marsden notes that ‘the flag was a prime choice as an integrated topic in the elementary school, and children frequently sang one of the many songs which celebrated the flag’ – and at official national celebrations of Monarchy and Empire in 1887 (the Golden Jubilee) and 1897 (the Diamond Jubilee).¹²² As already seen the Union Jack was ubiquitous on public occasions, a powerful visual totem symbolising the kinship of a United Kingdom, and so expressing the unity, both of the four home countries but also, by extension, of the Empire.¹²³ It may be that nationally Porter is right, that for the working-class, jingo ‘went down well’ because ‘it was exciting...but it was very superficial’. ‘All that was required was a minimum of apathy.’¹²⁴ But there is a strong argument to make that in Birmingham it was different.

Certainly the picture of an apathetic working-class ‘largely indifferent’ to Empire painted by Price – ‘the ethos of patriotism and a desire to serve the mother country largely pass(ing) it by’ – ill accords with Birmingham’s evidence.¹²⁵

There is a consistent pattern of jingoistic enthusiasm seen in public demonstration throughout the period up to 1906. In 1900 the *Birmingham Daily Post* (*BDP*) reported on the Curzon Hall cinema ‘filled with remarkable audiences

¹²¹ *BDM*, August 19th 1898.

¹²² E.g. ‘The Flag of Old England’; ‘Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue’

¹²³ Eriksen, T.H., and Jenkins, R.J., *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2007); Groom, N., *Union Jack: The Story of the British Flag*, (London, Atlantic, 2013).

¹²⁴ Porter, B., *op.cit.*, p.199.

¹²⁵ Price, R., *An Imperial War and the British Working Class*, (London, Routledge, 1972).

from first to last most patriotic and imperial. The vast assembly stood and sang 'God save the Queen' and throughout cheered every scene and every animated photograph of the generals and the war episodes.'¹²⁶In May the *Handsworth Herald* noted of the Relief of Mafeking that 'staid citizens whose respectability and decorum were usually beyond question were to be seen parading the streets, shouting patriotic songs, dancing, jumping and screaming in a delirium of unrestrained joy.'¹²⁷

Yet this sort of a scene was echoed elsewhere in the country. What is more significant is that in Birmingham it persists. Nowhere else witnessed scenes like the riots accompanying the visit of the prominent pro-Boer, and Chamberlain critic, David Lloyd George in December 1901. 50,000 people (according to the *BDP*) besieged the Town Hall. Many tried to rush the doors as he started to speak; revolvers were fired; windows and glass globes were broken. When the crowd broke past a police cordon and into the hall, only prompt action and luck saved him from lynching. A young man died. Far from being confined – as Price alleged – to the actions of idle lower-middle-class clerks, the arrested included working men, a machinist, a joiner, a railway shunter. ¹²⁸Is this mass riot to be seen as an excuse for affray, or as enthusiastic support for imperial war?

Jingo might be seen very much alive at the end of 1902 on the eve of departure for South Africa of the victor of the Boer War, Joseph Chamberlain. Then *The Times* wrote: 'the demonstration was one of the most remarkable and

¹²⁶ *BDP*, March 2nd 1900.

¹²⁷ *Handsworth Herald*, February 17th 1900.

¹²⁸ *BDP* December 19th 1901; *The Times*, December 21st 1901; January 3rd 1902.

memorable tributes ever offered...four thousand torch bearers carried out a striking illumination, the streets were lined from banqueting hall to the city boundaries...as Birmingham fitly expressed a national approbation.¹²⁹ It was, of course, about Chamberlain, but it was, too, an ‘approbation’ of his triumphant Imperial policy. The same applies to the celebrations of his 70th birthday in July 1906 to which we will return in another context; then, also, the paraphernalia of Empire jostled with expressions of personal loyalty and affection as tens of thousands lined the route from Bingley Hall to Highbury.¹³⁰ Chamberlain certainly reflected that ‘Birmingham has been consistently faithful, the most sturdy upholders of Imperial interest. Never in history has Birmingham sympathised with the Little Englander.’¹³¹

That difference may also be explained by the involvement of Birmingham firms in Imperial trade. We have seen above how Birmingham’s Chamber of Commerce was considering imperial preference solutions to the depressed state of Birmingham industry back in the 1880s. In 1899 the Birmingham business community was ‘hot for war’ – firms like Tangyes making hydraulic presses and pumping engines and lifts for mines, and Kynochs and BSA and their armaments links had a clear interest in a successful South African campaign.¹³² The connection between Imperial contracts and the welfare of the workers was a constantly reiterated theme of the Birmingham-based Tariff Reform League from 1903. And that, too, is important. It is entirely unsurprising that Birmingham

¹²⁹ *The Times*, November 18th 1902.

¹³⁰ *The Birmingham Pictorial and Dart*, July 13th 1906.

¹³¹ JC speech at Bingley Hall July 9th 1906 reprinted in *Mr. Chamberlain’s Speeches*, ed. Boyd, C.W., London, Constable, 1914, pp.362-6.

¹³² Barnsby, G., *Birmingham Working People*, (Wolverhampton, IPS, 1989), p.377.

should have been influenced by its vital role as headquarters of Chamberlain's national campaign for tariffs; he centred it there because he could keep an eye on it, but also because he could rely on it. And Birmingham was to be the first beneficiary of this pro-Imperial advocacy. Chamberlain launched Tariff Reform there in May 1903, and returned there frequently; the presses churning out pamphlet literature, posters and post-cards were located in Birmingham. It would be difficult to avoid the arguments and it would be a source of pride to many that the second city was at the epicentre of a mission, as well as a political storm.

Politicians had sought to exploit the issue of Empire for thirty years. Lawrence concludes of Wolverhampton in the 1890s that the connections between the Conservative Party, the Union and national prestige were 'unquestioned and widely celebrated in many of the poorest parts of the town.'¹³³ Cawood observes that 'one of the great achievements of the two Unionist parties was to present the cause of Empire in a fashion which could excite and activate working-class voters.' He observes that Chamberlain saw the unity of defending the Union and defending the Empire, and translated it into the language of liberalism, making it a mission with a moral purpose. He points to its success in presenting the Golden Jubilee as an assertion of a united nation (in contrast to divisive Gladstonianism), and to that of the 1897 Diamond Jubilee, when the dominant narrative was that this event was a celebration of the new politics of patriotism as expressed by Joseph Chamberlain.¹³⁴ The essential truth was that by 1900 – and despite the

¹³³ Lawrence, J., *op.cit.*, p. 108.

¹³⁴ Cawood, I., *op.cit.*, pp73-75.

existence, and the efforts, of some prominent Liberal Imperialists like Lord Rosebery – the Unionist alliance was recognized as the party of Empire. For Birmingham, with other factors predisposing it to sympathise with the imperial prospectus, the attractions of an imperialist Unionism must have seemed all the greater.

Birmingham – a model of political organisation

When raking over the ashes of the 1906 Election debacle Chamberlain wrote of Birmingham's aberrant performance that 'we owe much to our organisation which worked splendidly.'¹³⁵ Little had changed in over 40 years, for Birmingham was a national template for the dark arts of electoral management. A popular Liberal assembly organised John Bright's candidacy back in 1857, and with new constituencies formed after the Second Reform Act, Liberal electors were given their orders as to how to achieve a full house of Liberal representation by the strategic casting of votes. Harris, Schnadhorst and the committee of 2000 kept an iron grip on Liberal politics.¹³⁶ These caucus methods were projected first into the National Education League in the early 1870s, where 'disciplined obedience, not compromise or consensus, characterised its operations' and where a snug nexus of managers, all Birmingham men, all close associates of Joseph Chamberlain, ran a very tight ship.¹³⁷ It reflected

¹³⁵ Letter of March 5th 1906 from JC to the 'We Are Seven' banqueting committee published *BDP* March 6th 1906.

¹³⁶ Briggs, A., *History of Birmingham* vol. II (Oxford, OUP, 1952). pp.164-178; the 2000 was the (large) ruling Liberal committee in Birmingham.

¹³⁷ Auspos, P., 'Radicalism, Pressure Groups and Party Politics' *Journal of British Studies* 20 (1980) pp. 184-204; the National Education League evolved as a Nonconformist campaign group to overturn clause 25 of the Education Act of 1870 which allowed fees in denominational schools to be paid from the rates.

Chamberlain's priorities – that this should be 'a machine', controlling and relentless in extirpating derided Whiggery from the party. From this it metamorphosed into the National Liberal Federation, with a prospectus to unite grassroots Liberals and promote a Radical programme. Birmingham dominated it; in 1877 it provided the headquarters for the organisation, and all the officers were old League or Birmingham Liberal Association loyalists. Mundella, the Radical, expressed the disquiet of some at this Midland domination and at the federal structure: Jay quotes him as saying 'appeals to the associations will be made, or neglected, as Birmingham deems desirable, and Chamberlain moves Birmingham.'¹³⁸

The methods, then, of canvassing (vital to make the personal contact with a potential voter), registering, encouraging and directing Liberal voters were tried and tested by 1886, and although there were signs of working-class disillusionment with grand municipal schemes, the Liberal hold on Birmingham in the General Elections was unbreakable – even Conservative candidates, Lord Randolph Churchill and that cynosure of Imperial pluck, Sir Fred Burnaby, failed to break its monopoly.¹³⁹ In a titanic internecine struggle between Home Rule Gladstonian, and Unionist, Liberals in Birmingham from 1886 to 1889, those electoral insights were to be used most effectively by Joseph Chamberlain and his friends and, as a result, these years saw the forging of a steely political weapon, tempered and refined by the cadre. Individuals like J.T. Bunce the editor

¹³⁸ Jay, R., *Joseph Chamberlain*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981), p.159.

¹³⁹ Green, C., *op.cit.* Green argues that the expense of Municipal improvement schemes and failure to replace slum cleared housing with new accommodation upset the working classes in the early 1880s.; Wright, T., *The Life of Colonel Fred Burnaby* (London, Everett and co., 1908).

of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, and Dale, the revered Nonconformist minister, were central to the facing down of Schnadhorst and his Gladstonian supporters in the 2000 in 1886, allowing the new-born Liberal Unionist organization to survive its first weeks.

The battle for control was revisited in 1888 and Chamberlain then successfully convinced Liberals that he stood for Radical policies, and Conservatives that he was an essential Unionist ally in keeping the West Midlands. Seeing off Churchill, and promoting the election of Albert Bright in Central Birmingham in 1889, was a signal victory. It represented the reining together of Tory and Liberal voter in a Unionist alliance. The nascent National Radical Union, renamed National Liberal Union then West Midlands Liberal Union Association, employed psephological lessons learnt over decades; for example, it monitored carefully the strength of loyalty to Liberal Unionism by canvassing West Birmingham in 1889, finding 'an immense number of Liberal Unionists in the division' according to Powell Williams; after the Bright victory 'it had got to grips with the electorate and was surprised at the strength it found.'¹⁴⁰ Hartington, putative national leader of the Liberal Unionists after 1886, acknowledged this and ceded to the WMLUA effective control of Birmingham, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire in what became known as the Duchy; and Salisbury and Balfour came to recognise that the Radical prospectus it represented was a vote winner for the Liberal wing of the Unionist alliance. Here, then, is powerful evidence of a unique political force in Britain, an exceptionalist formula impervious to

¹⁴⁰ Cawood, I., *op.cit.*, p.127; Hurst, M., 'Joseph Chamberlain and West Midlands Politics 1886-1895', *Dugdale Occasional Papers*, no.15, 1962 p.50.

Gladstonian assault; in 1892 the whole West Midlands Duchy defied the national swing and 30/39 of the area's constituencies returned Unionists.¹⁴¹ 'What is necessary in order that our side might win? – of course, organisation' reiterated Chamberlain in 1892.¹⁴²

For Ian Cawood, 'Birmingham and the West Midlands became the unquestioned citadel of Liberal Unionism from 1886 till at least 1914.' What made it so was 'the almost unique achievement of being geographically concentrated and ideologically coherent' and in this it reflected the leadership of Joseph Chamberlain (see chapter 3). As other regions fell away (especially after 1902 when many Liberal Unionists were traumatised by the government's betrayal by its Education Act), the WMLUA (along with Glasgow) continued to invest in, and employ agents, to register and canvass and to produce pamphlets and publications in industrial quantities.¹⁴³ Lawrence finds Chamberlain writing to a defeated Shropshire candidate in 1904, chiding him that 'you had practically no lady helpers in your recent contest.'¹⁴⁴ The WMLUA and the tariff campaigns in Birmingham (where the Women's Unionist Tariff Association was founded) ensured that this valuable source of canvassers and leafleters was fully

¹⁴¹ Hurst, M., *op.cit.*

¹⁴² *The Times*, March 9th 1892, reporting on JC's speech to the Liberal Unionist Club.

¹⁴³ Cawood, I., *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁴ Thackeray, D., *Conservatism for the Democratic Age*, (Manchester, MUP, 2013), pp. 26-29; this Oswestry constituency certainly acted on Chamberlain's instigation, and the Unionist candidate's wife, Caroline Bridgeman, founded a branch of the WUA and ran a continuous campaign of monthly informal cottage meetings, and a regularly published magazine with success for her husband in 1906.

exploited.¹⁴⁵ The *Birmingham Mail* reported that ‘in Birmingham it is being whispered that the lady worker has contributed no mean part to the sweeping successes of the Unionist candidates.’ ‘Up to 300 ladies, morning after morning have been setting out in fair and foul weather to canvass the constituencies.’¹⁴⁶ For Thackeray this is evidence of the different approach Chamberlain and the Liberal Unionists had to women’s organisations; where the Primrose League was essentially social, the WLUA ‘devoted great attention to educational work...and (its earnestness) sat uneasily with the decorous social culture of the Primrose League.’ This latter body was neutral on fiscal matters and its lack of commitment explains the poor Conservative performance in many areas in 1906; Chamberlain’s WUTRA (founded in 1904), reflecting his aim of widening popular participation in politics, was focused on tariff reform and in Birmingham lively female political involvement saw a stronger Unionist result.¹⁴⁷

Birmingham was to be the heart of Tariff Reform and it clearly resonated with an industrial city as we have seen; Free Trade could not compete, as the *Gazette* smugly reported in the midst of the election campaign – ‘a Free Food demonstration on Saturday (January 12th 1906), without Free Fooders and without any visible signs of a demonstration, is apt to pall.’¹⁴⁸ This reflected the counter influence of the Tariff Reform League with its very own Birmingham Imperial Tariff Committee under that gifted organiser C.A. Vince, Chamberlain’s

¹⁴⁵ Lawrence, J., *Electing Our Masters*, op.cit p.86.

¹⁴⁶ *BDM*, January 18th 1906.

¹⁴⁷ Thackeray, D., *Conservatism for the Democratic Age* (Manchester, MUP, 2013), pp. 19-25; Thackeray, D., ‘Rethinking the Edwardian Crisis of Conservatism’, *Historical Journal*, 54, vol.1, 2011, pp. 191-213

¹⁴⁸ *BDG*, January 15th 1906.

former electoral agent. The impact on the surrounding city was palpable, by virtue of its offices, its Congreve Street warehouse, its printing works and in the visible product of those presses. 'The scale of propaganda demands recognition' writes J. Thompson, 'for it was the wealthy Tariff Reform League which distributed the most material, rivalling the efforts of the established parties.' He argues that the proliferating posters – part of the propaganda drive – 'both educated the public with eye-catching images, and claimed ownership of contested and symbolically valuable sites.' In the 1906 election, visual images were created by pro-Tariff Reform designers for posters. The principal central hoardings from Edmund Street to Great Charles Street were covered with 3500 square feet of Tariff reform posters, reported the *Mail* on November 21st 1905 - and newly popular picture postcards flooded Birmingham with the same images, as John Bull fought the deprivations of Herr Dumper, or was shackled to stocks labelled 'Free Trade'.¹⁴⁹ Kathryn Rix has shown how the Tariff Reform League's poster campaign legally evaded the spending limits decreed by the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 – with a vengeance.¹⁵⁰ The cartoons were displayed on 'every unguarded square of wall space' and influenced the house-style of newspaper cartoonists, as in *the Dart* and *the Owl*.¹⁵¹ It was Birmingham that hosted early versions of the dump shops illustrating the iniquitous cheap foreign imports, rolled out nationally in 1910. For Chamberlain it was axiomatic that 'industrial regions were more likely to respond favourably to an agitation

¹⁴⁹ *Birmingham Daily Mail*, November 21st 1905; Thompson, J., 'Pictorial Lies – Posters and Politics in Britain, c. 1880-1914', *Past and Present*, 197, (2007) pp. 177- 205; S. Mathew, 'Collecting Colonial Postcards', in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernity*, ed.A. Burton (London, Routledge, 1999).

¹⁵⁰ Rix, K., 'The elimination of Corrupt Practices in British elections?', *English Historical Review* 123 no.1, 2008, pp. 65-97.

¹⁵¹ Ward, R., *op.cit.* p.170.

directed from Birmingham rather than from London.’¹⁵² It indeed became the ‘the most powerful pressure group in British politics since the Anti-Corn Law League’ of the 1840s.¹⁵³

To what extent were Birmingham voters engaged by a febrile political debate? In several areas we can see an active, indeed an unusually strong, involvement.

Lawrence argues that ‘the platform and the soapbox dominated electioneering to 1914’ despite the contention of Vernon and others that after 1867 there was a gradual civilising and disciplining of political discourse.¹⁵⁴ Birmingham regularly witnessed political meetings involving thousands - it had done so since Attwood’s great rallies in the early 1830s, and the tradition lived on with Chamberlain – and they served to launch policy (as on May 15th 1903 with Chamberlain’s game-changing Tariff Reform speech) as well as to woo voters at election time. Heckling and the pertinent riposte were part of the accepted dialogue between candidate and voter. For the Liberal Unionists and the Tariff Reformers, their choice of Birmingham both as HQ, and as favoured venue for policy exposition, reflect a strong sense that it was friendly and loyal.

Yet Birmingham had another, darker, reputation, too, running back to the Bull Ring Riots in 1839. Lawrence sees no evidence that attitudes to electoral or political intimidation changed up to 1914, and Birmingham well illustrates that

¹⁵² Zebel, S., ‘Joseph Chamberlain and the Genesis of Tariff Reform’ *Journal of British Studies*, vol.7 no.1, 1967, pp.131-157.

¹⁵³ Ward, R., *op.cit.*, p. 157.

¹⁵⁴ Lawrence, J., *Electing Our Masters: the Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*, (Oxford, OUP, 2009), chapter 3 *passim*.

contention.¹⁵⁵ One notorious example in 1884 was that of the Aston Riots, when Liberal supporters broke in and laid waste to Aston Lower Grounds in seeking to disrupt a Conservative meeting welcoming Lord Randolph Churchill. *The Times* reported Sir Stafford Northcote 'distinctly charging the Birmingham caucus with having organised the disturbance', one in which a mob, wielding sticks, fought in the hall and on the platform to wrest control.¹⁵⁶ The thousands making up the mob clearly enjoyed the opportunity of physical expression, as they did in December 1901, when huge numbers sang patriotic songs in Victoria Square prior to stone-throwing, door-breaking and pistol-shooting as the Town Hall defences were breached, the stage stormed and Lloyd George threatened with lynching. Birmingham now had form and national notoriety, and the dominant partisanship in these contests was firmly pro-Liberal Unionist. In the 1906 election we find intelligence of an intention to break up that Free Food demonstration sufficient to prompt J.S. Nettlefold to publish a letter in the *Birmingham Daily Post* to Joseph Chamberlain urging him to muzzle his men: 'you will remember when Mr. Lloyd George came to Birmingham the real culprits were those who incited to riot and also those who could have prevented a disturbance had they so minded....I appreciate that you, on this occasion, disapprove.'¹⁵⁷ The occasion was a damp squib, but in Leamington at a Liberal election meeting a day later Lloyd George was silenced by deafening heckling and left without uttering a word; he did speak later and attributed the disturbance to 'free imports from Birmingham.'¹⁵⁸ In truth, it was only a mirror

¹⁵⁵ Lawrence, J., *Speaking for the People*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1998)

¹⁵⁶ *The Times*, October 14th and 15th 1884.

¹⁵⁷ *BDP*, January 10th 1906.

¹⁵⁸ *The Times* January 12th 1906.

image of what had happened to Chamberlain at Derby a week before. But Leamington was in the Duchy, and no Liberal, especially Lloyd George, who had sullied the Chamberlain reputation with his indictment of war-profiteering back in 1900, was safe from loyalist interventions. The point is that part of Birmingham's political character involved passionate exuberance, occasionally spilling into physical force, and Chamberlain knew how to summon and direct it as no other contemporary politician could.

Birmingham's press

An important part of this Unionist partisanship was that of the press. The *Birmingham Daily Mail* and the *Birmingham Daily Post* were Liberal Unionist, the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* was essentially Conservative and the *Birmingham Evening Despatch* was the official Unionist paper. The *Post* had a period of anti-protectionist apostasy but Chamberlainite pressure on the editor, Pountney, and his convenient resignation brought it to heel in 1905. The *Dart* became pro-Tariff Reform in 1904; the *Owl* was steadily supportive. The manifestation of this loyalty was not only in opinion pieces but, more subtly, in the very language with which events were reported. For example the *Gazette's* take on the Leamington meeting of January 11th 1906 alluded to already was nothing if not partial: 'Mr. Lloyd George causes trouble wherever he goes; the electors absolutely declined to listen to his scathing, his ill-considered, and his ill-timed arguments' It went on to suggest that 'the Liberals had courted this unseemly demonstration and 'asked for it' by disturbing and breaking up one of Mr. Lyttleton's meetings.'

It concluded that 'of course an attempt was made to ascribe the disturbances to an organised gang from Birmingham.'¹⁵⁹

A partisan press is not in itself a guarantee of electoral success; if it was then the Unionist weighting of the national papers, including much of the serious press as well as the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening Standard*, would have told in 1906 but it did not. However, in Birmingham the support was inexorable and unrelenting and must have had an impact on the voter.

Birmingham Nonconformity

Whilst a Nonconformist revival evidently had an impact on the Liberal victory nationally in 1906, it did not appear to have impacted much on Birmingham. Pelling notes the contrast with the Black Country, linking the strength of Dissent there to small-scale businesses in contrast to the larger enterprises in Birmingham. That is not to say that Nonconformists had not played a distinctive role in Birmingham: in the 1870s ministers like Dale and Dixon had strongly influenced those Liberal businessmen who had implemented Birmingham's distinctive civic gospel of municipal improvement for the betterment of working people. By the 1890s that influence had faded. Municipal socialism had not solved working-class housing deficiencies or poverty. And the 1892 *Birmingham News* Religious Census had revealed that, while 47% of churchgoers were Nonconformists, all adult worshippers together only accounted for 32% of the population, and a related problem emerged that working-classes in the inner

¹⁵⁹ *BDG* January 12th 1906; Mr. Lyttleton was Leamington's sitting Unionist MP.

ring barely attended church at all.¹⁶⁰ Politics affected Dissent, too, in Birmingham; the unity of its political arm, Liberalism, had been destroyed. Home Rule divided Birmingham and the dominant force which emerged, Liberal Unionism, by virtue of its alliance with Conservatives, aristocrats and Anglicans, inevitably blunted Nonconformity's edge. There was one notable point d'appui – on the issue of Balfour's Education Bill in October 1902. In the National Liberal Unionist Conference in Birmingham, full of outraged Nonconformists, Chamberlain's defence of government policy, his artful concessions, but his eventual victory when the vote was put, ended opposition from all but a handful.¹⁶¹ It was a seminal moment in Birmingham for Nonconformity had lost its last political battle. In the General Election in 1906 Unionism's most dangerous opponent was not a Liberal Nonconformist but a Labour candidate, a socialist trade unionist, Holmes in Birmingham East. Most of Birmingham's Dissenting leaders, like Chamberlain, had long since departed for the Unionist alliance, and the Birmingham Liberal Association was enfeebled; perhaps only George Cadbury, whose quiet anti-Chamberlain sponsorship enabled a fellow-Quaker, J.W. Wilson to win North Worcestershire in 1906, can be said to have offered serious resistance.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Peacock, R., 'The 1892 Religious Census' in *Religion in the Birmingham Area – Essays in the Sociology of Religion* ed. Bryman, A., (Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 1977).

¹⁶¹ Amery, J., *Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform campaign – The Life of Joseph Chamberlain vol. v 1901-3*, (London, Macmillan, 1969) p.105

¹⁶² Ward, R., *op.cit.*, p.171.

A Birmingham identity

The sum of the exceptional characteristics considered above was to establish in the city a strong awareness of its own significance. It took pride in its famous sons – notably Attwood, Bright and Chamberlain – and in the legacy of its own unique civic gospel, shaped by qualities and skills which were very specially Birmingham's, that is to say 'experience in large scale management and financial expertise' aligned to a strong Dissenting conscience, which wished to eliminate the social evils produced by successful business.¹⁶³ *The Times* thought it fostered political maturity and steadfastness; commenting on Birmingham's defiance of that national Liberal tsunami it sententiously congratulated 'an electorate (which) appreciate(d) sound arguments and serious treatment of political questions.'¹⁶⁴ It is then clearly important to test *The Times* claim and to establish how influential one man was on Birmingham's appearance of political maturity.

¹⁶³ Jones, L. 'Public Pursuit of Private Profit?: Liberal Businessmen and Municipal Politics in Birmingham, 1865-1900', *Business History*, November 1983, pp.240-259.

¹⁶⁴ *The Times*, January 18th 1906.

Chapter 3 The influence of Joseph Chamberlain

A symbiotic relationship

It is no exaggeration to say that for the last thirty years of his career, Joseph Chamberlain was – in the public mind – synonymous with Birmingham and it with him. No other figure in modern British politics developed a similar regional powerbase; some possible rivals like Gladstone or Churchill moved constituency several times in their careers, and others like Lloyd George, Disraeli or Macdonald failed to build on a long-standing regional connection as Chamberlain did in the West Midlands. Here it developed through symbiosis. Jon Lawrence argues that late nineteenth century ‘politics assumes a mediatory aspect in which politicians adapt their message to fit the perception of pre-existing attitudes as much as they seek to shape attitudes’ and without doubt Birmingham shaped Joseph Chamberlain and his policies just as he educated and shaped his bailiwick.¹⁶⁵

His Unitarian religion – before it faded abruptly after the death of his second wife – brought him into contact with the minister of the Unitarian Church of the Saviour, George Dawson, and civic gospel ideas of the Christian imperative to exert governing power for the benefit of society chimed with Chamberlain’s own innate tendency to want to control and manage, character traits the rest of this chapter will illustrate. His mayoralty and its successful ‘gas and water socialism’

¹⁶⁵ Lawrence, J., ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism 1880-1914’, *English Historical Review* 108, no.3, 1993, p.632.

gave him greater satisfaction than any other enterprise and by 1880 had established his strong personal appeal in the city.¹⁶⁶

His relationship with the working-classes

His business dealings had meanwhile extended his knowledge of, and sympathy for, the working men he met. By the 1870s he 'had developed an easy and accommodating style (with them), had learned their aspirations and their drive for respectability and so was able to appeal to workers over the heads of their employers....and build a popular electoral base.'¹⁶⁷ Political programmes for the rest of his life reflected these insights: in 1885 his 'Unauthorised Programme' was framed to tackle poverty in town and country; in 1886 his Circular to the Boards of Guardians (when he was President of the Local Government Board) was a first for any government, advice at a time of heavy unemployment on relief through public works.¹⁶⁸ He – fairly – claimed credit for those Acts of the Salisbury government to 1892 which benefitted working men dealing with free elementary education, smallholdings, working-class housing, and local democracy. His Radical Unionist programme in 1894-5 attracted Tories as well as Liberals; a package of labour conciliation boards, employers' liability, restriction of alien paupers, working-class house purchase and Old Age Pensions helped win a positive mandate for the Unionist alliance. Even if Imperialism, and the Boer War, dominated the political agenda in 1900, we can still see

¹⁶⁶ Jay, R., *Joseph Chamberlain*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981), p.27.

¹⁶⁷ Crosby, T., *Joseph Chamberlain, A Most Radical Imperialist*, (London, I.B.Tauris, 2011), p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ Ward, R., *op.cit.* p.99.

Chamberlain's concern for the working man in the new century; while the war was on in January 1902 Chamberlain attended the annual meeting of the West Birmingham Relief Fund. He talked with pride of the work over the previous decade he and his colleagues had done to alleviate the travails of men who 'due to misfortune or ill-health, or incapacity through old age' had fallen into poverty. 'Our example was subsequently followed in other divisions of the city.'¹⁶⁹ Here was practical action to help the unemployed. And, as Quinault points out, to Chamberlain the agricultural labourer was just as important as the industrial worker; hence his consistent advocacy of the householder franchise in the counties, of allotments and of the Scottish crofter. Part of his objection to Home Rule was that it distracted attention from these issues.¹⁷⁰

When it came to Tariff Reform his goals evolved, from imperial preference (always the ultimate aim) to retaliatory tariffs against dumpers, but a constant theme was the need to create and protect jobs for the workers. His thinking is distilled in a campaign speech at Saltley in January 1906: 'the distress which continues and increases in the midst of prosperous times is due to one thing only - want of employment. The answer is new and increased markets.' He was disappointed that trade union leaders failed to make the connection and were so hypocritical - 'protection of labour is just as much opposed to Free Trade as protection of goods, and the common enemy is free imports.'¹⁷¹ Chamberlain saw Tariff Reform as the way to create jobs through a protected home market, as well

¹⁶⁹ *The Times*, January 7th 1902.

¹⁷⁰ Quinault, R., 'Joseph Chamberlain: a Reassessment', in *Later Victorian Britain*, ed. Gourvish, T.R. and O'Day, A. (London, Macmillan, 1988), pp. 76-79.

¹⁷¹ *The Times*, January 8th 1906.

as the means to pay for Old Age Pensions, something he had first considered back in the 1880s.¹⁷² In speech after speech in Birmingham in the weeks leading up to the poll in 1906 he enumerated all the social reforms enacted ('more has been done in the last ten years than has been done in any similar period before') and reiterated that while the Liberals were clueless as to how to tackle unemployment ('John Morley says "I – John Morley - have no remedy"), he intended 'to get you more employment, end one-sided Free Trade – and secure you extra colonial trade.'¹⁷³ At these meetings, as the *Mail* recorded, huge banners draped across the proscenium arches emphasised the priority – 'Work for the Unemployed'.¹⁷⁴

He also responded to another working-class concern: immigrant labour.

Birmingham unemployed workers had complained in the late 1880s of pauperised Eastern immigrants coming over to take their jobs.¹⁷⁵ One in four election addresses had mentioned pauper immigration in the 1895 election, Chamberlain having articulated the problem of Jewish immigration – it 'could no longer be allowed' - in a Birmingham speech.¹⁷⁶ At Limehouse in East London,

¹⁷² JC 18/18/94 In a letter from Sir H. Maxwell to J. Garvin, JC's biographer, Maxwell revealed: 'In the 1880 Parliament we were walking together from a meeting of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor. I asked him 'how do you propose to raise money for pensions?' He replied, 'by an import duty on wheat.'

¹⁷³ *The Times*, January 3rd 1906 reporting on two speeches in West Birmingham made on January 2nd.

¹⁷⁴ *BDM* January 10th 1906.

¹⁷⁵ Ward, R., *op.cit.*, p.129; *The Times*, December 5th, 1893.

¹⁷⁶ Readman, P., 'The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Late Victorian England', *Historical Journal*, 42, 1999, p.475; Powell, E., *Joseph Chamberlain*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 1977). There is here a clear connection between Powell's own warnings of the consequences of immigration and those given by his biographical subject.

centre of the sweated trades, he was explicit, using inflammatory language we would now think racist:

you are suffering from unrestricted immigration of people who make cheap goods; the evils of immigration have increased during recent years and behind these people there are millions of the same kind who might follow in their track and might invade this country...already affect(ing)a district, it is spreading to other parts of the country. When aliens come here they are answerable for a large amount of crime and disease and hopeless poverty.¹⁷⁷

He later took pride in the passage of the Aliens Act telling his Birmingham loyalists that it 'will protect workers in this country against excessive importation of alien labour', perhaps reflecting that one piece of protection legislation had got onto the statute books.¹⁷⁸

In this, and in the larger area of social reform, Chamberlain demonstrated his concern for the working-man; it was a consistent thread running through his career from school board and mayoralty to national Radical champion, and in his very last speech two days before his debilitating stroke he was still at it: 'when the tide of national prosperity recedes and depression follows it, the working-classes will be the sufferers and we shall find it impossible to find employment for the increasing population.'¹⁷⁹ Nor was he indifferent to their pleasures; he was not a Nonconformist killjoy in his attitude to drink, for example, and

¹⁷⁷ *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches* ed. Boyd, op.cit.: speech at Limehouse, December 15th 1904, p.262.

¹⁷⁸ *The Times*, January 3rd 1906 an election speech in West Birmingham.

¹⁷⁹ *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, ed. Boyd, op.cit.: speech at Bingley Hall July 9th 1906, p. 361.

exemplified that Unionist understanding, already discussed, of the need to respond to the working-classes as they are, not as one might wish they were. The *Mail* reported in 1906 that he had said 'he would have supported an amendment to the Sunday Closing Bill to secure facilities for the working-classes to get their dinner and supper beer.' The Birmingham working man responded warmly: Stephen Roberts concludes of East Birmingham in 1906 that 'the working-men of Birmingham voted not so much for a party as for a single man – Joseph Chamberlain'¹⁸⁰ – and the numerous interruptions and heckles of election speeches in Birmingham, 'Vote for Joey', 'Come on Joey', testify to his popularity among the class for whom he genuinely pursued a reform agenda for forty years.

Chamberlain and Birmingham business

Chamberlain was essentially a businessman and his experiences coloured his political outlook. His civic gospel was at root an entrepreneurial one; 'integrity, financial acuity and managerial skill' were 'fit and proper virtues for service for the community' judged Dale, and the aims were mutually beneficial – in seeking to reduce the social and economic costs (crime and disease) which burdened the ratepayer, Chamberlain sought to eradicate evils afflicting the working-classes – sanitation, water and housing conditions.¹⁸¹ His attitude to industrial relations was shaped by his Birmingham experiences, when acting as first president of the

¹⁸⁰ Roberts, S., 'Politics and the Birmingham working-class: the General Elections of 1900 and 1906 in East Birmingham', *West Midlands Studies*, 1982.

¹⁸¹ Jones, L., 'Public Pursuit of Private Profit?', *op.cit.*, p.243.

South Staffs Mill and Forges Wages Board, or as an arbitrator in the nut and bolt, and coal, industries in the 1870s.¹⁸²

His own relentless competitiveness and expansionism with 'Nettlefold and Chamberlain' was mirrored in his approach to Empire, a great estate which demanded development. 'The question of trade and commerce is one of the greatest importance' ¹⁸³he said, and Birmingham people had been the 'most sturdy supporters of Imperial interest' because it translated into profits and jobs. Opponents charged him that Birmingham manufacturers, friends and family, profited from the Boer War.¹⁸⁴ His pessimism about Britain's inevitable economic decline was also rooted in what he saw in Birmingham. He feared that in the course of another generation Britain would be less an industrial country inhabited by skillful artisans than a distributive country with a smaller population.

In November 1903 he spelt out the implications for Birmingham, at Bingley Hall: imports were growing faster than Birmingham exports in jewellery, the brass manufacturers faced up to 60% in tariffs abroad, pearl button employees had shrunk from 6000 to 1000 because of the McKinley tariffs, and the cycle industry's exports had fallen by over £500,000 in ten years in the face of tariffs of

¹⁸² Briggs, A., *History of Birmingham* vol.ii, op.cit., p.61.

¹⁸³ *Monthly Notes on Tariff Reform*, ed. Vince, C.A. and Hunt, A.E., (Imperial Tariff Committee Birmingham 1904-6).

¹⁸⁴ Grigg, J., *Lloyd George: The Young Lloyd George*, (London, Eyre-Methuen, 1978).

up to 45% and of American dumping.¹⁸⁵ Tariff Reform reflected thirty years of Birmingham Fair Trade advocacy, and spoke for manufacturers facing the full force of German and American industrial innovation and trusts. The pages of the *Monthly Notes of the Imperial Tariff Committee* (based in Birmingham) from 1904 detailed those travails of every British industry in turn when faced with tariffs and dumping – many were represented in Birmingham. Unsurprisingly most of their managing directors supported the crusade.¹⁸⁶

Birmingham advocate

Not only were his policies influenced by Birmingham. Chamberlain also promoted Birmingham and its interests, and this solicitude unquestionably earned reciprocal loyalty. Chamberlain, for example, acted as the town's counsel, guiding the municipal gas bill through two parliamentary committees of enquiry. He later sponsored Birmingham legislation, like bills in parliament to secure water supplies from North Wales, to reform the King Edward's foundation and to incorporate his pet project, Birmingham University, the country's first red brick institution.¹⁸⁷ Throughout his parliamentary career he lobbied for Birmingham firms – BSA guns not London guns for example; Marsh notes him – 'attentive to the depressed economy in Birmingham' in 1880, using his influence with the

¹⁸⁵ *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, ed. Boyd, op. cit.: Birmingham, November 4th 1903.

¹⁸⁶ *Monthly Notes*, op.cit.; it should be noted, however, that Quinault takes a different view of Chamberlain's motivation for Tariff Reform, arguing that it was essentially to ensure Canada was bound to the Empire and did not drift away into an ever closer relationship (possibly even union) with the USA – Quinault, R., 'Joseph Chamberlain: a Reassessment', in *Later Victorian Britain 1867-1900*, ed. Gourvish, T.R. and O'Day, A., (London, Macmillan, 1988), p.87.

¹⁸⁷ Crosby, T., *op.cit.* p.18; p.161.

War Office to secure orders for the gun trade.¹⁸⁸ A letter in the Chamberlain papers to the mayor in 1904 speaks volumes for his methods and his priorities: he writes with satisfaction that ‘the government does not now intend to close the Sparkbrook small arms factory, with all the accompanying consternation among workmen in the factory.’¹⁸⁹ He had clearly intervened.

He was equally solicitous of Birmingham people, provided they were friendly or useful. So, in the 1892 Birthday Honours ‘the hand of Birmingham was apparent in a baronetcy for Henry Wiggin, retiring MP for Handsworth’, and – ‘after special pleading’ – for John Jaffray, owner of the *Birmingham Post*. Henry James told Devonshire that ‘there will be a row all round the Midlands’ if Chamberlain did not get what he wanted.¹⁹⁰ In 1895 his advocacy ensured the promotion into (subordinate) office of Powell Williams (War Office), Collings (Home Office) and Austen Chamberlain (Admiralty). When he formed a political organisation, he used Birmingham allies and family, and based it in Birmingham; so, the Tariff Committee in the summer of 1903 was peopled by the Collings/Vince/Powell Williams/Chamberlain loyalists. Over the decades Chamberlain’s devotion to the city earned him Birmingham’s deep respect and affection, one of the factors explaining those election results in 1906.

¹⁸⁸ Marsh, P., *op.cit.* p.140.

¹⁸⁹ JC 19/7/49.

¹⁹⁰ Shannon, R.T., *The Age of Salisbury 1881-1902*, (Essex, Longman, 1996), p.275.

Chamberlain's political gifts

Whilst many of the studies of Chamberlain comment on aspects of Chamberlain's political hegemony, none provide a comprehensive analysis of the means by which he achieved that extraordinary grip on Birmingham affairs; this thesis attempts to do that.

The instincts – and the skills – required to be an effective political leader are evident from the earliest point of his career. They reflected an inherently autocratic and controlling personality. As chairman of the executive committee of the National Education League, centred on Birmingham, he had 'virtual control of the whole organisation. Control of the purse strings helped but the determining factor was the combined force of his intellect, his political acumen, his personality and his ambition.' 'By 1873 he was sole dictator and League policy was Chamberlain's policy.' 'He demanded uncompromising obedience from fellow officers, and rank and file, and League officers pledged perfect loyalty.'¹⁹¹ This, and particularly the battle for control of the Birmingham School Board in 1873, established in Judd's eyes 'the political machine that was to dominate Birmingham politics.'¹⁹² In a letter to Morley, Chamberlain himself identifies the characteristics that brought success: 'in contrast to the boneless, nerveless thing that is the Liberal Party', his National Liberal Federation caucus represented 'force, enthusiasm, zeal, activity, and movement.'¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Auspos, P., 'Radicalism, Pressure Groups and Party Politics' *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1980), pp.186-8.

¹⁹² Judd, D., *Radical Joe*, (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1977), p.50.

¹⁹³ JC 5/54/21, letter, JC to John Morley, September 29th 1878.

The vaunted political machine was, then, an extension of one man's personality and this was seen after 1888 when the irreversible Liberal split forced Chamberlain to create a new Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association. He subsequently fought savagely to defeat his former Liberal friends, to ensure that his candidate Albert Bright was elected in Central Birmingham (not a potential rival, Lord Randolph Churchill) and then to guarantee in the Duchy that son Austen was selected for East Worcestershire in 1892 rather than a local Tory. The correspondence over the disputed Unionist nomination here tells us much about why he was successful. The battle with his Conservative allies was absolutely relentless; by turns threatening ('why should any Liberal Unionist in Birmingham or the surrounding districts move a finger or give a vote to any Conservative candidate?'), outraged and pleading, he bombarded Conservative leaders into submission. At Leamington in 1895 – another disputed nomination – his diligence and persistence, as well as his unpopularity as a result, are revealed in the lengthy correspondence of Vince, Powell Williams and Chamberlain himself.¹⁹⁴ This unyielding determination to keep battling on and to have the last word is just as evident in the newspaper columns in 1906. The *Times*, the *Birmingham Mail*, and the *Gazette* daily carry messages of support from Chamberlain to Unionist candidates round the country, as well as letters of refutation or clarification about policy. The vitality in a 69 year-old man is daunting.

That energy, as well as the sheer professionalism, is evident in his impact on the National Liberal Unionist Association. 'With Chamberlain as the new leader (in

¹⁹⁴ JC 6/6/1C/3 ; JC 6/6/1F – 38.

1892) the Liberal Unionists became much more adept at using modern media.¹⁹⁵ The 1895 General Election saw 71 Liberal Unionists elected, a reversal of the slump (to 47 seats) in 1892, and an indication of the impact of women canvassers, travelling lecturers and the employment of visual, musical and print propaganda in unprecedented quantities. As we have seen, Chamberlain energetically promoted a whole raft of working-class-friendly policies in the campaign. In sum, he had brought high-order election skills to the party, a marked contrast to his predecessor, the languid Hartington. And his operations were rooted in Birmingham, where the WMLUA was staffed by loyalists, and where he had a close-knit group of supporters like Collings, Vince, Powell Williams, and Austen who would speak for him, explain and execute his policies, and ensure the machine operated smoothly. These were the very people who would form a cabinet in the new Birmingham Tariff Reform Committee in 1903, joined by specialist advisors, Ashley, Maxse, Garvin, Amery and Hewins. This was the Chamberlain method, building a base on near-slavish loyalty and expertise. He conceded as much, writing to Collings that 'I cannot depend entirely upon the League and I must have my own organisation entirely under my control.'¹⁹⁶ 'My organisation', was in Birmingham, the heartland of all his operations from the National Education League, through the National Liberal Federation to the National Radical Union, the National Liberal Union to the Tariff Reform League. It responded to his control but it was unswervingly loyal too (or, like Morley, those who came to question his judgement must break with him forever), and characteristically even his new University of Birmingham, barely formed, was

¹⁹⁵ Cawood, I., *op.cit.* p.199.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Chamberlain to Collings, July 18th 1903, quoted by Amery, J., *op.cit.*, p.307.

recruited to the colours, providing him with a Professor of Economics, William Ashley, who was an articulate and influential advocate of tariffs.

He could be utterly ruthless in pursuit of his ends. Once he had launched his Tariff Reform crusade in May 1903 an arm wrestle with the Free Trader and Liberal Unionist leader, Devonshire, ensued. Chamberlain encouraged local associations to nail their colours to Birmingham's tariff mast and by spring 1904 a battle for control over the Central Liberal Unionist Association was underway. A fleet-footed Chamberlain comprehensively outmanoeuvred his leaden rival, and seized it, reconstituting the Association as the Liberal Unionist Council and being greeted 'with utmost enthusiasm' by the assembled microcosm of the Liberal Unionist party. Devonshire was driven into opposition.¹⁹⁷ In the run-up to the election Chamberlain was aggressively campaigning to remove Unionist Free Traders from their seats by running Tariff Reformers against them.

Lord Hugh Cecil, a Free Trader who was in Chamberlain's sights, knew his enemy's nature: 'the truth is, all along, Joe has been the aggressor and has striven to drive us out of the party. At present he is making war.'¹⁹⁸ Earlier he had warned that same correspondent, Unionist leader, Balfour, what he was up against: 'Unionist Free Traders have to face Joe at his best in the country with his immense skill and ability, his unequalled prestige and his electioneering dexterity and unscrupulousness.'¹⁹⁹ That 'electioneering dexterity' meant an understanding of the importance of canvassing, of close engagement with the

¹⁹⁷ *The Times*, July 15th 1904; JC 19/6/5.

¹⁹⁸ Letter from Cecil to Balfour, June 1905, quoted by Sykes, A., *Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903-1913*, (Oxford, OUP, 1979), p.91.

¹⁹⁹ Letter from Cecil to Balfour, July 15th 1903 quoted by Crosby, T., *Joseph Chamberlain op., cit.*, p. 168.

voter that he had utilised from the Birmingham School Board elections in the early 1870s and which reached a new level of intensity in the first years of the Tariff Reform League: 'for the Ludlow by-election (December 1903), unprecedented numbers of agents were dispatched', with success. This organisation always set the pace for its Free Trade rivals. Even his enemies recognised his mastery: 'Chamberlain shows us how to do it', wrote Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal Party chairman.²⁰⁰ As Thackeray has shown, 'the development of the tariff reform campaign reflected a widespread desire amongst Unionists (led by Chamberlain) to shape a new ethos of activism (and political education) better suited to dealing with the challenges of democratic politics.'²⁰¹

Perhaps it is unsurprising that a successful commercial manager should have had a real eye for presentation and packaging. He quickly adapted to new technology. Judd comments on 'the dispatch of Chamberlain's recorded voice into hundreds of small halls and meeting houses' to propagate the Tariff Reform message in 1905 and 1906.²⁰² Early on in his business career we learn that he discerned the importance of the colour of the wrappings used to package the firm's screws; French customers preferred blue, the Scots green.²⁰³ He was just as discriminating about his own appearance, understanding the power of a memorable image: the fresh orchid, the foppish monocle and the immaculately

²⁰⁰ Letter from H.Gladstone to R. Hudson, January 2nd 1904,quoted by Trentmann, F.,*Free Trade Nation*, (Oxford, OUP, 2008), p.101.

²⁰¹ Thackeray, D.,*Conservatism for the Democratic Age* (Manchester, MUP, 2013), p.19.

²⁰² Judd, D.,*Radical Joe*, (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1977), p.251.

²⁰³ Crosby,T., *op.cit.* p.10.

coiffed hair helped establish a defining look, a dream for cartoonists, friendly or otherwise. Tens of thousands of postcards bearing portrait photographs were produced in the years before the 1906 election in a 'frenzy of postcard activity' and, after the Post Office relented to allow an image to occupy the whole of one side in 1902, more than a million a day were sold, with the numbers for Chamberlain 'dwarfing all others' – even without television his appearance would have been universally known for the 'postcards leave no doubt that Chamberlain was the outstanding political figure of the early twentieth century.'²⁰⁴ It should be added that it was not always positive – Cawood has recently argued that the assault in Liberal publications of implacably opposed cartoonists like Carruthers Gould lost him and his party, the 1906 election.²⁰⁵ Even were that the case nationally, Birmingham - it would seem - was impervious, and the repetition of Chamberlain images, whatever the accompanying text, arguably just reinforced his significance, a matter for pride in Birmingham.

²⁰⁴ Macdonald, I., 'Postcards and Politics', *History Today*, Vol. 44, issue 1, 1994, pp.5 – 9. See also Mathew, S., 'Collecting Colonial Postcards', in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernity*, ed. Burton, A., (London, Routledge, 1999), pp. 95-115. Mathew says that in Britain in 1908 more than 860 million postcards were reported to have passed through the British postal system – unmatched in history. This was partly the result of a postcard collecting fad; he quotes an observer: 'the craze has a curious effect; wherever you go – cigar shops, libraries, chemists, fruit stalls – the picture postcard stares you in the face'. It is reasonable to conclude that the TRL's relentlessly promoted image of Chamberlain was ubiquitous in these years. For an outstanding collection of over 200 cartoon and photographic postcards with Chamberlain as the subject, see University of Birmingham Special Collections file of political postcards.

²⁰⁵ Cawood, I., in a talk 'Joe or Judas; the reputation of Joseph Chamberlain', to the Birmingham branch of The Historical Association, Newman University, October 15th 2013.

He was, then, translating this consciousness of the importance of image into his politics. We have seen already that the new leader of the Liberal Unionists in the Commons in 1892 made the party much more adept at using modern media. It is no coincidence that the Unionists led the way in exploiting 'visual dynamics.'²⁰⁶ He cannot, for example, have been unaware in 1900 of the Unionists' most ubiquitous, successful and wounding hoarding of Kruger and his supporters (all of whom were British pro-Boer Liberal opponents) – the image chimed too perfectly with his own aggressive campaign, besmirching all opponents as fellow travellers, not to have been prompted by its author.

He was at the heart of the use of posters by the Tariff Reform organisations, based in Birmingham, deliberately aping contemporary theatre advertisements, which aimed their message firmly at the newly enfranchised urban working classes. He evidently well understood the 'visual referents' which triggered responses – the stock caricatures of the walrus-moustached German, of aquiline top-hatted Uncle Sam, and of course corpulent, comfortable, Union Jack waist-coated John Bull. Chamberlain recruited John Bull, that personification of British yeoman virtue, to the Tariff Reform colours between 1903 and 1906: Tariff Reform League postcards frequently showed an excluded or persecuted John Bull suffering depredations at the hands of the protectionist foreign dumpers, or John Bull and Joe Chamberlain repelling foreign invaders. The *Mail* in the middle of the election campaign noted 'the pictorial postcard is not to be kept out of politics and today there is (a) very effective specimen with John Bull in a shop, rejecting a package of Home Rule and remarking to the shop man, 'If you've

²⁰⁶ Cawood, I., *op.cit.* p.201.

nothing more than that, you had better shut up shop.’²⁰⁷ He appeared in two early films, ‘John Bull’s Hearth’ and ‘Foreign Exchange’, the latter film of 1905 showing John Bull awakened from a spell, cast by the ugly fairy Free Trade, through the charm of the fairy maiden Fair Trade.²⁰⁸ With posters and films, the aim was ‘to strike the eye, for they have a better chance of reaching the brains of (passing) voters’, thought Seymour Lloyd, in a contemporary analysis of the vogue for an electoral competition through images. For it was the Tariff Reform organisations whose scale of propaganda ‘demands recognition.’ ‘It was the wealthy Tariff Reform League which distributed the most material’ and Chamberlain had prioritised this strategy as an essential element in his campaign.²⁰⁹

He employed stock images and symbols at his meetings as a shorthand, a sort of Pavlovian stimulus for his audiences. So we find time and again newspaper reports of such occasions, and two will serve; in 1900 at the Camden Street Board School placards with ‘Union is Strength’, flags of Union Jack and Red Ensign, and portraits of Unionist leaders were carefully disposed around the platform for Chamberlain’s speech.²¹⁰ At a political meeting in Derby in January 1906

the Chairman’s table was clothed with the Union Jack, the organ was similarly draped and the front of the platform bore trophies and flags, and cards and mottos drew attention to different colonies and dependencies –

²⁰⁷ *BDM* January 10th 1906.

²⁰⁸ Trentmann, F., *op.cit.*, pp.91-97.

²⁰⁹ Thompson, J., *op.cit.*, pp.199-205; he quotes Seymour Lloyd’s *Guide to Elections and How to Fight Them*, (London, 1905), p.64.

²¹⁰ *BDP* September 22nd 1900.

at the far end of the room (was a banner) in scarlet letters, on white ground, 'Work for the Unemployed.'²¹¹

On this occasion it all proved too much for Liberal infiltrators, who howled Chamberlain down and forced him out of Derby. But Chamberlain, and the Unionists, had staked claim to an emotive symbol, the Union Jack, and like O'Connor in the Chartist movement he was using a mnemotechnic aid (for O'Connor it was the cap of liberty and Hunt's white hat) to promote group solidarity.²¹² It was deployed right up to the time of the Falklands War – for him it evoked the battle since 1886 to preserve the integrity of the United Kingdom, as well as representing the wider tutelage of Britain over a world-wide Empire, and he intended the audience to associate with him as champion, defending and promoting those joint causes.²¹³

As a good businessman and salesman, he understood the need for the memorable catch-phrase; 'We Are Seven' and 'Work for the Unemployed' were widely used by supporters but his 'Big Loaf, Little Loaf' stunt at Bingley Hall in November 1903 'was a PR disaster', gifting to his opponents a set of symbols whose constant reiteration arguably cost the Unionists the 1906 election.²¹⁴ He intuited the power of spectacle – on the day of the Birmingham election results in 1906 a rally at Smethwick (the Handsworth constituency had yet to cast its

²¹¹ BDP January 4th 1906

²¹² Pickering, P., 'Class without words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), pp. 152-157.

²¹³ Groom, N., *Union Jack: The Story of the British Flag*, (London, Atlantic, 2013), preface.

²¹⁴ Trentmann, F., *op.cit.*, p.89. In his speech Chamberlain produced two loaves of almost equal size to demonstrate that tariffs would have little impact on the cost of the working man's staff of life. His opponents seized on this image and greatly exaggerated the relative sizes of Free Trade and Tariff reform loaves.

votes) saw his entry coincide with the curtain from the proscenium arch falling to reveal, in huge lettering, the results of the victorious Birmingham Seven, while hundreds of handbills carrying the results fluttered from the roof.²¹⁵ He understood, as the Chartists did before him, the emotional impact of massed torches, and ensured his triumphal progresses in 1902 and 1906 were so illuminated.²¹⁶ He also knew the emotional uplift from inspiring music: reports frequently comment that Chamberlain encouraged the crowd to sing – at that Camden Street election meeting in 1900, for example, he finished by asking “who is going to lead Rule Britannia?” Then the air was started, at first a few different keys, then voices in unison and the stirring song of Empire and liberty swelled exultantly.²¹⁷

Chamberlain knew exactly what he was doing – appealing to working-class Birmingham’s strong Imperial loyalties – and at least on home territory he was adept at this manipulation of voters, for many of whom, by now, he was an idol.

We have seen that he could be ruthless and one of his darker traits was his tolerance of, perhaps encouragement of, violence. As noted earlier, Jon Lawrence has cogently argued that – contrary to received wisdom – ‘plebeian politics were not tamed.’ ‘The use of physical force remained a central and widely tolerated element of popular politics.’²¹⁸ No contemporary understood this better than Chamberlain, and even if it is difficult to find him directly endorsing physical action, his prints were often all over incidents of political affray in Birmingham.

²¹⁵ *BDP* January 18th 1906.

²¹⁶ *The Times*, November 18th 1902; *The Birmingham Pictorial and Dart* July 13th 1906.

²¹⁷ *BDP* September 22nd 1900.

²¹⁸ Lawrence, J., *Speaking for the People*, op.cit. p. 181.

Certainly his opponents thought so. At the time of the Third Reform Bill, when the Lords rejected Gladstone's Franchise Bill proposals in October 1884, a great Conservative rally was held in Aston, Birmingham. Hundreds of Liberals swarmed over the park walls, fights broke out, the platform was stormed, a human torrent flowed over the speaker, a Mr. Buckley, and Lord Randolph Churchill and Northcote were badly shaken up. Sir Fred Burnaby, a Conservative candidate in Birmingham and no stranger to fisticuffs in a direct, manly way, accused the Liberal hierarchy of promoting violence, for a circular was widely disseminated: 'Churchill leaves the Exchange Rooms at 10.30pm; meet him and greet him.' Burnaby went on, 'I think the country will now estimate at its own worth the Brummagem brag of Free Speech and the rest. All humbug, and blackguardly humbug at that.'²¹⁹

An incensed Lord Randolph went much further, attacking Chamberlain in the Commons. He accused him of having invited the riots by his provocative language at a rally in Birmingham on the previous August Bank Holiday. Churchill quoted him at length: having talked about the great popular riots at Derby and Nottingham in the fight for the 1832 Reform Bill, Chamberlain went on to say, 'if we are commencing this great conflict (for the 1884 Franchise Bill) with temper and moderation, it would be a mistake to suppose we are less earnest or resolute than our forefathers'. At Hanley three days before the Aston Riots Chamberlain had returned to the fray: 'These gentlemen presume your love of order and hatred of violence...this generation will show courage and resolution, a love of liberty, a hatred of injustice, which will sweep away those

²¹⁹ Wright, T., *The Life of Fred Burnaby*, (London, Everett and co., 1908), p.244.

puny obstacles which are barring the advancing tide.' Churchill made the connection for the House: 'Mr. Chamberlain's constituents instantly translated his words into bludgeons and scaling ladders and proceeded to make their own application, breaking the strong wall into Aston Grounds.'²²⁰ A day later another Conservative, Drummond Wolff, underlined the charge: 'I was present. I witnessed the riots which were incited by the Right Hon. Gentleman himself.'²²¹

From now on the suspicion was always there that Chamberlain directed a willing mob to do his business; making a fortress of Birmingham was a physical, as well as a metaphorical, reality. So when in 1901 Lloyd George, spokesman of the pro-Boer Liberals and intrepid investigator of the Chamberlain-Kendrick business interests in the South African War, came to the citadel, Birmingham itself, it was taken as a deliberate provocation. Sandwich-board men paraded the streets calling on the people to 'Defend King, Government and Chamberlain against the Brum Boers', false tickets were issued (by Unionist troublemakers), a fraudulent telegram was published giving Lloyd George's whereabouts, and unsurprisingly a boisterous element needed no second invitation for a riot.²²² It is difficult to believe Chamberlain did not know, and he made no public denunciation of the violence, which almost cost Lloyd George his life.

In November 1903 two Unionist Free traders – W.S. Churchill and Cecil – planned to speak in Birmingham. The row that ensued prompted a correspondent in the *Gazette*, J.B. Tate to ask:

²²⁰ Hansard, October 30th 1884.

²²¹ Hansard, October 31st 1884.

²²² Lawrence, *op.cit.*, p.184; *BDP* December 19th 1901- January 4th 1902.

if the Conservative party as a distinct body is really existing in Birmingham....unless a man sacrifices every opinion to the demands of Mr. Chamberlain, that man must be ostracised, proscribed, abused and treated dishonourably.²²³

The *Post* reported a by now familiar strategy – well-known agitators bearing placards reading ‘Men of Birmingham. Shall Radicals be allowed to oppose our Joe? Town Hall, Wednesday, Come in Thousands.’²²⁴ How could Chamberlain – with his iron grip of, and need to control, every aspect of political organisation in Birmingham – have been ignorant of this, and not have given at least tacit agreement to an explicit threat of violence made in his name?

By 1906 it was widely assumed that he condoned, perhaps even colluded in the planning of, the physical disruption of opponents’ electoral meetings. He personifies Lawrence’s point about the importance of ‘controlling civic space – public squares, meeting halls and factory gates’ – for the incidents we have noted were about securing Birmingham from the enemy, be he a Conservative opponent of Reform (in 1884), a pro-Boer (in 1901) or a Free Trader (in 1903). From the numbers involved in doing his bidding it would seem that many Birmingham people responded to that appeal – to an atavistic, civic loyalty, both to Birmingham and to Joe himself, which resented the interfering outsider. Lawrence goes on to say that ‘better formal organisation simply improved the efficiency with which the politics of disruption could be directed against one’s

²²³ *BDG* November 11th 1903, quoted in Ward, R., *op.cit.* p.165.

²²⁴ *BDP* November 11th 1903.

opponents.²²⁵ Chamberlain was the supreme political manager of his generation; targeted physical intervention in Birmingham was simply an extension of the battle for political mastery, but on a different front. In 1906, as we have seen, J.S. Nettlefold used the columns of the *Post* to pin responsibility for any prospective violence at a Free Food meeting firmly onto Chamberlain – the assumption was he could call off the dogs whenever he wished.²²⁶ Chamberlain strenuously denied the accusations – in a speech at Wolverhampton he referred to a reputation for ‘rough work’, citing the meeting at Leamington the previous day where Lloyd George had been unable to make himself heard – ‘he accused me of breaking it up and spoke of me as the man who imported freely Birmingham roughs into Leamington...I have never descended to sending roughs into any meeting.’²²⁷ It was an emphatic, but a not altogether convincing, denial.

Not only was he a master of the shadowy world of political intrigue. He was the oratorical star of his generation. Henk te Velde in his study of charismatic leadership in this period identifies three types of politician ‘capable of arousing the masses to an uncommon devotion to the sanctity or heroism of an individual’: the prophet, the party manager and the city organiser. He says: ‘Chamberlain was a party manager and city administrator but not really a prophet like Gladstone,’ although he was ‘able to deliver great oratory.’ He contrasts Chamberlain’s gifts as an operator with Kuyper, the Dutch leader of the

²²⁵ Lawrence, *op.cit.*, pp. 181-184.

²²⁶ *BDP* January 10th 1906.

²²⁷ *BDP* January 12th 1906.

ARP Protestant party from 1879; 'everybody was moved before the speech had even began.... the audience wanted to be moved.'²²⁸

Delimiting Chamberlain's leadership in this way does scant justice to the contemporary evidence. Velde himself concludes that 'the interplay or symbiosis between leader and audience was a typical element of charismatic leadership', and the Diaries of Beatrice Webb illustrate exactly that point. It is true that she was in love with Chamberlain- but the picture she paints of a meeting of the Birmingham Liberal Association in January 1884 feels authentic.

As Chamberlain rose to speak, the crowd became wild with enthusiasm and hats, handkerchiefs, even coats, were waved frantically in an uproar of applause. At the first sound of his voice they became as one man. Into the tones of his voice he threw warmth and feeling and the slightest intonation was reflected in the faces of the crowd.' (It is) 'a wonderful sight, watching these thousands of faces upturned in eager expectancy.

She goes on later to reflect that

the devotion of his electors no doubt springs partly from the consciousness of his deep loyalty and affection for them; but the submission of the whole town to his autocratic rule arises from his power of dealing with different types of men, attracting devotion by the mesmeric quality of his passion.²²⁹

²²⁸ Henk te Velde, 'Charismatic leadership in Late Victorian and Edwardian Politics', in *Making Reputations: Power and Persuasion in Modern British Politics*, ed. Gottlieb, J., and Toye, R., London, I.B.Tauris, 2005, pp. 42-53.

²²⁹ Webb, B., *Diaries*, LSE digital library, pp.124-142.

Like Kuyper his audience was moved, transfixed even, before he had started to speak. Webb is recording a symbiotic relationship, his sensitivity to them, and their response to his every inflection, which absolutely fulfills Velde's requirement for a charismatic leader.

The point is that one of the factors which explains the extraordinary election results in Birmingham up to 1906 is the power of Chamberlain's personality, projected in his oratory – he conveyed force, vitality and conviction. He employed those gifts on national tours and – although Gladstone could rival him, especially in his Midlothian mission in 1879 – no other contemporary politician could match Chamberlain's record of speaking tours over a thirty-year period. In 1885 'lengthy columns in *The Times* charted his sweep through the country and attested to his popularity at public meetings.' 'His excoriating style of speaking were advantages held by no other politician.'²³⁰ In 1892 'he spoke in every constituency in the city (of Birmingham) and most of the surrounding counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, and succeeded spectacularly.'²³¹ From 1903 to 1905 he boxed the compass of industrial Britain from Glasgow to Limehouse speaking on Tariff Reform, and adjusting the message to suit his audience and its economy. He could not always persuade – in this latter instance, much of the country remained resistant to his arguments. But all recognised his seductive quality. Winston Churchill, who became an entrenched enemy, could still write that 'when I looked out of my regimental cradle and was thrilled by politics, he (Chamberlain) was incomparably the most

²³⁰ Crosby, T., *op.cit.* p.52.

²³¹ Cawood, I., *op.cit.* p.194.

lively, sparkling, insurgent and compulsive figure in British affairs.'²³² He recalled Chamberlain coming to support him at Oldham in 1900; 'inside the meeting we were all surprised at his restraint. His soft, purring voice and reasoned, incisive sentences made a remarkable impression.'²³³ So the rhetorical devices, the passion and the relentless mastery of the brief were all exportable beyond Birmingham.

Yet with his last great campaign for Tariff Reform he was most effective in his Duchy; indeed during the 1905-6 election campaign he remained confined to his fastness. Beatrice Webb had observed twenty years earlier that admixture of pride and flattery when he spoke to his people: 'Birmingham society is superior in earnestness, sincerity and natural intelligence to any in the world,' he had said in 1884.²³⁴ In his great May 15th 1903 speech he praised Birmingham people, even when they had emigrated to South Africa (whence he had just returned), talking of their enthusiasm, proud to recall their connection with our city, anxious to prove that 'neither time nor distance had lessened their affection for their old home.'²³⁵ By 1906 Chamberlain sees a total identity of interest with his adopted city; speaking at Smethwick on the day after the victory of the Birmingham Seven but before the Handsworth poll, he said: 'Birmingham is not jumpy. We are not carried away by gusts of popular delusions. We are very steady going....We are interested in almost every conceivable British trade and have a better idea of what is going on at any time in British commerce than any

²³² Churchill, W.S., quoted in *Winston S. Churchill's Maxims and Reflections*, ed. Cooke, C., and Batchelor, D., (USA, Boston, 1947), p. 64.

²³³ Churchill, W.S., *My Early Life*, (London, Thornton Butterworth, 1930), p.354.

²³⁴ Webb, B., *op.cit.* p.138.

²³⁵ Mr.Chamberlain's Speeches vol. II ed., Boyd, C.W., pp.125-139.

other British provincial town. We made our mind up on political questions a long time ago and we are not going to change our minds because of a lot of excitable people.'²³⁶ The reiteration of 'we' is a significant rhetorical trope but, on the morrow of a great victory defying national trends, he had some justification for feeling that he and Birmingham were one and the same.

Certainly the impact of his oratory on the election there was tangible. In the closest contest, Birmingham East, his intervention appears decisive: at Saltley he issued a personal message to entreat wavering workmen – 'when other cities have fallen away, show generous loyalty to old friends and old causes.' They did and the Unionist Stone won. In that speech he played on a sense of togetherness: 'You know, men of Birmingham, how great an influence this city has exercised over many years. One great reason is that we have been united among ourselves.' The Reverend Adderley, vicar of Saltley, thought 'the worship of Mr. Chamberlain is quite extraordinary.'²³⁷ There seems little doubt that in a marginal fight in this strong working-class constituency, the presence and the persuasiveness of the charismatic Chamberlain won the day.

Chamberlain and Birmingham – in sum

By the end of his career his efforts on Birmingham's behalf, his organisational control, his imagination and the formidable projection of his ideas, had won the

²³⁶ *BDP* January 18th 1906.

²³⁷ Roberts, S., 'Politics and the Birmingham working-class: the General Elections of 1900 and 1906 in East Birmingham', *West Midlands Studies*, 1982; *The Times*, January 8th 1906.

support of the majority of Birmingham's citizens, even if Gladstonian Liberals, the Cadburys and the Schnadhorsts, had been alienated, and even if a number of old school Conservatives remained suspicious and resentful of their putative ally. Most working people took pride in Chamberlain and his achievements: how he had ensured Birmingham was, in his own words, 'parked, paved, assized, marketed, gas and watered' and, he might later have added, educated; how as Colonial Secretary, 'he was perceived as conferring credit on the city'; how, with Tariff Reform, he had listened to local Fair Trade advocates and had devised a policy designed to meet the needs of the West Midlands worker – employed or unemployed.²³⁸ Chamberlain felt that support and in his final speech at Bingley Hall, on the occasion of his 70th birthday celebrations, that relationship was suffused in a nostalgic glow – 'here in the warmth of your reception there is an assurance of personal feeling and kindness. I have been your representative for thirty years and during all this time Birmingham has been behind me.'²³⁹ He had faith in Birmingham and, electorally, it had faith in its favourite son, the man who had given Birmingham self-confidence, a sense of its own importance, and a heightened national profile. So much was this the case, and so enduring, that his influence nationally continued even after his stroke in 1906 and only waned with Bonar Law's leadership from 1911; nearly thirty years later Labour canvassers were still being told in Birmingham, 'my father voted for Joe Chamberlain, and what was good enough for him, is good enough for me.'²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Ward, R., *op.cit.*, p.78, quoting Chamberlain in *Joseph's Dream; a centenary of civic achievement*, Birmingham, 1989; Ward, R. *op.cit.*, p. 146.

²³⁹ JC, speech July 9th 1906 from Boyd, C.W., *op.cit.* p.361.

²⁴⁰ Hastings, R.P., 'Birmingham Labour Movement 1918-1945', *Midland History*, vol v., 1978-79; Dutton, D., 'Life Beyond the Grave: Joseph Chamberlain 1906-1914', *History Today*, vol. 23, May 1984.

Conclusion

In the heady aftermath to Unionist triumph, the loyalist *Birmingham Post* attributed the result to several factors. Yes, it could agree in one regard with Liberal cynics who dismissed the result as merely personal; 'in Birmingham,' it averred, 'Chamberlain stands for something not to be found elsewhere in England, namely strong, wise and confident leadership.' But this was by no means all: Birmingham's reply to the 'Liberal challenge is an answer in favour of Fiscal Reform, and ...(against) the evils of dumping, the inordinate pressure of unjust (foreign) tariffs, and the helplessness of the industries of the country to compete successfully against such odds.'²⁴¹ The message resonated, then, as much as the man. The entire passage from *The Times*, which was alluded to at the end of chapter 2, linked the two: 'the results show what can be done by a clear-thinking, painstaking and well informed man, dealing with an electorate which had been taught very largely by himself to appreciate sound arguments and the serious treatment of political questions.'²⁴²

That Birmingham should have heeded one man in this way, in defiance of the national mood, makes this one more chapter in a unique story in British politics. No parallel exists either for the strength and enduring nature of the relationship between a British statesman, Chamberlain, and a geographical entity, Birmingham and its immediate environs, which grew and deepened over forty years; or for the unbreachable electoral redoubt which he constructed in this

²⁴¹ *BDP*, January 19th 1906.

²⁴² *The Times*, January 18th 1906.

part of the West Midlands. It was already formidable by 1873 when, by dint of hard graft, persuasion, and steely will power, the Birmingham School Board was wrested from the Tories. Chamberlain even then was politicising every aspect of Birmingham government with 'opponents accusing him of introducing a Tammany Hall spoils system.... so that even street cleaning was a job reserved for Liberal loyalists.' This inexorable organisation, allied to 'his practical contribution to Birmingham's physical well-being and the dynamic style of his politics, was to provide him with a power-base, and Birmingham was to become his personal political fief, repaying him with loyalty.'²⁴³ Part of the explanation for those 1906 election results is that Chamberlain's machine continued to be well maintained, and Birmingham people, far from feeling exploited, seem to have relished their proximity to the engine room of both the Tariff Reform League and the West Midlands Liberal Unionist Association.

It is not easy to determine the extent to which Chamberlain learnt from his adopted city, and that to which, as *The Times* suggests, he educated it. His early business experience developed in him a sympathy for the working man, his 'aspirations and drive for respectability,' and one could argue that his entire Radical prospectus, designed to counter unemployment, insanitary living, and dangerous working conditions, and to provide a proto-safety net for the poorest workers, was dictated by Birmingham.²⁴⁴ It unquestionably impacted on him as regards fiscal policy, and in this particular *The Times* may exaggerate.²⁴⁵ A long

²⁴³ Judd, D., *Radical Joe*, (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1977), pp.59-67.

²⁴⁴ Crosby, T., *Joseph Chamberlain – A Most Radical Imperialist*, (London, I.B.Tauris, 2011), p.19.

²⁴⁵ My emphases.

history of Birmingham support for Fair Trade, among employers and employees, encountered rigorous fiscal orthodoxy in Chamberlain for over a decade before ministerial experience and local influence combined to convert him into a born-again protectionist. Thereafter the tariff enthusiasm of one reinforced that of the other.

In other ways, it was Chamberlain indeed who 'taught' Birmingham but, more often, the influence was reciprocal. In the 1860s and 70s it enthusiastically endorsed his municipal gospel designed to cheapen utilities and make them efficient, and to improve urban physical environment. Although disappointments surrounding town improvement and working-class housing saw a backlash in the 1880s, in time Chamberlain's unwavering enthusiasm for the betterment of his city (extended to libraries and university education) brought its reward, a civic pride in the total achievement which, by 1900, brooked no contradiction. The very architecture expresses a wealth of reciprocal meaning: Cannadine writes that the Chamberlains 'saw their town as a latter-day Renaissance Venice and themselves as latter-day oligarchs, a hereditary patrichiate.' In turn, 'these buildings involved Birmingham people in all sorts of ways, creating a sense of excitement, identity, tradition and inclusion...while they projected an image of the managing oligarchy, confident and benevolent.'²⁴⁶

Chamberlain may not have educated Birmingham imperially; his own conversion to Empire could, as Jay claims, be traced to the Commons debate on Uganda in

²⁴⁶ Cannadine, D., *In Churchill's Shadow* (London, Penguin Allen Lane, 2002), pp. 120-124.

1893 when he agreed with Rosebery 'that Britain should peg out claims for posterity...(for)...I believe in the expansion of Empire.'²⁴⁷ It may have been as far back as 1882 when, surprisingly, the Radical scion voiced qualified support for Egyptian annexation. However, once converted, he exploited Imperial messages, symbols and images consistently, to woo Birmingham people. To be fair, Birmingham had embraced the Imperialist message of its own volition, and just as early, with school curricula reflecting moral messages for future stewards of Empire as far back as the late 1870s. Indeed in this, as in so much else, an understanding of Birmingham's needs quietly influenced Chamberlain. Jay goes on to write that Chamberlain in 1894 favoured 'deliberately annexing unclaimed territory.... appealing to specific trades with an interest in opening up new lands, not least from the Midlands, the centre of Britain's metal and weaponry industries.'²⁴⁸ Later, Chamberlain's advocacy of imperial preference was at least partly designed to arrest the growth of colonial industry (a potential challenge to manufacturing centres like Birmingham), by promoting guaranteed markets for their primary products, while Protection, and anti-dumping, were responses to the distress of Midlands industry. Birmingham would benefit.

Birmingham in 1906 was singular, with its class collaboration, its diverse industry, its politically sophisticated heritage, and its enthusiasm for Empire and for Fair Trade, but what made for its adamant Unionism was its bond with Joseph Chamberlain. He had the vision to discern what would profit Birmingham, and the political skill to articulate, and to realise, that vision. His electoral

²⁴⁷ Jay, R. *Joseph Chamberlain*, (Oxford, OUP, 1981), p.194.

²⁴⁸ Jay, R., *op.cit.*, p.194.

message in 1906 was, then, attuned to his heartland, even if the rest of the country deemed it by turns too heretical, too irrelevant, too anachronistic, or plain too disturbing. That explains both his success in Birmingham, and his party's electoral oblivion elsewhere.

Further research could usefully be done on the origins, character and durability of Birmingham working-class Imperialism, and on, firstly, the creation and manipulation of visual images and symbols as part of the political process in this period and secondly, the way that these images, the condensation of political argument, impacted on the Edwardian electorate.

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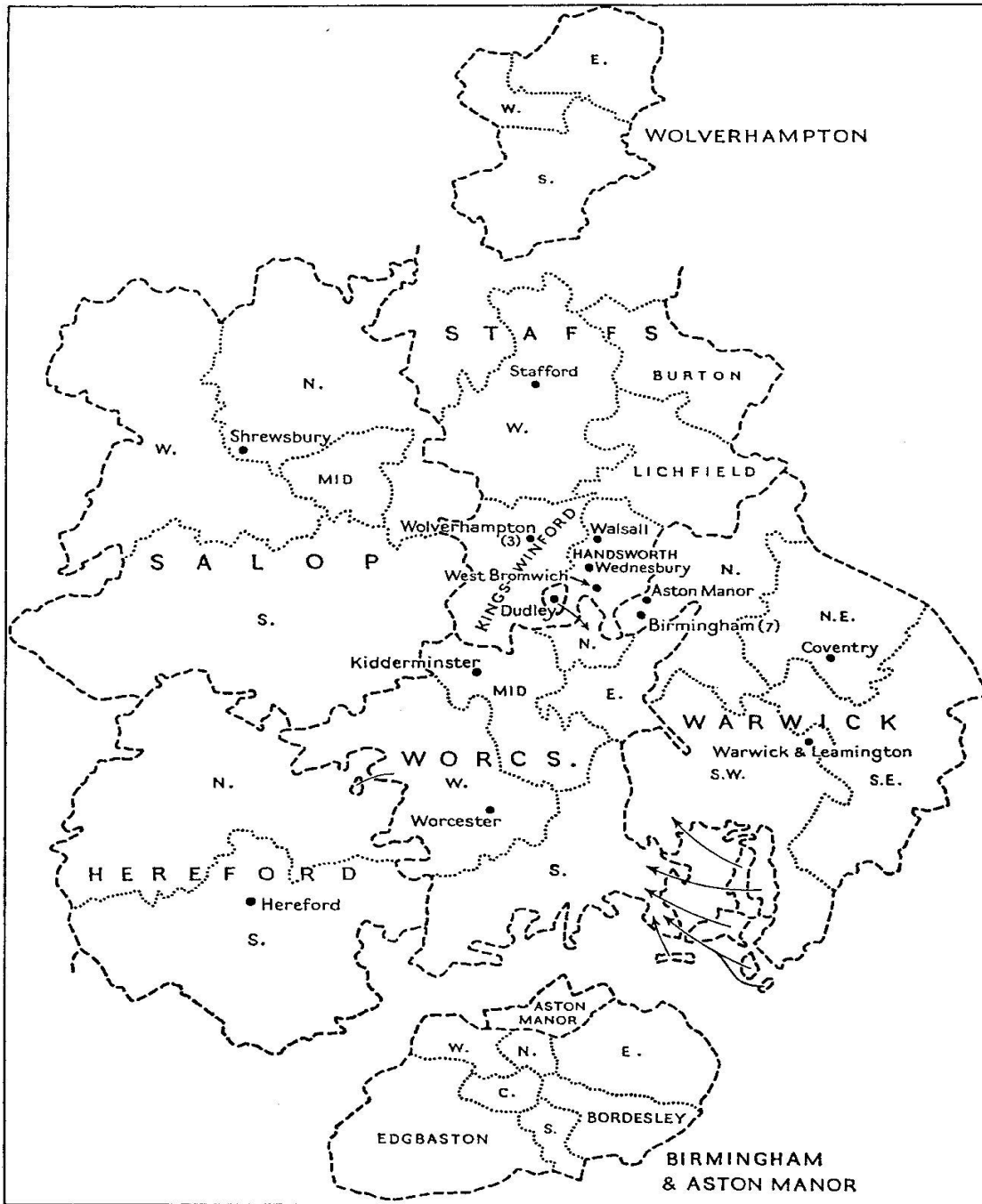


Fig. 1 West Midlands Constituency map, 1885 – 1914
 With acknowledgment to H.Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910*,
 London, Macmillan 1967.

Appendix

1. General Election results for Chamberlain's Duchy 1900/6 – see Figure 7

Birmingham Bordesley	1900 1906	Rt.Hon J.Collings Rt.Hon J.J. Collings J.B.Glasier	LU LU Lab	Unopposed 7763 3976	66.1% 33.9%
Birmingham Central	1900 1906	E.Parkes E.Parkes T.G.Lee	LU LU L	Unopposed 5684 2075	73.3% 26.7%
Birmingham East	1900 1906	Sir J.B.Stone J.V.Stevens Sir J.B.Stone J.Holmes	C L/Lab C Lab	4989 2835 5928 5343	63.8% 36.2% 52.6% 47.4%
Birmingham Edgbaston	1900 1906	F.W.Lowe Sir F.W.Lowe HonL.R.Holland	C C L	Unopposed 7263 3103	70.1% 29.9%
Birmingham North	1900 1906	J.T.Middlemore J.T.Middlemore J.Hood	LU LU L	Unopposed 5172 1275	80.2% 19.8%
Birmingham South	1900 1906	J.P.William Viscount Morpeth J.V.Stevens	LU LU L/Lab	Unopposed 5541 2641	67.7% 32.3%
Birmingham West	1900 1906	Rt.Hon.J.Chamberlain Rt.Hon.J.Chamberlain R.L.Outhwaite	LU LU L	Unopposed 7173 2094	77.4% 22.6%
Aston Manor	1900 1906	E.Cecil E.Cecil J.A.Richardson	C C L	Unopposed 7134 2431	74.6% 25.4%
Worcs. East	1900 1906	J.A.Chamberlain Rt.Hon. J.A.Chamberlain J.Morgan	LU LU L	Unopposed 10129 5763	63.7% 36.3%
Warwicks. Tamworth	1900 1906	P.A.Muntz Sir P.A.Muntz J.S.Keay	C C L	Unopposed 7561 4842	61% 39%

Staffs. Handsworth	1900	Sir H.M.Meysey- Thompson	LU	Unopposed	
	1906	E.C.Meysey.Thompson H.S.Leon	LU L	13407 8636	60.8% 39.2%

**2. General Election results for West Midlands seats
neighbouring the Duchy 1900/6 – see Figure 7**

Warwick and Leamington	1900	Hon.A.Lyttleton	LU	2785	58.8%
	1906	H.J.Mackinder	L	1954	41.2%
		T.H.D.Berridge	L	3011	51.8%
		Rt.Hon.A.Lyttleton	LU	2802	48.2%
Warwicks Stratford-on-Avon	1900	V.Milward	C	Unopposed	
	1901	By-election (death)			
		P.S.Foster	C	4755	61.5%
		B.King	L	2977	38.5%
		1906	T.M.H.Kincaid-Smith	L	4321
P.S.Foster	C		4173	49.1%	
Warwicks Nuneaton	1900		F.A.Newdigate	C	5736
	1906	W.Johnson	L/Lab	4432	43.6%
		W.Johnson	L/Lab	7677	56.8%
		F.A.Newdigate	C	5849	43.2%
Coventry	1900	C.J.Murray	C	5257	55.7%
	1906	L.Cowen	L	4188	44.3%
		A.E.W.Mason	L	6554	54.5%
		J.K.Foster	C	5462	45.5%
West Bromwich	1900	J.E.Spencer	C	Unopposed	
	1906	Dr.A.E.W.Hazel	L	5475	56.2%
		Viscount Lewisham	C	4259	43.8%
Wednesbury	1900	W.D.Green	C	4733	50.9%
	1906	E.Horton	L	4558	49.1%
		C.G.Hyde	L	6150	54.2%
		A.F.Bird	C	5206	45.8%
Dudley	1900	B.Robinson	C	6461	52.4%
	1906	W.Belcher	L/Lab	5876	47.6%
		A.G.Hooper	L	8296	52.4%
		G.H.Claughton	C	7542	47.6%
Wolverhampton East	1900	Rt.Hon.Sir H.H.Fowler	L	Unopposed	
	1906	Rt.Hon. Sir H.H. Fowler	L	5610	67.1%
		L.C.M.S. Amery	LU	2745	32.9%
Wolverhampton South	1900	H.Norman	L	3701	51.2%
	1906	W.Oulton	LU	3532	48.8%
		H.Norman	L	4823	53.8%
		C.H.Villiers	LU	4137	46.2%
Wolverhampton West	1900	Sir A.Hickman	C	Unopposed	
	1906	T.F.Richards	Lab	5756	51.8%
		Sir A.Hickman	C	5585	48.2%

		W.R.Campion	LU	6429	48.2%
Worcs. Droitwich	1900	R.B.Martin	LU	4020	51.7%
	1906	C.B.Harmsworth	L	3752	48.3%
		C.B.Harmsworth	L	5165	52.8%
		E.A.Knight	C	4611	47.2%
Worcs. Evesham	1900	C.W.Long	C	Unopposed	
	1906	C.W.Long	C	4385	50.5%
		A.W.Biggs	L	4293	49.5%
Worcs. Bewdley	1900	A.Baldwin	C	Unopposed	
	1906	A.Baldwin	C	5912	68.5%
		G.R.Benson	L	2718	31.5%
Staffs. Kingswinford	1900	W.G.Webb	C	Unopposed	
	1906	H. Staveley-Hill	C	5490	52.9%
		E.M.Dunne	L	4887	47.1%
Staffs. Leek	1900	C.Bill	C	4800	54.3%
	1906	R.Pearce	L	3485	45.7%
		R.Pearce	L	5749	57.4%
		C.Bill	C	4275	42.4%
Staffs. Lichfield	1900	T.C.T.Warner	L	4300	55.2%
	1906	W.B.Harrison	C	3485	44.8%
		T.C.T.Warner	L	5421	64.4%
		Hon.R.U.Grosvenor	LU	2991	35.6%
Staffs. NW	1900	J.Heath	C	6205	57.5%
	1906	J.Lovett	L	4594	42.5%
		A.Billson	L	7667	58.0%
		Sir J.Heath	C	5557	42.0%
Staffs. W	1900	A.Henderson	LU	Unopposed	
	1906	H.D.McLaren	L	5586	54.3%
		Sir A. Henderson	LU	4708	45.7%

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