

Thesis Abstract

Gentlemen Landowners and the Middle Classes of Bromley: The Transfer of Power and Wealth? 1840-1914

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The central driving force behind this thesis was to study and analyse the balance of power, influence and wealth held by the landed gentry and the middle classes during the period 1840 to 1914. This was accomplished by focusing on the town of Bromley, Kent, which historians and modern commentators alike have championed as the archetypal middle-class suburb.

The thesis begins with an in-depth examination of the origins, ideals and actions of the small group of individuals who, in 1840, owned between them the majority of land in the town. Findings about the local gentry challenge existing theories about landowners' alleged antipathy towards commercial interests and show that landowners were not averse to exploiting prevailing economic conditions to their own financial gain.

Gradually the local gentry's 'social' power and influence was surrendered to the middle classes which were gaining in wealth and self-confidence. Even though the socio-economic composition of the local middle class was increasingly diverse, there existed no conspicuous divergence in their aspirations or intentions. Indeed, unity of purpose intensified their impact upon the social and economic life of the community, as well as upon prevailing ideals.

An ever-growing influx of commuters residing in the town, notably affluent financiers, merchants and professionals working in the City of London, occasionally challenged this unity over demands for improvements in facilities for urban - or *suburban* - living. However, in the long run these wealthy commuters were adopted as the 'new' elite of local society, helping to promote deferential and paternalistic relationships in a class that was drawn together within a complex web of social, cultural and economic ties.

Whilst social harmony was secured by such ties, an obsession with image and perceived status helped preserve social ranks and social distinctions, of which geographical segregation became the most overt illustration. Such were the middle classes' fears of social degradation that they raised a united defence against the emergence of radicalism and socialism. This helped Bromley to emerge, or to be seen to emerge, as the most middle-class of English suburbs, even though this misjudges its more complex Victorian and Edwardian past.

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Contents

Note on References

Plates, tables and figures

Page

Chapter One:

Introduction

1

Chapter Two:

Gentlemen Landowners

24

Chapter Three:

The Middle Classes - Composition

80

Chapter Four:

The Middle Classes - Aspirations and Directions

139

Chapter Five:

*'Drains on The Rate' - Local Government in
a Suburban Setting*

175

Chapter Six:

Politics and Class Relations

219

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion

244

Bibliography

257

Abbreviations and Note on References

Place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

(Full explanations of surveys mentioned below are given in the appropriate point in the thesis)

<i>BPL</i>	Bromley Public Library
<i>BDT</i>	Bromley District Times (Kentish Times)
<i>BLHS</i>	Bromley Local History Society pamphlets
<i>BR</i>	Bromley Record and Advertiser (page numbers given where available)
<i>Econ.H.R.</i>	Economic History Review
<i>OFF</i>	Survey of Office-Holders, from administrative, political, social, recreational and cultural institutions, clubs and societies, between the years 1840 and 1905. The precise information was taken from the periods 1840-1845, 1855-1860, 1870-1875, 1885-1890, 1900-1905.
Oral Collection	Author's own collection of interviews, made between 1987-1995
<i>P&P</i>	Past and Present
<i>PP</i>	Parliamentary Papers
<i>REG</i>	Survey of parish marriage and baptism registers: samples of St.Peter & St.Paul, Bromley and St.George's, Bickley, taken in 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911.
<i>TS</i>	Trades Survey carried out using Trade Directories 1866-1911
<i>UDC</i>	Urban District Council

List of Photographs, Graphs and Tables

		Page
Figures (Photographs and Graphs)		
Figure 1.1	Bromley 1868 (O.S.Map)	11
Figure 2.1	Size and Distribution of Landholdings, Bromley Parish (St. Peter & St. Paul), 1841 Tithe Commutation.	31
Figure 2.2	Size of Selected 'Surviving' Estates, 1841-1873	32
Figure 2.3	Map of Bromley showing main Landed Estates, 1841	34
Figure 2.4	The Bishop's Palace, Bromley. Built by Bishop Thomas, 1775 Residence of the Coles Childs from 1846	38
Figure 2.5	The Rookery, Bromley Common, before alteration in 1890 Residence of the Norman family	38
Figure 2.6	Bickley Hall. Built by John Wells, Esq. in 1780 Residence of the Wythes family from 1861	42
Figure 2.7	Sundridge Park Mansion, after 1792 Residence of the Scott family	42
Figure 2.8	Map Showing Railway Lines in environs of Bromley, 1857-78	50
Figure 2.9	Value of Estates 1841 - Rent Charge Per Annum	53
Figure 2.10	Value of Estates - Estimated Gross Rental 1873	54
Figure 2.11	Value of Estates Between 1 and 100 Acres - Estimated Gross Rental 1873	54
Figure 2.12	Estimated Value of 'Surviving' Estates, 1841-73	56
Figure 2.13	Estimated Rental Value of Estates, 1841 and 1873	57
Figure 2.14	Estimated Rental Value of Estates 1841 and 1873 (Estates below 500 acres)	56
Figure 2.15	Estimated Rental Value of Estates, 1841 and 1873 (Estates below 150 acres)	57
Figure 2.16	The Town Hall in Market Square (c.1899) Built by William John Coles Child in 1868	75
Figure 2.17	St. George's Church, Bickley Built by George Wythes, consecrated in 1865	75
Figure 3.1	Marital Status of Lower Middle Class Heads of Household, 1851 and 1891	84
Figure 3.2	Marital Status of Upper Middle Class Heads of Household, 1851 and 1891	85
Figure 3.3	Occupations of Middle-Class Heads of Household 1851 and 1891	87
Figure 3.4	Employment Status of Women & Proportion of Domestic Servants 1851-1891	109
Figure 3.5	Birth Rate and Death Rate Per Thousand Head of Population, Bromley, 1891-1914	116
Figure 3.6	Birthplaces of Middle-Class Heads of Household, 1851 and 1891	124
Figure 3.7	Birthplaces of Lower and Upper Middle-Class Heads of Household 1851	125
Figure 3.8	Birthplaces of Lower and Upper Middle-Class Heads of Household, 1891	125
Figure 3.9	Map of Bromley showing Census Enumeration Districts 1851-1891	134

Figure 3.10	Semi-detached villa properties at 39-41 Bromley Common (Photograph taken 1981, BPL)	135
Figure 3.11	Large detached property in Page Heath Lane, Bickley (Photograph taken 1983, BPL)	135
Figure 3.12	Distribution of Middle-Class Heads of Households, 1851 and 1891	136
Figure 6.1	Parliamentary Election Results for West Kent (1832-1885) and Sevenoaks (1885-1918) Divisions	222
Figure 6.2	Parliamentary Election Results, Bromley District and Bromley Parish (1835-1868)	223
Figure 7.1	Labourers on Springhill Farm, c.1883	251

Tables

Table 2.1	The Ten Largest Landowners, 1841	35
Table 3.1	Middle-Class Heads of Household By Socio-Economic Classification and Gender 1851 & 1891	85
Table 3.2	Registered Trades, By Categories, 1866-1911.	91
Table 3.3	Age Distribution of Population of Bromley Urban Sanitary District (1891 Census).	108
Table 3.4	Composition Of Middle-Class Households, 1851 and 1891	114
Table 3.5	Household Size 1801-1911 (Census Returns)	114
Table 3.6	Decennial Mean Birth and Death Rates, Population Growth, Natural Increase in Population and Inward Migration, 1891-1910	117
Table 3.7	Mean Age at Marriage, Per Socio-Occupational Class . Parish of St. Peter & St. Paul, Bromley. (Marriage Registers)	118
Table 3.8	Number of Servants Per Occupational Category, 1891	127
Table 3.9	Geographical Distribution of Middle Class, 1851 and 1891	132
Table 3.10	Geographical Social Segregation & Changes in Composition of Middle Classes, 1851-91.	133
Table 4.1	Distribution of Office-Holding, 1840-1905	153
Table 4.2	Occupational Analysis of Donors and Subscribers to Bromley Literary Institute, 1873	161

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A number of factors stimulated the choice of Bromley for this thesis, not least of which was that over the last twenty years, historians and observers alike have selected Bromley as the archetypal middle-class suburb. When Hanif Kureishi wrote *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1988), it was no coincidence that he set his story in and around the town of Bromley.¹ Having been brought up in the town himself, he recognised within it the quintessential characteristics of a middle-class English suburb. Leafy roads, tree-lined avenues, secluded private estates cut off from the more monotonous semi-detached developments all contributed to the suburban image. As such, the town provided the ideal backcloth to Kureishi's experimental notions of sex, sexuality, race, class, culture and family values, simply because the majority of suburbanites were so routinely predictable. In an earlier publication, with an historical rather than fictional basis, the historian F. M. L. Thompson had also used the town as a classic example of a middle-class suburb.² He recognised in Bromley the characteristics of the classic railway 'boom' town. Within thirteen years of the advent of the first railway line in 1858, the town's population had exploded beyond any contemporary's expectations.

In the *Book of Lists* for the year 1980 Bromley was heralded as the most middle-class town in the country, on the basis that only 0.02% of the occupied population were involved in any form of manufacturing industry.³ The remaining 99.98% were engaged in service industries, principally in the commercial, professional or clerical sectors. By 1994, Bromley had become the butt of jokes and criticisms relating to 'trim' suburban life. On several occasions, inhabitants of Albert Square in the television soap *EastEnders* were known to accuse friends of turning their backs on their heritage by escaping to the affluent suburb of Bromley.⁴ In 1994 itself, the 'classic' middle-class retreat came under closer inspection. The Foreign Office was the first to get the pot stirring. It was revealed in the *Guardian* newspaper in May that the Foreign Office, in deciding the level of expenses to be paid out to its staff working abroad, had based their calculations on prices paid in the town of Bromley.⁵ In explaining their decision, the Foreign Office claimed that the 'typical' Bromley

¹ H. Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, published in G. Giles and D. Hughes (eds.), *The Minerva Book of Short Stories* (1988)

² F.M.L.Thompson (ed.), *The Rise of Suburbia* (Leicester, 1982), p. 20

³ *Book of Lists* (1980), where the figures have been taken from the 1871 Census Abstract for Bromley

⁴ *Eastenders*, B.B.C. Television

⁵ *Guardian* 11 May 1994, p.3

inhabitant was as near to the socio-economic class of their ambassadorial staff as they could hope to find.

In the Spring of 1994, a series on Channel Four about suburban life presented by the architect and journalist Jonathan Glancey cited Bromley as typical of dull, monotonous, lifeless suburbia, taken over by hundreds of Mr. Neat and Tidies isolated behind net curtains and closely-trimmed hedges.⁶ Here, middle-class individuals and families kept to themselves, to venture out only according to pre-arranged meetings and coffee-mornings. Yet this is very much a 'presumption' on the part of Jonathan Glancey, part of the perceived 'image' of the town which has portrayed Bromley as archetypal suburbia. To some extent, this has been due to the middle-class character of the town, which has encouraged observers to apply the suburban label, bringing with it images of a derisory nature. Cynics have argued there is little evidence of spontaneous activity in the town, no sign of widespread community action or collective spirit. Satirical jibes about the country's most 'boring', 'faceless' town in an article in *Independent London* in September 1994 aroused a plethora of 'Disgusteds' in Bromley's local press.⁷ Does Bromley's Victorian and Edwardian history demonstrate any real basis for its symbolic representation as the archetypal middle-class suburb?

There were three principal objectives behind this study of Bromley. The first of these was to analyse the means and processes by which a small, select group of landowners, who dominated society in 1840, lost their virtual monopoly of power to the aspiring middle classes. The second aim was to illuminate the impact the middle classes had upon the mechanisms of local government and society. Thirdly, this thesis sets out to understand the reasons why Bromley has been portrayed as a classical 'suburb', at least in the years before the First World War. To date, all histories of the town have accepted the label with little or no qualification,⁸ yet this thesis will show that such acceptance can cloud the more complex issues that were at work. As such,

⁶ Channel 4 series, *Heaven, Hell and Suburbia*, transmitted 14, 21, 28 April 1994

⁷ *Independent London* Sept. 1994 (*Independent Newspaper Supplement*)

⁸ J. M. Rawcliffe, 'Bromley - Kentish Market Town to London Suburb 1841-1881' in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 28-91; M. Waugh, 'Suburban growth in North-West Kent 1861-1961' (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of London, 1968), p.95; B. Taylor, 'Bromley, Beckenham and Penge, Kent Since 1750 - A Comparative Study of the Changing Geography of Three Towns on the Southern Fringe of the Metropolis' (Univ. of London, Ph.D. thesis, 1965)

the investigation of Bromley as a 'suburb' is used as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

A purely narrative account of events and developments in Bromley during this period has already been provided by E. L. S. Horsburgh's exhaustive work,⁹ whilst J. M. Rawcliffe has added information about the 'physical construction' of this Victorian suburb.¹⁰ Thus far, little has been revealed of the precise nature or characteristics of either the local gentry or the middle classes. Indeed, in market towns and suburban settlements as a whole, we know little about gentry or middle-class ideals, aspirations or social relationships. It was intended in this thesis, therefore, not simply to provide another history of the town, but to consider degrees of similarity and contrast between these classes and to place their interaction in a supposedly suburban setting. In the process, this led to questions about previously accepted notions of class idiosyncrasies and relations, some of which now demand re-thinking in the light of experiences in this once rural market town.¹¹

On the one hand, since the late 1970s there has been a major debate over the extent of land purchase by successful nineteenth century businessmen. This is important to the modern historian if only because it seeks to assess the strength of those arguing in favour of a 'gentrification of the bourgeoisie'. The controversy has resulted in the formation of two 'camps', with W. D. Rubinstein and L. and J. C. Fawtier Stone ranged amongst others against F. M. L. Thompson, H. Perkin and M. Daunton.¹² The latter have taken issue with findings that few wealthy businessmen purchased land on a significant scale. M. J. Wiener has provided another dimension to the debate in claiming that by selling out to the interests and ideals of the landed gentry, the middle classes were sabotaging the industrial success of the nation.¹³ W. D. Rubinstein's most recent retort, rejecting the very core of M. Wiener's hypothesis, ensures that the debate is far from over.¹⁴ To date, however, both 'camps' have relied on studies made from a *national* perspective, relying upon *national* data and selected, isolated examples. Wiener, in his attempt to chronicle the gentrification of the

⁹ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *Bromley - From the Earliest Times to the Present Century* (Chislehurst, 1929)

¹⁰ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*

¹¹ In D. Cannadine, *Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth Century Towns* (Leicester, 1982), there are several detailed studies of social relations and the struggle for local influence, but these are limited to major towns and resorts

¹² See, for example, W. D. Rubinstein, 'Cutting up rich', *Econ.H.R.* XLV, 2 (1992), L. and J. C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford, 1986), F. M. L. Thompson, 'Stitching it together again', *Econ.H.R.* XLV, 2 (1992), H. Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (1969), M. Daunton, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism' and British Industry 1820-1914, *P.&P.*, 122 (1989), pp. 119-58

¹³ M. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge, 1981)

¹⁴ W. D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain 1750-1990* (1993)

bourgeoisie, based much of his argument upon literary sources.¹⁵ Conversely, Rubinstein's conclusions about the success of capitalists at the turn of the century have ignored the 'men of letters', focusing instead on a wealth of statistical surveys.¹⁶ Little attempt has been made to approach the matter from what we might call the 'lived experience' of *local* circumstance.¹⁷

There are still gaps in our knowledge of how far the urge to purchase a landed estate or country retreat pervaded the business classes. In any case, the desire to buy hundreds or thousands of acres of land did not of necessity preclude the appetite for continued business success. This thesis aims to shed greater light on the origins, ambitions and ideals of those who purchased land in the Victorian era, as well as tracing their fortunes once in occupation of a 'gentleman's seat'.¹⁸ By focusing on the situation in Bromley, it is possible to measure the accuracy of the findings of H. Berghoff and R. Moller, who have recently struck out against Wiener's 'gentrification' theory - with the associated 'escape' of businessmen to the countryside - on the grounds that businessmen who invested in land did so close to their place of work.¹⁹ In coming to understand more closely the driving forces behind the landowners of the parish of Bromley, this thesis begins to explode the myth of the 'gentry - bourgeois' divide, encouraging the need for greater flexibility when dealing with the impact of their supposedly idiosyncratic ideals.

The issue itself has led to a need to reconsider the meaning of the terms around which the debate has been centred, notably 'gentlemen landowners' and 'middle classes'. Landowners, for instance, have frequently been lumped together by historians, well-to-do yeomen and parish gentry either being slotted neatly into the aristocratic vein or being tagged on the end as an afterthought.²⁰ F. M. L. Thompson, D. Cannadine and G. E. Mingay have all acknowledged that differences between the landed classes *did* exist, but the major part of their studies has focused on the upper

¹⁵ M. J. Wiener, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ W. D. Rubinstein, 'The Victorian Middle Classes: Wealth, Occupation & Geography', *Econ.H.R.*, 30, 1977

¹⁷ There have been notable exceptions to this, especially D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*, and Stana Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the urban middle classes and the 'dominance' of manufacturers in 19th century Britain', *Econ.H.R.*, XLIV, 1 (1991), pp. 66-85

¹⁸ The phrase 'gentlemen's seat' was employed widely in late 18th and 19th century writings and histories, as in T. Wilson, *An Accurate Description of Bromley in Kent*, (1797), p.54

¹⁹ H. Berghoff and R. Moller, 'Tired pioneers and dynamic newcomers? A comparative essay on English and German entrepreneurial history, 1870-1914', *Econ.H.R.*, Vol.XLVII, No. 2, May 1994, pp. 62-287

²⁰ For example, see M. L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy - A Comparative Synthesis* (Manchester, 1984), p. 40 and p.196 where it is implied that the gentry aped aristocratic ideals such as the rejection of involvement in trade and business

echelons of landed society.²¹ The fortunes of the aristocratic landowners of Cardiff, Bournemouth and Southport have been meticulously investigated,²² but we are left ignorant of the two to three thousand individuals who owned land as members of the 'gentry'.

Historians of the great landowners have generally assumed that 'gentry' status began with landed property in excess of 1,000 acres.²³ This may be realistic for rural areas and for landownership patterns in specific urban environments, but for many a Victorian market town or developing suburb such a minimum is wholly inappropriate. In 1840, the greater part of the parish of Bromley was divided up amongst only a handful of families. Under criteria employed above, most of these landed estates would have fallen under the lesser category of 'yeomen' properties. In practice, the reverence and respect which these families secured in the local community, in addition to the county and London 'society' in which they mingled, would confer upon them nothing less than the status of 'gentry'. Admittedly, most of Bromley's largest landowners also owned landed property outside of the town, in the likes of Devon or the London docklands, thus 'qualifying' them above the alleged level of 'yeoman'.²⁴ Yet divisions based solely on acreage are artificial. Of equal importance for individuals owning landed property were the status and prominence in which they were held by their fellow townsmen.²⁵ Image was crucial especially when traditional power and economic domination were under threat. William John Coles Child, for example, may have held only 245 acres of land within the parish, but as the owner of the manorial Palace Estate, his dominance of local affairs remained virtually unquestioned for over twenty years, thus ensuring for himself the status of a 'gentleman landowner'.

As with William John Coles Child's property, many of the 'gentry' estates of England were in country and market towns that were to experience sudden and dramatic suburban growth in the second half of the nineteenth century. This brought demands upon landowners that were to test the very heart of their ambitions and ideology. In the impact of urbanisation - or suburbanisation - upon the landed gentry, it was not simply a question of the 'bourgeoisisation of the gentry' or 'gentrification of the

²¹ See F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1963), D. Cannadine, *op. cit.*, and G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry - The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (1976)

²² D. Cannadine, *op. cit.*; M. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870-1914* (1977)

²³ For more on the 'boundaries' of landowner classification, see F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1976), and L. Stone and Jeanne Fawtier Stone, *op. cit.*

²⁴ These particular examples refer to G. E. Wythes and William John Coles Child respectively

²⁵ Frederick Wakely, who lived in Bromley at the end of the nineteenth century, recalls seeing the carriages of landowners like John Lubbock, Lord Avebury, and considered all of them as the 'gentry' of the district. (*Oral Collection*) The local press regarded them in the same light, often referring to the esteemed gentry of the neighbourhood.

bourgeoisie', but a much more complex interaction of the two. There were no hard and fast rules for how either the gentry or the middle classes might react. As R. J. Morris and Richard Rodger have shown, landowners used their leverage to direct the way in which their estates were developed, but their decisions were in turn heavily influenced by market forces.²⁶ A rapidly expanding market town like Bromley had the effect of throwing all previously held hopes and ideals into the melting pot. Coming to an understanding of how proprietors of landed estates reacted and responded to the pressures of rapid change will significantly advance our appreciation of the extent and impact of the 'gentrification' or 'bourgeoisisation' argument.

In particular, landowners faced the emergence of an increasingly wealthy and self-confident middle class. Previous works have tended to lay emphasis on distinctions between these two classes, rather than on common strands of interest.²⁷ None of Bromley's landowners in the nineteenth century were 'mere' gentry. Ironically, they were essentially 'middle class' in terms of their lineage and descent. Labels lose their meaning when faced with such blurring of distinctions. The term 'middle class' might be used to identify those with more than just a meagre amount of wealth or property. It might be used for those educated at special academies or grammar schools. Alternatively, it might distinguish those families who employed servants from those who could not escape the drudgery of manual labour. Whatever the more overt trappings of 'middle classness', qualification for middle-class status was essentially based on something much less quantifiable. The notion of 'middle class' was an ideal, an aspiration, a state of mind. Having accepted this fact, it is easier to appreciate the mobility and fluidity that existed between the varying ranks of society. It also helps explain the forces of unity and cohesion operating across these ranks, preserving the status quo against threats of revolution. At any given time, the 'artisan elite' of the working class might share similar aspirations to the merchants and professionals of the 'apparent' middle class, as might do the successful business magnates amongst the so-called gentry. This was the case even where economic mobility was in practice limited.

Similar difficulties emerge over the identification and allocation of the term 'suburb'. All published histories on Bromley have seen the Victorian era as a period during which the market town of Bromley became a suburb of the spreading metropolis. If by 'suburb' is inferred an outlying - ordinarily residential - dormitory of

²⁶ R. J. Morris and Richard Rodger, *Victorian City - A Reader in British Urban History* (Harlow, 1993), p. 17

²⁷ See H. Perkin, *op.cit.*; M. L. Bush, *op. cit.*; G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside, Vol.2* (1981)

a city, then a number of factors need to be investigated before assigning suburban status to Bromley during the nineteenth century. Firstly, Bromley was already popular as a place of residence for City gentlemen *before* the advent of the railway, something which may well have had a significant impact on the nature of developments after rail connections were secured. Secondly, it would be surprising if Bromley's function as a market town serving surrounding village communities simply disappeared, so we need to consider to what extent the town retained a vibrant economy of its own. Thus the divide between market town and suburb becomes less clear. Were the majority of inhabitants occupied locally or in London? How large was the purely 'residential' community at this time? A solution to these enquiries would not only test the accuracy of the 'suburban' label, but would also clarify the extent to which middle class 'suburbs' like Bromley were not simply places of temporary refuge and retreat.²⁸

Many of those who came to the town may well have come for the opportunity of employment or commercial success, which raises interesting questions about relationships between mere commuters and those individuals more directly dependent upon the local economy. More specifically, did the town develop and expand because of the 'rus in urbe' ideology that apparently drove the middle classes away from the ugliness of the city centre? This is very much the argument that F. M. L. Thompson has advanced.²⁹ We also need to consider R. J. Morris's and Richard Rodger's notions of an affluent middle class 'investing' in suburbs as an outlet for profits from business.³⁰ Through generating a demand for goods, services and improved amenities, these new 'suburbans' helped provide a 'self-sustaining capitalism' that reinforced middle class power in the community.³¹ If this was indeed the case, the degree of 'control' and 'influence' these newcomers effected over the existing community needs to be more precisely analysed. For this reason, the central part of this thesis is devoted to the impact of the middle classes upon the life and administration of the town, suggesting ideas that build upon the work of, amongst others, R. J. Morris on Leeds and J. Roebuck on Lambeth, Battersea and Wandsworth.³² The image of a 'dull' retreat referred to earlier, may disguise the fact that members of the 'new' middle class - from wherever they originated - were more inclined to involve themselves in the

²⁸ For the first studies of Bromley as a place of retreat, see J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.* and F. M. L. Thompson's introduction in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *op. cit.* (1982). For a description of how suburbs developed, it will be difficult to find a more comprehensive work than J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing* (1986), pp. 105-105 and pp. 188-216

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ R. J. Morris and Richard Rodger, *op. cit.*, p. 23

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party - The Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds, 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990), and J. Roebuck, *Urban Development In 19th Century London - Lambeth, Battersea and Wandsworth 1838-1888* (1979)

affairs and development of their local community than historians have hitherto divulged.³³

If the unity and impact of the middle class have until recently been understated by historians, then so too have been the role of gender and the impact of women. Ordinarily it was the men of the landed and middle classes who set the political and administrative agenda, but women too had a part to play. In terms of women's 'contributions' to the local decision-making processes, Patricia Hollis has done much to pave the way for further research. Beatrix Campbell has also provided invaluable information, in highlighting the participation of women in party political campaigns.³⁴ However, the work of Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff has delved further behind the public scene, advancing our understanding of the effect notions of gender and the middle-class family had on the formation of class and 'acceptable' cultural values.³⁵ The image of the 'masculine' man also emerged as an integral part of society, a sense of manliness that revealed itself through hard work, and the adoption of authority in the home and outside. In the latter part of the century, this image was bound up with support for imperialistic policies abroad.³⁶

By studying developments in a particular setting - in this case a market town that experienced rapid growth in the second half of the nineteenth century - it is possible to trace changes in gender roles and appreciate what impact these had for society as a whole. As a developing suburb, Bromley is particularly interesting as with the accompanying increased separation between home and workplace, it might be expected that women's influence would in large part be restricted to the home. Conversely, the town's proximity to London might encourage greater social and economic opportunities for women, such as through the extension of employment prospects in the late Victorian period, thus challenging the notion of 'separate spheres', ideals of 'domesticity' and women's subordinate role in the community. Either way, the issue of gender amongst the middle class had important consequences for the cohesive strength of their ideology and the impact this ideology had on society as a whole. In essence, women helped shape ideas about gender and class, and in so doing bolstered middle-class leverage in the administrative and social life of their local communities.

³³ This was not limited to purely cultural or charitable involvement, as L. Davidoff has concentrated upon in *The Best Circles - Society Etiquette and The Season* (1973), p. 74ff, but also to 'political' action in terms of involvement with urban government

³⁴ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect - Women In Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1967), and Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies - Why Women Vote Tory?* (1987)

³⁵ Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, *Family Fortunes - Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (1987)

³⁶ M. Roper and J. Tosh (cd.), *Manful Assertions - Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (1991), pp. 1-3

If it is hazardous generalising about Victorian and Edwardian social classes and values, then it also problematical generalising about how these affected the governing of urban settlements. Asa Briggs has argued for the growth of civic power and the simultaneous evolution of the civic ideal.³⁷ As towns expanded, the boards and then councils took over authority from other local government bodies. It was all part of a process that promoted the influence and power of the middle classes above all others. With the later expansion of the use of bye-laws, 'civic power' may well have been magnified, but not necessarily as part of a movement towards the glorification of any 'civic' ideal. We need to qualify our thoughts on civic pride and ponder more carefully the extent to which such powers were adopted primarily for reasons of 'class' rather than community. In addition, there are town size and local circumstance to consider. Developments in the great cities of Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham and London were far removed from those that took place in those smaller cities and resorts.³⁸ Indeed, it was another twenty or so years before the latter experienced the 'municipal collectivism' that had emerged in the greater cities in mid-century. It now needs to be shown *when*, and to *what extent*, the country towns and suburbs of the nation witnessed any such phenomenon.

Arguments over labels, generic terms and ideologies only brush the surface of historical debate involving landowners and the middle classes in this period. Political and social relations *between* the classes were also of prime significance, something to which few studies have hitherto given due recognition. To help overcome this deficiency, this study of Victorian and Edwardian Bromley, even though broken down into sub-sections for practical purposes, has attempted to place the features of each social class in a wider social context.³⁹ By tracing class relations, it is hoped to provide reasons why gentlemen landowners allowed their estates to be broken up and fragmented by the onslaught of urban development and why the mass of the working class of the town were apparently inactive and acquiescent. In particular, if the ideals and ambitions of the gentry were so divergent from the commercial and professional middle classes of the town, then it needs to be shown how seemingly profound changes took place in the town with little confrontation between them.⁴⁰ Furthermore,

³⁷ See A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (1963)

³⁸ See D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*

³⁹ Given the parameters of this study, this has essentially involved relations between the gentry and middle classes, but reference has also been made in places to relations with the working classes of the town who made up three-quarters of the local population

⁴⁰ A. J. Reid has recently written a strikingly fresh and succinct booklet entitled *Social Classes and Social Relations 1850-1914* (1992), pp. 37-59, in which he debates the force of 'coercion', 'control' or 'consent' in maintaining social order; in his concluding thoughts, he plumps for 'consent' above the other two factors.

if the 'gentry' of the parish still managed to retain their traditional influence and respect amongst the local community, as argued by F. M. L. Thompson and D. Cannadine, then the mechanisms involved in this process demand closer scrutiny.⁴¹

According to H. Perkin, who has repeatedly contended that the middle class were 'riven' by divisive ideals, the gentry should have been wealthy and united enough to have seen off any threats from below.⁴² The fact that this was blatantly *not* the case, again raises doubts about existing theories on the divisions in middle class ideology, most notably that epitomised by separate 'professional' and 'entrepreneurial' ideals. As R. J. Morris has suggested in his study of the middle classes in Leeds, there may have been far greater forces pulling *together* those professionals and businessmen who challenged for positions of power and influence.⁴³ Points of common interest need to be measured up against points of divergence. Bromley is an ideal place in which to carry out such a test, if only because of the influx of newcomers from a such a wide social base. In what light, for instance, would the farmer-cum-shopkeeper from deepest Sussex perceive the 'City' barrister or international ship broker? The answer may be determined not simply in the way the middle classes saw *themselves*, but more decisively in the image they had of themselves amongst other groups in society. This is why relations between the middle classes and those immediately above and below them are so worthy of investigation.

Before embarking on these areas of analytical study and debate, it is vital that the arguments are presented within a meaningful context. Earlier in this introductory chapter, it was suggested that the town of Bromley is today renowned for its dreariness. In fact, descriptions highlighting the dullness of Bromley abounded as much in the past as they do today. The first history of Bromley itself, penned by Thomas Wilson and published in 1797, spoke of the lack of amusement in the town, with the exception of 'a very respectable subscription concert and one circulating library.'⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Bromley was already an important market town at this time,

⁴¹ For greater discussion of landowners maintaining dominance in urban environments, see D. Cannadine (ed.), *op.cit.* and F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963)

⁴² H. Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society* (1990), pp. 27-36

⁴³ R.J.Morris, *op. cit.* (1990)

⁴⁴ Thomas Wilson, *History of Bromley* (Bromley, 1797), pp. 44-45

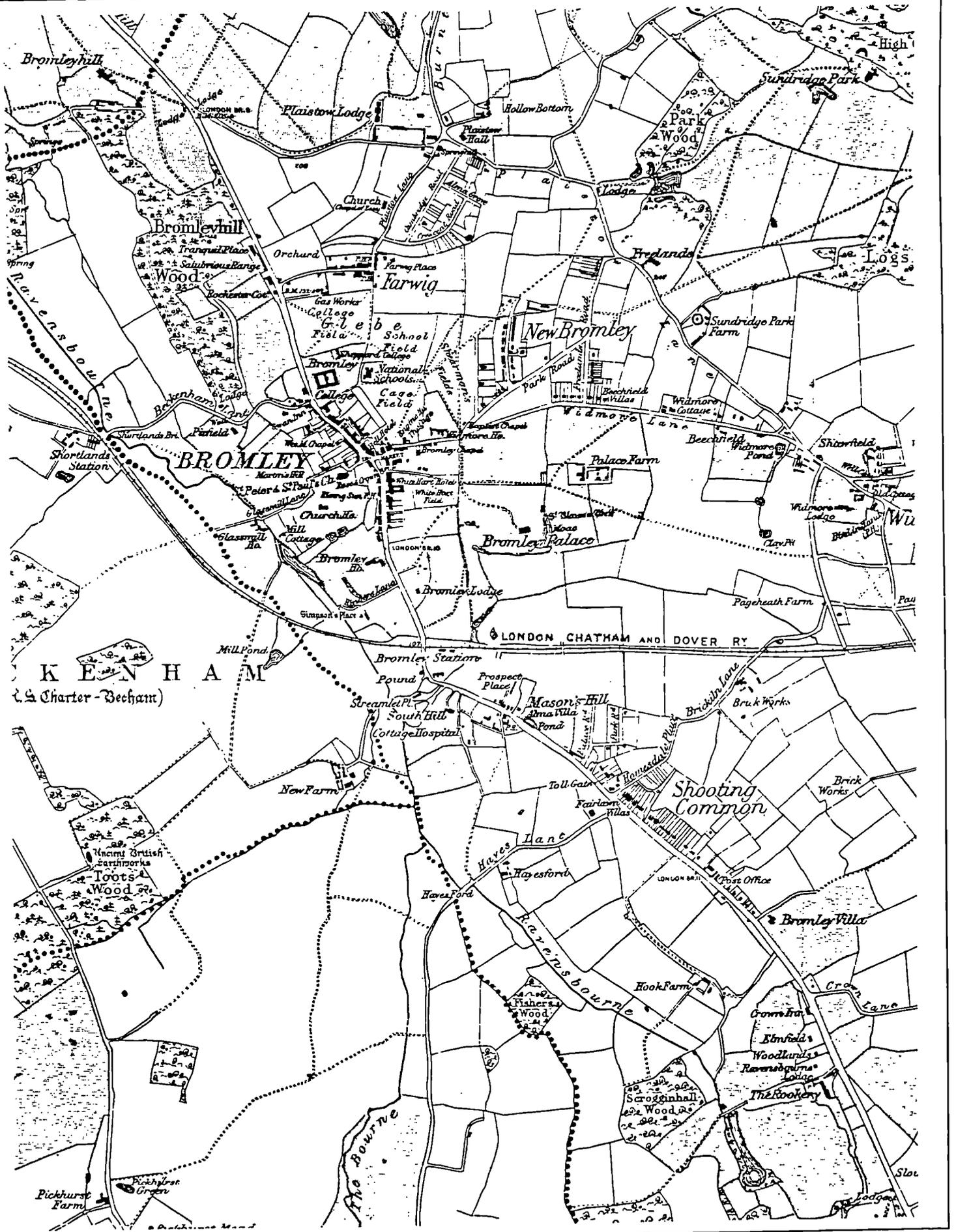


Figure 1.1 Bromley 1868 (O.S. Map)
 Scale: 4 inches to 1 mile

servicing a wide agricultural district and dominated by individuals involved in crafts and distributive trades.⁴⁵ Wealthy and 'respectable' individuals were drawn to the vicinity, notably the healthy and scenic countryside on the town's borders. This led to most complimentary and romantic descriptions of the town, as shown here by Charles Freeman:

The place is interspersed with many handsome seats and buildings, which are chiefly the residences of persons of opulence: no parish perhaps, considering its short distance from the Metropolis, and that coaches pass through it almost every hour in the day, could afford a more desirable retreat from the hurry and bustle of Town; besides which, its is rendered peculiarly so, on account of its pleasant and healthy situation.⁴⁶

In 1785, William Pitt the Younger had purchased the Holwood Estate near Keston, three miles to the south of Bromley. He spent much of his recreational time here, obsessed with the upkeep of his home and gardens, where he reputedly discussed the abolition of slavery with William Wilberforce.⁴⁷ In the early nineteenth century, the well-to-do were attracted to Bromley for a different reason, the presence in neighbouring Shortlands of a famous surgeon. This was James Scott, who had arrived in the town in 1792 and specialised in the treatment of diseased joints.⁴⁸ His remarkable success helped spread his fame far afield, drawing in wealthy clients in search of relief from pain. Many brought their families with them and had houses built in areas bordering the town, as at Bromley Common.

James Scott's death at Shortlands in 1848 coincided with a lean time in terms of Bromley's economic fortunes. The financial hardship of the See of Rochester had forced the Ecclesiastical Commission to sell off the Bishop's Palace and Estate at Bromley.⁴⁹ This ended the Bishop of Rochester's 800 year role as the town's Lord of the Manor. The departure of the Bishop brought despair to many tradespeople who feared the town was already suffering enough under the strains of the social and economic difficulties of the so-called 'Hungry Forties'. Between 1841 and 1851 the population diminished from 4,325 to 4,127.⁵⁰ During the 1850s the town recovered with the rejuvenation of the Palace Estate by William John Coles Child and with the

⁴⁵ J. Dunkin, *Outlines of the History and Antiquities of Bromley in Kent* (Bromley, 1815), p. 28

⁴⁶ Charles Freeman, *History of Bromley* (Bromley, 1832), pp. 16-17

⁴⁷ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p.46

⁴⁸ A. H. Watkins, 'James Scott, the famous surgeon of Bromley', in *BLHS* No. 4 (1979), pp. 41-47

⁴⁹ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p.47

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50

coming of the Mid-Kent Railway (1858). By 1861, the population had increased to 5,505; ten years later it had almost doubled.⁵¹

Bromley continued to grow progressively until the First World War, bringing inevitable changes to the social characteristics and infrastructure of the town. The ancient parish of Bromley was modified in order to accommodate the expansion of previously minor hamlets like Plaistow and Bickley. Landed estate after landed estate fell under the auctioneer's hammer, the builder's trowel supplanting the farmer's plough. From the opening of the first railway station at Bromley (South), many advertisements appeared in the *Bromley Record* for homes and building land to be let or sold.⁵² The developers of the emerging Bickley Park Estate boasted that 'all the convenience of town will be combined with the beauty of country scenery'.⁵³ However, the invasion of 'several good houses' was not viewed with delight by all.⁵⁴ In the *Record* a certain Rusticus, a notoriously romantic contributor to the columns of the press, spoke in 1882 of how older inhabitants still saw Bromley as 'a country market town', whose green fields were being invaded by the evils of 'villadom'.⁵⁵

The town was to gain its fair share of speculative builders in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, all eager to benefit from the swelling demand for houses. Local tradespeople too may have gained from the new business generated, but some complained that builders with whom they had dealt had been unable to pay their bills.⁵⁶ The *Record* complained bitterly in October 1889 that they had 'swooped down on Bromley and made it their happy hunting ground'.⁵⁷ Occasionally this culminated in court cases to recover financial losses. However, it seemed nothing could off-set the attractiveness of the district, as testified by the number of advertisements seeking the attention of 'gentlemen seeking residence &c. in this healthy, convenient and favourite neighbourhood'.⁵⁸ Similar claims were being made well into the Edwardian era. The number of houses may have mushroomed in the town during Queen Victoria's reign - from 669 to over 4,500 - but there was still ample open space ripe for development. Fields of golden corn dissected by public footpaths and country lanes were not yet a thing of the past.⁵⁹ However, the appearance of the town was changing ever more

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *BR* 1858, June-December.

⁵³ *BR* Sept. 1861

⁵⁴ *BR* Feb. 1866

⁵⁵ *BR* July 1888

⁵⁶ *BR* Oct. 1889

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *BR* March 1900

⁵⁹ Older residents recollect that the town still had many fields of corn up until the Second World War and beyond

rapidly. Instead of wallowing in days gone by, the *Record* adopted a more pragmatic opinion of the transition from old market town:

Bromley has now become a busy suburban centre. The more conservative townspeople view the trend of events with regret, but bow to the inevitable with the knowledge that times bring many changes.⁶⁰

Such was the expansion of Bromley during the second half of the Victorian era - by 1901 the population had risen to over 27,000⁶¹ - that the town received a Charter of Incorporation in 1903.⁶² Having acquired borough status, new onerous duties and responsibilities were adopted by those in local government. This was far removed from the ill-defined and *quasi*-legal functions of the old vestry administration that had directed local affairs from the seventeenth century until 1867. The newly instituted borough councillors, for instance, found themselves discussing matters of educational and welfare provision which would have been unthinkable fifty years earlier.

New and wider roads began to emerge, slowly at first then more dramatically in the Edwardian era. Thousands of newcomers were brought to the town, many travelling daily by rail to London to earn a living in the City. These were the 'new' middle class, the middle class of the businessmen, the financiers, the civil servants and the expanding professions. They came to reside in this once rural market town to escape from the noise and pollution of the metropolis. Nevertheless, this well-to-do group was not prepared to suffer the indignity presented by poor urban facilities. They began demanding improvements that ranged from the draining of sewage to more stimulating forms of entertainment and cultural activity. By the commencement of the First World War, the town had become a bustling centre for shopping and entertainment, boasting a 'free' library, a playhouse and picture house as well as a host of social clubs and societies.⁶³

⁶⁰ *BR* Jan. 1906. It is interesting that the paper should describe Bromley as suburban, even though the majority of those residents who were 'occupied' worked in the town itself. However, the number of commuters was increasing, and many of the town's 'elite' were commenting about the 'suburbanisation' of the town at this time.

⁶¹ *Census, Bromley Enumeration District, 1901*

⁶² E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 264

⁶³ The two picture houses were the Lyric Theatre (opened 1906) and the Palais-de-Luxe (opened 1911) - see *BR* Nov. 1906 and *BR* May 1911 respectively

The First World War made even more dramatic and weighty demands upon local administrators, the impact of government, with new regulations and restrictions, being brought closer to home than ever before. By 1934, both the influence of the council and the size of the town itself had expanded so greatly that the borough's boundaries were extended to include the parishes of Keston and Hayes.⁶⁴ The final remnant of the rustic landscape that cut Bromley off from the sprawling metropolis was by this time disappearing under the emerging bricks and mortar of the Downham Estate. Today, 'Bromley, The London Borough' - the name London Borough of Bromley having been discarded in the 1980s for its communal undertones⁶⁵ - is the largest local authority in the London region. Its vast geographical area that extends from Penge to Chelsfield, Chislehurst to Biggin Hill, bears little resemblance to the 'ten ploughlands at Bromleag' in the town's original charter from Ethelbert in AD 862.

The central geographical focus of this thesis the settlement of Bromley as delineated by the ancient parish of St. Peter & St. Paul. Yet both geographical and administrative boundaries remain artificial. A local community is not bordered off by lines on the map.⁶⁶ The cartographer's map flatters to deceive in that it depicts demarcations and ties of communication that do not necessarily exist in either the minds or lives of members of that community. Instead, the community is a blend of less discernible ties and contacts, relationships that exist within parameters that are rarely fixed and rarely consistent. The 'community', or 'local society' is essentially forged by common spheres of activity. Religious affiliations, political loyalties, economic inter-dependence and ties of kinship all form *separate* spheres of activity

⁶⁴ *Bromley District Times*, 13 April 1934

⁶⁵ This also came at the time of the demise of the Greater London Council

⁶⁶ For an illuminating perspective of both geographical and 'mental' maps, see C. Carson, *Belfast Confetti* (1990), and M. J. McLaughlin, *Difficult to keep trace: Everything a bit askew - The Poetry of Ciaran Carson* (M.A. Dissertation, University of Greenwich, July 1994)

which may in some instances overlap but in others be quite distinct. The interplay between these spheres helps form a network of social intercourse that goes much further in painting an authentic picture of a local 'community' than restrictive administrative borders.

A local 'community' is an intricate, ever-changing web of social contacts. In Bromley in the mid-nineteenth century, a relatively strict social hierarchy was still observed, with the parish gentry sitting majestically at the centre as the 'elite' of local society. Power came through the opportunity to direct affairs and impose control over the various ties and links that enveloped all other bodies. The mass of the people remained on the outside, serving the interests of those classes closer to the 'elite' at the centre, and dependent upon the elite, economically, politically and psychologically. Such dependence was secured by the 'spokes' of this web of contacts, those social institutions and forces that maintained order and conserved the status quo. The prevailing systems for voting, political representation, the law, education and poor relief, alongside the persuasive influence exerted by the church and press, all reinforced the ties that preserved power in the hands of the few.

Societies are not static.⁶⁷ There will be times when local communities need to adjust to different demands and pressures that are brought to bear. Between 1840 and 1914, relationships between different groups in society changed, sometimes in the most subtle, inconspicuous manner, and at other times in a more overt fashion. Either way, 'local' control was surrendered to new forces and new inhabitants. Local communities themselves were always changing, always adapting, even if these adjustments were only striking at specific times in a community's history. In the nineteenth century the name 'Bromley', for instance, might be used to represent the ecclesiastical parish, or the Poor Law Union, or the division of magistrates at petty sessions, or even the wider neighbouring district. In fact, the geographical 'borders' for this thesis remained unchanged, covering an area of 4,700 acres that were dictated by the boundaries in which the main arm of local government held jurisdiction.

Given the difficulties of exposing the complex network of relationships that prevailed in local society, the historian is left wondering about the purpose and direction of local history. It is tempting to do away with the notion of a 'local society' or 'community' altogether. The approach taken here has been to concentrate on

⁶⁷ For a recent discussion of the 'dynamics' of society, and relations therein, see A. J. Reid, *op. cit.*. In this, he suggests the idea of cycles in public life, alternating between expansion and contraction (p.63)

'problem-centred' rather than 'community-centred' studies.⁶⁸ Debates about ideological values, political tendencies, economic motivation and social hierarchy dominate the discussion. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to divorce such arguments from the idiosyncratic characteristics of the community from which they stem. The precise nature of relations and confrontations in Bromley was determined by a combination of factors - geographical location, social composition and historical development to name but a few - that were not mirrored elsewhere. Together, they were peculiar to Bromley and thus emphasise the need to study 'problem' issues within a 'community-based' framework.

Another dilemma is how the historian of a local community intends to use the vast wealth of information that has been accessed. Inevitably there is considerable interaction between particular situations at the local level and general developments across the nation as a whole. For the duration of the period studied the majority of the people of the nation did *not* live in the great cities.⁶⁹ Instead, they lived in towns with populations below 50,000, the very places that have been relatively ignored by historians until quite recently.⁷⁰ By relying upon the city, as well as the picture painted by 'national' statistics, historians have been guilty of over-generalisation. Local discrepancies have been ignored to the detriment of our overall understanding. It is these differences and contrasts that have had a crucial impact on the formation of society and relations within society, either at the time or at some point later.⁷¹

This thesis has sought to draw on a wide range of both primary and secondary resources. However, four sources in particular were employed to give a clearer picture of the composition and characteristics of both the gentlemen landowners and the middle classes. In no particular order of preference, these were trade directories, parliamentary census returns, landownership surveys and the local press. Diaries,

⁶⁸ There has been much debate about the purpose of local history and the nature - or myth - of a local 'community'. In particular, see M. Stacey, *The Myth of Community Studies*, *British Journal of Sociology*, XX, (1969), A. Macfarlane et al, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (1977) and C. Phythian-Adams, *Re-thinking English Local History* (Leicester, 1987)

⁶⁹ See J. F. C. Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain 1875-1901* (1990), p. 240 which uses data from D. C. Marsh, *The Changing Social Structure of England and Wales* (1965) that shows in 1871 only 36.5% of the population lived in towns above 50,000; by 1901 the proportion had reached 44.6%, but still reflected a minority - albeit a sizeable one - of the population. Also see D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.12

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-13

personal recollections - both written and oral - ordinance survey maps, health surveys, educational reports, parish registers, family records and government documents were just some of the other sources used to add further insight into the nature and development of local society.

By studying trade directories over a 45 year period (1866-1911), it was hoped that a clear picture might emerge of the changes in the town's economic and business activity.⁷² It was appreciated at the outset that even if the directories could reveal much about the nature of trades and services in the town, they could only act as indicators of social and economic characteristics.⁷³ For instance, the figures tended to measure the number and type of services rather than all those employed within these services. In addition, there emerged problems when a business fell into more than one category, as with 'carmen and contractors' or 'plumbers and ironmongers'. In such cases, where one trade was clearly distinct from another - at least from a modern perspective - it was recorded under each separate 'trade'. As a result, it might be argued that the impression of the overall number of businesses within the town has been distorted, but at least it illustrates the range of economic activities that were being performed at the time. In addition, unlike census returns, directories recorded *only* those economic functions carried out *within* the registration district.

The census enumerators' returns were clearly more revealing of the occupations of the town's inhabitants, but they also posed their own drawbacks. As with all census data, they were only a record of those present within the household at the time of enumeration. This has led to false information about levels of domestic service - many 'servants' were not co-resident - as well as about family size. The surveys carried out for this thesis focused solely on middle-class households, comparing their composition in 1851 with 1891. The definition of 'middle class' remains a contentious issue, designations about class in these surveys being made on the occupation of the head of household, combined with the number of co-resident servants and/or apprentices. Caution, therefore, needs to be taken before reading too much into the survey's analytical statistics. Where the number of servants per socio-economic class were concerned, for example, the results could be regarded as part of a

⁷² Detailed, regular trade and street directories for Bromley did not commence until 1866. Initially they were produced by Edward Strong, the local printer and proprietor of the *Bromley Record*; they were later replaced by *Bush's Directories*. The first directories in each decade between 1871 and 1911 were studied, with the addition of *Strong's* 1866 directory which was the first comprehensive register of trades for the parish.

⁷³ There is considerable literature on the use and value of trade directories, notably G. Shaw and A. Tipper, *British Directories - A Bibliography and Guide to Directories Published in England and Wales 1850-1950 and Scotland 1773-1950* (Leicester, 1988), and D. Reeder (ed.), *Urban History Yearbook 1984* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 22-45

self-fulfilling prophecy. The fact that only heads of households were selected for the main statistical surveys, for both the 1851 and 1891 parish returns, meant that the socio-economic characteristics of the remaining members of the household might have gone unnoticed.⁷⁴ For this reason, more thorough surveys were carried out on selected middle-class households in an attempt to cover cracks in the main sampling method employed.⁷⁵

The census surveys employed two main socio-economic classifications, that is a distinction between *upper* and *lower* middle class. The method of allocation was based on official HMSO classifications⁷⁶ and groupings employed in the work of other historians.⁷⁷ Again designations were based upon occupation of the head of household and the extent of domestic help, as well as upon place of residence (where either there was evidence of the type and size of residence or the house was still standing). Landed proprietors were recorded separately, but fell into the category of *upper* middle class when data was analysed. In terms of occupation alone, the *upper* middle class included City financiers and merchants, accountants, solicitors, architects, doctors, clergy, army officers and the most successful local businessmen, although several of these occupations were not as prevalent in 1851 as 1891. The *lower* band were composed of tradespeople, retailers, teachers and clerks. However, no procedure for classifying either status or occupation is fool-proof. For instance, an 'annuitant' might be someone living off independent means or someone in receipt of parish relief. A 'fundholder' suffers the same dilemma.

Even greater difficulties were experienced in attempting to classify the Victorian 'farmer'. According to W. A. Armstrong ⁷⁸, when studying urban environments all farmers with over 5 acres of land to their name should be placed in 'Census Socio-Economic Class II'. Yet this would fail to distinguish between the larger and smaller farmers. It also fails to take into account the dramatic changes that both farming and landownership encountered during the Victorian era. In a market town,

⁷⁴ All 'middle class' heads of household were surveyed in the 1851 returns, but for 1891 a 1 in 4 sampling method was employed - that is every fourth middle-class head of household in the census enumerator's returns - returning approximately the same number of household heads in 'absolute' terms. These general surveys took *no* account of the occupations of offspring, relatives or visitors, and thus offer only a limited reflection of middle-class occupations

⁷⁵ Thirty middle-class households were selected for more detailed investigation. These were the households of middle-class heads who appeared influential in the running of local administration, in local business or involved in local affairs. The more detailed surveys of 1851 and 1891 were *not*, therefore, necessarily representative of the middle-class population as a whole.

⁷⁶ E. Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census* (1989, H.M.S.O.)

⁷⁷ See in particular L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *op. cit*

⁷⁸ For more information on classifying occupations see W. A. Armstrong and M. Anderson in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society - Quantitative Methods for Social Data* (1972)

such as Bromley in 1851, 40 acres of arable land would have been the amount required for self-sufficiency but would not have placed a farmer in the upper echelon of local society. By 1891, a similar area of land, given over to 'cash' crops like hops, would have yielded higher financial returns with the accompanying likelihood of more respectable social status. To help draw some distinctions amongst the farming fraternity, all farmers with more than 100 acres of land were classified as *upper* middle class, those below as *lower*. For 1851, when looking at the examples of Charles Jessop of the 'Bird-in Hand' Inn and his neighbour Thomas Smith of Bickley Farm - with 145 and 345 acres respectively - this seems to make historical sense. According to contemporary records and nineteenth century local histories, both farmers were well connected and well regarded in the local community.⁷⁹ For 1891, such decisions were unnecessary since farming as an occupation had been so devastated by the suburbanisation of the town that no farmers were picked up in the one-in-four sampling survey.

The full impact of suburbanisation would have been even more dramatically revealed if there had been a survey of landownership after the so-called 'Bateman' survey of 1873.⁸⁰ The latter return proved useful - with revisions carried out by W.E.Baxter using local records to verify acreages involved - as a comparison with the pattern of landownership as it stood at the time of the Parish's Tithe Commutation and Award in 1841. Nevertheless, unlike the tithe survey, the survey of 1873 failed to record levels of owner-occupation and also included land which fell beyond the boundaries of the parish. Furthermore, it gave no recognition to those individuals owning less than one acre of land. A comprehensive land survey, if carried out at the turn of the century and with none of these omissions, would have proved an invaluable source to the local historian. Alas, such an investigation never materialised.

The survey of 1873 revealed that the London banker, Sir Edward Henry Scott, had recently acquired 59,125 acres on the Isle of Harris in Scotland and 800 acres at Sundridge Park, Bromley. Indeed, F. M. L. Thompson used this very example in an on-going debate with W. D. Rubinstein about businessmen's continued investment into landed estates.⁸¹ Both of these eminent historians, however, have based their arguments upon centrally registered data that takes little account of local peculiarities. The Sundridge Park Estate was a prestigious piece of land and, contrary to W. D. Rubinstein's conviction, even at only 800 acres would have guaranteed gentry status in

⁷⁹ They clearly mixed with influential persons in the district, as testified by a variety of sources, including old histories of the town, the local press and in personal recollections from the nineteenth century

⁸⁰ W. E. Baxter, *The Domesday Book for Kent Landowners 1873* (1877)

⁸¹ For more detail on the arguments in this debate, see *Econ.H.R.* Vol. XLV No. 2 1992

the district. Moreover, the data failed to show that Sir Edward Henry Scott had inherited his estates from his grandfather, Samuel, who had died in 1869. In addition, the survey was unable to show the intentions of Sir Edward Henry Scott, who within the first decade of his inheritance had begun to sell off parts of his Sundridge property for railway and residential development.

The fourth major source of evidence employed was the local press, notably the *Bromley Record*. Edward Strong, a local printer, issued his first edition of the *Bromley Record and Advertiser* just weeks before the opening of the town's first railway station in July 1858.⁸² The monthly journal was aptly named since its main function for most of the period appeared to be recollecting major events and boosting tradesmen's business, something it succeeded in doing for over fifty years.⁸³ Although the paper always boasted of political neutrality in its reports, Edward Strong was himself a long-time supporter of the Liberal Party. For most of the period, the *Record* lacked colour and intrigue. Only in the 1880's did the paper adopt a more opinionated journalistic style, as it attempted to deal with some of the hotly disputed political issues of the day. Of no small significance in this change of tact was the growing rivalry between Edward Strong and Charles W. Gedney, the proprietor of the *Bromley Telegraph*, the *Record's* most serious competitor. Insults were exchanged upon the printed page until Charles W. Gedney took out a libel action on Edward Strong in 1884. It is only when arguments like these came to the fore, as through the medium of the magistrate's courtroom, that divisions in an apparently unperturbed community were revealed. Without the existence of Charles W. Gedney's *Telegraph*, and without the libel action, it might have been assumed that Edward Strong's *Record* was a relatively unbiased observation upon life in Bromley. Yet the more 'progressive' Charles W. Gedney regularly accused Edward Strong of pandering to the wealthy and elite of the town, without considering the needs of the majority of inhabitants.⁸⁴

The four sources of evidence expanded upon above were also utilised for a more distinct purpose, that of identifying the socio-economic characteristics of those

⁸² *BR* July 1858

⁸³ Edward Strong charged between 5 shillings and £1 for advertising in the journal. In addition to announcing railway and carriage time-tables to London, he hoped the journal would offer local tradesmen the opportunity to off-set possible injury to their business from London advertisers and businessmen. Throughout its existence, the paper provided a descriptive narrative upon the administrative and cultural life of the town. Until its demise in 1913, the paper always claimed neutrality in its observance of events and controversies, even where this was challenged by other local papers.

⁸⁴ For example, in *BR* June 1884

holding 'offices' and positions of influence in the local community.⁸⁵ This unveiled the extent to which power in the local community was concentrated into the hands of an 'elite'. Accepting the fact that the more one searches for an elite, the more one is likely to find one, it is still crucial to consider how far posts of responsibility were monopolised by either a handful of individuals or a distinct social class, possibly both. The historians F. M. L. Thompson and W. D. Rubinstein, for example, have agreed that society as a whole was dominated by an 'elite' until at least the First World War, even if they dispute its composition and aspirations.⁸⁶ Consideration of this phenomenon in Bromley during the period provided a backcloth against which authority, the direction of local affairs and the nature of social relations could be more clearly revealed.

The thesis is concentrated within the period 1840 to 1914 because this spans the time when the impact of urbanisation was being felt more intensely than ever before. The 'Tithe' land survey of 1841 served as a useful starting point for a study of landholding in the town, whilst the sale of the Bromley Palace Estate in 1846 out of the hands of the Bishops of Rochester, the traditional Lords of the Manor, marked a turning point in the town's history. The thesis could have begun in 1858, the year the railway came to Bromley - and indeed much of the focus has been on the four decades that followed the building of this line - but including the 1840s and 1850s put later developments in context, as well as providing the opportunity for comparative analysis. By 1914, the pattern of Bromley's development had already been set and it was clear how the middle classes of the town were responding to a variety of political and social pressures. In any case, the effects of the First World War and the years that followed deserve an entirely separate study.

In challenging existing theories and issues concerning society between 1840 and 1914, this thesis begins with an in-depth examination of the origins, ideals and actions of the small group of individuals who between them owned the majority of land in the town. The third chapter then moves on to focus upon the composition of

⁸⁵ The survey attempted to find the occupations of all those who were officers of local government and those who were members of local institutions, charities, clubs and societies. In practice, it proved necessary to select particular years to study, spanning a time period between 1840 and 1905. It was easier to identify individuals' occupations for the early years because the number of 'offices' held were relatively small and because after 1891 census data on individuals' occupations was not available

⁸⁶ *Econ.H.R.* Vol. XLV No. 2 1992

the much more extensive 'middle class' elements of the local population, leading onto chapter four which analyses the aspirations of the middle class and to what extent they were united behind any common causes. This allows the last part of this chapter to expose the impact the middle classes had upon the social and economic life of the town, and how they influenced prevailing ideals amongst the community itself. Chapter five takes this last point further, outlining the mechanisms and strategies by which an elite middle-class group ran the administration of the town, as well as the controls and limitations under which it was obliged to work. The nature and significance of wider political and social relations in the town become the subject of study in chapter six, with a special focus upon how education and entertainment were deployed as tools of social control. It is important to analyse the political orientation of both the local gentry and the middle class to place these groups in context against the emergence of radicalism, socialism and the struggle for women's suffrage. In conclusion, it will be ascertained just how far the diverse groups within the local middle class were able to forge the social, cultural, economic and political characteristics of this supposedly quintessential 'middle-class suburb'.

CHAPTER 2: GENTLEMEN LANDOWNERS

Over the last thirty years historians have been divided over the extent to which the landed classes of England dominated society during the course of the nineteenth century. In his attempts to explain the decline of England's industrial success this century, Wiener has stressed the hold the landowners exercised over the country's politics, economy and culture.¹ As such, the 'rustic image' was glorified and business enterprise scorned. To some degree, this view would be supported by the likes of D. Cannadine², and G. E. Mingay³, all of whom argue for the persistence of the landed interest, whether it be in the expanding towns or the country. Others, such as E. J. Hobsbawm and H. Perkin, have recognised much deeper change, with the ruling aristocratic class all but ousted by the end of the Victorian era. This latter view was more prevalent in the 1960s than it is today.⁴ Marx's divide between capital and labour has been challenged by those historians who have identified strains of continuity where *vertical* bonds of patronage and dependence were not removed wholesale by new *horizontal* ties of class consciousness.⁵

The era of the Industrial Revolution brought drastic alterations to the way people lived, worked, played and thought. By 1851 the majority of the population lived not in the countryside but in rapidly expanding towns. Factories, mines, machines, railways and all the trappings associated with industrial expansion had serious repercussions for the nature of relationships between the different groups in society. Much of the division in the historical debate stems from the definition and delineation of these social groups. What, for instance, makes a *landed gentleman*? In practice, this 'well-begotten' individual might hold 50,000 acres in the Scottish Highlands or merely 800 acres in a town 10 miles to the south of London: such is the problem of social distinction.⁶

Similar problems emerge over the question of the 'openness' of the ruling elite. According to Perkin's *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (1969), the

¹ M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981)

² D. Cannadine (ed.), *Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth Century Towns* (Leicester, 1982)

³ G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry - The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (1976)

⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (1968); H. Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (1969). Some historians still emphasise dramatic shifts in social relationships, such as M. E. Rose, 'Social Change and the Industrial Revolution' in R. Floud & D. McCloskey (ed.), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700* Vol. 1, 1700-1860 (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 253-275

⁵ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (1848), p. 79ff, 1907 edn.. Historians challenging wholesale changes include F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1963)

⁶ Reference is being made here to the main estates owned by Sir Edward Henry Scott of Sundridge Park, Bromley in 1873

ruling landed classes were fluid enough to accommodate those of the industrial bourgeoisie who aspired to similar heights.⁷ At the same time, problems of assimilation were eased by social emulation on the part of the upwardly mobile, for as Perkin has argued, 'the leisured gentleman was the ideal at which the whole society aimed, and by which it measured its happiness and ambitions.'⁸ It seems, however, that at the level of the lesser gentry land did indeed provide a key safety valve through which new wealth in the nineteenth century could 'escape'. L. and J. C. F. Stone confirmed, through exhaustive research, the very *closed* nature of the highest echelon of society, the aristocracy.⁹ In itself this is not enough to refute the fluidity of the landowning classes as a whole, although there is indeed a need to trace the extent of this fluidity through both time and place. Contact between landowners and sections of the middle classes in and around London may well have been more extensive than in remote rural districts.¹⁰ Likewise it would be difficult to make a case against the blurring of the distinction between large landowners and wealthy businessmen that reputedly occurred in the last decades of the century.

Most recently, historians have supported the notion of a merging of landed and rich business interests¹¹, although there remains some argument over the persistence of the landowners' domination in this relationship. Any number of 'watershed' years between the 'old' and 'new' worlds have been identified. The year 1850 has been seen as signalling a predominantly urban environment. The year 1868 has been pinpointed as the climax of the golden years of agriculture, whilst 1885 has been picked out as the time when the Home Rule crisis split the Liberals and supposedly drove landowners and the middle-classes alike into the arms of the Tories. The landed interest certainly suffered in the second half of the century, but it by no means surrendered. Any changes that occurred did so gradually rather than abruptly. It still remains to be shown that any local community threw off the traditional respect or patronage of the gentleman landowner before 1914.¹² The Duke of Wellington's remarks after the passing of the 1832 Reform Bill, that the 'orthodox gentlemen of England' had been rooted out by the 'atheistic and Dissenting shopkeepers', were made more out of anxiety than from any

⁷ H. Perkin, *op. cit.* (1969), p. 56 ff

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55

⁹ L. Stone & J. C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford, 1986), p. 131 and p. 283; W. D. Rubinstein, *Wealth and Inequality in Britain* (1986), p. 69

¹⁰ For a fascinating insight into the merging of upper-class and middle-class 'societies', as in London, see L. Davidoff, *The Best Circles - Society Etiquette and The Season* (1973)

¹¹ The number of historians is too great to reference here, but suffice it to say that historians with as diverse views as W. D. Rubinstein and F. M. L. Thompson, or L. Stone and H. Perkin, would concede this point

¹² See F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 211. Thompson goes further and, although recognizing the financial difficulties of the gentry, claims they retained not just respect but 'leadership' as well

accurate reflection of contemporary events.¹³ A plethora of notable artists, writers, philosophers and political thinkers had indeed emerged in reaction against the development of an industrial world, but the extent of social change demands qualification by greater in-depth analysis, particularly at the local level.

The landowners themselves were neither homogeneous nor static in their outlook and persuasions. Although on the whole traditionalist, they were not necessarily as one on politics, economic theory or religion. Outside agencies, length of lineage, individual quirks must all be taken into account, making it difficult to distinguish any common denominators. Land was considered not only as a source of prestige, as Wiener and Perkin have suggested, but also as a source of profit.¹⁴ A number of landowners, whether from the aristocracy or the gentry, exploited the mineral, commercial and residential value of their estates, making the latter important units of economic production.¹⁵ In this way it might be proposed that the landed classes were more akin to the business classes than they were willing to reveal, even if their active personal involvement was often limited. If this was indeed the case, then there remains the question addressed by Wiener about the infiltration of 'their distinctive set of values and style of life' into society as a whole.¹⁶ By developing the economic vitality of their estates, the landed elite were not automatically surrendering their cultural values. Neither, as recent urban studies have shown, were they confronted by a united and culturally homogeneous middle-class.¹⁷

Wiener has very few problems in representing the 'rustic image' as personified by cultural figures in Victorian society, but he has neglected to be more specific and precise about the 'gentrification' process beyond the realms of literature and education. This is not to say that such influences were unimportant, but it does appear that the overall argument itself is over-simplified. At its outset, is it fair to talk of 'gentry' and 'bourgeoisie' as two separate entities? F. M. L. Thompson and W. D. Rubinstein have agreed that businessmen purchased estates during at least the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Quite often these were relatively small estates, qualifying their

¹³ Quoted in H. Perkin, *op. cit.* (1969), p. 349

¹⁴ M. Wiener, *op. cit.* (1981), p. 174

¹⁵ F. M. L. Thompson has emphasised the productive worth of estates, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 156 and p. 183 *ff.*, as has D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.* (1982), p. 3

¹⁶ M. Wiener, *op. cit.*, p. 174

¹⁷ See R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party - The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990) for the factors that both united and divided the middle classes in the first half of the 19th century

¹⁸ W. D. Rubinstein, 'Cutting up rich' and F. M. L. Thompson, 'Stitching it together again', *EHR* XLV, 2 (1992), pp.

proprietors for the status of lesser gentry.¹⁹ Can we impose upon these 'new' gentry a hard and fast rule for their mode of behaviour? Did they act out their roles as landed patricians in any way different to those from well-established landed families? If indeed land purchase 'gentrified' the businessman, would he fail to exploit a money-spinning opportunity if it meant safeguarding his 'genteel culture'? In essence, was this 'genteel culture' itself opposed to making money?

Land itself was an attractive form of investment, as Lord Erle recognised in the first decade of the nineteenth century,

the social advantages of landownership and its apparently remunerative character, as well as the large fortunes realised in recent trade, combined to give land a fancy value. New capitalists gratified both their ambitions and their speculative instincts by becoming purchasers....²⁰

Yet land could assure neither permanent benefits nor unfailing security. In the first half of the century, enclosure, tithe commutation, railway construction, home-building and the demands for tenant rights helped keep the question of land high on the political and social agenda. An adaptable and pragmatic landlord could exploit such developments to good effect, even if in the 1820s and 1830s he was unlikely to make the easy profits in farming that had been customary during the Napoleonic Wars. Land was also the basis of his right to vote, thus offering enormous potential for political leverage. Nor did he suffer by the 1832 Reform Act, which if anything helped preserve the rank and property rights of landlords. The effects of the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 are perhaps more debatable. For some time, the landed classes who dominated both Houses of Parliament had come under increasing pressure from below to adopt the principle of free trade in their own back yards, as set out in the *Extraordinary Black Book* of 1831:

Surely, if a free trade in manufactures was for the benefit of the community, so was a free trade in the produce of the soil. But then, our feudal Solons (lords) do not deal in

¹⁹ See earlier reference about the rank and size of estates

²⁰ Lord Erle, *English Farming Past and Present* (6th edn. 1961), pp. 321-2

cotton, nor silk, nor hardwares; they are only dealers in corn, and that makes all the difference.²¹

The fact that landowners did not *only* deal in corn made all the difference when it came to pondering over the adoption of free trade. No doubt there were landowners who saw the repeal of the Corn Laws as one means of appeasing the reform lobby, but there were also many who suffered less than it might initially appear. Firstly, many were cushioned by their dependence on farm rents rather than corn prices; secondly those who relied upon pastoral farming were unaffected by foreign competition until later in the century. Furthermore, since a considerable proportion of landowners generated income from *non-landed* sources, the potential blows of the 1846 Repeal were substantially softened. Why else would Parliament have agreed to such a reversal of policy? Robert Peel himself only agreed to it when the new agricultural interests, enjoying a period of rejuvenation and innovation, would be sustained rather than swept aside.²² The 'golden age' of farming that lasted on and off until the end of the 1860s served to justify his aspirations, securing for the gentry, in the words of G. Kitson Clark, their 'legitimate influence' in the local community.²³

It appears that those landowners who invested heavily in agricultural improvements such as drainage projects, fertilisers, buildings and machines, never recovered an equivalent return on their investments.²⁴ This idea has been refuted to some degree by Cannadine who has argued that a landed class in financial disarray could never have afforded the new mansions and expensive improvements of the early 1870s if they were excessively in debt.²⁵ Only when the full force of the agricultural depression was felt did landowners and farmers alike recognise the need to make their farming practices more efficient. Even then, some of the landed classes fared better than others. Mingay has maintained that the South and East of England were hit hardest by the depression. Farms handling cattle, milk, fruit, vegetables, and hops, however, experienced relative prosperity when compared to those engaged in arable cultivation.²⁶

In the final quarter of the century, there emerged questions about leases, tenants' rights and the 'free trade' of land. In essence all three questions centred around

²¹ Extracts from the *Extraordinary Black Book of 1831* can be found in N. Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (1991) and D. Holman (ed.), *Portraits and Documents: Earlier 19th Century* (1965)

²² See F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 48; L. Stone & J. C. Fawtier Stone, *op. cit.* (1986), p.13

²³ G. Kitson Clark, *An Expanding Society, Britain 1830-1900* (1967), p. 28

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 167

²⁶ D. Cannadine, 'Aristocratic Indebtedness in the 19th Century - The Case Re-Opened', *EHR*, 30, 1977, p. 647

the landlords' monopolistic hold over land and thus posed the greatest of alarms to English landed society. Three acts in particular represented a shift away from the traditional respect shown for landowners' privileges: the Ground Game Act of 1880 granting tenant farmers the right to kill hares and rabbits without the landlords' permission; the 1882 Settled Lands Act giving greater security to tenants-for-life; and the Agricultural Holdings Act of the following year securing tenant ownership of the unexhausted value of their improvements. Greater numbers became sympathetic to the ideas of Cobden and Bright, thus swelling the ranks of the Free Land League and the Land Nationalisation Society. Political economists such as J. S. Mill were joined by women suffragists like Millicent Fawcett in their clamour for taxation on ground rents.²⁷ The stranglehold on land as exercised by the age-old systems of primogeniture, strict settlement and entail also came under attack. According to D. C. Moore, many townspeople supported a 'free trade' in land in order that it would increase production and reduce the concentration of ownership; entrepreneurial owner-occupiers would make land find its own 'level' in the market place, and in the process abolish the existing 'rentier' landlord class.²⁸

This was too much for landowners, and indeed for many of the propertied middle classes, to swallow. Coupled with anxiety over the attack on the leasehold system and the controversy over the landlord's reversionary interest, it becomes easier to appreciate Perkin's hypotheses that businessmen were carried into a defensive alliance with landowners against both these 'radical' assaults and the 'nationalisation' of land.²⁹ After all, any interference with the rights of landed property was a threat to the ownership of property itself, landed or not. Unlike the seaside resort of Southport, where J. Liddle identified a concerted attack on the leasehold system from Corporation councillors, there were few influential critics of the great landlords in Bromley.³⁰ Then again, the growing town of Bromley had relatively few social problems, there being little concern amongst local administrators for either overcrowding or the overall state of housing. Instead, Gladstone's intervention into the rights of Irish property, along with the arguably more divisive issue of Home Rule, served to worry society's elite enough to block further land and leasehold reform.

²⁷ D. Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women - The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (1991)

²⁸ D. C. Moore, 'The Gentry' in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside Vol. 2* (1981), p. 390

²⁹ H. Perkin, *op. cit.* (1969), p. 432ff

³⁰ J. Liddle, 'Estate Management and Land Reform Politics: the Hesketh and Scarisbrick families and the making of Southport, 1842-1914' in D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 157

The significance of these controversial issues becomes more apparent when scrutinising developments at the local level, such as those that occurred in Bromley. A detailed picture of landownership in Bromley is provided by the two nationally instigated assessments of 1836 and 1873.³¹ The Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 serves as a useful starting point since it engendered detailed surveys of local landownership and rent payable *in lieu* of tithes. Although the Bromley apportionment was not published until 1841, it was agreed upon two years earlier at a meeting attended by owners of land of which at least two-thirds were subject to tithes.³² All tithes were payable to the Bishop of Rochester - as Lord of the Manor - or to his lessees. The Parish of St. Peter & St. Paul covered 4,668 acres, of which 567 acres were exempt from payment, mainly glebe-land and the ancient demesne of the Bishop himself. The survey also recorded land-use and reflected the dominance of arable farming in the parish, 2048 acres as compared with only 1,718 acres of pastoral land; woodland covered a space of just over 334 acres.³³ The tithes of Bromley were commuted to a total of £1,200 pounds which was to pass on to William Leigh of Mount Radford in Exeter as the Bishop's lessee. Like most parishes in the country, the tithes were commuted 'voluntarily', that is by agreement between at least two-thirds of the landowners *by value* and of course the tithe-owner himself.³⁴ Once agreed to, commutation was binding upon the rest of the landowning community.³⁵ Presumably the process of commutation ran relatively smoothly since local contemporary writings and autobiographies mention it only in passing. Quite possibly some landowners might have disputed their own apportionment when compared to the lands of others, but existing records point to landowner acquiescence rather than antipathy.

The later 'domesday' survey of land was initiated in 1873 to assess the extent to which large estates were swallowing up smaller holdings. People like the Earl of Derby, who raised the issue in the House of Lords in February of 1872, felt that this was not in fact the case.³⁶ He argued that many people owned land and a 'monopoly of land' simply did not exist. Instead, he insisted that the 1861 census figures on the number of landowners were inaccurate. As proprietor of Holwood Estate on the

³¹ It is worth pointing out that these assessments were made at different times depending upon the district being surveyed; neither assessment was without error

³² *Tithe Commutation and Apportionment of the Parish of Bromley, 1841*

³³ *Ibid.*. The figures given here are for land subject to tithes

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ For a detailed account of the process of tithe commutation and its impact upon society, see E. J. Evans, *Tithes and the Tithe Commutation Act 1836* (1978)

³⁶ See W. E. Baxter, *The Domesday Book of Kent Landowners 1873* (1877), p. iii

southern borders of Bromley, he witnessed the emergence of a 'new small class of owners' close to town centres and railway stations.³⁷ Within Bromley, the investigation was carried out by the clerk to the Board of Guardians. The fact that these statistics were compiled from rate-books led to a number of inaccuracies, particularly concerning land held jointly or in trust. W. E. Baxter, who produced results that covered the whole of Kent, attempted to solve any discrepancies by contacting the landowners concerned, and did not publish his results until 1877.³⁸ For this reason, the figures upon which conclusions have been drawn in this study are not the unadulterated originals, even if in practice they might be more accurate.³⁹ In Bromley's case, the Earl of Derby's doubts about accuracy were fully justified, at least as far as the 1851 census figures are concerned, since only 5 individuals were recorded as being landowners or landed proprietors, compared with 83 in the 1841 tithe commutation and at least 67 in the 1873 survey.

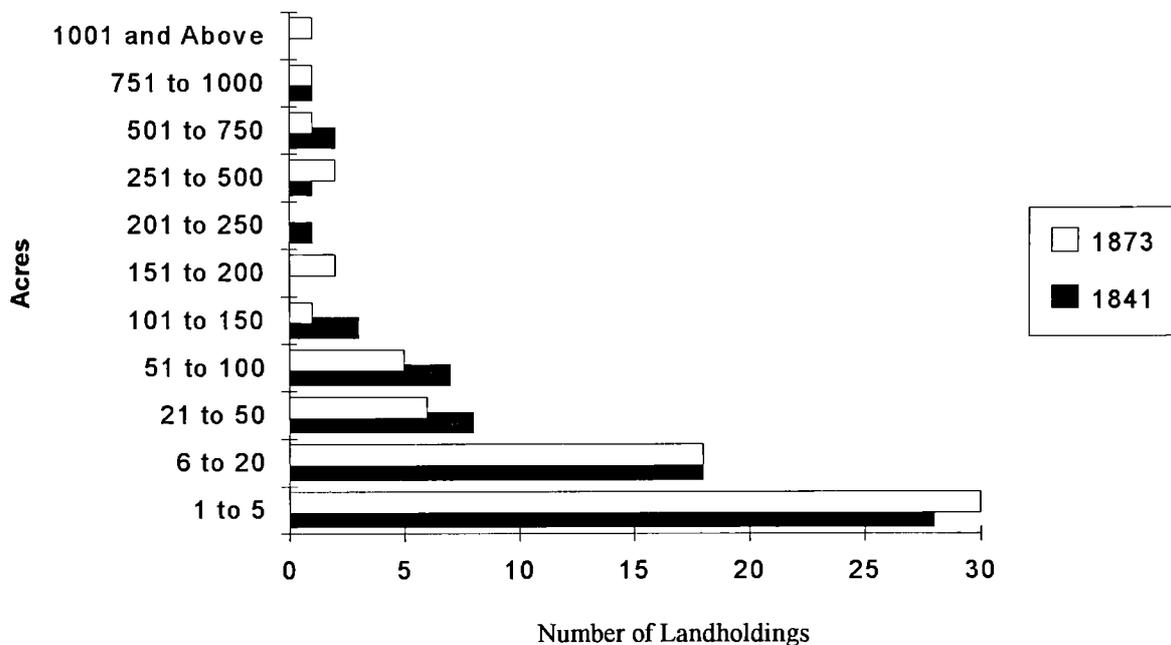


Figure 2.1 Size and Distribution of Landholdings, Bromley Parish (St. Peter & St. Paul) 1841 and 1873 (Sources: 1841 Tithe Commutation and 1873 'Domesday' Survey).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ The return showed the names of those who owned more than one acre of land, but only included the number of those who owned less than one acre of land. Since the return listed the landowners alphabetically by name and not by town or parish, the relevant statistics for Bromley had to be identified from registered addresses. For reasons of comparison, it was felt advisable to include land within the old parish boundary, but it was not always possible to verify whether this was the case

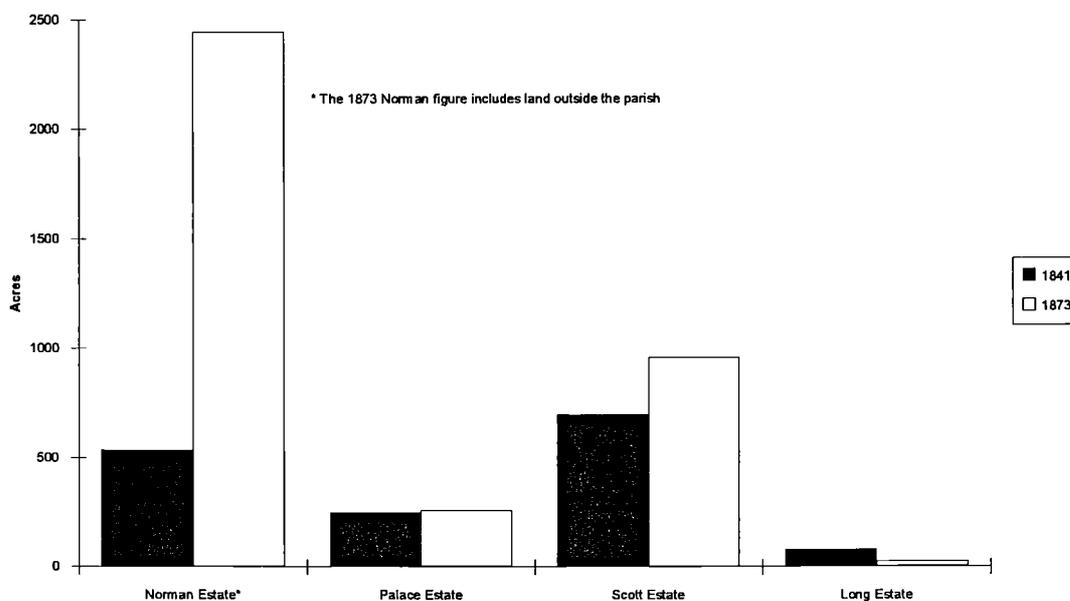


Figure 2.2 Size of Selected 'Surviving' Estates, 1841-1873.
(Source: 1841 Tithe Commutation, 1873 'Domesday' Return)

On the surface, then, the 1873 survey depicted a fall in the number of landowners. The figure of only 67 landowners has to be treated with some caution, however, since on the one hand it does not include proprietors of less than one acre but on the other hand does incorporate some land which fell outside the parish boundary. If the 1841 figure is adjusted to comprise only landowners of more than one acre, then there is little difference between the two years, 69 as opposed to 67. Given the population increase in the period, from 4,325 in 1841 to approximately 11,000 by 1873, there did not appear to be a corresponding growth in the number of landowners. However, the 1873 survey made no register of cases below one acre for Bromley itself. If Bromley followed the pattern for Kent, or England and Wales as a whole, then possibly 200 individuals would have fallen into this category. Figure 2.1 shows the distribution of land according to size of the 'estates'. Again there were more similarities than differences. In both cases there were eight landowners with more than 100 acres, reflecting little change in the distribution of land.

F. M. L. Thompson has emphasised the increasing concentration of land in Victorian times, particularly because of the effects of debts, borrowing, and the increase in land prices prior to the 1860s.⁴⁰ This is certainly a picture that seems to fit

⁴⁰ F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 233

the *national* situation as recognised by statistical research carried out by E. Davies in his study of the decline of the small landowner between 1815 and 1918.⁴¹ As F. M. L. Thompson concedes, however, it is not an accurate reflection of developments around London, where new mercantile wealth settled for 'yeoman' properties between 300 and 1000 acres.⁴² Considering the fact that no Bromley estate in 1841 could trace its heritage back before 1759 - apart from the old manor itself which had been granted to the Bishop of Rochester by William the Conqueror - then support is given to the view of D. C. Moore and L. and J. C. F. Stone that the smaller the estate, the higher the turnover.⁴³ As towns or suburbs experienced more intensive residential development, estates were broken up and the number of landowners multiplied. In urban areas, then, landownership often become more widespread, although such a process seems to have been delayed longer in Bromley than in places closer to London, like Camberwell.⁴⁴

Research on the origins and background of the major landowning families in the parish revealed greater insight than can be permitted by statistics about acreage. Although commentators of the late eighteenth century noted the desire of wealthy merchants to become landed gentry, historians such as L. and J. C. F. Stone have claimed this rarely occurred in practice, even less so after the Reform Act of 1832 and the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.⁴⁵ However, their hypotheses have been drawn mainly from the research of three counties, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, and Hertfordshire, the first two of which appear to differ markedly from districts immediately surrounding London. London's countryside fed the thriving capital at the same time as providing room necessary for expansion.⁴⁶ Prestigious retreats such as that of the Earl of Chatham at Hayes Place, a mile to the south-west of Bromley, symbolized the wealth and privilege of London's elite. Of the three major landowning families in Bromley in 1841 (shown in Table 2.1) - between them owning *half* of the parish - none could trace their landed ancestry in the town back more than 90 years, and all had made their fortunes in businesses centred on London.

⁴¹ E. Davies, *EHR* I, 1 (1927), reproduced in E. M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *Essays in Economic History, Vol. 1* (1954), p. 270

⁴² Estates of this size were actually quite large in a market town or suburb, and as such are in certain cases deserving of 'parish gentry' status

⁴³ D. C. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 390; L. Stone & J. C. Fawtier Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 106

⁴⁴ H. Dyos, *Victorian Suburb - A Study of the Growth of Camberwell* (Leicester, 1961), p. 41

⁴⁵ L. Stone & J. C. Fawtier stone, *op. cit.*, p. 131ff

⁴⁶ P. Brandon and B. Short, *The South East from AD 1000* (1990), p. 268ff

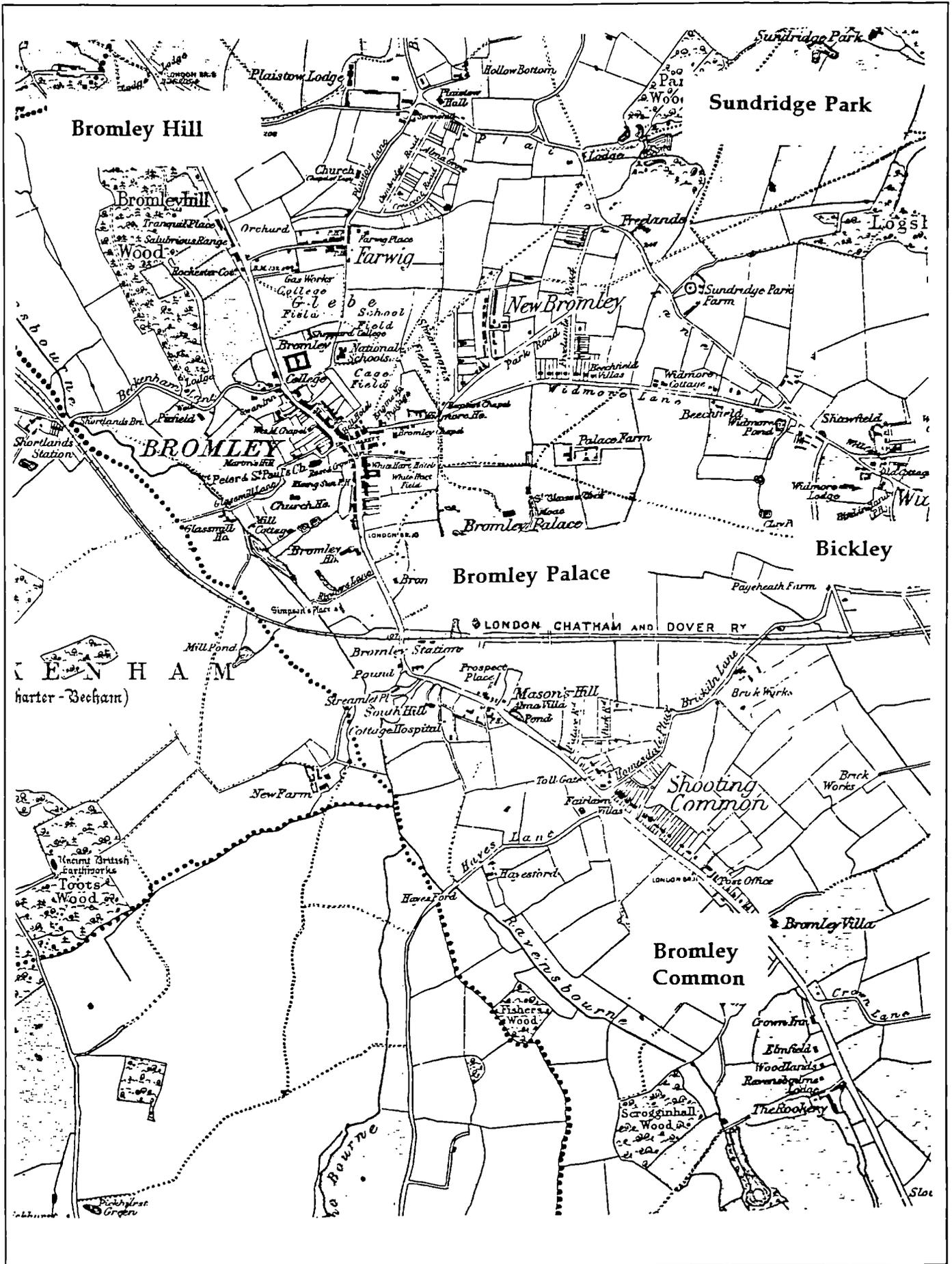


Figure 2.3 Map of Bromley showing main landed estates, using 1868 O.S. Map

Scale: 4 inches to 1 mile

Landowner	Acres
John Wells	879
Sir Samuel Scott Sir	698
George Warde Norman	535
Bishop of Rochester	251
Cooper Trustees	227
John Wells Jun..	147
Executors of Bonar Thompson	142
Robert Boyd	121
Robert Makepeace	98
John Cator	90

Table 2.1 The Ten Largest Landowners in Bromley, 1841
(Source: Tithe Commutation).

The family of John Wells, whose combined estates covered 1,026 acres to the south-east of the town, had been shipbuilders in Deptford for many generations.⁴⁷ They had first invested in property in Bromley in 1759, making further purchases well into the following century. Another large landowning family, the Scotts of Sundridge Park, had been major corn factors at the end of the eighteenth century, with their granaries at Rotherhithe on the Thames.⁴⁸ By gaining a contract to supply grain to British troops in the Peninsular War, Claude Scott's business flourished so rapidly that in 1796 he was able to purchase an estate of nearly 700 acres at Sundridge Park. A much smaller piece of land had been bought by the Norman family - the third of the main landowners - back in 1765.⁴⁹ This meagre 37 acre-estate at the Rookery, Bromley Common, was added to by both the original investor James Norman and his son George. The latter was a timber merchant whose large interests in Norway enabled him to consolidate his estate and make further purchases after the Bromley Common Enclosure of 1821.

In 1846 the Manor of Bromley, along with various ancient rights and privileges, was purchased by another businessman, William John Coles Child, coal merchant and wharfinger with extensive docks in Greenwich and Belvedere.⁵⁰ The sale of the land had been protracted, particularly because the estate of 286 acres had been poorly managed and the market town itself seemed to be caught in the midst of

⁴⁷ J. L. Filmer, 'The Wells Family of Deptford and Bickley', in *BLHS* No. 1 1976, p. 27; G. W. Norman, *Memoranda Regarding Bromley and Its Neighbourhood During the Residence of our Family There* (c.1857-1880, hand written notes, BPL)

⁴⁸ J. L. Filmer, 'Sundridge Park, Bromley and The History of the Scott family Who Lived There', in *BLHS* No. 4 1979, p. 8

⁴⁹ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*; J. L. Filmer, *G. W. Norman - His Family, Forbears and Descendants* (unpublished booklet, BPL)

⁵⁰ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *Bromley - From Earliest Times to the Present Century* (Chislehurst, 1929), p. 52; J. L. Filmer, 'The Bromley Palace and Coles Child, Lord of the Manor of Bromley, 1846-1873' in *BLHS* No. 5 1980, p. 27

economic depression. Yet a survey of 1845 had concluded that the estate had sufficient quality parkland, fields and timber for it to be run on a commercial basis.⁵¹ The surveyor himself, a Robert William Clutton, proclaimed that land was a better investment than any business enterprise, because the value of the manor's demesne land had risen from £365 to £650 in just five years. William John Coles Child bought the estate, which included the Bishop's commodious palace and all manorial perquisites, for a total of £20,525. Immediately he set to work improving the estate's agricultural productivity and efficiency.

William John Coles Child was just *one* of the 'new' purchasers of land in Bromley in the mid-nineteenth century. Out of 18 landowners who possessed more than 25 acres of land in 1873, at least 11 of them had not owned land in 1841, nor had they inherited it from another member of the family.⁵² In some cases it is difficult to trace the origins of the wealth necessary to purchase property in one of the most sought-after suburbs of southern London, but the background profile of Bromley's second greatest 'new' landowner, George Wythes, is well documented. George Wythes was an international railway contractor and purchased his 630 acre estate in Bickley in 1861.⁵³ The date itself is significant in that no investment in a large estate seems to have been made after the mid-1860s. Of those who held land in 1841, both the Scott and Norman families had expanded their landed estates by 1873. The enlargement of the Scotts Sundridge Estate was minimal, but the expansion of the Norman family's estate at Bromley Common was far more impressive. By concluding deals on farms at Bromley Common, Southborough and elsewhere, George Warde Norman became the proprietor of nearly 2,500 acres.⁵⁴ In his autobiography, begun in 1857, Norman reveals how a slump in the timber trade and heavy losses of £20,000 from the American stock crash earlier in the century, had driven him away from his business ventures. Instead, he was able to concentrate on his landholdings in Bromley, along with the social and political benefits and responsibilities thus accrued:

The leisure arising from my quitting business, my new position in Kent, my strong political feelings, and other circumstances impelled me at this time to take part in public business, which I had never done previously.⁵⁵

⁵¹ J. M. Rawcliffe, 'Bromley - Kentish Market Town to London Suburb 1841-1881' in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), p. 44

⁵² These statistics are taken from the 1841 and 1873 land surveys, *op. cit.*

⁵³ See *BR* April 1883, p. 159; J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 44

⁵⁴ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*; this may well include land outside the parish

⁵⁵ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.* (c.1857), p. 237

As Cannadine, the L. and J. C. F. Stone and others have pointed out, as a form of capital investment land was very expensive.⁵⁶ Along with the land itself came the farm buildings, machinery, drainage ditches, wages and the costly running and upkeep of the gentleman's country house. In the century before 1857, the Norman family had spent £100,000 on land and various properties; half of this had been spent by George Warde Norman since 1830.⁵⁷ A further £26,000 had been spent enlarging and improving the home and gardens at the Rookery, Bromley Common. As on much larger estates such as the Bute's in Cardiff, expenditure on land had initially been subsidised by income from business.⁵⁸ On more than one occasion, George Warde Norman expressed his regret that his grandfather had lavished so much money on the home and its grounds rather than on land.⁵⁹ Such regret was deepened by the fact that few land purchases had been well-chosen. Writing in the late 1850s, it is evident that Norman believed landed property could yield at most 3% per annum, and proposed this as the main reason why few Englishmen were willing to invest in its purchase or improvement.⁶⁰ Land which had cost the Norman family over £100,000 to acquire, he maintained, was hardly worth more than £150,000 at the time of writing.⁶¹ If this in itself helped make land unattractive, then matters were not helped by bad debts, marriage settlements⁶² and costly allowances which quickly whittled away George Warde Norman's £100,000 personal inheritance.⁶³

Although George Warde Norman sought to enlarge his Bromley estate, he disclosed that this was *not* done out of a desire to accumulate vast wealth. Such revelations help explain his self-imposed divorce from business.⁶⁴ As an indication of his scepticism in the commercial attractiveness of land *per se*, Norman sold off a

⁵⁶ D. Cannadine, *op. cit.* (1977); L. Stone & J. C. Fawtier Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 125

⁵⁷ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ J. Davies, 'Aristocratic Town-makers and the Coal Metropolis' in D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.* (1982), p. 18

⁵⁹ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ J. L. Filmer, *op. cit.* (unpublished)

⁶¹ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*

⁶² For the potential repercussions of such allowances, see L. Stone & J. C. Fawtier Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 125

⁶³ G. W. Norman, *Autobiography* (1857 onwards, unpublished), p. 226

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

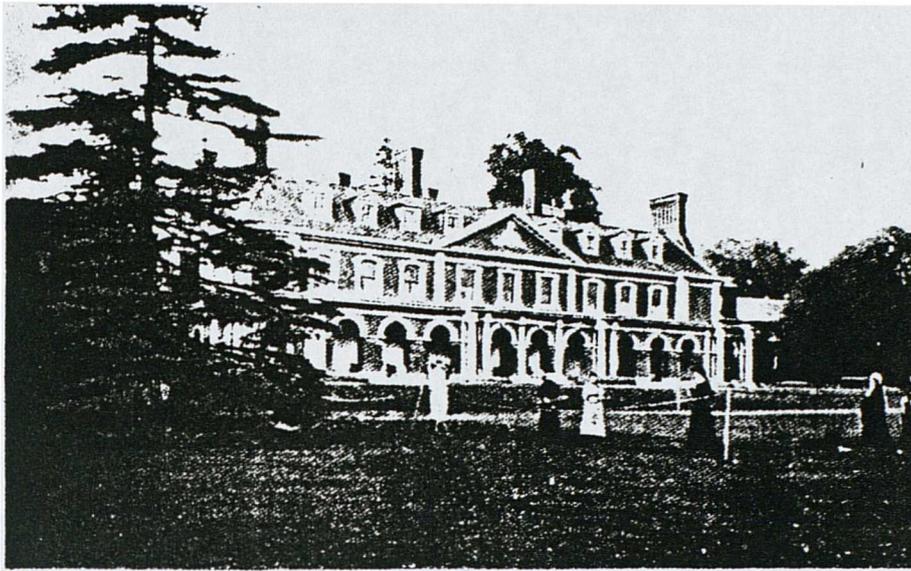


Figure 2.4 The Bishop's Palace, Bromley. Built by Bishop Thomas, 1775.
Residence of the Coles Child family from 1846.
(Source: E.L.S.Horsburgh)

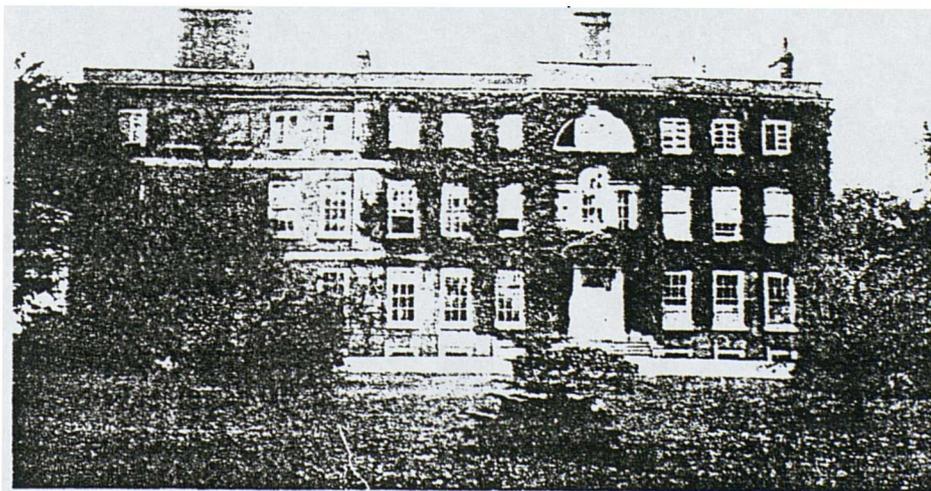


Figure 2.5 The Rookery, Bromley Common, before alteration in 1890.
Residence of the Norman family.
(Source: E.L.S.Horsburgh)

number of properties outside of Bromley. These properties were given over for residential development or railway construction, effectively losing for Norman a small fortune in the process. After poor advice, he had sold some wharf property near Blackfriars for £5,600 in 1862, only for the London, Chatham and Dover Railway Company to resell it, with some additional land, to the Metropolitan and District Railway for £56,000 a mere seven years later!⁶⁵ Whatever Norman's misgivings might have been, his income from land and rents, which had been £1,500 in 1830, had grown to £3,800 by 1862. Money from his businesses had no doubt helped him in his early life, helping him to invest in considerable plots of land, but after giving up his business pursuits, it was his estate that maintained him in the life to which he had grown accustomed. Thus land continued to be an economically viable investment, even if not the most fruitful.

Norman's career and aspirations fit neatly into the theory of land investment as postulated by H. J. Habbakuk: 'the main point about landowners - in England at least - is that they did not acquire their land in order to develop it, but in order to enjoy it.'⁶⁶ Enjoyment did not consist solely of leisurely pursuits such as hunting or shooting game, it also entailed a generous measure of social, political and economic power in the local community. Nevertheless, other local gentry did not conform so conveniently to Habbakuk's conclusions. William John Coles Child's 'improvement' schemes aimed to set his Palace Estate on a commercial footing,⁶⁷ not simply to acquire pleasure or social prestige.⁶⁸ He was enlightened enough - and enough of a fortuitous entrepreneur - to introduce hops on to his land, thus avoiding the problems associated with arable farming later in the century. Great barns, drying sheds and oast-houses replaced the old Tudor barns, creating a 'model' farm that boosted the economic vitality of his estate. For some time, Child took great pride in providing London with the first hops of the season.⁶⁹ Within 15 years of purchase, he had raised the average rental per acre by 64%. If ever proof was needed that capitalist principles were not necessarily the monopoly of businessmen, one need look no further than William John Coles Child.

Neither did the position and status of landowner restrict Child to merely agricultural activities. Having emerged from the world of commerce, and as a director of several London companies he was enough of a businessman to recognise, just as George Warde Norman had done, that there was a limit on the financial returns to be

⁶⁵ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.* (c. 1857-1880)

⁶⁶ Quoted in M. J. Wiener, *op. cit.*, p. 13

⁶⁷ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 46

⁶⁸ See H. Perkin, *op. cit.*, p. 85

⁶⁹ *BR* Aug. 1868; J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p.46

gained from land. On the southern border of his estate he constructed a vast brickworks, utilising the clay dug from his own land and exploiting the demand from a rapidly expanding local population. By the mid-1860s he was selling land off on the fringes of his property for gas works and residential development.⁷⁰ By 1873 the value of his estate had increased by a further 200%, enabling his productive landed estate to escape the full impact of the 'great depression'.⁷¹

Two further examples illustrate the entrepreneurial tendencies of certain landowning 'gentry'. Success as a corn factor and a 700-acre estate with a large rambling mansion at Sundridge Park designed with the aid of Humphrey Repton and John Nash, had helped gain for Claude Scott the title of baronet in 1821.⁷² Not wishing to rest upon his laurels, Sir Claude Scott established a London banking firm with his son Samuel, and recorded a surplus of over £200,000 in their first year. Samuel Scott's income continued to improve after his father's death in 1830, particularly with the aid of a handsome dowry from his wife. When Samuel Scott himself died in 1849, the banking business passed to his two sons, but the cornfactor side appeared to have ceased, perhaps made less attractive by the relative depression in trade after the Napoleonic Wars. By 1869 - when Samuel's son Claude Edward died in Nice - the Scott family had achieved millionaire status. Sir Edward Henry Scott, Samuel's grandson by his second son, then inherited a fortune in real estate and personalty worth £1,400,000.⁷³

In the landowners' return of 1873, Sir Edward Henry Scott is recorded as owning 59,125 acres on the Isle of Harris in addition to the 959 acres at Sundridge Park.⁷⁴ F. M. L. Thompson, in his reply to Rubinstein's criticisms, used Samuel Scott's grandson as an example of a businessman who invested in large estates well into the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ However, Sir Edward Henry may well have been 'clearly of landed gentry style and consequence'⁷⁶, but he actually gained his lands through inheritance and not purchase. By 1882 the local newspapers were reflecting upon the likely consequences of Sir Edward ceasing to reside at Sundridge Park, permitting an influx of building contractors to ruin 'Scott's Park'.⁷⁷ In fact Sir Edward had already

⁷⁰ *BR* March 1863

⁷¹ The nature and effects of the 'great depression' are debatable, but there is no question that agricultural prices and rents suffered badly, especially in arable areas

⁷² J. L. Filmer, *op. cit.* (1979), p. 9

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁷⁴ F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1992), p. 372

⁷⁵ Reference has already been made to this debate, see footnote 6

⁷⁶ F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1992), p. 373

⁷⁷ *BR* July 1882

begun the break-up of the estate, a process that was to continue in the hands of his son Samuel.

The last investor in a large landed estate in Bromley was George Wythes, son of a Worcestershire farmer and railway contractor extraordinaire.⁷⁸ Having made his fortune constructing railways as far afield as Canada, South America and India, he had decided to seek a semi-rural retreat on the outskirts of London. After purchasing the Bickley Estate (once part of the property of John Wells), he initially renovated the mansion of Bickley Hall (see Figure 2.6), but soon after set about developing his remaining land.⁷⁹ The new roads and detached villas that he erected rather spoiled the Romantic image of a country gentleman as portrayed later by his obituary in the *Railway News*, 'he delighted in the retirement of the country, and devoted his leisure to farming, which he conducted with his usual enterprise and practical sense.'⁸⁰ Such sentiment admirably reflects Wiener's ideas about the lure of the land upon wealthy businessmen, but images do not always reflect reality. In practice, Wythes devoted himself to developing an exclusive residential estate whose urban rents helped him amass a fortune of one and a half million pounds.⁸¹

Whatever its viability, and whatever the historic period, investment in land could not protect even the wealthiest of proprietors from financial ruin. After losing a personal fortune in the 1841 Whitmore Banking House crisis, John Wells had to sell off most of his 879 acre estate, managing to retain 370 acres for his wife Julia.⁸² His estate was not parcelled off in small plots, however, and much of it was eventually bought by the contractor George Wythes. The only other noteworthy case of a 1841 landowner selling off part of his land was Colonel Long of Bromley Hill (formerly the residence of Lord Farnborough) whose property had been reduced from 79 acres to 25 during this period.⁸³ None of the *large* landed estates (those over 100 acres) had been broken up by 1873, even though the value of these estates as revealed by the 'domesday' survey of that year suggests that selling off land for urban development would indeed have been financially lucrative.

⁷⁸ *BR* April 1883

⁷⁹ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 44

⁸⁰ This was reprinted in *BR* April 1883, p. 159

⁸¹ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 44

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 42; G. W. Norman, *op. cit.* (c.1857-1880)

⁸³ It should be noted that the comparative study of the 1841 and 1873 land returns does not identify those individuals who purchased landed property after 1841 and sold it before 1873



Figure 2.6 Bickley Hall. Built by John Wells, Esq. in 1780.
Residence of the Wythes family from 1861.
(Source: E.L.S.Horsburgh)

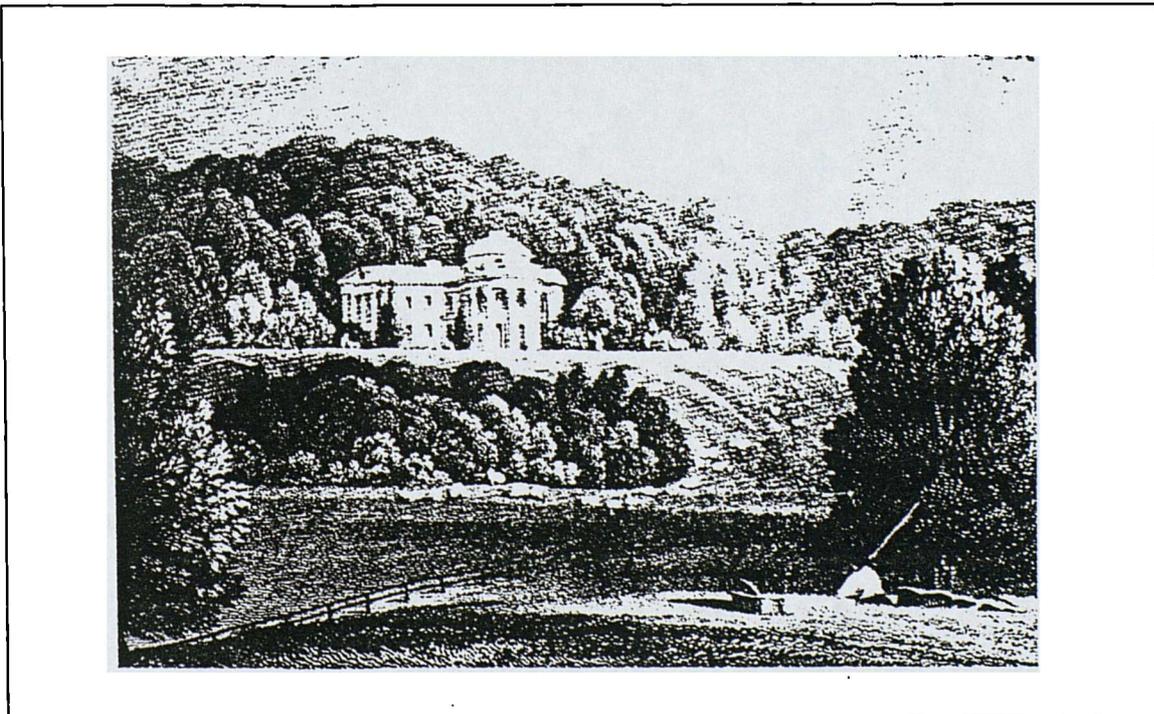


Figure 2.7 Sundridge Park Mansion, after 1792.
Residence of the Scott family.
(Source: E.L.S.Horsburgh)

It would be misleading to represent the decisions facing landowners in the second half of the nineteenth century as a simple choice between agricultural or urban development. The two could and did coexist side by side if the individual wished them to and if encouraged to do so by social and economic circumstance. G. E. Mingay has claimed that landowners preferred agricultural to non-agricultural properties, since the former provided a source of power that the latter could not match.⁸⁴ Elsewhere he qualified this argument by recognising the potential value of transport and industrial developments to landowners, in the form of enhanced rents and lower poor rates.⁸⁵ A more recent study by Avner Offer has highlighted the unpredictability of revenues gained from farming land, although it was common for landowners to externalise farming risks by shifting them onto tenants.⁸⁶ The low levels of owner occupation that resulted must have reduced the landlord's ties to the agricultural working of his property. In addition, increased competition from outside challenged farms to become more efficient and encouraged urban gentry to exploit the commercial possibilities of their estates.⁸⁷

Competition through improved international trade and communications helped precipitate the agricultural depression of the 1870s and 1880s, which itself posed new difficulties for landowners. The market-orientated economy of London's southern hinterland cushioned Bromley landowners from its worst effects, particularly since they had relied less on arable crops. Some landowners, such as William John Coles Child, had introduced industrial crops like hops.⁸⁸ Contemporaries commented on the Bromley farmers' dependence on market gardening products, in an 'agricultural district' where 'most of the talk is of cabbages and turnips.'⁸⁹ Livestock farming seemed to ride the worst effects of the depression,⁹⁰ and the demand for meat resulted in cattle auctions being held in the town as late as 1887, even when the district's fairs and Agricultural Association had long since ceased to exist (1865 and 1877 respectively).⁹¹ Reports in the local press suggest that Bromley followed along the lines of agricultural developments in Kent as a whole.⁹² Meadows replaced fields of corn in many parts of the county in the last third of the century, whilst by 1900 the once commercially

⁸⁴ G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1981), p. 367

⁸⁵ G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 165

⁸⁶ A. Offer, in *EHR* Vol. XLIV, No. 1, Feb. 1991, p. 8

⁸⁷ G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 168; F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 191; a variety of examples given in D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ P. Brandon and B. Short, *op. cit.*, p. 322

⁸⁹ *BR* Feb. 1860

⁹⁰ G. Hueckel, 'Agriculture During Industrialisation' in R. Floud and D. McCloskey, *op. cit.*, p. 192

⁹¹ Information about cattle markets has been taken from short reports and advertisements in *BR* between 1865 and 1887. The major cattle market in the wider district was Croydon

⁹² See W. Page (ed.), *A History of the County of Kent - The Victoria History of the Counties* (1908), pp. 459-468

successful hop-growing had become less attractive. In 1876, Sir Edward Henry Scott had voiced his concern over the trend towards greater pasturage in case of war, in both town and county.⁹³ By the end of the century even non-arable cultivation had suffered, with Kent fruit farmers complaining of the extortionate profits of the market garden middle-men.⁹⁴ Between 1880 and the beginning of the First World War, agricultural land had declined from 59.74% to 31.07% in the space of just 35 years.⁹⁵ By 1915, when home-grown food supplies were again heavily in demand, farming in Bromley consisted of little more than the working of orchards and nursery gardens.

Superseding farm rents and income from agricultural products were the rents to be gained from urban development. In a unique collection edited by Cannadine new ground has been broken on the influence of landed patricians on both urban politics and development:

There was urban development to plan and mould, urban labour to employ and manage, urban livings to finance and fill, urban society to adorn and lead, and urban government and representation to dominate and control.⁹⁶

Permeating each of the towns considered is the strength of leverage exercised by the owners of the countryside over the inhabitants of the town. In particular, landowners could gain through *leasehold* development which returned a steady income and did not carry the risk of speculative building.⁹⁷ If necessary, restrictive covenants and conditions were employed to ensure both high class housing and a higher reversionary interest, as was the case with the Hesketh's estate in Southport.⁹⁸ In earlier studies of the topic, H. Dyos and Perkin had shown how the ground landlords were able to control not just the overall layout and style of new housing developments but also the precise location of town halls and market places.⁹⁹ According to Dyos, the degree of planning varied in relation to the number of landowners: the greater the number of landowners, the less co-ordinated the planning.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ *BR* Nov. 1876, p. 85-86

⁹⁴ *BR* Oct. 1892, p. 182

⁹⁵ B. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 410ff

⁹⁶ D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 3

⁹⁷ J. Liddle, *op. cit.*, p. 153

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155

⁹⁹ H. Perkin, *op. cit.*, p.73; H. Dyos, *op. cit.*, p. 40ff

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

In Camberwell most building construction was carried out by speculative builders, the vast majority from the local area.¹⁰¹ Few homes were owner-occupied and much was made of the absentee leaseholders, commonly called the 'landlords' by occupiers. It was the wealth to be gained from this leasehold system that brought freeholders and leaseholders alike under more vehement attack in the last quarter of the century. As inferred earlier, many townsmen felt that ground rents should be taxed so that the local community too could gain from the 'improvement' of property.¹⁰² Landed proprietors would even 'donate' pieces of land to the town in order to have it 'improved' by drainage and road facilities, thus enhancing the value of adjacent land which would then be eligible for building.¹⁰³ Occasionally, landowners might demand excessive prices for land or even block developments, hoping to retain the prestige and social advantages that came with landed property. In some incidences, refusals to release land were driven by a desire to prevent the intrusion of unwanted elements into a particular neighbourhood, or by hopes of preserving facilities for sport.¹⁰⁴ Whatever the actions of landowners might be, in the last quarter of the century, social and economic circumstances had changed such that landowners could more readily profit from their inheritance:

The richest crop for any field
Is a crop of bricks for it to yield
The richest crop that it can grow
Is a crop of houses in a row.

Anon.¹⁰⁵

The nature of the development of Bromley's landed estates varied according to several determining factors. A landowner's business connections might make him more flexible to new demands and possibilities; a proprietor with less attachment to the local area might surrender to suburban sprawl more readily; the pressures of suburban encirclement might force a landed gentleman to sell off all or part of his estate, gaining heavy compensation in return.¹⁰⁶ Before the advent of the railway to Bromley in 1858, the market town's thriving coaching trade had already seen the introduction of 'neat

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137

¹⁰² G. M. Young, *Victorian England - Portrait of an Age* (edn. annotated by G. Kitson Clark, 1977), p. 148

¹⁰³ J. Liddle, *op. cit.*, p. 156

¹⁰⁴ *Parliamentary 'Urban' Land Review of 1914*, p. 318

¹⁰⁵ This poem appears in Tarbuck's *Handbook of House Property* (1875), and is quoted in H. Dyos, *op. cit.*, p. 87

¹⁰⁶ See M. C. Carr, 'The Development and Character of a Metropolitan Suburb: Bexley, Kent' in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *op. cit.* (1982), p. 211. The Parliamentary 'Urban' Review of 1914 criticised landowners for excessive compensation demands made over the previous half century

houses and villa residences' on Bromley Common land,¹⁰⁷ leased out by the Norman family following their acquisitions after the 1821 Enclosure.¹⁰⁸ When moves were afoot to establish a railway line through the town, they were initially blocked by William John Coles Child who owned most of the land in and around the town centre.¹⁰⁹ Only when he had gained satisfactory terms did he support the project. In this way the Mid Kent Railway Company was obliged to alter the location of the Bromley (South) station, use Child's own locally-manufactured bricks and offer him a seat on the Company Board.

Nationally, peers and gentry may well have supported the spread of railways with less enthusiasm than commercial men in the 1830s and 1840s. After 1850, however, there was a marked shift towards more direct involvement and investment by landowners.¹¹⁰ This was particularly the case in the construction of secondary lines where railway companies were forced to consider alternative routes or meet demands similar to those being proposed by Coles Child.¹¹¹ In towns around London, there was less of a contrast in the actions of gentry and men of commerce since many of the gentry had in any case always been closely connected with commerce. John Wright Nokes, who it appears was the manager for the creditors of the bankrupt estate of John Wells, purchased the freehold of the Bickley Estate in 1841 along with the leasehold property of the Bromley Manor Estate. He claimed that but for deficient communications and a lack of a railway station, 'I should lay out a great many thousand pounds in building, and I could have let to different builders something like a hundred acres.'¹¹²

The very same thoughts were echoed by a former East India Company Director, William Dent, who bought Nokes' Bickley Estate eleven years later after Nokes had defaulted on his mortgage.¹¹³ Dent saw the prospect of a railway line as a means of enhancing the building potential of his land. In 1856 he became the Chairman of the Mid-Kent Company which eventually built the line and on his property constructed the Southborough Road station, later renamed Bickley. According to F. M. L. Thompson the railway had a dramatic impact upon the town. In *The Rise of Suburbia*, he depicted Bromley as the archetypal middle-class railway suburb.¹¹⁴ As

¹⁰⁷ S. Bagshaw, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Kent 1847I*, p. 636

¹⁰⁸ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.* (c.1857-1880)

¹⁰⁹ J. L. Filmer, *op. cit.* (1980), p.29

¹¹⁰ G. R. Hawke and J. P. P. Higgins, 'Transport and Social Overhead Capital' in R. Floud and D. McCoskey (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 233

¹¹¹ P. S. Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution* (1974), p.96

¹¹² J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.

¹¹⁴ F.M.L.Thompson (ed.), (1982), p.20

many as 1,500 newcomers to the town between 1851 and 1861 had helped account for a 46% decennial increase in population, but even this fell well short of the dramatic 96% rise during the decade that followed.¹¹⁵ In his more embellished account of the railway's arrival, J. M. Rawcliffe aptly described the motivation and means behind the introduction of these new lines of communication.¹¹⁶ Yet one question remains unanswered: could any distinctions be drawn between the part played by landowners and that played by the members of the resident middle classes?

Pressure for a railway line in the 1850s came from a variety of sources, but was co-ordinated and directed by Dent and Coles Child.¹¹⁷ Plans for a railway, 'as projected by certain landowners of the county of Kent'¹¹⁸ were first discussed in the town in January 1851, at a specially convened Vestry meeting of all owners and occupiers of land. Landowners in the area were to provide the capital and financial security, but three years after the completion of the line, the parish was to contribute to the line's upkeep. Out of the 42 present at the meeting, only a handful objected to the proposal, arguing that the line would bring a 'heavy and unjustifiable burden' upon the parish.¹¹⁹ The vast majority agreed with Robinson Latter, solicitor and Vestry Clerk, that, 'this Vestry feels the necessity of a Railway for the advantage of this town, and therefore assents to the principle of the proposed Rate-in-aid.'¹²⁰

Coles Child's role in the matter was ambiguous and at first sight contradictory. As a Director of the South-Eastern Railway Company (SER), he helped block a scheme to construct a line from Lewisham to Bromley, resulting in the withdrawal of the respective Bill from Parliament in June 1854. The reasons for his objections are unclear, as indeed are the motivations and dealings of other members of the South-Eastern Board. At a meeting on 16 March 1854, it had been officially minuted that 'the majority of the Directors considered it advisable to submit to you [the shareholders] the propriety of constructing a Branch Railway from Lewisham to Bromley.'¹²¹ By September, the Board were talking of 'great differences of opinion' that had been expressed by Directors at this self-same meeting, particularly by those worried about

¹¹⁵ Census Returns, 1851-71: 1851 Census of Great Britain - Enumerators' Return for the Parish of Bromley (BPL); 1861 and 1871 figures given by E.L.S.Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 50

¹¹⁶ J.M.Rawcliffe, in F.M.L.Thompson (ed), *op.cit.*, pp.35-38

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Vestry Minutes* 23 Jan. 1851

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*.E. Bilke and Colonel Long of Bromley Hill were the only two major landowners to raise objections at this time

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *South-Eastern Railway Minute Book*, General Meetings, No.3, 1851-54, meeting of 16 March 1854.

serious pecuniary difficulties.¹²² As a Director of the company, Coles Child may well have agreed that the line proposed was 'not the best, either for the company or the public';¹²³ alternatively, he may have feared either the disruption or the potentially embarrassing amount of compensation due to him if the proposed scheme was pushed through.

Whatever the individual motives may have been, the SER was reluctant to fund new projects because of existing commitments and the relatively insecure financial climate.¹²⁴ However, Coles Child soon came round to the way of thinking of landowners as personified by John Nokes.¹²⁵ In April 1856, he gave his seal of approval to the plans laid down at the inaugural meeting of the Mid-Kent (Bromley to St. Mary Cray) Railway Company.¹²⁶ Under the leadership of William Dent, its Chairman, the Company sought to prepare agreements with the West End & Crystal Palace Railway Company and the East Kent Railway Company to link Bromley with neighbouring lines.¹²⁷

Ironically, it was partly due to Coles Child's involvement in inducing the support of local landowners that the Mid-Kent scheme came to fruition. By October 1858, the first trains were running into Bromley Station at Masons Hill.¹²⁸ For his part, Coles Child had been compensated in full for land lost, in addition to gaining 600 shares in the Company valued at £10 each.¹²⁹ He had also used his influence to relocate the station originally sited near the Market Place, and required the line to be built upon brick arches where it traversed the southern part of his estate. In 1864, he was further recompensed with a seat on the Mid-Kent Board of Directors.¹³⁰ Significantly, Child's apparent change of heart had been animated by a *locally* based company with mainly *local* support. By 1858, receipts from most lines in England were falling, discouraging further investment. Local landowners and businessmen, conversely, rallied to the cause, persuaded by the likes of Messrs. Latter, the solicitors,

¹²² *Ibid.*, meeting of 7 Sept. 1854

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ In *South Eastern Railway - Position and Projects'* (1845-6), a report by the SER Directors, the latter were at pains to point out that they had already made an outlay of over £4,000,000 on existing building work. At this time, their proposals *did* include a line from Lewisham to Maidstone via Bromley, but as it later proved, other commitments took priority. Clearly, promoting any railway line was an expensive business, as suggested by the SER Minutes of 7 Sept. 1874 which reveal that Parliamentary and legal expenses for all their proposals between 1845 and 1853 had cost £479,711.

¹²⁵ J.M.Rawcliffe, *op.cit.*

¹²⁶ *BR* May 1856

¹²⁷ *Mid-Kent Railway Company, Minutes of Proceedings*, Vol.1, 1856-64, minutes of 11 April 1856

¹²⁸ J.L.Filmer, 'Bromley Palace & Coles Child', *BLHS* No.5 (1980)

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

of the need to improve Bromley's prosperity at a time when nearby towns such as Croydon, Lewisham, Woolwich and Greenwich had already been linked to the capital. It was indicative of the widespread nature of support for the line that few dissenting voices to the final scheme were recorded; even these were subsequently appeased through special agreements or compensatory payments.

After 1863 there were intermittent attempts to bring a new railway line to Bromley, linking the northern part of the town with Charing Cross via Grove Park.¹³¹ The main promoter of the scheme, the People's Freehold Land Society, was confronted with disinterest on the part of the SER and disfavour from Sir Samuel Scott, whose land the line would traverse.¹³² In practice, the procrastinators were not inseparable since Scott was a Director of the SER and recognised the potential dangers of competition from another line. For their part, the townsmen who backed the Bill for the Bromley Direct Company to build the line, tried to allay suspicions, 'While the line could afford to the town a great boon, it would do no damage to Mr. Scott's estate and injure neither ornamental or residential property.'¹³³ The opening of the line finally came in 1878, by which time support for a faster commuter service to Charing Cross had intensified. At this time, landowners like Samuel Scott's heir Sir Edward Henry Scott were behaving less belligerently, perhaps recognising as the House of Lords Committee had done back in 1863, that 'the letting and selling value of land is in general greatly increased by its having advantage of easy access to railways.'¹³⁴ The initial route of the line had been diverted after negotiations with Sir Edward Henry Scott, and the subsequent railway was made to run along the borders of the Sundridge Park estate. Land prices in the area immediately rose and the Scott family reaped their financial rewards through the residential development of their estate.¹³⁵ To cap it all, Sir Edward Henry Scott had an additional station, *Sundridge Park*, built close to his mansion, only 300 yards from the main *Bromley North* station itself, in order that he might find it more convenient to mix with London society. On several occasions, the Prince of Wales was known to have come down to the new station in order to enjoy game-shooting on the Sundridge Estate.¹³⁶

¹³¹ See various reports in *BR* 1863-1873

¹³² *BR* April 1874

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Quoted in F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 256. Until at least 1841, the Scott family had shown little interest in developing their land, occupying 86% of it themselves (1841)

¹³⁵ *BR* Jan. 1878

¹³⁶ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op. cit.*, p. 313

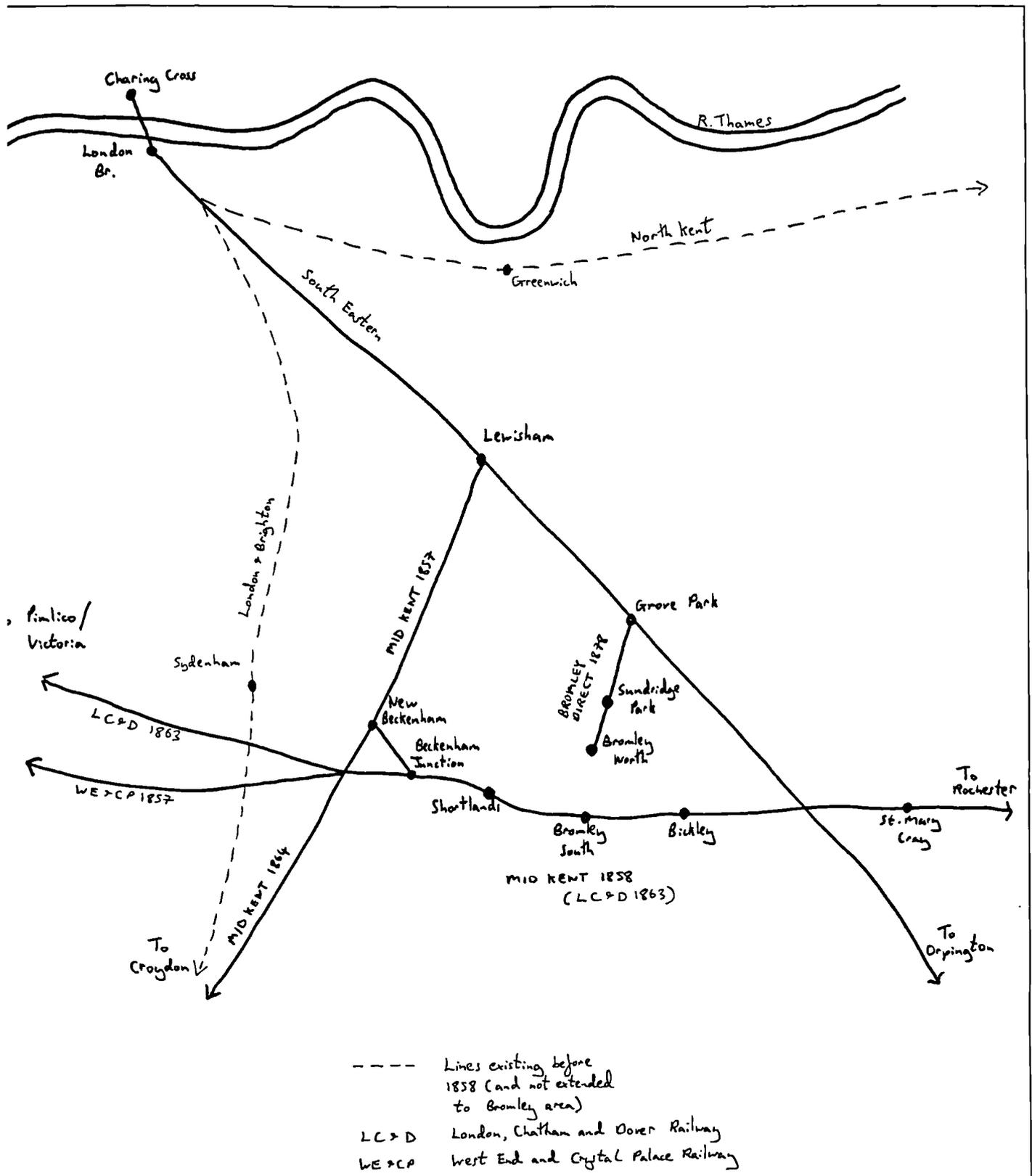


Figure 2.8 Map showing Railway Lines in Environs of Bromley, 1857-78.
 (Source: Redrawn from J.M. Rawcliffe - not to scale)

The expansion and urban development of Bromley that followed in the wake of the railways¹³⁷ resulted in new threats and challenges to the owners of landed estates. George Wythes and William John Coles Child were two landowners less anxious to resist these pressures, particularly if they were given the opportunity to exploit them financially. In so doing, they often brought upon themselves the wrath of those who wished to see the peaceful rustic tranquillity of a once quaint market town preserved. To these 'romantics', tradition was being overturned by such acts as the stopping of footpaths by landowners with no pedigree among the local community.¹³⁸ *Private* property, which in certain cases had by ancient custom also been for *public* enjoyment, gradually came into the hands of developers seeking to feed the demands of a rapidly rising population. An ever-larger number of landed estates surrendered to the boom in residential development. The gradual disappearance of 'settlement by entail', by which land was settled on persons successively and could not be bequeathed at pleasure, made the sale of land all the easier. In Bromley, 'Plaistow Estate' was sold off in the late 1850s and early 1860s; 'Bromley House Estate' in 1865; 'Bromley Lodge Estate' in 1872; and 'South Hill Estate' in 1878.¹³⁹ Some of the larger properties were sold at London auctions, attracting investors from outside the local area. Upon these old estates, a mass of building programmes was effected, giving rise to a number of new parishes. Observers such as the Bromley-born H. G. Wells were left in no doubts about the effects of 'a mindless, wasteful, anarchy which was suburbia' when he fictionalised the growth of New Bromley in *The New Machiavelli* (1911),

The outskirts of Bromstead were a maze of exploitation, roads that led nowhere, that ended in tarred fences studded with nails...It was a multitude of uncoordinated fresh starts, each more sweeping and destructive than the last, and none of them ever really worked out to a ripe and satisfactory completion.¹⁴⁰

Some elements of urbanisation were even less attractive. The major issue about which landowners and townspeople appeared concerned in the late 1860s and 1870s was that of the draining of sewage.¹⁴¹ It threatened to break any existing alliances between or within the landowning and middle classes. Some of the debates on the question were as distasteful as the subject matter itself. Most people wanted to get rid

¹³⁷ See F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *op. cit.* (1982), p. 19 and 34 for the rapid expansion of the town after the coming of the railway

¹³⁸ The issue of stopping or moving 'public' footpaths raised its head in the 1860s as estates began to be broken up for residential development. On the whole, the vestry agreed to most of the changes

¹³⁹ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 40ff; *History of Baxter, Payne and Lepper 1760-1985*, a booklet produced by the estate agents with that name (undated)

¹⁴⁰ H. G. Wells, *New Machiavelli* (1911), pp.44-45

¹⁴¹ For further detail on this, see Chapter Five, pp. 185ff

of the material but very few were willing to discard it anywhere near their own property. The actions of Coles Child over the affair were peculiarly distinct from the response of Bromley's other major landowners.¹⁴² He persistently resisted the Local Board's ideas on drainage, and was equally determined the town should adopt *his* schemes. Perhaps surprisingly he advocated a plan to drain the sewage onto his own land close to his place of residence, a move he hoped would prevent a costly public scheme at the same time as providing his own farmland with nutritious irrigation. He even went to the trouble of experimenting with the use of sewage tanks financed out of his own pocket.

Bromley's Lord of the Manor was by no means alone in his objection to the Board's drainage schemes, although he appeared to be the only landowner proposing his own ideas. Major Boyd of Plaistow Lodge, on finding that the initial proposals of 1869 would carry the sewage next to his estate, threatened the Board with legal action for devaluing land he planned to sell for building purposes.¹⁴³ Fears of this and other 'nuisances' that might arise from the town's drainage plans led George Warde Norman to employ the legal services of Frederick Henry Norman (no relation) at a Local Government Enquiry on the issue.¹⁴⁴ The Norman family continued to fight the potentially costly plans of the Board, until in December of 1874 George Warde agreed to lease, though not sell, 90 acres of his land at Crofton (near Orpington) for 31 years, to act as a sewage outfall for the town. Six months later, he lent his weight behind a campaign to develop the more widespread and cost-effective West Kent Scheme, which eventually proved more popular and relatively undemanding on the rates.

The introduction of the railway and the subsequent expansion in buildings and amenities had far-reaching effects on the value of land in the town. The land assessments of 1841 and 1873 reveal marked changes in these values, given in the form of 'rent charge' in the case of the first survey and estimated yearly rental for the latter. As such, a reasonably accurate picture of the land's financial worth in the middle of the last century emerges (see Figure 2.9). Even though the surveys measured different values, in relative terms there was a marked decline in the value of land on the large *rural* estates when compared to the smaller, *urban* plots. In 1841 the average annual 'rent charge' for landholdings was just above five shillings per acre.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² *BR* Sept. 1869, pp. 125-127

¹⁴³ *BR* May 1869, p. 97

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ The rent charge replaced the tithe and was based on the level of tithes paid between 1829-35. In practice tithes *in kind* had already been superseded by money payments, but these represented less than 10% of the actual value of the land. Arable and pastoral land were valued at similar rates, below that of houses and gardens, but well above woodland

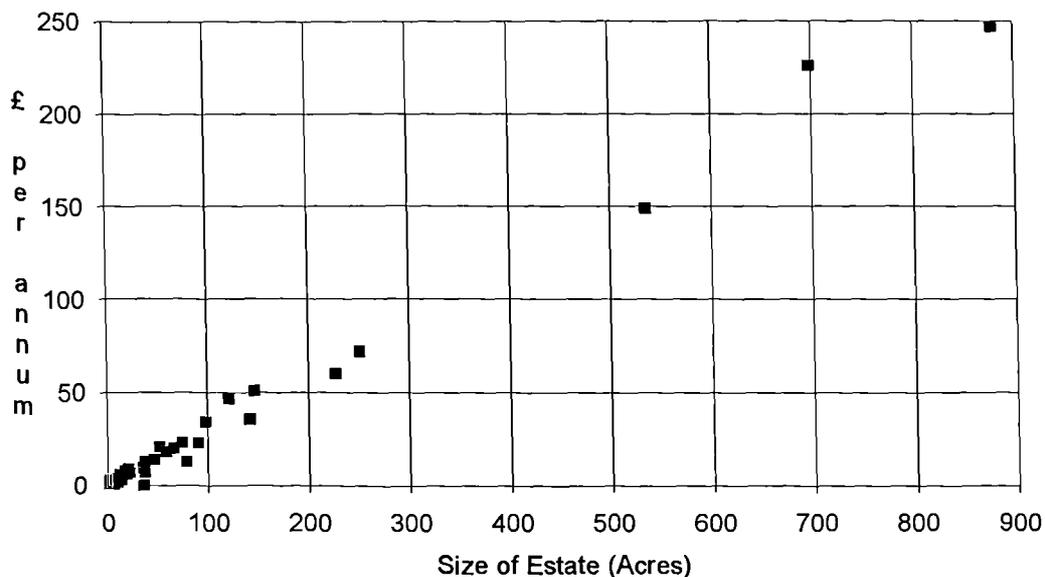


Figure 2.9 Value of Estates 1841 - Rent Charge Per Annum
(Source: 1841 Tithe Commutation)

However, some of the smaller holdings were assessed at over £1 per acre, suggesting that they made relatively higher payments *in lieu of* tithes. By 1873 the differentials between small and large 'estates' had mushroomed: whilst the largest holdings - agricultural holdings or commodious dwellings with extensive grounds - tended to be below the average of £8 per acre, smaller properties were often valued at £160 or more (see Figure 2.10 and 2.11). This must have had devastating effects on the attractiveness of larger estates. Indeed, only estates that had already been developed by 1873 were assessed at a high rental value: George Wythes' 'villa kingdom', for instance, was valued at £20 per acre compared with George Warde Norman's land at just £2 per acre and Sir Edward Henry Scott's, at £3 per acre. The late 1860s, then, suggests itself as a decisive turning point in the development of land values and land utilisation.

In 1873 there were thirteen cases where rental values of land exceeded £150 per acre. Easily the highest estimated rental was produced by the Bromley Gas Consumers Company, at over £1,600 for a mere three acres of land. Business concerns that supplied the amenities for the town and beyond were guaranteed high financial returns, helping to explain the correspondingly high rental assessments. Less apparent

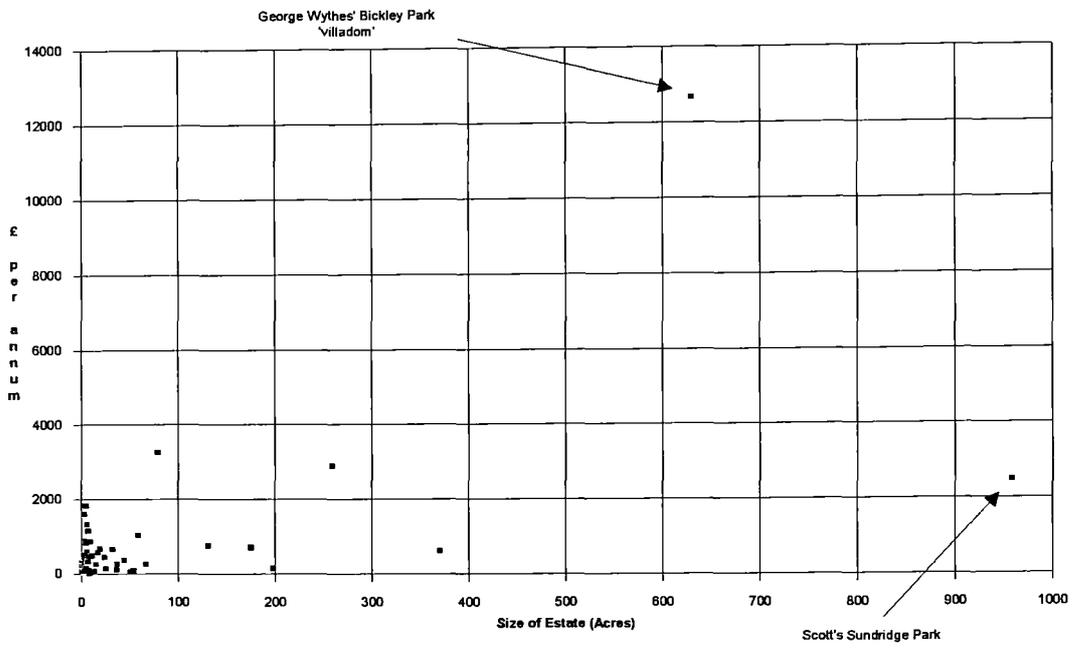


Figure 2.10 Value of Estates - Estimated Gross Rental 1873
(Source: 1873 'Domesday' Return)

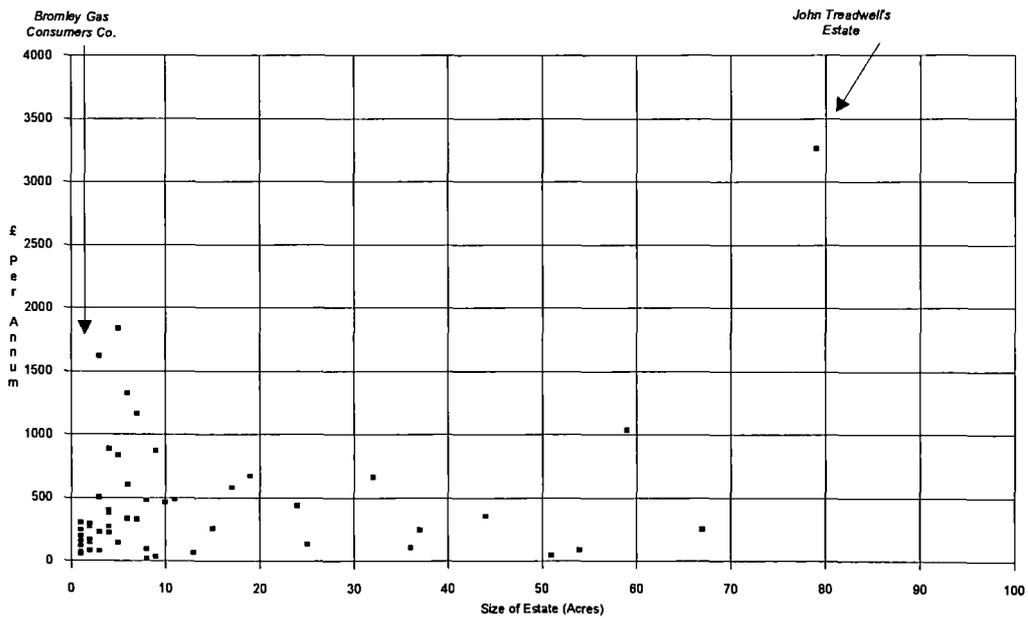


Figure 2.11 Value of Estates Between 1 and 100 Acres - Estimated Gross Rental 1873
(Source: 1873 'Domesday' Return)

are the reasons for the high values associated with the other twelve 'top' cases. The majority were close to the town centre but not nearer than half a mile, with the exception of two properties on the High Street itself. Advertisements that appeared in local newspapers and catalogues held by local estate agents support the attraction, and hence high valuation, of land that was ripe for development (see the rental value of John Treadwell's Estate in Figure 2.11).¹⁴⁶ The whole of the South Hill Estate was sold off in lots in 1878 at about £600 per acre, expressly for *building* purposes. At the same time farmland on the southern borders of the town was fetching little above £80 per acre, not a great deal more than the £50 required to purchase a small plot for a *single* house at Bromley South. By 1873 Bromley could boast exceedingly high land values. The average yearly rental for the town was 60% higher than the national average, and 20% higher than for Kent. Even if there were few people willing to buy up and farm existing large estates, there were clearly plenty of customers for the spacious middle-class homes, and no shortage of investors in urban development. Common amongst these 'clients' was the recognition of the value of their investment. Here also were the estate developers, the speculators and those who ploughed money into facilities to improve the town's infrastructure.¹⁴⁷ Unlike the traditional landowners, they sought more than a mediocre 3% return upon their investment.

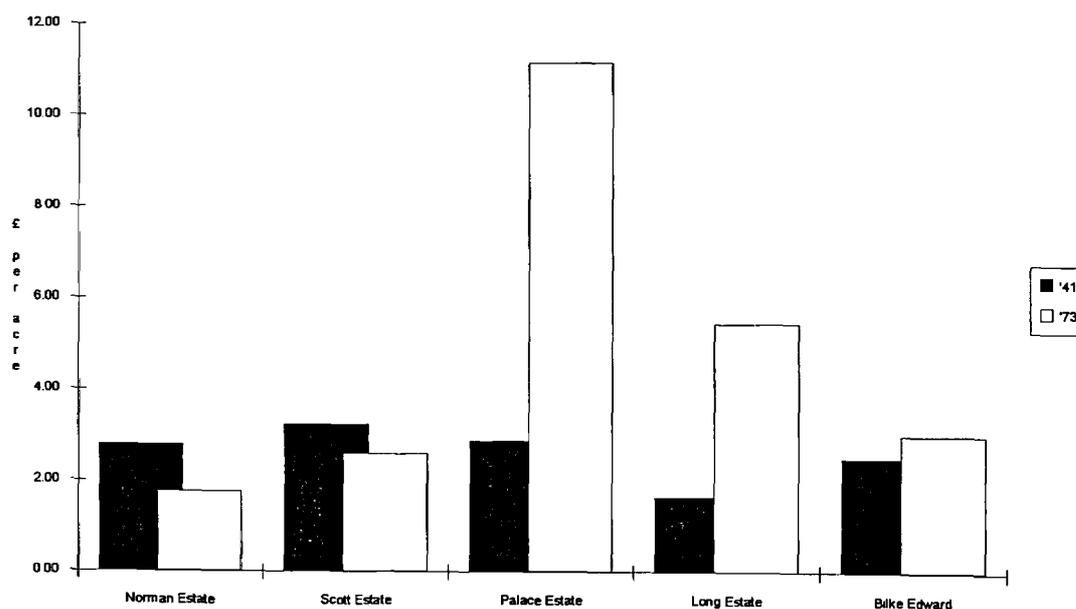


Figure 2.12 Estimated Value of 'Surviving' Estates, 1841-73
 N.B. 1841 measured 'rent charge', 1873 estimated rental income.
 (Source: 1841 Tithe Commutation and 1873 'Domesday' Return).

¹⁴⁶ *History of Baxter, Payne and Lepper, op. cit.*

¹⁴⁷ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p.53

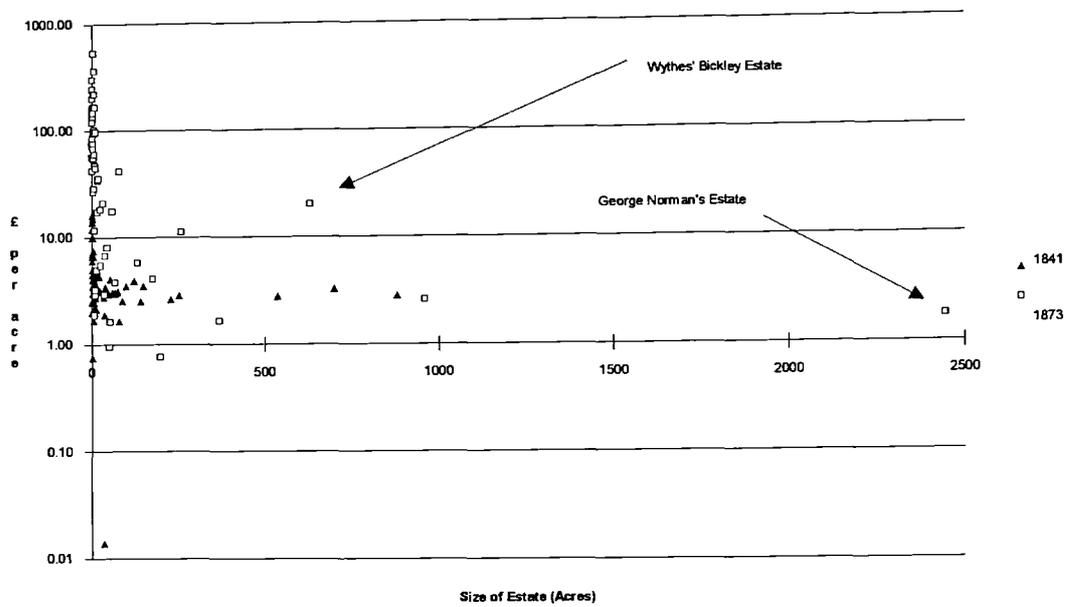


Figure 2.13 Estimated Rental Value of Estates, 1841 and 1873, on a Logarithmic Scale (Source: 1841 Tithe Commutation and 1873 'Domesday' Return).

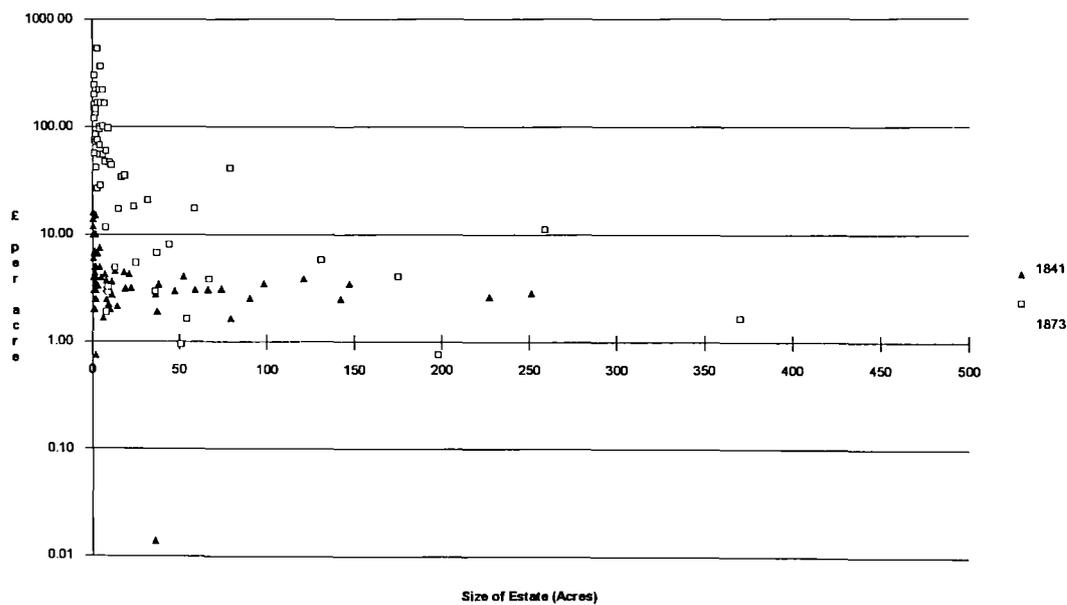


Figure 2.14 Estimated Rental Value of Estates up to 500 Acres in Size 1841 and 1873, on a Logarithmic Scale (Source: 1841 Tithe Commutation and 1873 'Domesday' Return)

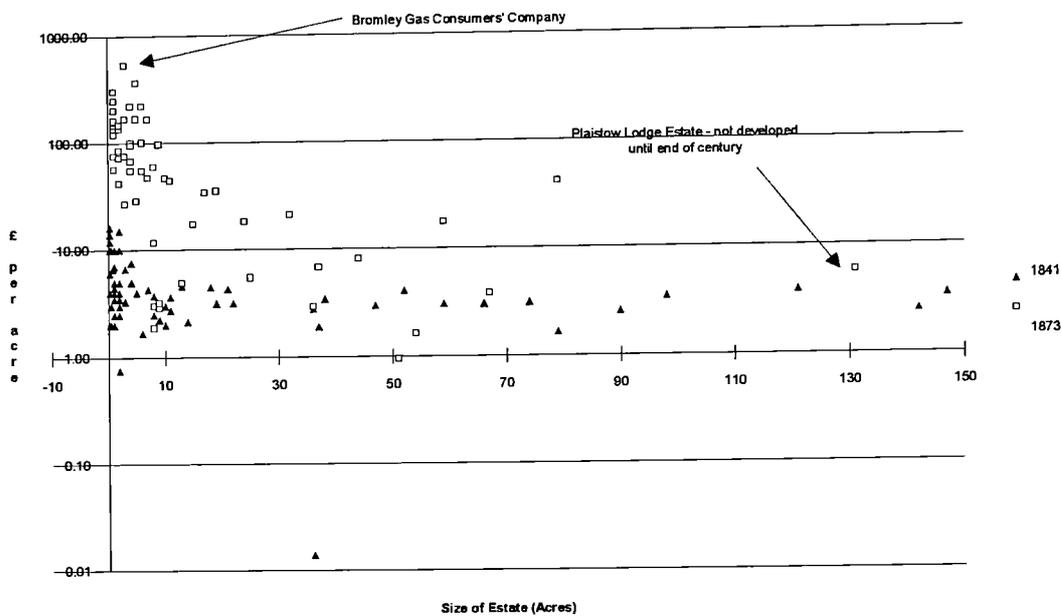


Figure 2.15 Estimated Rental Value of Estates up to 150 Acres in Size 1841 and 1873, on a Logarithmic Scale (Source: 1841 Tithe Commutation and 1873 'Domesday' Return)

In comparing the Bromley situation with national trends and developments in other localities, a similar picture emerges. In England and Wales between 1850 and 1873, it became increasingly difficult for landowners to maintain agricultural rent levels.¹⁴⁸ In the same period, non-agricultural rents rose more than three times faster than general prices.¹⁴⁹ The Bute farm holdings in Wigtown, Dumfries, fetched only five shillings per acre in 1883 compared with £5 for their Glamorgan estate, much of which had been leased for urban development.¹⁵⁰ The value of the land owned by the Earls of Dartmouth covered an even wider range, that of ten shillings per acre in Sussex compared to £80 in Middlesex.¹⁵¹ The Earls were also able to take advantage of the family's property in Lewisham which by the 1880's had become especially valuable as building land and afterwards became progressively more lucrative. Elsewhere, the trustees of the Scarisbrick estate in Southport found that although the rack-rents gained from agricultural land made up nearly 45% of their total income in 1881, new building leases were taking an ever-sizeable proportion of their total income. By 1901, these leases had replaced rack-rents as the primary source of income, raising £50,000 per annum.¹⁵² Whether all landowners recognised, or perhaps were able or willing to recognise, the advancing tide of urban rents, is difficult to

¹⁴⁸ F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 308

¹⁴⁹ H. Perkin, *op. cit.*, p. 416

¹⁵⁰ J. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 19

¹⁵¹ R. Trainor, 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier' in D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 76

¹⁵² J. Liddle, *op. cit.*, p. 143

ascertain. Did they appreciate the full extent of the financial implications? Might some of them have hoped for a recovery in agriculture after the 'depression' of the 1870s and 1880s, rejuvenating the so-called 'golden years' of the mid-century?

Hopes and desires were one thing, the precise role of a landowner another. For landowners across the nation, there was certainly more to the landed estate than mere economic value. Ownership of land had been one of the fundamentals behind English society and politics, and the place of the landowner at the head of this society had rarely been challenged. In the mind of Adam Smith, writing back in the late eighteenth century, only a landowner was competent and disinterested enough to be given responsibility for the general welfare of society.¹⁵³ For centuries the landed interest had been vital for political and social stability. By providing the main livelihood for most commercial and professional people, landowners maintained their control of local economies. The rise of the middle classes from the eighteenth century onwards - which initially took place in the industrial and commercial sector - began to challenge their local autonomy. With the gradual urbanisation of society, which itself altered the foundations of the landowners' power, a number of factors emerged to define their new role in the local community. The number of large landowners in a district may well have been significant, as well as the size, location, distribution and antiquity of landed estates. Financial circumstances and affiliations to business also played a part, as did political loyalty. Then there was the degree of absenteeism or involvement with county - as opposed to parish - affairs which substantially affected relations with the local community. Finally, individual quirks or accidents of birth and death may well have been decisive factors¹⁵⁴ - including the gender of one's offspring - although individual circumstances were often over-ridden by pressure exerted from outside agencies such as government institutions or private companies.

In most towns, the parish gentry were able to take advantage of new developments and increase the scope for 'rural' patrician influence on urban life. They played upon divisions amongst the middle classes of the towns, and long after 1850

¹⁵³ A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Oxford, 1905 edn.), I, p. 263

¹⁵⁴ For some of these factors I am indebted to the works of D. Cannadine and R. Roberts in D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 7 and p. 206

still continued to gain undue respect and credit for social improvements.¹⁵⁵ Individually, landowners had financial backing far in excess of most middle class gentleman. Gradually, enlarged debts, falling incomes from land, and sales of estates weakened their means of securing deference and led to an abdication of their traditional paternal role. However, even after selling off huge areas of land, landowners still felt that they might exercise 'control' of the local community. This was particularly the case if they secured that community's gratitude for releasing land in order to improve the town's commercial prospects. Liddle has suggested that landowners traded their social and political power for financial success and profits,¹⁵⁶ although it is hard to see how lesser *country* gentry would have had the opportunities to accomplish this. Judging from Rubinstein's research, in 1880 landowners were still the wealthiest members of society.¹⁵⁷ However, by the end of the century, it seems that they had been superseded by financiers from the City. Instead, the landed aristocracy and gentry took on a more symbolic role in the form of Parliamentary honours, company directorships or Vice-Presidencies of local clubs and societies. The 'liquidation of the landed interest' as it is referred to by F. M. L. Thompson,¹⁵⁸ supports Wiener's conclusion that 'land had ceased being a major source of wealth and the country house was now valued more as a symbol of ancestry than of economic power.'¹⁵⁹

Similarly, the landed classes had once dominated the political stage of the nation. In the 1830s, they comprised three-quarters of the House of Commons and all of the House of Lords; by 1900, only one-third of the Commons were landed, and peerages were granted on the grounds of wealth and service rather than simply landed property or birth.¹⁶⁰ Perkin has argued that this domination seeped down to the parish level, where 'close vestries' were operated by large property-owners, especially owners of *landed* estates.¹⁶¹ Often this local landed elite resisted interference from central government, and at best acted in an ambivalent manner when confronted with reforms in aid of education, the poor and the insane.¹⁶² From the 1830s, an assortment of commissioners and inspectors fuelled the fears of local authorities by their potentially costly demands, as threatened by the introduction of the new Poor Law of 1834. By its potential to reduce the arbitrary powers of the local gentry who had previously controlled the relief of the poor, the Act aroused both fear and resentment amongst the

¹⁵⁵ J. Liddle, *op. cit.*, p. 146

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ W. D. Rubinstein, *op. cit.* (1986)

¹⁵⁸ F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 269ff

¹⁵⁹ M. J. Wiener, *op. cit.*, p. 66

¹⁶⁰ D. C. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 396

¹⁶¹ H. Perkin, *op. cit.*, p. 40

¹⁶² D. Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (1979), p. 147

landed classes. Yet in practice centralisation did not automatically signify a reduction in the influence and power of local landed elites. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, for example, incorporated the landowning magistrates into its administration system firstly as *ex officio* members - with multiple votes in the Board of Guardian elections - and secondly as Chairmen of the Boards themselves. On the more directly political level, landowners certainly did suffer later in the century with the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884-1885, the Secret Ballot Act of 1872 and the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883.

Along with the power and influence that was invested in landowners and their traditional ecclesiastical allies, came the responsibility of paternal stewardship. The more insensitive of them might abuse their positions, although D. Roberts has suggested that the gentry, as opposed to the aristocracy, epitomised the image of the benevolent patriarch:

For a more personal and intimate paternalism of land, one must turn to those model country gentlemen, those exemplary squires, who showed a loving care for that most viable of paternalistic units, the small estate in which all tenants and labourers and their wives and children look up to the squire as the father of the parish.¹⁶³

In the first half of the century the gentry were very closely involved in directing the behaviour, vitality and well-being of the community. They took the lead in setting up local volunteer militias, establishing country banks, providing relief for the parish poor and in subsidising Anglican churches and schools. As towns expanded they continued to supply welfare to their 'charges', but in addition patronised sports clubs, friendly societies, hospitals, dispensaries and reading rooms. Their grounds were opened up to 'selected' members of the public for social functions such as teas and picnics, especially in aid of the Established Church.¹⁶⁴ Great publicity and feasting accompanied celebratory events like a marriage or attaining the age of majority, whilst long corteges mourned the death of members of a landed gentleman's family. The gentry appeared to be more attached to their local society than their aristocratic counterparts who mixed in London and the great country houses.¹⁶⁵ With the onset of the railways, however, local ties became less important. Ironically, the opportunity for greater mobility and travel affected the upper classes as much as it did the working classes, and it may well have been that Sir Edward Henry Scott was more amenable to

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 136

¹⁶⁴ G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 185

¹⁶⁵ D. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 257

the building of the Bromley Direct Railway than his father, because of the resulting ease of access to the social circle of the Prince of Wales.

Many of the social functions that landowners encouraged in both urban and rural districts existed to establish and maintain harmony in the local community. Such functions took various forms, from the Agricultural Association ploughing match that attempted to bridge the divide between landlord and tenant farmer, to the annual cricket match between estate employees and the leading tradesmen of the town. The fact that such events were only held annually was symptomatic of the limitations upon *direct*, informal contact between social classes. Some activities were socially exclusive, such as the shooting of game that became increasingly popular amongst landowners from the late 1850s. Compared to game-shooting, fox-hunting was less contentious, serving to link landowners with those townsmen who could afford the expense incurred. In this way bankers, brewers, doctors, clergy and even tradesmen entered into the 'society' centred on the landlord's estate.¹⁶⁶

No serious discussion of a landowner's place in his local society should ignore the role and impact of women. Although women's rights over property were ill-defined and restricted, there were still many women farmers and a number of 'ladies' who held considerable amounts of land during the nineteenth century. Later in the century, the wives and daughters of country and urban gentry began to dominate the social scene, although as early as the 1840s, Disraeli had commented about the social influence of 'ladies', '...who think you govern the world by what you call your social influences: asking people once or twice a-year to an inconvenient crowd in a house...'¹⁶⁷

In London, middle-class and upper-class 'society' of the mid- to late- Victorian era was controlled and formalised almost entirely by women.¹⁶⁸ Through their activities, social events became a highly effective means of linking family life with public life, allocating 'places' and 'positions' in the local community. In Bromley, there is little evidence available to quantify the force of these relationships. Certainly, it was not simply through teas, balls and entertainments that women made their mark. Not content with the less-inspiring habits of letter-writing, music and fancy needlework, many 'ladies' sought direct involvement with local schools, first aid, the distressed and the poor.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 181

¹⁶⁷ B. Disraeli, *Sybil or The Two Nations* (1845), p. 215. Here Disraeli is outlining his own feelings, through the character Egremont

¹⁶⁸ See L. Davidoff, *op. cit.* (1973) for a fuller discussion of this development

¹⁶⁹ G. E. Mingay, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 176

In the economic sphere, estates provided substantial local employment, from the land agent down to the agricultural labourer. At any given time, the landowner's contribution to the local economy varied with location and the degree of dependence upon him. Often, this took the form of financial subservience since considerable numbers of landowners supplied credit to set people up in trade, business or a profession.¹⁷⁰ Such examples add greater weight to those who see nineteenth century estates as units of *production* as opposed to simply expressions of prestige.¹⁷¹ As sources of economic wealth and influence, which Cannadine has gone as far to say helped landowners keep townspeople in the 'hollow of their hands', their very nature had to be adapted later in the century.¹⁷² Attacks on property rights and privileges, agricultural depression, falling returns and pressures from intensified urbanisation persuaded many landowners to forsake their heritage and regard ownership of land in a new light. Land remained an economic asset, but essentially for its 'development' value. Hence the old economic ties with local society were gradually broken, fragmented or secured on a less intimate basis.

With landowners increasingly exploiting the commercial possibilities of their estates, it might be difficult to appreciate Wiener's viewpoint about the continued predominance of 'rustic values' and the 'rural past'.¹⁷³ Did the values of the landed gentleman infiltrate the rest of society such that they urged the commercial and industrial middle classes to strive for gentility and respect rather than profit? Wiener's dependence upon literary evidence, especially that which ensued from the 'romantic' movement, leads to his conclusion about a 'culture of containment' whereby the landed classes 'contained' the new economic forces that emerged with the industrial revolution. The public school is highlighted as the central instrument of this process, with little value apportioned to either commerce or industry.¹⁷⁴ Since the middle classes too aspired to the academic heights of Eton and Rugby in the nineteenth century, at least in Wiener's eyes, they presumably adopted similar ideals to their landed role-models.

Before accepting or rejecting Wiener's thesis, caution needs to be taken over chronology. D. Coleman has shown that up until 1870, very few public schoolboys went into business. Nevertheless, by the turn of the century, even though public

¹⁷⁰ R. Trainor, *op. cit.*, p. 70

¹⁷¹ F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 191

¹⁷² D. Cannadine in D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*

¹⁷³ M. J. Wiener, *op. cit.*, p. 47 and p. 93

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11

schools neglected to offer commercial education, the proportion of 'business' school-leavers had greatly increased.¹⁷⁵ This alone does not refute Wiener's argument, since it could be countered that the public school domination of company directorships contributed to England's relative economic decline. The classic image of a 'gentleman', for instance, is certainly not the ideal required for successful industrial capitalism.¹⁷⁶ Even though there were numerous incidences of close contact between landed gentlemen and the wealthy middle classes,¹⁷⁷ cultural influence between the two proved to be more than a one-way process. Instead, values were exchanged, adopted, adapted and even lost in a complex series of relationships. To some degree, this had always been the case since 'classes' in English society had rarely been mutually exclusive. Is it therefore correct to talk of either a 'gentrification of the bourgeoisie' or a 'bourgeoisisation of the gentry'? A decade before Wiener, Perkin had written about the domination of the industrial bourgeoisie, and how they had managed to mould society in their own image.¹⁷⁸ In comparing English to German entrepreneurs between 1870 and 1914, Berghoff and Moller have argued for the preservation of the English businessman's commercial interests, who even after purchasing estates retained his 'middle-class identity and business acumen'.¹⁷⁹ It is true that men of business were awarded titles once befitting great landowners, but according to Berghoff and Moller, 'the ennoblement of business men signalled the incipient embourgeoisement of the aristocracy rather than the feudalization of the bourgeoisie'.¹⁸⁰ Although this theory may again overstate what actually occurred in practice, there is no doubting the force with which values such as morality, domesticity and thrift impinged on nineteenth century society.¹⁸¹

It is not possible to understand cultural influences without analysing the role played by religion. The existence of the aristocracy and the gentry was so closely tied to that of the Established Church, that virtually all were Anglican, with only a sprinkling of Roman Catholics and Nonconformists. Outward display of religious belief was part of their social duty as Christian stewards. The nature, extent and sincerity of their ideals varied from individual to individual. Suffice to say that historians have tended to regard the gentry as more *serious* in their worship than the aristocracy. H. McLeod, employing the words of Walter Besant in the 1850s, sees the 'suburban

¹⁷⁵ D. C. Coleman, 'Gentlemen and Players' in *EHR*, 26, 1973, p. 92ff

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ L. Davidoff, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁸ H. Perkin, *op. cit.*, p. 271ff

¹⁷⁹ H. Berghoff and R. Moller, pp. 262-287

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.276

¹⁸¹ For a fuller discussion of this development, see L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes - Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1750-1850* (1987), F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1982) *et al*

gentry' in particular as practising a multitude of religious observances which helped generate their superior social standing, 'this profession of seriousness generally belonged to a large house, beautiful gardens, rich conservatories, a large income and carriage and pair.'¹⁸² Even unbelievers amongst the gentry attended church and had their children baptised and schooled by clergymen. Attendance itself was a matter of social prestige, whilst rented pews and the 'ceremony' surrounding the arrival of a landed gentleman to the parish church helped to reinforce the divinely ordained social hierarchy. These were points not missed by Anglican middle-class individuals who aped the habits of the 'genteel'.

The decline in the social, cultural and political power of the landowning classes can be closely linked to the weakening of the Established Church. Suffering under the attacks from the Evangelical movement at the beginning of the century, and under poor attendance as revealed by the religious census of 1851,¹⁸³ the Anglican Church attempted to rejuvenate itself in the second half of the century. Yet it could only delay the onset of Nonconformist demands over education, marriage, University entrance and local church rates. In Bromley, the 'Anglican interest' on the vestry stoutly refused provision of a Nonconformist burial ground, until it was obliged to give way in 1876. One of the Anglicans' few 'successes' was the defence of the extraordinary tithe on hops and market garden products. Even this was more significant for landowners than the Church itself due to the common practice of tithe appropriation. The 'British Anti-State Church Organisation' (established in 1844) united Nonconformist opposition in a way that had never been achieved before. The easy-going 'squarson' came under critical fire for hunting game instead of shepherding his flock. By the end of the century, they had helped gain the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in all but name; for their part, the landed gentlemen had seen their role as Christian stewards slowly evaporate.

Such a trend, however, can not be isolated from changes in other areas of society such as economic, cultural and political developments already alluded to, all of which played a vital part in reducing deference to landowners. The control of society, whether urban or rural, had been effected through the age-old networks of paternalism. The basis of traditional paternalism had been the land, and the landed aristocracy resolutely defended their position at the apex of this hierarchical system. At the level of the gentry, good virtue, moral respectability, discipline and responsibility had been central to the patron's character. Members of this 'elite' had served as the unpaid local

¹⁸² From W. Besant, *South London* (1899) as quoted by H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (1974), p. 152

¹⁸³ *Papers of the House of Commons, (C.89) 1852-1853, Census of Great Britain, Religious Worship*

bureaucracy and ruled over every aspect of local life - the church, the vestry, the magistracy and the Board of Guardians (after 1834). If necessary, authority and order, so essential to the smooth operation of the system, could be maintained at quarter sessions by severe punishment. The more benevolent touch was provided through philanthropic and charitable actions that taught the middle and lower classes to appear grateful and deferential.

Nevertheless, the system was by no means uniform across the nation and was by its very nature dependent upon a 'static' society. Unless it was adapted at the local level, it failed to cope with new pressures being brought to bear after the mid-eighteenth century. New industries, new businesses, the gradual expansion of education and the expectations of greater wealth all took their toll. At the same time, the landed elite's manners and way of life were themselves being challenged by the rise of fashionable society no longer exclusively dependent upon their class. Although D. Roberts has painted a most romantic picture of the country squire and his 'loving care', he tempered this by an acknowledgement of the squire's adherence to 'the profit motive, hard bargaining, and market forces.'¹⁸⁴ When faced by the demands of the modern era, many of the 'squires' were not slow to use new laws and changes to their own advantage. Hence their domination of the Boards of Guardians - albeit in harness with farmers and tradesmen - and their manipulation of the location and regulations for railways, gas works, town halls and the like.

The preservation of paternalism was difficult in an expanding society where personal ties and relationships became decreasingly the norm. In their place emerged more formal institutions of contact and socialisation such as School Boards and Boards of Health.¹⁸⁵ Outside agencies began to fill a vacuum created partially by the landowners' depreciating resources for his own personal benevolence. F. M. L. Thompson has gone so far as to claim that the landowning classes were in fact taking less interest in the affairs of the countryside, choosing instead to employ agents whose profession was becoming more organised and expert,¹⁸⁶ where 'the roots of deference in a personally administered paternalism were being sapped.'¹⁸⁷ New urban problems, intellectual developments, the growth of a large central administration with an increasingly professional civil service unequivocally diminished paternalistic ties. By

¹⁸⁴ D. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 142

¹⁸⁵ A. J. Reid, *Social Classes and Social Relations in Britain, 1850-1914* (1992), p. 17

¹⁸⁶ For a comprehensive study of the rise of the professional middle class, see H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society - England Since 1880* (1989)

¹⁸⁷ F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 183

the end of the century, as businessmen and tradesmen became colleagues of the squire and magistrate, they inevitably became less deferential.¹⁸⁸

By studying the circumstances of particular families and individuals in Bromley, as well as the make-up of Bromley's office-holding 'elite' between 1840-1900, it is possible to analyse the accuracy and applicability of some of these statements.¹⁸⁹ At the beginning of this period, the landed patricians held the tightest grip on the local reins of power. Authority and responsibility rested primarily upon their shoulders through a monopoly of the county bench, even though their influence in both administrative and social spheres was tempered by the presence of numerous wealthy tradesmen. Their predominance, given their numbers, persisted through the 1850s and early 1860s, but by 1875 there were conspicuous signs of change. In that year, on the bench at Petty Sessions sat a manufacturer and a scientist: significantly, however, both owned land as well. The former, Charles Devas Esq. had used the money from his copper-smelting to purchase the Bromley Lodge Estate in 1868 for 14,500; whilst the scientist was none other than Charles Darwin Esq. who had retired to a relatively small estate in Downe. The bench apart, landowners were gradually having to face stiffer competition for office and influence from local 'professions' and well-to-do middle classes who were involved in finance and commerce *outside* of the town.

As far as the political situation was concerned, like most of the Home Counties Bromley was overwhelmingly Tory.¹⁹⁰ Coming under the constituency of West Kent until 1885 (returning two M.P.s) and thereafter Sevenoaks Division (one M.P.), the town's Parliamentary representatives during the nineteenth century were always major landowners. For most of the century, agricultural interests determined political allegiance and led to the rejection of the principles of free trade, initially over the Corn Laws' Repeal but more vociferously later over the call to emancipate land. George Warde Norman's own explanation for refusing to stand for Parliament was that his support for 'Free Trade' would receive only minimal backing from voters dependent upon farming.¹⁹¹ Instead he devoted much time and money to promoting the Liberal cause in the division, helping to achieve regular representation until 1859, after which

¹⁸⁸ L. Davidoff, *op. cit.*, p. 64

¹⁸⁹ This research involved a purely statistical analysis of all local institutions recorded in *Kelly's and Bush's Trade and Street Directories*, with the identities of office holders discovered after reference to minutes of institutions, census returns and a variety of miscellaneous sources

¹⁹⁰ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op. cit.*, p. 460-461; *Poll Books* for West Kent and Sevenoaks Divisions, 1830-1905

¹⁹¹ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.* (c.1857-1880), p. 255

his efforts were all to no avail as the Liberals steadily lost ground. George Warde Norman particularly resented the fact that his £100-200 expense at election time was a pittance compared to Tory magnates supplying up to ten times that figure. Until the broadening of the franchise and the end to excessive election expenditure, the Tory landed interest as represented locally by the likes of the Scotts, Kinnairds and the younger William John Coles Child, held firm. Only in 1902 did the Liberals come anywhere near to providing a major upset.

Government at the local level took the form of the Parish Vestry until 1867, when its role was superseded by the Local Board. Sitting on the Vestry in 1840 were two landowners (George Warde Norman and John Wells), Colonel Tweedy of Widmore House, two farmers, two professional persons, ten tradesmen and two builders.¹⁹² On the whole the tradesmen were successful 'producer - retailers' who in several cases owned land as well. The fact that the varied personnel co-operated well together for some time was indicative of the close ties between them. Land, and the services demanded by the owners of the land, was the bond which united them all. It was also arguably a reflection of a rather more simply structured local society which had not yet been subjected to the demands of an expanding urban middle-class. When the pressure for representation and improved facilities triggered the demise of the Parish Vestry, local government fell increasingly into the hands of professional persons and retailers. The new Local Board heralded the end of the landowner's control of local policies and decisions, even though by other means they helped frustrate schemes for new railways, educational reforms and urban improvement. Not one major landowner ever sat on the Board or its successor the Urban District Council, hence weakening the traditional alliance between the gentry and the privileged classes.

One sinecure for landowners, as far as involvement in government was concerned, was their representation on the new County Councils - whose meetings they repeatedly chaired - and their high-ranking posts in the civil service. Sir Samuel Scott epitomised such modifications in the functions performed by landed gentry. He fought in the First World War between 1914 and 1917, and after retiring from active service, became Parliamentary and Personal Military Secretary to the Secretary of State for War.¹⁹³ Where once landowners had been honoured and given peerages in recognition of their landed wealth, they were now also rewarded for public service. In 1919, for example, Coles Child jun. was knighted for services to the government abroad.¹⁹⁴ Earlier, parish gentry were placed as Chairmen of government instituted

¹⁹² This was a one-off sample of members present at a Vestry meeting in December 1840.

¹⁹³ J. L. Filmer, *op.cit.* (1979), p.15

¹⁹⁴ *Burke's Peerage* 1934, p. 536

bodies, just as Colonel Sir John Farnaby Lennard was as first Chairman of the West Kent Sewerage Board (1875). Where once the gentry had monopolised political power in the nation, they were now a subordinate administrative class. In the words of G. M. Young, writing towards the end of the Victorian age, 'the natural line of development for the gentry was to become the administrators of a State and Empire which they could no longer claim to govern as of right, advisers and leaders of a people whom they could no longer hope to rule.'¹⁹⁵

Landowners such as William John Coles Child and George Warde Norman had objected to the introduction of a Local Board, perhaps resenting the fact that they would no longer be in a position to impose their will so effectively.¹⁹⁶ After losing the reins of power in local government, Bromley landowners attempted to maintain their leverage over the social, economic and cultural institutions of the town. Until at least the end of the century they commanded the administration of poor relief through chairing the Board of Guardians. On a more personal level, they helped fund numerous schools, churches and charitable bodies. The activities of the Scott family should suffice in depicting such benevolence. Sir Samuel Scott subsidised the building of St. Mary's School in 1865, whilst his heir Edward Henry was on the committee to establish a non-denominational 'Combined British School' in 1872. The latter also contributed to the Bromley (National) Schools Enlargement Fund, provided a trust fund of £400 in consols to the Science and Art School in 1875 and sat as a governor for the endowed schools of the town until his death in 1883. During his lifetime, Sir Edward Henry Scott had, in addition, purchased a new organ for the parish church to the tune of £1000, made regular subscriptions to the Cottage Hospital and patronised local friendly societies.

Like Sir Edward Henry Scott, Bromley's other landowners took their paternal role very seriously, supporting the local Philanthropic Society for distressed tradesmen and acting as patrons for associations as diverse as the Working Men's Clubs, the Bromley Literary Institute and the Chrysanthemum Society. On their estates, the parish gentry held special Christmas dinners for their workers, as well as 'harvest homes' and festivities to celebrate the eldest son's coming of age.¹⁹⁷ At the younger Coles Child's coming of age in May 1883, estate employees were treated to a lavish dinner and each presented with a handsome bible. In return, tradesmen from the town handed Coles Child jun. a silver inkstand, claiming that the late William John Coles Child was 'the

¹⁹⁵ G. M. Young, *op. cit.* (1977), p. 166

¹⁹⁶ *BR* March 1867

¹⁹⁷ *BR* Jan. 1884 and *BR* Nov. 1994

first to take Bromley in hand and put new and vigorous life into it.¹⁹⁸ As late as 1895, Coles Child jun. was holding 'hop feasts' for his employees and friends. Only at the end of the Victorian age was there a conspicuous decline in the gentry's personal social altruism, preferring instead to lend their names and corresponding status to numerous local organisations. At the beginning of the Edwardian era, for instance, Sir Samuel Scott acted as president of various sports clubs including Sundridge Park Golf Club - opened in 1902 on land leased from his estate - and as the landlord of Bromley Cricket Club.

Their wives and daughters had also tended to adopt the philanthropic mantle, but with greater vigour in the last two decades of the century than previously. Children's teas and picnics organised by 'respectable ladies' replaced the 'harvest homes' that were more akin to the town's rural past. Not that these 'ladies' had remained inactive previously, as Mrs. Wythes involvement in local charities and Mrs. Norman's daughter's support for the successful Science and Art School in the 1870s had shown. In 1880 Lady Emilie Scott, a prominent Unionist, opened her own school at Sundridge, surviving as 'Lady Scott's' infant school well into the twentieth century. Three years later, George Warde Norman's widow lay the memorial stone to the new Church of England elementary school in Addison Road.¹⁹⁹ The philanthropic role was one to which the domesticated 'lady' of the gentry home was encouraged to adopt. It was she who had the time and disposition, it was widely felt, to care for those less fortunate than themselves. After Sir Samuel Scott had married in 1897, for example, it was left to his mother and new bride to organise festivities for the town's tradespeople and the tenants of the Scott estate. This was typical of the actions that gentry wives and daughters could perform in order to complement the paternalism as practised by male members of the family, although their philanthropic activities could also be carried out outside of men's control. Such actions also helped extend networks of paternalism to arenas that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Paternalism itself stemmed from the gentleman landowner's domination of both his family and his domestic servants. The census returns for Bromley lend an insight into the composition and characteristics of a landowner's household and help demonstrate the distinctive wealth of these individuals. The number of children - or more exactly the number of children dwelling at home - varied according to each family and each census year. In 1851, for instance, there were no children in the household of William John Coles Child (aged 38), whilst there were eight in George

¹⁹⁸ *BR* June 1883. This particular extract came from a speech made by Mr. Pocock of the Foresters Friendly Society

¹⁹⁹ *BR* April 1883

Warde Norman's (aged 57). By 1871, William John Coles Child had gained a son, whilst six of George Warde Norman's offspring had left home. The sons of the parish gentry often entered into government service, as in the case of Walter Boyd who was serving as an army captain in India in 1851. If numbers of children varied widely, one thing they had in common was affluence. In 1851, the town's five gentlemen landowners possessed 58 servants between them, performing specialised functions such as grooms, coachmen, nurse and laundry maid. At this time, it appears that servants dwelt under the same roof. As the century progressed, however, increasing segregation set in. By 1871, Norman had three gardeners, all of whom were housed in a separate building. In the same year, two of Coles Child's eleven servants lived in a lodge-house, as did five of Sir Edward Henry Scott's eight servants. It was also significant that Edward Henry himself was not recorded as resident at his Sundridge Park mansion at this time, because he was spending more and more of his time away from Bromley, his duties being performed by estate managers and bailiffs. In similar fashion, his son Samuel later relied upon the services of his cousin Lt. Col. W. V. Packe, D.S.O. of Elmfield, Bromley Common, to act as agent for the Sundridge estate. This reflected a trend towards greater landlord absenteeism, which by 1891 accounted for a complete dearth of parish gentry permanently resident in the town.

The last quarter of the century, in particular, had witnessed a dramatic decline in the gentleman landowner's ties to the land, of which increased absenteeism was just one symptom. Another was the disinterest in the farming of this land. At the time of the Parish's Tithe Commutation Survey in 1841, 90% of the land was used for agricultural purposes. By 1878 this had fallen by a third, and then half as much again by the outbreak of the First World War. Similar trends are revealed by the census returns, where in 1851 35% of all occupied males were employed in agriculture or breeding animals; by 1871 this had fallen to just 15%.²⁰⁰ In practice, both developments are symbolic of not simply the diminishing importance of farm-land, but also of the weakening economic dependence upon landowners. As the local economy changed, new social relationships began to emerge in Bromley. With the ill-effects of the agricultural depression, farmers like William Pawley, who had in the past been both an agreeable and deferential tenant, began to complain of the local gentry hunting over farmers' land.²⁰¹ In 1880, the Kentish 'Farmers' Friend' John May stood as a non-party candidate in the general election, attacking monopolistic landlords and defending the

²⁰⁰ *1851 Census, op. cit.*. 1871 Census figures have been taken from B. Taylor, 'Bromley, Beckenham and Penge, Kent Since 1750 - A Comparative Study of the Changing Geography of Three Towns on the Southern Fringe of the Metropolis' (Univ. of London, Ph.D. thesis, 1965) and J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*

²⁰¹ *BR* Nov. 1873,

rights of tenants. In his campaign, he received sympathy from local Liberals but opposition from Tories who had always claimed they were the true defenders of the agricultural interest.²⁰² Four years earlier, Sir Edward Henry Scott, a leading Conservative, had addressed the annual Agricultural Association meeting, denouncing claims that land was in the hands of a few capitalists. Instead, he countered that 70% of cultivated land was divided into farms of less than 50 acres: 'any man, by thrift and perseverance, could, if he so desired, possess himself of one of these small holdings'²⁰³ His speech in October 1877 was of a different note, regretting the termination of the Association yet celebrating its success in protecting the farming interest.²⁰⁴ Ironically, Edward Henry himself was in the process of selling off part of his land at the time. Instead it was left up to the West Kent Farmers Alliance under John May to defend the rights of landholders on such issues as grain imports, agricultural holdings and extraordinary tithes. In surrendering their agricultural interest, landowners were in fact abandoning some of their closest natural allies.

Urbanisation and the development of landed estates led to a reduction in estate employees, but indirectly created opportunities for more extensive employment. The local gentry maintained the services of surveyors, land agents, solicitors and the like. They also continued to employ labourers, domestic servants and gardeners - William John Coles Child for instance paid out up to £5000 per annum on wages - but on an ever-decreasing scale. It was not for long that landed proprietors like George Wythes of Bickley Park could boast that the committees of local Working Men's Clubs were made up of estate carpenters, bricklayers, masons, plumbers and plasterers. By the 1870's, the fragmentation of their estates had greatly boosted the building trade in the town, precipitating over twice the number of construction jobs that had existed in 1851.²⁰⁵ With the building boom came a flock of property developers, contractors and 'landlord' leaseholders who constructed and rented out housing on an unprecedented scale. Although, through their actions, the landed gentlemen had attracted these relatively new 'occupations' to the town, their means of control over this group of individuals was limited to the conditions they set for development, if indeed any were ever set. Once housing projects were complete, even landowners who retained the freehold interest rarely interfered with the activities of developers or leaseholders. Direct personal contact between the two groups, so essential for maintaining benevolent paternalism if not outright domination, had virtually disappeared by the end of the century.

²⁰² *BR* April 1880

²⁰³ *BR* Nov. 1876

²⁰⁴ *BR* Nov. 1877

²⁰⁵ *1851 Census, op.cit.*

If Bromley landowners had lost their economic power in the second half of the century, did they retain their cultural domination? Two crucial areas of cultural domination were religion and education, the former being an issue conspicuously absent in Wiener's thesis on the subject.²⁰⁶ Apart from William John Coles Child and Lord Kinnaird of Plaistow Lodge, all the major nineteenth century landowners were solidly behind the Established Church. For instance, each subscribed to the new Bromley Parsonage in 1867, and each made regular contributions to the upkeep of their nearest Anglican Church. George Wythes provided £12,000 for the building of the Church of St. George, consecrated in 1865 and a majestic focal point for his exclusive 'villa' development. In fact, on both a national and local level, without the gentry's support and finances it is unlikely that the Church of England could have resisted the Nonconformist onslaught: the notion of subdividing ancient parishes into smaller units each with its own church would certainly have been impossible without them. In Bromley, only Coles Child and Lord Kinnaird seemed to offer the Nonconformists of the town any support. William John Coles Child claimed neutrality when it came to either political and religious loyalty, and opened up his grounds for meetings of both Wesleyans and Baptists.²⁰⁷ In the case of Lord Kinnaird, his religious allegiance was less ambiguous, if not entirely behind the Dissenting cause. In 1873 he contributed towards the cost of the town's Wesleyan School Chapel, although ten years earlier he had declined an invitation to attend the opening of the new Baptist Chapel by the famous Rev. Spurgeon.²⁰⁸

In terms of education, the local gentry promoted the cause of the Anglican 'National' Schools and objected to the 1870 Act permitting the creation of non-denominational 'Board' Schools. Such a stance symbolised their commitment to an ethos of education as taught through the teaching of Christian morality and discipline. Second generation landowners like George Warde Norman and the younger Coles Child had both been through church preparatory schools before moving on to Eton.²⁰⁹ Their educational experience had thus followed the 'classical' tradition which left little room for innovation. George Warde Norman himself was later critical of the nation's traditional schooling system since he felt some of the newer practical 'training' schools

²⁰⁶ M. J. Wiener's index includes many a philosopher, artist, politician, literary figure and architect, but makes no mention of Nonconformists or the Dissenting movement, which were so influential in the formation of the ideals of the middle class

²⁰⁷ William John Coles Child's religious allegiances may be compared to his son, who adopted the more respectable and acceptable faith of the Established Church, something not uncommon amongst newly gentrified families

²⁰⁸ *BR* Aug. 1864

²⁰⁹ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 279

were more beneficial to an industrial society.²¹⁰ Other Bromley landowners also sought to extend practical education in the town, hence Sir Edward Henry Scott's involvement with the Science and Art School, primarily directed at adults. Gentry patronage of reading rooms was another means used to educate the town's working classes. Nevertheless, these were arguably exceptions which proved the rule that, on the whole, drastic educational reforms were resisted by a landowning class which saw no reason to threaten the structure of traditional society. Landed gentlemen sought to use the education system, notably public schools, to further their cultural domination, as suggested by Wiener.²¹¹ It was ironic that whilst the gentry promoted the values adopted by the public and grammar schools - and attracting the interest of the aspiring middle classes - financial difficulties later forced many of them to sell off their capacious mansions to house new educational institutions.²¹² Lord Kinnaird's *Plaistow Lodge* went this way in 1896, to be converted into the Boys' preparatory school, *Quernmore*, for the training of naval cadets.

Patronising private and charitable institutions lent to the gentry a disproportionate measure of respect given the decline in their political and economic power. They also continued to preside over civic dinners, the opening of public parks and other special ceremonies. Similar deference was bestowed upon them by the local press, particularly the *Bromley Record* which regarded itself as the most reliable and responsible recorder of local events. Throughout its existence (1858-1913), the paper devoted considerable space to the celebration of gentry affairs and business, and the glorification of their munificent benevolence. Curiously, in 'Rusticus's' adulation of the old market town's rustic heritage he placed his faith in the likes of Sir Edward Henry Scott, the very man who had begun the fragmentation of the Sundridge Park Estate! Reference has earlier been made to one of the *Record's* many obituaries of landowners, that of George Wythes, who was admired for his agricultural skills and the fulfilment of his desire for a rural retreat. In the 1880s and 1890s, the paper was particularly mournful at the passing of so many of the district's well-established landed gentlemen.

Finally, the influence of land and the rustic image was portrayed through the town's styles of architecture. At the end of the eighteenth century, Sir Claude Scott had commissioned John Nash and Humphrey Repton to design a new house and grounds at Sundridge Park. In so doing Scott created an estate with dramatic vistas centred on a Classical-style mansion, theatrically set against a wooded backdrop.²¹³ At

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ M. J. Wiener, *op. cit.*, p. 11

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 21

²¹³ K. Wilson, *Sundridge Park* (undated booklet), p. 10ff

the time it was fashionable for gentlemen's retreats to blend sublimely into a well-groomed landscape. It is difficult to gauge the magnetism which architectural styles held over the thoughts and ideals of Bromley's inhabitants, but easier to measure building imitation. The Gothic Style, so closely tied to the orthodox church through Augustus Pugin and the Oxford Movement, dictated the designs of the town's public buildings for several decades in mid-century. The new Town Hall, commissioned by William John Coles Child and constructed by his own workers in 1863, was nothing but classically Gothic in structure, being described by J. Thorne as, 'a showy red brick Gothic Town Hall, emblem of prosperity and modern gentility'.²¹⁴

Towards the end of the century the tide was turning. Child's Town Hall was being referred to as an ugly monstrosity by the *Bromley Record* and instead architects and developers were advancing a more discreet and accessible rural image through the 'rustic cottage'. Charles Norman, George-Warde's son, employed the services of the celebrated Richard Norman Shaw to add a certain 'quaintness' to The Rookery at Bromley Common by blending the house into its 'natural' environment.²¹⁵ Gentlemen from the city were being encouraged to move to a 'villa' retreat near the countryside, in homes similar to William Morris' pioneering 'Red House' (1860) in nearby Bexleyheath. These were less ostentatious and showy than their Gothic counterparts, preferring exclusivity and discreteness to grand publicity. Even workers' homes, such as those erected in New Bromley, were being classed as terraced 'cottages' to conjure up some long-lost Romantic vision of the countryside.

Many of the issues raised here beg two fundamental questions, what did Bromley landholders want from their land and were they united as a class? From the small tenant farmer to the opulent landed gentleman, there were many types of people dependent upon land and doubtless as many expectations. The largest landowners in the district dominated the lives of the people for much of the nineteenth century, although a number of factors determined their role in local affairs. The intimate detail provided by George Norman's own hand supports the notion that, for some, land was to be used primarily as a means of pleasure and public service, or so he claimed. He believed that the occupation and ownership of land was regulated by the principles of free trade, which partly explained his spirited support for the Corn Law Repeal and his associations with James and J. S. Mill.

²¹⁴ J. Thorne, *Handbook to the Environs of London* 1876, p. 61 (1970 edn.)

²¹⁵ Members of the Advanced Commercial Group of Bromley Technical College, *A Short History of the Rookery Estate and Its Owners* (unpublished)



Figure 2.16 The Town Hall in Market Square (c.1899). Built by William John Coles Child in 1868. (Source: BPL)

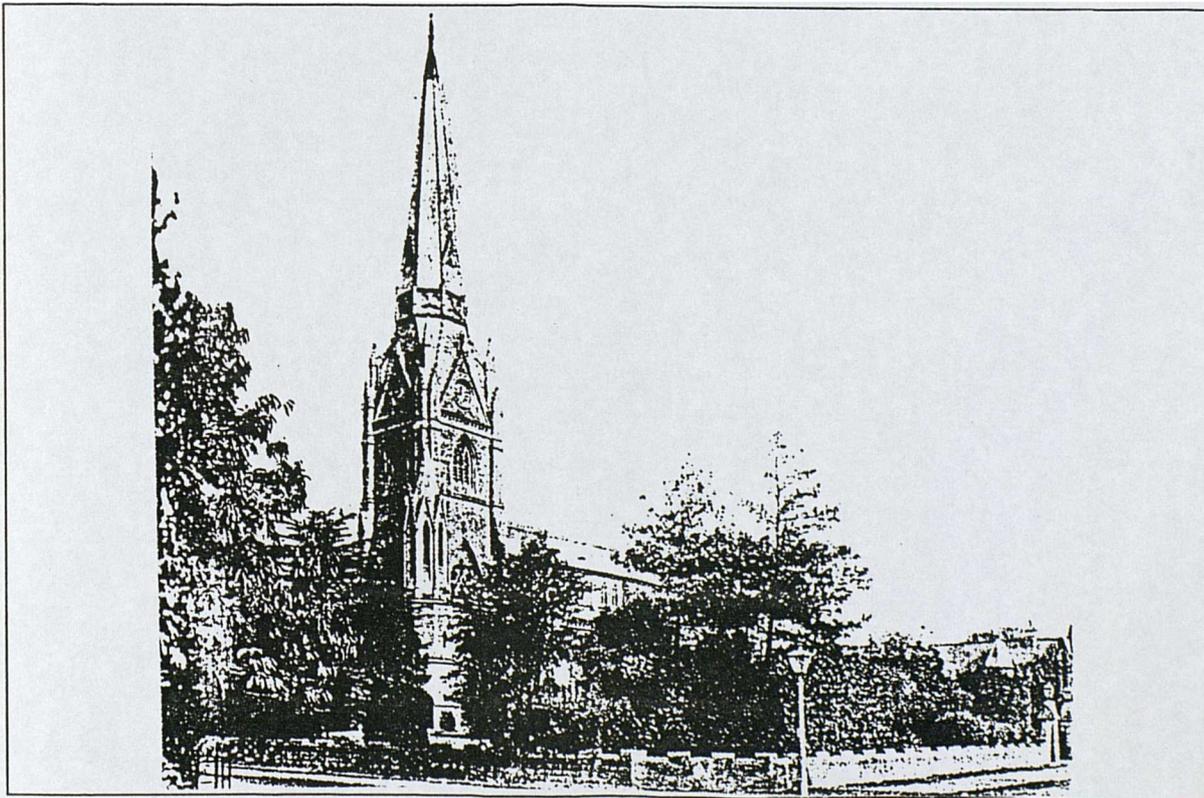


Figure 2.17 St. George's Church, Bickley. Built by George Wythes, consecrated in 1865. (Source: BPL)

A founder member of the Political Economy Club in London, Norman was more flexible than most of his local counterparts. He was one of the few to support the Poor Law Amendment of 1834, later arguing that although bogged down by certain inadequacies, it had helped prevent a 'pauper revolt' and saved the Bromley ratepayers up to £5,000 per annum. He offered no support to the demands of 'radicals', rejecting Chartist calls for universal male suffrage. His was a society constituted on the 'have and get' (his own words) principle, where those in positions of wealth and power acted as custodians and providers for those not so fortunate. Yet deep down, Norman was a sincere defender of the rights of property and objected to the ideas of Cobden and Bright: in his eyes, changes in legislation could not make *poor* people *rich*.²¹⁶

There are facets of Norman's values towards which other Bromley landowners, both of his time and later, would have been sympathetic. In particular, all felt the need to serve their local community, and by default all had the leisure time to satisfy their desires. As members of the 'gentry', they saw themselves on the one hand as independent of the aristocracy, and on the other as detached from the wage-earning middle class. Yet their lives, beliefs, actions and landed estates were not ruled by personal values alone. Firstly, there were differences in origin, in estate size and location, in length of lineage, in local reputation, and in prevailing social and economic circumstances. All the major Bromley landowners of the nineteenth century had very close ties to business, thus encouraging commercial-like qualities in the management of their estates. Only two families in 1850 could trace their local connections back to the eighteenth century, the Normans and the Scotts, and local journals paid these higher respect than more recent landed proprietors such as William John Coles Child or George Wythes. In the case of Coles Child, although he was praised for his regeneration of the manorial estate, he was also criticised at different times by diverse sections of the local people, initially over his procrastination over the railway and later for his interference over drainage projects and 'public' rights-of-way.²¹⁷ As for Wythes, he dedicated himself to the conception of an exclusive middle-class estate at Bickley, and concerned himself little with the public affairs of the town.

It is commonly accepted among social historians that it took two or three generations before a 'new' landed family could be accepted as members of the gentry.²¹⁸ This may well explain why the Scotts and Normans were more closely tied

²¹⁶ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 290ff

²¹⁷ For example, a booklet entitled *Bromley Bells* (1872) heavily criticised Coles Child's drainage plans in a very satirical manner

²¹⁸ See F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 127 *et al*

to their community than were the Wythes'. The Norman family was the only one to turn completely away from the business world, although George Warde Norman remained for forty years a Director of the Bank of England.²¹⁹ Another significant difference was that the other landowning families held on to substantial amounts of land *elsewhere*, outside of the local area: the Scotts owned 50,000 acres in Scotland and another 5,000 acres in Dorset; the Wythes had estates in Surrey, Suffolk, Essex, and Epping; and the Childs had property in London. The Norman family did have land in Hampshire and at East Peckham in Kent, but significantly they were unusual in that they consolidated and expanded their estate in the immediate locality (at Hayes, Cudham, Orpington, Bickley and of course at Bromley Common itself). This brought them into a much closer bond with the people of the district, a feature made more evident by the participation of many of the male and female family members in local affairs well into the 20th century.

The actions of Bromley's landowners, as anywhere else, could not be divorced from changes in social, economic and political circumstances. It would not be appropriate, for example, to compare the policies of Sir Edward Henry Scott (the fifth baronet.) in the 1870s with that of his great-grandfather Sir Claude Scott (the first baronet) in the 1790s. In the Napoleonic era, great fortunes could be made by those cultivating and selling grain. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, however, wheat prices may well have risen by a third, but revenue from urban rents had more than doubled, thus encouraging widespread estate development. However, as has been shown earlier, landed families acted in *contrasting* manners under the *same* prevailing climate. Even where this may have been a reflection of profound differences of motivation and vested interests, another handful of ingredients cannot be ignored, which for want of a better term may be loosely described as 'lottery' factors. Chance rather than design might play its hand, as it did in the premature death of G. E. Wythes. He had inherited his father's estate in 1883, but died just four years later at the age of 19. He had already seen his elder brother pass away in 1875, and consequently the land passed into the hands of his younger brother who for some reason ceased to reside in the town after 1892.²²⁰ Illness affected the ambitions of George Warde Norman who, with better health, would have devoted more of his time to both Bank Of England affairs and national politics.²²¹ Business decisions, themselves risky at the best of times, might lead to riches as with George Wythes' heavy investment in the Bickley Estate, or disaster as befell John Wells with the collapse of the Whitmore Banking House in 1841. Sometimes this was due to little

²¹⁹ *Dictionary of National Biography (1968)* Vol. XIV, p. 557

²²⁰ *BR* April 1883

²²¹ G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*

more than poor advice, as given to George Warde Norman who was encouraged to sell his London wharf properties less than a decade before they became the much-coveted desire of the powerful railway companies.²²²

Beneath much of historians' discussion about the activities of landowners lies the preoccupation with the notion of class. The existence of these discrete social categories infers a certain degree of homogeneity in terms of culture, values and behaviour. The landed families of Bromley sought to reinforce their position as the natural rulers of society through mixing in respectable society. This might take the form of presenting debutantes to London 'society', in the way that Lady Emilie Scott presented her daughter Annie to the Queen in May 1886. At other times, it was through marriages arranged with other families of the same class. Hence Annie Scott's marriage to Viscount Marsham, eldest son of the Earl and Countess of Romney, in June 1890. Amongst Bromley landowners themselves, common threads did prevail, as with the concept of the paternal steward. Nevertheless, although many of them mixed socially and entered into mutual congratulations at the dinners and ploughing matches of the West Kent Agricultural Association, away from *public* display they occasionally embroiled in *private* disputes. In the early nineteenth century, George Warde Norman's father had provisionally agreed to an exchange of land between himself and the Scott family of Sundridge Park: Elmstead Woods, owned by the Norman family yet adjacent to the Scotts' property, was to be traded for Hayesford Farm, part of the Scotts' land and next to the Normans' Bromley Common estate.²²³ As a gesture of goodwill, the Normans gave up the shooting of the woods in the 1840s, but were angered by the fact that the Scotts subsequently declined to invite them to shoot there. Eventually, resentful of Hayesford Farm acting as a drain upon the game of his estate, George Warde Norman offered to pay the Scotts a sum of £1,200 to complete the projected transaction. The difference in the value of the properties was to be made up in the process.

The first Coles Child achieved similar dissatisfaction in his dealings with the Scott family. In 1862 he attempted in vain to claim nine 'heriots' from Samuel Scott in respect of parts of the estate. Having raised his demands by the later 1860s, William John Coles Child finally resorted to legal action. The outcome of 28 judging sessions, held between June 1876 and October 1878, favoured Sundridge's new proprietor Sir Edward Henry Scott.²²⁴ George Warde Norman's omission in his personal accounts of any close relationships between local landowners, with the exception of that between

²²² G. W. Norman, *op. cit.* (c.1857-1880)

²²³ *Ibid.*; J. L. Filmer, *op. cit.* (1979), p. 12

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13

his own father and the ill-fated John Wells, was doubtless indicative of the situation in the second half of the century. When George Warde Norman enviously referred to 'property elsewhere' rising enormously in value, he needed to look no further than the Palace Estate of William John Coles Child, who was in the process of setting his newly-acquired asset on a more profitable footing. The latter's commercial success helped secure a solid basis for the execution of power and influence in the local community, although the authority of the parish gentry was increasingly challenged by divisions amongst themselves and by the emergence of a more self-confident middle class.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MIDDLE CLASSES - COMPOSITION

The emergence in the town of an influential middle class has led observers to assign to it the status of a classical middle-class suburb. Yet today's images are not necessarily those of yesteryear, and historians and sociologists need to tread warily when attempting to trace the roots of modern characteristics. Victorian and Edwardian Bromley was not simply the idealistic '*rus in urbe*', and the middle classes who dwelt there were not simply commuters seeking refuge. Neither would the residents of the town have lived, worked, thought and played in the same way as inhabitants of 'Bromley - The London Borough' do today. By first investigating the composition of the town's middle class, it will be possible to analyse factors that determined their aspirations, relations and actions in the local community.

The make-up of the middle class in Bromley underwent significant changes during the period, reflecting developments in economic circumstances at both a national and local level. As changes in these circumstances took place, the condition of the people, religious beliefs, existing ideologies and social relations were all heavily affected. Those Victorians who held the most power and influence liked to seek religious and moral justification for their status, but in essence social hierarchy was based on the ownership and control of economic resources. In the nineteenth century, the urban middle classes took an ever increasing share of economic wealth, from the *upper* stratum of industrialists, merchants and bankers, through the *middle* layers of smaller business-owners and professionals to the *lower* tier of tradespersons, shopkeepers, book-keepers and clerks.¹

Historians have always tried to classify social groups in order to come to a clearer understanding of their society, yet subdivision of the middle-class of England and Wales can ascribe disparities that in reality may never have existed. Perhaps it would be more realistic to study differences of *status* rather than class *per se*.² No socio-occupational group was homogeneous in terms of status, and the views of contemporaries as revealed by autobiographies or oral histories suggest that status distinctions were very real indeed.³ The shopkeeper, for instance, might run a small or large scale business, and serve a specialised or general market of demand with goods of varying quality, and as such acquired remarkably contrasting degrees of status

¹ W. D. Rubinstein, 'The Victorian Middle-Classes: Wealth, Occupation & Geography', *EHR*, 30, 1977; J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing* (1986) p. 97ff.

² T. May, *An Economic & Social History of Britain, 1760-1970* (Harlow, 1987), p. 201

³ See T. Vigne & A. Howkins, 'The Small Shopkeeper in Industrial and Market Towns', pp. 202-4 in G. Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Classes In Britain, 1870-1914* (1977)

within the community he or she served.⁴ Status distinctions, then, could cross occupational lines of demarcation, and reflected a number of important factors in their construction. Ownership of 'property' and of economic resources was most the most decisive of all.

For much of the nineteenth century, in legal terms, property remained the preserve of men. Men regarded wives and daughters as additional items of property, subordinating them to their will. In practice, such dominance varied with social class and individual families, as well as time and place. Property for most of the middle class involved mainly liquid assets, and as such distinguished them from the gentry. Such resources could provide greater flexibility, although were more prone to economic fluctuation. Members of the professions or government service could perhaps expect less uncertainty and more security in the course of their lives, since their 'wealth' stemmed from their education, training, skills and a network of contacts. Such guarantees could not always be relied upon, of course, as Eustace Oules, a prosperous City solicitor resident in Bromley, found to his cost when struck off for improper conduct in March 1900.⁵ Having lost his capacious house, carriage and servants he was driven to penury and spent his last days in the Union workhouse at Farnborough.

Individuals involved in trades or their own business saw it as their duty to family, society and sometimes to God, to enhance their wealth. They sought to maximise profits in order to support their 'establishment', that is a combination of their household and business enterprise. In mid-Victorian Bromley their households included servants or apprentices living in with tradesmen and shopkeepers as integrated members of the household. For instance, the High Street premises of John Nash, Bromley's most prestigious draper, was home to four assistants aged between eighteen and 32, and an errand boy aged seventeen. The practice of living-in assistants was still common in the early 1890s, for in 1891 the mean ratio of employees per trading or retailing household still stood at 2:1, the same as it was forty years earlier.

Until recently, many social histories of the nineteenth century have ignored the role women played in the business life of society.⁶ The fact that women played a minor role may be more true for large towns and cities than expanding market towns like Bromley.⁷ The 1851 census revealed that 30% of middle-class heads were in fact

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *BR* Apr. 1900

⁶ However, see C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class - Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992) which attempts to redress this imbalance

⁷ See L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *Family Fortunes - Men & Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (1987), pp. 183-4

female, and that although most of these were described as 'fundholders' or 'annuitants', among their number were also thirteen involved in trades, three schoolteachers, an inn-keeper, a house-proprietor, a farmer and an owner of a silversmiths.⁸ Analysis of *all* those occupied showed that 72% were involved in some form of domestic service, 16% in 'manufacturing', 5% in 'dealing' and 5% in occupations of a 'public' or 'professional' nature.⁹ These figures take no account of all those wives and daughters who performed economic functions that went unrecorded by enumerators. Such was the case with H. G. Wells' mother, Sarah, who ran the china shop virtually single-handed whilst her husband played cricket for the banking families of Hoare and Norman.¹⁰ She may have neglected her housework, as Wells recalled later, but she took the full brunt of the problems and anxieties associated with taking up an unsuccessful business in which the couple had invested all their savings: 'This seems a horrid business, no trade. How I wish I had taken that situation with Lady Carrick.'¹¹ Numerous women worked hard to keep businesses alive, even if historical documentary evidence rarely gave them the credit they deserved. Sarah Dunn, for instance, who took over her father's furniture and funeral business when he died in 1830, personally supervised affairs until 1857, when she handed the business over to her brother Edward.¹²

Between 1851 and 1891, women servants increased by 10%, but the overall proportion of those occupied in either 'manufacturing' or 'dealing' fell by a half.¹³ By the end of the century, very few women ran their own trade or business, a situation more akin to larger towns forty years earlier. The decline in the economic independence of women in Bromley can be attributed to a combination of factors, not least of which was the change in the accepted image of working women. Middle-class society in general had come to accept the segregation of the roles of men and women within their own class. Such distinctions, however, serve to disguise the disjunction between the notion of separate spheres and the increasing desire to challenge it. Until recently, historians' perceptions of the Victorian 'public' man and 'private' woman, or J. Ruskin's 'active' male and 'passive' female, have been somewhat generalised.¹⁴ The notion of 'separate spheres' was most fully worked out for the *upper* middle class, for

⁸ Survey of all middle-class heads of household, taken from *1851 Census of Great Britain - Enumerators' Return for the Parish of Bromley* (BPL)

⁹ J. M. Rawcliffe, 'Bromley-Kentish Market Town to London Suburb 1841-1881', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Rise of Suburbia* (1982), pp. 82-3

¹⁰ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), pp. 60-61

¹¹ *Idem.* H. G. Wells is quoting his mother directly, taking her words from her diary entry of 7 Nov. 1855

¹² *Public Announcement of Sarah Dunn to Family & Friends 1830* (BPL)

¹³ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-3

¹⁴ See J. Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), 1909 edn., pp. 72-74, pp. 87-95; M. Roper & J. Tosh (ed.), *Manful Assertions - Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (1991), p. 1

amongst the *lower* middle class women had a greater participatory role, even if this was sometimes disguised. Furthermore, the 'acceptable' image did not remain static, as exemplified by the move away from the more intellectual 'Arnoldian man' in mid-century to the more aggressive and strong-willed image that triumphed with the new imperialism at the end of the century.¹⁵ This has led recent historians of gender to identify a 'crisis in masculinity' after 1850 whereby men struggled to live up to an image removed from emotional ties to the family.¹⁶ The pressure to conform led to a resistance of 'unmanly' assertions and tendencies; male expressions of love and emotion became less conspicuous as the century progressed.

The home and domesticity were so closely associated with femininity that boys from affluent middle-class families were packed off to boarding school at an early age. Many were later exhorted to serve in the army or government service overseas. Conversely, no self-respecting 'lady' should be seen to soil her hands with any form of business or employment except that concerning the running of the home.¹⁷ In the 1880s and 1890s Bromley women were caught between ideals of feminine economic dependence that existed locally, and expanding opportunities available to women within the job market of the metropolis. Teaching and writing had always been more acceptable for women - the town being temporarily graced by the presence of George Eliot who rented a cottage in 1873 - but London began to offer women new prospects in clerical work. For this reason, those involved in the 'public' or 'professional' sector gradually increased after 1880, even if numbers fell well below the figures for Britain's major towns and cities.¹⁸

The issue of gender roles brings into question the degree to which developments in the town were immune to more widespread change, particularly that occurring in London. In particular, to what extent was the local economy affected, and what were the knock-on effects on the social composition of the town's inhabitants? In the mid-nineteenth century, census and trade directory evidence suggests that the town was relatively prosperous with a 'middle-class' population above the national norm.¹⁹ However, the town had not yet developed characteristics associated with wealthy middle-class suburbs such as Edgbaston, on the outskirts of Birmingham, in that the proportion within the *upper* middle-class band was relatively

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17

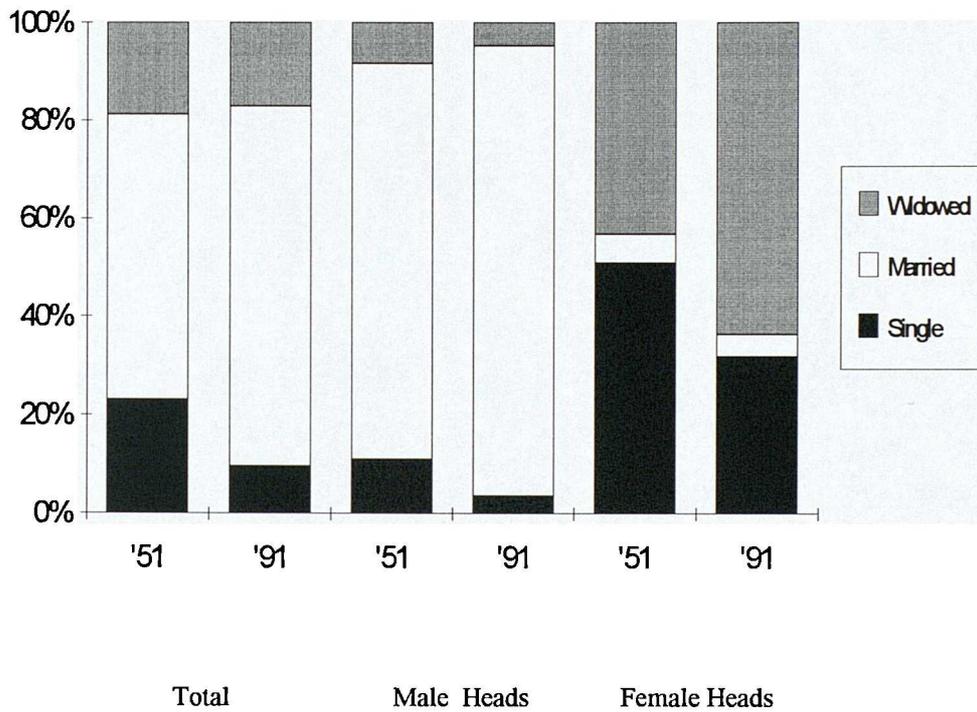
¹⁶ For more detail on this phenomenon, see M. Roper & J. Tosh, *op.cit.*.

¹⁷ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 183

¹⁸ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-3; one of the problems with census returns is that they were not fully revealing of women's waged work

¹⁹ See J. Burnett, *op.cit.*; pp. 188-189. He estimated that around one-sixth of the population could be classified middle-class.

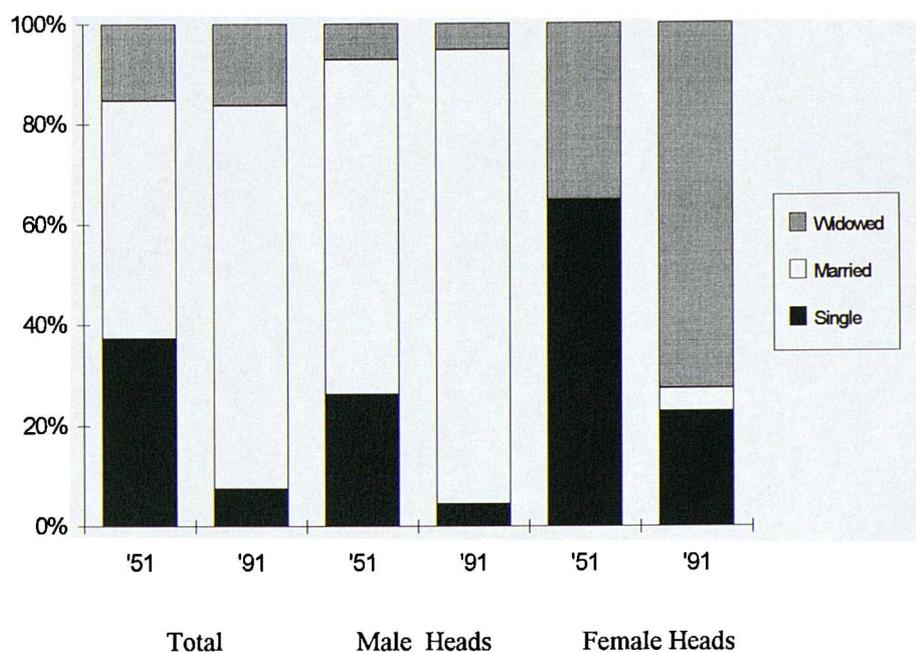
small.²⁰ This may well suggest that the town at this time was more self-contained - in that most people worked and lived locally - and less of a 'classical' suburb than has been previously thought.



N.B. For 1851 N = 173; for 1891 N = 106 (1 in 4 sample)

Figure 3.1 Marital Status of Lower Middle Class Heads of Household, 1851 and 1891. (Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample)

²⁰ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 233; this study has used similar classification procedures as Davidoff & Hall's study in ascertaining proportions of *upper* and *lower* middle class



N.B. Note overall decline in the number of 'single' women heads of household
 For 1851 N = 58; for 1891 N = 134 (1 in 4 sample)

Figure 3.2 Marital Status of Upper Middle- Class Heads of Household, 1851 and 1891. (Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample)

	Total Middle Class Heads		Upper Middle Class		Lower Middle Class	
	1851	1891	1851	1891	1851	1891
Male	70%	83%	18%	47%	52%	35%
Female	30%	17%	7%	9%	23%	9%
Total	100%	100%	25%	56%	75%	44%

N.B. Percentages given are as a proportion of all middle-class heads of household.
 (1851 N = 231; 1891 = 240 in 1 in 4 sample)

Table 3.1: Middle-Class Heads of Household
 By Socio-Economic Classification and Gender 1851 and 1891²¹
 (Source : Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample)

²¹ 1851 Census, *op. cit.* and sample of one in four middle-class heads of households taken from 1891 Census of Great Britain - Enumerators' Return for the Urban Sanitary District of Bromley (BPL), covering the same geographical area as the traditional Parish. For more on the method of classification, see Chapter One - Introduction.

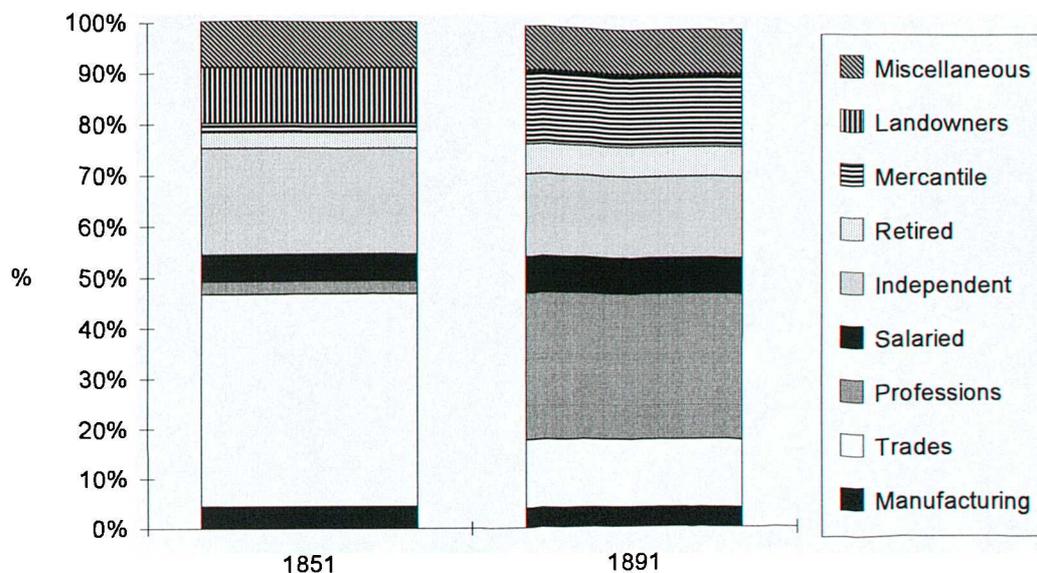
Taken as a whole, there was little difference between 1891 and 1851 in the proportion of Bromley's population that was designated 'middle-class'. Similar criteria were used in the process of social classification as were employed in the 1851 survey, with allowances made where necessary (e.g. with 'new' occupations).²² Bromley's population in 1891 was 21,684: 9,541 were male, 12,143 female and there were 3,907 inhabited houses. Since a one in four sampling method was adopted when analysing the 1891 census, the total number of 'middle-class' households amounted to around 960 (4 x 240), approximately 25% of all houses. This was almost identical to the proportion in mid-century. In essence, then, there were many more 'middle-class' people in Bromley by 1891, but only in *absolute* terms and not *relative* to the size of the 'working- class' population.

Marked differences emerge, however, in the characteristics of the middle classes of 1891. Well over half were part of the 'upper' stratum, twice as many as in 1851. To a limited extent this might be explained by the fallibility of the method of classification, but essentially the same criteria for categorisation was used in each case. Before carrying out the survey, it was expected that throughout the whole period there would be a preponderance of 'lower middle-class' retailers and traders, since Bromley was renowned as an important market town and retail centre. In effect this did not materialise, although this may be put down to the fact that many of the tradespeople were regarded as coming within the higher echelons of the working class, or the 'artisan elite' as they are sometimes called.²³ Only those who were classed as 'employers' or those who could afford the services of at least one living-in servant were taken to be 'middle class'. This seems to reflect the attitude of contemporaries such as H. G. Wells.²⁴ Even allowing for possible inaccuracies, what can be said of Bromley's middle classes of 1891 is that on the basis of servant-holding and style of housing, they were more affluent and more sophisticated than their mid-century counterparts.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See G. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society - Kentish London 1840-80* (1978), for an in-depth study of the 'artisan elite'.

²⁴ H. G. Wells, *op.cit.*, p. 73. His views tally with those of Seebohm Rowntree, Charles Booth and Beatrice Webb.



N.B. For 1851 N = 231; for 1891 N = 240 (1 in 4 sample)

Figure 3.3 Occupations of Middle-Class Heads of Household in 1851 and 1891. (Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 sample)

The social make-up of Bromley's middle class, in terms of occupations, had changed dramatically since 1851. In relative terms, the census returns showed that there was a considerable reduction in those involved in either a trade or in retail trading. In their place had emerged a middle-class belonging to the professions, the salaried clerks and the world of commerce and high finance.²⁵ The middle class of Bromley had become more diverse, in terms of occupations, by the 1890s, yet the character of the local economy was clearly changing. There were no large-scale farmers in 1891 and its own 'producer-retailing' trade appeared to be in relative decline. Once again, caution must be taken when dealing with such a limited sample, particularly that which precludes the labours of the working class. Even though the proportion of manufacturers in the town had not fallen by 1891, it was indicative of Bromley's economy that there were very few large-scale workshops at this time. Until the First World War, the town maintained its importance as a shopping centre in the district, but it increasingly became a refuge for those who liked to separate their homes from their workplace. This helped to generate a separation of spheres that was increasingly adopted into the public image of the middle class. In turn, this had significant implications for gender roles, in particular for the wife or mother dwelling at home whilst father was away at work in London.²⁶

²⁵ 1891 Census, *op. cit.*

²⁶ In C. Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-100, the author points out that although separation of home from work

The number of persons retiring to Bromley had also grown during the period. In 1851 only seven of the middle-class heads of household were recorded as 'retired', constituting 3% of the sample. They were all men coming from a variety of occupations, and none were born locally. Only two were aged below 55, both of whom had been pensioned off after service overseas. By 1891, the proportion of retired heads amongst the middle-class population had doubled. Once again all were born outside the local area, and significantly over one third were born in London. Once again, this adds weight to the argument that Bromley was a town *beyond* suburbia rather than a place enveloped into the sprawling mass that was the London workforce feeder zone. The fact that a substantial majority of these middle-class heads were from professional or mercantile occupations, and not from a tradesman's or retailer's background, was indicative of the affluence of those moving to Bromley as a retreat in retirement. The same picture emerges from the 'birthplace' records as a whole, which reveal a massive influx of successful business men originating from London.²⁷

It is difficult to calculate how many of the middle-class were employers since for many of the heads of household there were no records of their employment status. Often this was because they were 'retired' or 'living on own means'. Of those whose employment status *was* given by the 1891 census, over 40% were employers, around 35% employees and the remaining 25% classified as 'neither'.²⁸ To some extent these figures have been distorted since shopkeepers and tradespersons were only included in the survey if they either had a servant or were designated as 'employers'. Whatever, the graphs show a substantial proportion of Bromley's middle class as employers, reflecting a prosperous and successful local society. The majority of those designated as 'employees' came from the 'professional' class (e.g. actuaries and teachers) and the salaried clerks. Unfortunately, it was not possible to make comparisons with the 'employment status' situation in 1851 because that year's census returns did not uniformly record such information, even though *numbers* within a business' workforce were usually given.

The notion that the business entrepreneurs of England and Wales were objects of scorn, as so vehemently postulated by Wiener, is founded more on the work of

had a part to play in the demarcation of men's and women's work, women continued to play a vital role amongst the lower middle class, notably those businesses that maintained the whole family as the unit of economic production

²⁷ *1891 Census, op. cit.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

high-brow literary figures than experience of everyday life.²⁹ The function and custom of those involved in trades, retailing and small businesses in Bromley may well have altered during the nineteenth century, but at no time was there a deprecation of business success.³⁰ On the contrary, at any particular point in time, the town could boast of a number of local tradespeople who had achieved both fortune and status within their immediate community. In mid-century, many trades were inextricably tied or linked to other businesses in the town, often run by members of the same family.³¹ Take the Isards, for instance, where the family plot of land was used to graze cattle which supplied the meat Henry Isard sold at his butcher's outlet in the High Street. Meanwhile Richard Isard used the excess fat for his tallow-chandling business on Market Square. Together, the crafting-artisan and retailing trades at the time made up at least 60% of the town's economic business. A change in the economic characteristics of the town *did* occur during the later stages of the nineteenth century, but trading interests remained of prime importance. The separation of home and enterprise, and of retailing from production, was gradual and reflected a change in material and economic circumstances rather than any decline in 'industrial spirit'. Ordinarily these changes also occurred earlier in bigger towns, later diffusing to smaller towns in an hierarchical way.

With the arrival in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of wealthy City bankers and merchants seeking landed retreats, the market town of Bromley began to extend its array of service activities. The *Record* in April, 1858, spoke of the importance to the local trades of the liberal patronage on offer from 'the Nobility, Gentry and Inhabitants of Bromley and surrounding district'.³² According to George Warde Norman, local tradesmen had not been very successful, with the exceptions of the Alexanders (butchers), the Lascoes (saddlers and collar makers) and the Dunns (upholsterers, furniture dealers and funeral directors).³³ This judgement, however, was somewhat unjustified since it was considering local tradesmen within the same context as those who had made their fortune in City finance or commerce. It was also made around 1860, and was thus a reflection of the situation in the first half of the century. The coming of the railway in 1858 could well have brought undesirable competition to local tradespeople, but it was not seen as an immediate threat to their livelihoods, and

²⁹ M. Wiener, *English Culture and The Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (Cambridge, 1981)

³⁰ For more on this argument, across the nation as a whole, see Berghoff & Moller, *op. cit.*

³¹ *Pigot & Co.'s Royal National & Commercial Directory of 1839, Kelly's P.O. Directory of Kent 1855.*

³² The same message comes through in the adverts that appeared at this time in both local trade directories and the *Record* itself

³³ G. W. Norman, *Memoranda Regarding Bromley & Its Neighbourhood*, (written 1857-1880, unpublished).

if anything brought an influx of new clients demanding more clothes, linen, fuel and food. Businessmen like James Mowat the tailor hoped to prosper further, and he confidently claimed when the railway opened that he could exploit existing contacts with London and Paris fashion houses in order to compete with the large City firms.³⁴ New well-to-do residents also required a labour force to keep their houses, gardens and roads in good order, which is why reputedly 'middle-class' towns like Bromley always had a sizeable 'working-class' population.³⁵

P. Brandon and B. Short have commented that 'as the range of shops and services increased, so the still rural surrounds looked increasingly to Bromley as a centre'.³⁶ This was one of the major paradoxes of Bromley's position, satisfying the demands of both rural and urban inhabitants at the same time. Greater numbers of well-to-do inhabitants with more disposable income intensified the demand for semi-durables like china and furniture, leading to a development in domestic consumerism in which displays of material wealth helped set families apart from the lower classes in society. Trade directory data suggest that the number of trades kept pace with the rise in population (see Table 3.2).³⁷ The peak year appeared to be 1881, showing an increase of one third in the *absolute* number of trades since 1871, compared to only one sixth in the following decade. This had followed on from the opening of Bromley's second line to London in 1873. Between that year and 1911, household services in the town grew by 400%, a third faster than the growth in inhabitants. In particular, hairdressers, perfumers, gardeners, dyers, and laundries benefited from new habits and changes in social behaviour, as did those men and women who established dining and coffee rooms towards the end of the century. By 1900, wealthy Bromley residents were seeking the services of a masseur, while the pawnbroker registered by the trade directory of 1881 seemed to have lost his custom (or at least had ceased trading solely in this business).

³⁴ BR 1858 Advertisement

³⁵ F. M. L. Thompson, *op.cit.* (1982), p. 20

³⁶ P. Brandon & B. Short, *The South-East From A.D. 1000* (1990), p. 283

³⁷ The 'Trades Survey' (TS) covered 55 years, from 1866 to 1911. The 1866 Directory was the first in a continuous series of directories up to and beyond 1911. Information about trades in the town was taken first from the 1866 directory and then from directories in the census years after 1870.

	<i>No. of Registered Trades</i>	<i>Total Trades per 1000 pop.</i>	<i>Professional Trades per 1000 pop.</i>	<i>Artisans per 1000 pop.</i>	<i>Retailers per 1000 pop.</i>
1866	278	35(e)	1(e)	10(e)	11(e)
1871	393	37	2	10	13
1881	609	40	3	10	13
1891*	693	32	0	9	13
1901	907	33	2	10	12
1911	1173	35	3	9	12

N.B. * Figures for this year are particularly unreliable as a number of (known) tradespersons and professionals went unrecorded; (e) = estimate

Table 3.2: Registered Trades, By Categories, 1866-1911.
(Source: Kelly's and Bush's Directories of Bromley, Kent)

While the expanding middle-class insisted on improved shopping facilities, tradesmen and shopkeepers were encouraged to seek credit facilities more extensive than those on offer from country banks or individual money-lenders.³⁸ To this end a branch of the London and County Bank - which was to maintain a close connection with the town for some years to come - was opened in 1866. Money management itself became the key both to success in commerce and to economic security across a broader social spectrum. Such institutions as the 'Penny Bank' founded in April 1869, in which 70 tradesmen and artisans invested within the first month, provided a means of saving that had previously barely existed.³⁹ Other financial services that emerged were the offices and agents belonging to insurance companies, banks, building societies and financial institutions of all kinds. The trade directories record just one such institution in 1866, four in 1881, fifteen in 1901 and finally twenty-four in 1911.⁴⁰ Taking earlier directory records into account, it is likely that these figures are very conservative, but the underlying *trend* which they reveal is unmistakable. Bromley residents and businesses were becoming increasingly aware of the need for financial security, the essential ingredient for assuring social status.⁴¹

It could be argued, as indeed Wells was later at pains to do, that such institutions epitomised the monopolistic corporate companies that infiltrated English

³⁸ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 63

³⁹ *BR* May 1869

⁴⁰ *TS*

⁴¹ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 63

commerce and ruined the 'small man', '...the essential thing about it seems to be this, that there is a change of scale going on in most human affairs, a substitution of big organisations for detached individual effort almost everywhere.'⁴² Wells' claimed that his views were based on personal experience since he argued his parents' business suffered from unscrupulous competition from such concerns as the *Army and Navy* stores.⁴³ Other small shopkeepers and traders too found it difficult to compete with their large-scale neighbours.

Impoverishment, however, was not inevitable as successful Bromley retailers like the Grinsteds, Weeks and Medhursts were to prove. The fact that no large chain stores existed in the town until the turn of the century - the first large chain store was David Grieg's which arrived in 1912 - suggests that Bromley was not a 'classical' suburb but a town with a high level of 'local' commercial activity. Furthermore, contrary to the suppositions of some historians, in suburban towns like Bromley family businesses continued to flourish, and for a time forestalled the arrival of the manager in his corporate-image suit.⁴⁴ The 'smaller' capitalist may also have felt that the achievement of general limited liability (1855-7) and the subsequent boom in joint stock companies, particularly in London, made use of 'idle' capital and secured financial investments.⁴⁵ Within Bromley, there were numerous tradesmen who invested in the 'Bromley Gas Consumers' Company' throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and later local retailers like F. Medhurst helped found the Electricity and Light Company. Certainly there were many Bromley residents in the 1880s and 1890s who had gained from joint stock enterprises or who commuted every weekday to their corporate business in the City.

The overall move away from the craft image of a semi-rural market town had undoubtedly accelerated after the late 1860s. Although the railway had resulted in a rise in custom, outside competition, coupled with a trend towards greater specialisation, had led to a gradual decline in the direct exchange between producer and consumer. Trade directory surveys have shown that relative producer or artisan numbers altered little between 1866 and 1911, but the number of producer-retailers declined. The artisan community itself in Bromley comprised a great variety of tradespersons, primarily tailors, dressmakers and boot or shoe makers. Such business concerns constituted later stages in the manufacturing process, there being no factories or mills in the immediate district, and suggest close trading links with some of the

⁴² H. G. Wells, *New Worlds for Old* (1909), p. 167

⁴³ H. G. Wells, *op. cit.* (1934), p. 44

⁴⁴ H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (1969), p. 430

⁴⁵ J. B. Jefferys, 'The Denomination & Character of Shares 1855-1885', in *Essays In Economic History*, E. M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), Vol.1, 1954

larger mercantile 'houses' of London. As 'finishing' trades, they served to clothe and dress the residents of not just Bromley but also of the communities within the town's broad sphere of influence. As the century progressed, so did the numbers of potential clients. Some older trades did suffer at the end of the Victorian era, notably blacksmiths, farriers, coach-builders, tallow-chandlers and masons, whose services became less in demand. However, the latter part of the century saw no wholesale collapse of the artisan in Bromley, and even producer-retailers like J. How the clockmaker or T. Ayling the bootmaker, continued to prosper.

By 1901 there were 907 trades in the town, as recorded by the trade directory of that year, compared to 693 in 1891. The fact that there were more builders recorded - eleven in all - than any other individual trade was indicative of the extent of residential development taking place at that time. The second most common trade was laundries, showing how 'domestic service' was moving out into business concerns with specialised functions. Next most common were the drapers and dressmaker-milliners, both of whom had profited from the influx of affluent residents in the area. However, it was the shops dealing in clothes and shoes that dominated the High Street, making up as much as 23% of all businesses there. Food and drink stores were the next most common, constituting 15% of businesses. By 1914, these proportions remained identical for both 'trades' within the High Street, although there was a significant increase in professional and commercial concerns from 6% to 9%, in dyers and cleaners from 1% to 3% and in premises used for meeting places or entertainment from 3% to 5%. This latter trend illustrated how the functions in the High Street were becoming more diverse, reflecting a change in character of the local population who demanded more than the services of a traditional craftsman or retail shop. Similar developments were conspicuous in the town as a whole, where recorded trades had not only increased to nearly 1200 but now included large numbers of house agents, plumbers, and gas and water fitters.

A closer look at the structure and fortunes of one of Bromley's most famous and enduring businesses will offer deeper insight into the issue of artisans and retailers in the period. The Dunn family could trace their business connections in the town back to 1710 when John Dunn ran a draper's shop on Market Square.⁴⁶ At some point, the enterprise turned towards cabinet-making, which then lent itself to the production of coffins for servicing funerals. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Dunns had expanded into the manufacture of furniture, gaining the sought-after custom of the proprietors of Hayes Place and Sundridge Park. The firm's most notable customer was

⁴⁶ *Dunn's Records and Memorabilia* (BPL)

Louis Napoleon who, when in exile, was resident at Camden Park, Chislehurst.⁴⁷ Such was the success of the family business that it maintained its producer-retailing character for the duration of the Victorian era, employing at least half a dozen staff and sustaining remunerative contracts with international concerns like 'Maple & Co.' of London and Paris.⁴⁸ Only in the 1890s was there a hint of change in the air, when H. G. Dunn commissioned his first advertisement in the *Bromley Record* (1894). Subsequent years were to witness a sharpening of the retail focus of the enterprise, with H. G. Dunn constructing an impressive store on Market Square in the 1920s. The geographical mobility of Bromley's wealthy residents had also encouraged the family to establish a furniture depository in Park Road just outside the town's centre, caring for the household goods of merchants and civil servants working abroad.⁴⁹

The number of shopkeepers as a whole rose steadily after 1850, although it is difficult to assess how many of these were purely retailers with no input on the production side. In mid-century bakers, butchers, drapers, grocers, general storekeepers and greengrocer-fruiterers were the prime retail outlets, which as a distinct category constituted a quarter of all registered 'trades'.⁵⁰ There were certainly more families engaged in trades and retailing activities than in towns as diverse in their occupational make-up as Birmingham, Northampton, Oldham and North and South Shields.⁵¹ If this contrast is not due to different methods of statistical analysis, then one plausible explanation was Bromley's importance as a market town serving a substantial local area, one that possessed few professionals, merchants or industrialists at the time. By 1911, retailing still dominated the local economy with over a third of all 'trades' involving shopkeeping of some variety.⁵² As with artisans and certain tradespeople, retailers too benefited from the boom in population of the local district, particularly drapers, outfitters, tobacconists, confectioners, stationers and nurserymen.

At the end of the Victorian era, most retailers were still individual, 'independent' entrepreneurs like George Lawrence, fruiterer of Bromley Common, or H. G. Cooper, butcher for 30 years in Widmore Road. Shopkeepers with more than one store had gradually become more common, as exemplified by William Uridge, grocer of Widmore Road, Chislehurst Road and Blackheath, or Daniel Grinsted, corn and coal merchant in the High Street, Market Square, Bromley Common and

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Letter from H. G. Dunn to Edward Dunn (BPL)*

⁴⁹ *Dunn's Records and Memorabilia*

⁵⁰ *TS*

⁵¹ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*, p.229ff; J.Foster, *Class Struggle & The Industrial Revolution - Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (1974), p. 163

⁵² *TS*

Beckenham. These 'chains' were locally based and did not extend beyond the immediate region. In fact, there were very few 'multiples' in Bromley, stores like 'Freeman, Hardy and Willis' and 'Truform' not appearing until the Edwardian era.⁵³ This situation was in marked contrast to suburbs like Camberwell where the number of multiples grew rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Surprisingly very little work has been done to date on the diffusion of chain stores, which was usually hierarchical, but their growth must have been dependent upon spending power, distance from regional commercial centres as well as the success, standing and network of contacts of independent local retailers.

The most striking example of a successful retailer in the town was Frederick Medhurst. He and other *retailers* of cloth were fast outgrowing tailors and dressmakers involved in producing or *finishing* cloth, maintaining a trend that was to gather pace in the new century. Frederick Medhurst had established his small draper's business on Market Square in 1879, but did so well that he soon acquired the adjacent premises.⁵⁵ By the middle of the Edwardian era, 'Medhurst's' had become the town's first department store, branching out into household goods and toys. Such was the business' expansion that in 1908 the store was turned into a private limited company, with Frederick Medhurst as Chairman and Managing Director. In 1912 he purchased land at the rear which almost doubled the floor space. By 1914, Frederick Medhurst had created a store of the highest order, serving the well-to-do inhabitants of Bromley, Beckenham, Chislehurst and Farnborough. Deliveries were made by large horse-drawn drays, housed at stables near the electricity yard in West Street, itself under the proprietorship of the Electricity and Light Company in which Frederick Medhurst had a controlling interest.

The 'Medhurst's' store was in fact a microcosm of the local society it served. Older residents recall seeing the carriages of the district's gentry, such as Lord Avebury of High Elms, drawing up outside the store. This 'carriage trade' made up the bulk of Medhurst's business. A commissaire in uniform would open the door for the client, whose needs would then be seen to by a particular salesman.⁵⁶ Sales staff sometimes spent half a day with one client. Inhabitants of lesser social status were infrequent visitors to the store, and instead were much more likely to be employed by the company as delivery men or shop assistants. Many of the assistants 'lived in', with

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ H. J. Dyos, *Victorian Suburb - A Study of the Growth of Camberwell* (Leicester, 1961)

⁵⁵ See *A Brief History of the Medhurst Family* (Unpublished, BPL)

⁵⁶ From *Medhurst's Centenary - A Hundred Years of Service to the Public 1879-1979* (Souvenir Edition, produced by South East London and Kentish Mercury)

separate accommodation for men and women. All worked under a full apprenticeship system based on an hierarchical structure that discouraged direct contact between management and the shop floor.⁵⁷ In 1891, there had been nine living-in apprentices and shop assistants employed by the firm, all of them working within drapery at that time. A draper's assistant's life may well have been as dull as that illustrated in *The Wheels of Chance* (1935),⁵⁸ but at least an effective apprenticeship system offered training and reasonable prospects of promotion. Those working for 'Medhurst's' in the early twentieth century were also able to take advantage of a communal dining room, games room and tennis court. By the 1920s, Frederick Medhurst had acquired the services of his nephews John and Percy Medhurst, and had achieved a reputation amongst the local community normally reserved for merchants and financiers, who were ordinarily seen as socially superior to mere retailers.⁵⁹ As for the Medhurst family,

They were very paternal in their outlook to the people who worked there. They were very kind, but it was a very different kind of society for traders. Ordinary people would never have wandered into Medhurst's off the streets.⁶⁰

Work by oral historians like T. Vigne has helped to emphasise the concern shopkeepers felt for their standing or *status* within the local community.⁶¹ Status for them varied not so much with speech or education *per se* but with shop location, size of enterprise, type of goods sold, customer market, and displays of prosperity within the home. In practice, their position was also very dependent upon the overall social composition of the community they served. Specialist dealers like jewellers, tailors, drapers or chemists were often *class*-based rather than *community*-based, in that they attracted wealthier clients from further afield. Dealers in general goods were regarded as of lower status. William W. Baxter, the leading High Street chemist, had inherited his father's flourishing business and mixed freely among the social elite of the town.⁶² He involved himself heavily in the local affairs of the town, avoiding local government office but serving on the committee of the Literary Institute and on the board of the Cottage Improvement Company, as well as attending the local lodge of the Freemasons. Having retired in 1897, he in turn passed on the business to his son who

⁵⁷ From *Medhurst's Centenary* (Unpublished, BPL)

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ 'Medhurst's' makes an interesting comparison with that fictional establishment which is the subject of H. Granville-Barker's *Madras House* (1909) in G. Weales (ed.), *Edwardian Plays* (New York, 1962), in which retailers are seen as struggling to gain social recognition and status.

⁶⁰ *Medhurst's Centenary*, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ T. Vigne & A. Howkins, *op. cit.*, p.186

⁶² E. L. S. Horsburgh, *History of Bromley From Earliest Times To The Present Century*(Chislehurst,1929) 1980 edn., pp. 406-7

had qualified in pharmaceutical chemistry, and spent the rest of his days indulging in the glories and infamies of Bromley's past. Yet the nature of goods sold did not alone dictate either status or class. Ironmongers like George Weeks, or corn and coal merchants like Daniel Grinsted could also achieve a high social standing. Weeks had come to Bromley in 1852 from a Dartmoor village, and set up his business in the High Street near Baxter's.⁶³ After the advent of the railway in 1858 he extended to the adjoining premises and then in 1870 opened a second store in Beckenham. Seven years later he bought up a much larger building opposite the Bell Hotel in Market Square, establishing the handsome premises of 'George Weeks & Son Ironmongers &c.'. The business passed on to his three sons in 1890 when George retired to his detached villa property in Homefield Road. As we have already seen, Daniel Grinsted too expanded his original business, and in 1896 gained even greater renown by becoming the first ever retailer to ascend to the local magistracy.

As Vigne's study found: 'At the top end, the family was rigidly removed from the shop, and although there may have been some economic insecurity the business still provided a firm base of economic prosperity for a local political and social career.'⁶⁴ Not all shopkeepers could hope to rise to such heights. Many families found themselves in the position of the Wells', so vulnerable to fluctuations in trade that they could quite easily descend the social ladder. 'Living on the margin' made the majority of shopkeepers insecure members of the 'middle-class', and mothers often carried out other occupations to make ends meet. The experience of the Wells' family highlights this predicament. In prosperous times, Sarah Wells employed 'Betsy' to come in and char, something she herself had to do when times were hard.⁶⁵ Another factor in the equation were changes in the retail trade demanding new skills and services. In an atmosphere of intensifying competition, these threatened to sink the 'small man' and the family unit of production. Bemoaning such developments, Wells was later to write:

Bromley was being steadily suburbanised. An improved passenger and goods service, and the opening of a second railway station, made it more and more easy for people to go to London for their shopping and for London retailers to come into competition with the local traders.

Presently the delivery vans of the early multiple shops, the Army and Navy, Co-operative Stores and the like, appeared in the neighbourhood to suck away the ebbing vitality of the local retailer. The trade in pickling jars and jam-pots died away. Fresh housekeepers came to the gentlemen's houses,

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ T. Vigne & A. Howkins, *op. cit.*, p. 207

⁶⁵ H. G. Wells, *op.cit.* (1934), p. 70

who knew not Joseph and bought their stuff from the stores.⁶⁶

As noted earlier, in reality the 'multiples' were slow to come to Bromley. The town's first Co-operative store opened relatively early in 1867, but it was quickly ostracised by 'independent' retailers. Beneath the rejection lay a very real fear of losing both profit and the control of credit. The *Bromley Record* accused it of being grossly disorganised and unable to manage its own accounts, resulting in numerous appearances at the County Court.⁶⁷ Anglican clergy, ironically recalling Napoleon's words of abuse, joined in the barrage too with the claim in 1872 that in this 'nation of shopkeepers' the latter must have their profit or be starved out of the community. In their eyes, Co-operatives only served a useful purpose in working-class areas. By contrast, they felt that in middle-class areas the 'gentry and professional classes' could afford to pay the shopkeeper his resulting margin of profit and thus had no need for Co-operative Societies.⁶⁸ The church itself went as far as to recommend local clergymen to use local shops and not support the new Co-operatives. Such scare-mongering was misjudged but revealing of prevalent middle-class attitudes. In practice, Bromley had sufficient numbers of 'high-class' residents for retailer and Co-operative to exist side by side, each serving the different needs and wants of the local population.

On the whole the four Co-operatives that had been established by the 1890's were small-scale enterprises utilised by the lower middle class and below, as was the associated Penny Savings Bank founded in 1891.⁶⁹ The movement was not well supported by influential local figures with the exception in its formative years of Dr. William Farr, the Registrar-General resident in Bickley, and much later Henry Nye, cabinet maker, Unitarian and 'progressive' Council member. To the majority of retailers and well-to-do individuals, the Co-operative symbolized a threat to economic security, social stability and the image of the self-made man. When Henry Nye launched the *Bromley and County Independent* newspaper - established on democratic principles through the purchase of £1 shares - in September, 1889, the *Bromley Record* revelled in its failure, blaming dissension amongst the directors. Henry Nye and his Co-operative ideals were enough to unite diverse members of the town's middle-class, including those successful City merchants, bankers and financiers who, though less concerned for the preservation of local commerce, had a substantial vested

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44

⁶⁷ *BR* Apr. 1869

⁶⁸ *BR* May 1872

⁶⁹ *BR* Feb. 1891

interest in preserving society's status quo.

Those men concerned with high finance and international commercial activities, who either commuted daily to London or had come to the town as refuge in retirement, represented the wealthiest ranks of Bromley's middle-class. In 1851, there were very few to be found within the parish boundaries, with the exception of those merchant and banking families who had earlier purchased their landed estates in the locality.⁷⁰ The most prominent was Joseph Edlmann of Bickley House, whose household was the second largest in the town. In the census of that year, this Austrian-born gentleman was described simply as a 'merchant', an occupation which had brought in enough money to enable him to lease out the landed estate of John Wells of Southborough. Such was the strength of his financial position that, in addition to his eight children, he could afford to maintain a sister, two relatives and as many as thirteen servants. By the end of the century, the Edlmann name was renowned throughout the wider Bromley district, and family members are recalled today for their involvement in local schools and in the introduction of daylight saving, with the family name commemorated in a nearby wood.⁷¹

Bromley's relative proximity to London ultimately dictated the nature and composition of the town's middle class. London was Britain's major port and trading centre, its pre-eminence in the world financial market revolving around a handful of well-established merchant banks.⁷² The stock exchange was the hub of the 'City's' financial transactions, and more stock exchange members lived in the south-east of England than anywhere else. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bromley was not without its fair share of either exchange members or other well-connected businessmen. The enhanced accessibility of London, the appeal of a healthy environment and the availability of cheaper property all contributed to a growth in the town's financial and mercantile population from just 1.2% of middle-class heads in 1851 to over 15% by 1891.⁷³ The abstracts of the census returns of this period do not include information on all occupational groups, but commercial activities relating to 'industrial service' are included and coupled with other evidence suggest that the rate of increase hastened in the last two decades.⁷⁴ By 1911, in the 'occupied' population as a whole, there were 661 men working within the mercantile and financial sector. Ten years later, this figure had grown once again to 2,316, although for this year the

⁷⁰ *1851 Census, op. cit.*

⁷¹ *Collection of Oral Histories*, No. 27, Paul Johnson

⁷² C. More, *The Industrial Age - Economy and Society in Britain 1750-1980* (1989)

⁷³ *1851 Census, op. cit.*; *1891 Census, op. cit.*

⁷⁴ B. Taylor, *Bromley, Beckenham and Penge - Suburban Growth* (Ph.D. thesis), p. 722ff.

abstracts included clerks amongst their number.

It seemed most common for City merchants and financiers to come to Bromley in their forties and early fifties.⁷⁵ A number of them held senior positions within their corporate businesses, including directors of major insurance and shipping companies. Septimus Scott, senior partner of Messrs. Scott, Stratten & Co. and one-time Chairman of the London Exchange, came to the town towards the end of his career and spent his last days at his home in Widmore Road. J. Wheeler-Bennett of the Home & Foreign Produce Exchange, and member of the London Chamber of Commerce, built his wholesale merchant's business up into an international enterprise and arrived in Bromley around 1881, purchasing the 'Carisbrooke' residence on Bromley Common. At the same time, T. C. McIntyre came to reside in Elmstead Lane, Bickley after moving down from Scotland to open up a branch of his ship-broking business in London. Other notable chairmen, directors and senior officials who had earlier set up home in the town included Thomas Davis, Thomas C. Dewey and Conrad Wilkinson. Two financiers, E. F. Duncanson and near neighbour William McKewan, were directors of the London & County Bank (later the Westminster Bank), one of the first joint stock banks (1836) and the first to open a branch in Bromley in 1865. George Dennen, manager of this branch for many years, was regarded as Bromley's local 'man of finance' and involved himself on the committees of a wide variety of local clubs and societies.

The coming of the railway had also stimulated the infiltration of those occupied in the professions, both 'old' and 'new'. Of the 20 middle-class heads who could be ranked as professionals in 1851, five were church or chapel ministers, five were solicitors and four were doctors.⁷⁶ All worked locally, the majority at or near their place of residence; with the exception of three schoolmistresses, all were male. The most recent professions, as represented by a handful of schoolteachers, were ranked amongst the *lower* middle-class, their residential location and lack of living-in servants meriting no higher status. As for architects, surveyors or accountants, not one appeared as a head of household in this snapshot of mid-century society. By 1891, the image had changed dramatically, revealing a much more diverse group of professionals who went to make up nearly a third of all middle-class families.⁷⁷ One quarter of all those recorded as 'professionals' were connected to the legal profession, the majority solicitors; the three other prominent groups in this area were teachers, accountants and

⁷⁵ 1891 Census, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ 1851 Census, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ 1891 Census, *op. cit.*

church ministers.⁷⁸ Given the fourfold increase in population since 1851, it is perhaps not surprising to find an increase in such occupations, growing to service more specialised demands. Yet the number of 'professionals' had increased ten-fold in the same period, which suggests that they were playing an increasingly important role in society towards the end of the century. By 1914, there were over a thousand 'professionals' amongst the local population as a whole, representing 6.8% of *all* 'occupied' persons.

The extent of the rise in professional occupations represented the move society in general was making towards bureaucratization. Non-manual production, the impersonalization of relationships, the instigation of more precisely defined rules and regulations demanded trained expertise. In Bromley, the third quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a drift away from the large landowner managing his estate personally, and instead came to rely more heavily upon local land agents, accountants, surveyors and solicitors.⁷⁹ Real estate increasingly came to be an investment to be 'worked' for commercial gain, if necessary to be parcelled up and sold off. The necessary transactions involved, both direct and indirect, laid down hitherto unparalleled opportunities for the trained professional to display his superior skills. The transition towards a more 'professionalized' society, of which this was just one part, was also marked by the sons of the gentry entering the professions or government service. The younger Coles Child became an Ambassador, and was rewarded for his public service by a knighthood in 1919. His son in turn went into acting. One of George Warde Norman's male offspring went into law, another became an artist.

Detailed research on the so-called 'rise of the professions' has been carried out by Perkin in *The Rise of Professional Society* (1990). In his earlier works, Perkin had labelled this group the 'forgotten middle class', the men who adopted a practical and functional role that gained scant attention from contemporaries and historians alike.⁸⁰ Unlike other occupations, he argued, doctors and solicitors came into contact with individuals from different social backgrounds and classes, enabling them to adopt a broader perspective of the society they served. They saw themselves as 'disinterested experts', driven not by profit but by merit, intervening for the fair and efficient functioning of society.⁸¹ Society rewarded them by offering the opportunity of high incomes, deference, authority and self-respect: coupled with the professionalisation of

⁷⁸ Census returns did not recognise architects and surveyors as professionals until 1881, and accountants until 1921.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2, p. 63ff

⁸⁰ H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1969), p. 252ff.

⁸¹ M. E. Rose, 'Social Change and the Industrial Revolution', in R. Floud & D. McCloskey (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 262-263

society, these 'gifts' elevated their status to the point where commentators like H. G. Wells could describe them as the 'aristocracy of the new world'.⁸² Supposedly divorced from the struggle for income, M. J. Wiener has contended that the professional image bolstered the cultural containment of industrial capitalism.⁸³ However, the notion of the 'gentrification of the professions', as described by M. J. Wiener, should not mask the fact that doctors, accountants and lawyers were by no means averse to making money. For one thing, their income was based on a monopolistic level of fees. For another, it could be argued that those professionals involved in the multitude of land deals that enveloped the nation in the nineteenth century brought the professions into the very heart of capital movements.⁸⁴ It was not for nothing, for example, that Robinson Latta, Bromley's most prestigious solicitor, was instrumental in bringing both the 'Mid-Kent' and 'Direct' railway lines to Bromley, for there were profits to be made on land sales along their routes.

The professions, then, did not have one specific set of goals or easily identifiable value-system. The Ilotts, medical doctors, and the Lattas, solicitors, had since the end of the eighteenth century forged close connections with the people of Bromley and had devoted much time to their well-being. Yet unlike some of the professionals who came to the town in the second half of the nineteenth century, they were less susceptible to new ideologies or movements for social reform. They were less inclined, for instance, to embrace the 'collectivist' principle adopted by Dr. William Farr who, on his arrival in Bromley in 1860 after training in Paris and London, immediately sought support to improve the drainage and sanitation of the district.

Improvements were also the goal of Mary Heppel, Headmistress of Bromley High School for Girls (1883-1908). Teaching was an avenue to social mobility for women, unlike other professions which placed obstacles in the way of aspirant women. Heppel was the eldest daughter of John Mortimer Heppel, a distinguished civil engineer. After her father's death she had joined the staff of Notting Hill High School as an assistant mistress, and in 1882 had been one of the first women to gain a degree at London University. The following year she was appointed Headmistress of Bromley High School, in charge of 23 pupils and two staff. In 1888 she successfully gained a place on the town's first School Board, later recalling that it was 'abnormal, almost indecent' for a woman to be seen pushing herself forward in a public election.⁸⁵ She

⁸² H. G. Wells, text of speech on 'Socialism and the Scientific Motive', 21st March, 1923 (BPL)

⁸³ M. Wiener, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-16

⁸⁴ H. J. Dyos, *op.cit.*

⁸⁵ *Baxter Newscuttings*, Vol. 4, p. 87 (1925)

attended more Board meetings than anyone else and used her position to extend educational opportunities in the town, for girls as well as boys. When the Board was replaced by the Education Committee in 1903, Mary Heppel was one of the only old Board members to be re-elected.⁸⁶ Such reformers, however, were thin on the ground. The majority - if not all - of the professionals of the town were motivated by the desire for efficiency and the avoidance of waste: the equalization of society was not on anyone's agenda. The principle of *laissez-faire* still predominated amongst them, as revealed by the lack of support for intrusive initiatives run by the state or funded from public subscription.

The fortunes of the professionals were not divorced from the fortunes of business. The varying ranks and groups of the middle class were economically dependent upon one another. The chain that linked the farmer, wholesaler and retailer, also tied in the railway contractor, railway shareholder, 'flyer' and cabman, for the latter shared in the profits of transporting their goods. All these concerns were in turn served by banks, insurance companies and firms of solicitors, surveyors and accountants, that is the so-called 'disinterested' professionals.⁸⁷ William Morris referred to such individuals as 'the parasites of property', looking to increase their personal wealth and social standing.⁸⁸ In Morris' eyes, only men of science, arts and letters were disinterested and impartial, for they were not driven by the attraction of financial gain. Certainly within Victorian society as a whole, and more specifically Bromley during the Victorian era, the only professionals who were less directly linked in the economic 'chain' or 'network' were doctors and teachers. This helps explain why the latter played a greater participatory role in movements for social reform. To the likes of Dr. William Farr and Mary Heppel, 'social' costs took precedence over considerations of mere finance.

Those professionals who may have held sufficient influence to encourage reform, then, were themselves closely tied to the preservation of existing social conditions. Gainsford Bruce, for instance, a barrister who was promoted to the Queens Bench in 1892, was the son of a clergyman and a strong Tory Unionist. One of the Latters, Robinson Latter (1819-95), was not just an eminent solicitor patronised by the local gentry, but was also a substantial landowner. The town's most respected doctor of the late nineteenth century, J. W. Ilott (1815-96) had helped found the

⁸⁶ Mary Heppel remained on the Education Committee until 1925, when she retired after 37 years service to education in the town. She continued to be one of the most regular attendees, and was particularly involved with the School Medical Service and the Children's Care Committee.

⁸⁷ See Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society* (1990), p. 117

⁸⁸ W. Morris, *News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs (1962), pp. 117-122

Literary Institute, the foremost cultural medium for promulgating middle-class values and philosophy. As a director of Bromley's commercially successful Gas Company, it could hardly be claimed that his goals were 'disinterested'. Indeed he represented a high-status professional group who were inextricably linked to the gentry and the well-to-do. Like Gustav Loly, the headmaster of Quernmore Boys School who used his position as chairman of the School Board to delay the onset of free secondary schooling, these influential professionals resisted changes that might disturb their vested interests. They may have given the impression that they were aloof from the struggle for profit, but in reality they were driven by a less conspicuous economic motives.

The men and women of the 'salaried' occupations, notably clerks, were another socio-occupational group that expanded with the increased bureaucratization of society. Often equated with the growth of suburbia, clerks have been stereotyped to the point of mockery, especially by contemporary writers.⁸⁹ Wells at times made out the life of a clerk to be tedious and monotonous, but in a different mood could reflect upon the clerk as, 'a public servant...a man doing some work in the complicated machinery of the modern community for a salary and not for speculative gain.'⁹⁰ Research by the likes of G. Crossick have attempted to view beyond the clerk's dullish facade. In practice, clerks varied greatly in their status, income and social respectability. At the most prestigious level were those connected with banking, insurance and government service. Those at the lowest level carried out more menial tasks and ranked only just above the working-classes. Victorian Bromley never had a large proportion of clerks or salaried individuals amongst its local inhabitants: in the second half of the century, their size varied between 6% and 8% of the town's middle-class, with only 391 clerks recorded as late as 1901.⁹¹ The most noteworthy was R. G. Mullen, who came to the town in 1871 as clerk to the Board of Guardians, and within ten years had secured the major clerical posts within a multitude of local administrative authorities. Although achieving the Presidency of the Kent Association of Poor Law Officers in 1889, R. G. Mullen could not hope to attain the income or status of men like A. Stoneham, Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trade, or Hugh D'Oyley Tweedy, in the diplomatic service of His Majesty the King of Sweden. The clerical profession, like society, too had its own distinctive ranks, gender divisions and hierarchical structure.

⁸⁹ See G. & W. Grossmith, *Diary of a Nobody* (1892); also see G. L. Anderson, 'The Social Economy of Late Victorian Clerks', in G. Crossick, (ed.) *op.cit.*, pp. 113-129

⁹⁰ H. G. Wells, *An Englishman Looks at the World* (1914), pp. 339-340

⁹¹ *BR* Nov. 1898

Paucity of numbers, diversity of status and lack of any 'collective' ideology contributed to making the 'salaried' of Bromley into a relatively insignificant force in the town's affairs. Only in the Edwardian era did clerks become more numerous in Bromley, with an increase of 57% during these years.⁹² In 1911, for the first time, census abstracts made a separate record of *women* clerks. There were 102 women involved in general administration and local government, whilst 183 were either business or commercial clerks. These women faced difficulties from male clerks who feared emasculation of their status by the feminisation of their 'profession'. In terms of total numbers involved in these occupations, women constituted 20% and 30% respectively. Until comparative figures from the end of the nineteenth century become available, it is difficult to assess the significance of these numbers. Summaries from the 1871 census suggest that women comprised approximately 32% of 'public and professional persons'; by 1911, this had grown to around 38%. At first sight, these statistics reveal a trend towards widening opportunities for women. However, there are two major problems with this. Firstly, the change was not necessarily a continuous one over the forty year period. Secondly, the census abstracts are not only unreliable when dealing with occupational classifications, but also make no differentiation over the income or status levels within particular occupations. Thus it is impossible to distinguish those women clerks who came from a middle-class family from those whose background was from amongst the upper echelons of the working-class.

Unlike clerks, the town's builders and contractors were increasingly prominent in local affairs, since they stood to gain from more intensive urbanisation - or rather *suburbanisation* - of the town. George Henry Payne, born in Lewisham in 1847, moved to Bromley as builder's apprentice with his grandfather and became one of several builders to profit from the expansion in local construction projects. As such, George Henry Payne may have been more willing to accept change than the rest of middle-class society. He was certainly regarded as a 'progressive' by the *Record* for his work on the Urban District Council in securing open spaces for the general public, earning him the nickname 'father of the Recreation Ground'.⁹³ Building and construction projects had themselves mushroomed in the late nineteenth century, and by 1901 George Henry Payne was one of as many as 1,450 men involved in the building and construction trade. By 1911, this figure had fallen to 1,390 because of a depression in the building trade after 1907. In addition to the dozen or so builder-contractors who had expanded their business and gained middle-class status during this period, there were a number of men and women exploiting the growth in the housing

⁹² *Abstract of 1911 Census, England and Wales* (10 Edward 7 and 1 George 5, Ch. 27) - *County of Kent*

⁹³ *BR* Feb. 1896

market by letting lodgings. The success of Martha Howlett, for example, in securing the deeds to a number of properties which she then leased, also demonstrated what could be achieved by 'independent' women capitalizing on new circumstances.

To gain a deeper awareness of the socio-economic characteristics of the varied ranks of the middle-class demands closer investigation of the family and its respective household. One of the greatest difficulties in tracing the changing nature of family life, apart from the enormous variety of experience, lies in the lack of comparative data. Although a mass of statistical information in the form of census data exists, this has generally been analysed for the nation as a whole, or at best for only major towns and cities. As yet not enough data has been collated or transposed onto computer format to allow the study of the family in terms of geographical mobility, changes in economic fortune or the timing of specific events within family life-cycles e.g. birth of children, change in occupation, death of husband. For instance, it would very difficult to trace back the residential history of those families who moved to Bromley in their thousands during the second half of the nineteenth century. It would take a huge relational database to include all the information to make such a search, and it will be some time before the appropriate technology exists.

The most recent sociological publications on Victorian families, households and demographic change *have* attempted to draw together results from a variety of localities as well as undertaking in-depth research of relevant census returns. This has led to some provisional 'national' data that can be used as a benchmark for other local studies, particularly when looking at the Mid-Victorian era.⁹⁴ Recent works on the Victorian household have raised a number of historical controversies that warrant further investigation. The mid-Victorian era raised the issue of 'redundant' women. The end of the century saw concerns over servant-holding. Under increasing economic stress, the middle-class family appeared to be practising increased limitation

⁹⁴ M. Anderson, 'The Social Implications of Demographic Change', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, Vol.2, (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 8-70

of numbers. In the meantime, outside pressures were tarnishing the image of the moral, respectable, cohesive family unit. What effect did these developments have on the middle classes? After studying Bromley census returns that span a total of sixty years, it is clear that this expanding town did not reflect developments identified as 'national' changes. Indeed, Bromley lagged behind London and other larger urban communities in terms of the changes experienced by its inhabitants.

Sociologists and historians of changes in demography have highlighted the prevalence of so-called 'redundant women' in the nineteenth century, especially with the 'excess' of women in the population. Wives and spinsters who were given an increasingly 'ornamental role' within both the family and society.⁹⁵ In 1851 Bromley was inhabited by a large number of well-to-do women as heads of household, the majority enumerated either as 'annuitants' or 'fundholders'.⁹⁶ Approximately 30% of all 'middle-class' heads were female, compared with just 18% later in 1891.⁹⁷ Yet it seems that there were just as many - in fact slightly more - *wealthy* women heads of household in 1891 as 40 years earlier - 9% of the survey as opposed to 7%. The *overall* decline in women heads may be due to statistical distortion, but analysis of occupations does suggest that there were far fewer middle-class women running their own trade or business by the end of the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ This is interesting if only because such a trend contradicts the notion that middle-class women's opportunities had necessarily improved in last two decades of the century. In practice there may have been a gap between expectations and actuality, especially when given the opportunities on offer in the metropolis. In Bromley at least, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a decline in the employment prospects for middle-class women. Had they lost a measure of independence whereby they forsook their productive role for the role of 'consumer'?

Given the great mass of women servants in 1891, the vast majority of whom were single (94%) and 60% of whom were below the age of 25, it is not surprising to find both a large female presence amongst the local population (see Table 3.3) and a relatively low birth-rate.⁹⁹ Between 1851 and 1891, the female quota among the population had risen from 54% to 56%. This may appear a small increase, but in

⁹⁵ M. Vicinus, *Independent Women - Work & Community For Single Women, 1850-1920* (Melbourne, 1985), pp. 2-4

⁹⁶ *1851 Census, op. cit.*; for more on these terms, see Chapter 1, p. 19

⁹⁷ *1851 Census, op. cit.* and *1891 Census, op. cit.*

⁹⁸ *1891 Census, op. cit.*. This supports the theory about the declining economic independence of women as put forward by contemporary thinkers like G. Simmel, *op. cit.*, p. 375

⁹⁹ *1891 Census, op. cit.*; survey of Registers of the Parish of St. Peter and St. Paul and St. George's Bickley 1850-1910 (*REG*)

practice meant that the surplus of women above men had risen from 19% to 27% in forty years. The trend continued up to the First World War, three years before which the difference had grown to 30%, leaving nearly four women for every three men.¹⁰⁰ The graph showing the age structure of the local population in 1891 also reveals the huge divide in the numbers of men and women between the ages of 10 and 30, where there were over half as many women again than men. By studying the occupational returns, as well as the sex distribution of middle-class offspring, the two main causes of this disparity were the large number of young female servants and the relatively high incidence of daughters remaining at home. Even taking into account the fact that daughters were more likely to survive the first years of infancy, when compared to their brothers, a disproportionate number of them failed to flee the family nest. Out of a detailed study of 40 middle-class households, there were 79 daughters still at home, compared with just 40 sons; of those over 15 years of age there numbered 46 and 17 respectively.¹⁰¹

Age Range	Males	Females
Over 80	11	22
70-80	78	148
60-70	225	333
50-60	463	625
40-50	849	1060
30-40	1131	1429
20-30	1492	2124
10-20	1698	2641
Under 10	2353	2397

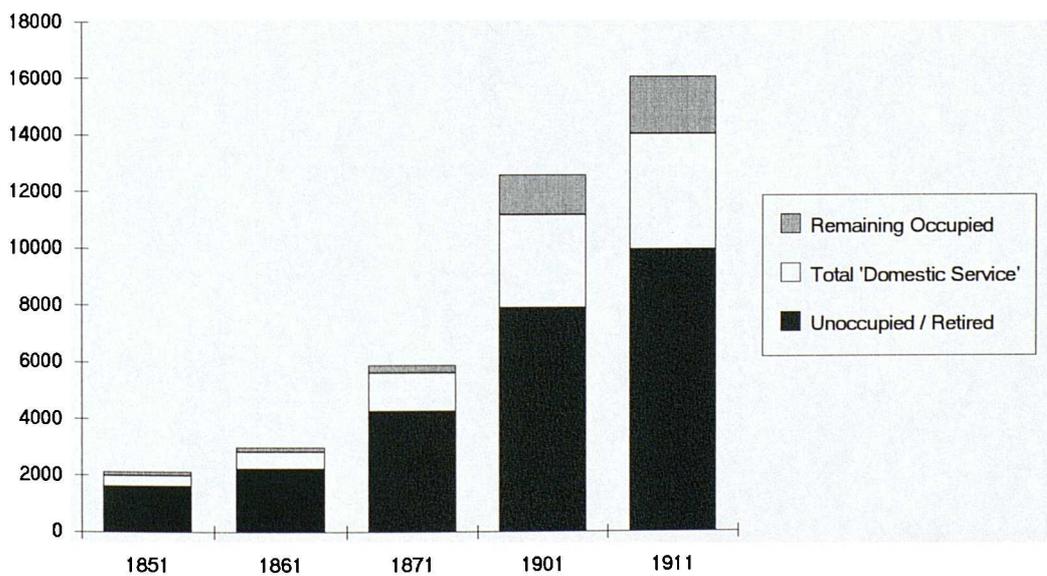
Table 3.3: Age Distribution of Population of Bromley Urban Sanitary District (Source: 1891 Census).

By looking closely at the census summaries of the wider Bromley Registration District for the years 1851-91, it is evident that many of these 'surplus' women were single. Also evident is the fact that the proportion of single women rose considerably during the period, from around 22% to 30%. In effect, most of the single, adult, 'surplus' women who lived in Bromley around 1900 were the working-class servant girls, resident in the homes of the middle-class. Yet among the middle classes themselves at the end of the century, there were very few single female heads of

¹⁰⁰ 1911 Census, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ 1891 Census, *op. cit.*

household - and most of these were schoolteachers. Throughout the period it was expected that women should marry, but the great surplus of women over men towards the end of the century made it more problematic. As Davidoff accurately summed up women's predicament, 'the greatest chance of economic and social survival was still through marriage.'¹⁰² 'National' commentators such as W. R. Greg had already lamented the 'unnatural' number of single women in 1862, reflecting a mood in society which considered older unmarried women as something of an oddity.¹⁰³ This would certainly seem to tie in with the experience of middle-class families in Bromley later in 1891, where the age and number of daughters still at home reflected the difficulty in establishing ones own independence outside of either marriage or ones immediate family.¹⁰⁴ Authoresses like Mariannne Farningham, who had achieved a measure of independence yet, like Mrs. Humphrey Ward, organised anti-suffragist meetings, informed an audience of Bromley men and women in 1879 that wives and daughters should care for those at home and only seek employment if the needs of the family so dictated.¹⁰⁵



* Precise figures do not exist for 1881 & 1891

Figure 3.4 Employment Status of Women & Proportion of Domestic Servants 1851-1891* (Census Returns).

¹⁰² L. Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', in F.M.L.Thompson (ed.), *op. cit.* (1991), p. 105

¹⁰³ M. Vicinus, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4

¹⁰⁴ *1891 Census, op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵ *BR* Feb. 1879

In the mid-nineteenth century in Bromley it had certainly been more common for women to experience greater economic independence and find themselves involved in the running of farms and small businesses. Figure 3.4 shows that a lesser proportion of women were occupied in 1901 and 1911 than in 1851. It seems that many women were unable to take advantage of the opportunities that must have later presented themselves with the suburbanisation of Bromley. The woman who did not adopt the role of the ideal wife or celibate spinster was the exception who proved the rule.¹⁰⁶ Such an exceptional individual in the town was Mary Heppel, the only woman member of the Local School Board when it was founded in 1888.¹⁰⁷ In late Victorian Bromley women did not fill the ranks of the employers or the owners of even medium-sized businesses. The service to society which the wives and daughters of the upper middle class felt they could offer - apart from a minority who were involved in political electioneering and the demand for the vote - was generally restricted to charity work and philanthropy. The middle class represented *working* wives and mothers as unnatural, but charitable duties were seen as a natural extension of women's 'domestic' virtues.¹⁰⁸ Mrs. W. T. Beeby, wife of the town's Medical Officer, gave much of her time to the benefit of others. She was a frequent visitor to Bromley Cottage Hospital and sat on the Committee of the Boys' Institute and School of Science & Art. As President of the local branch of the Church of England Society for Providing Homes for Waifs and Strays (1887-1898), her charitable works also included befriending neglected children. The role of women in this field has led M. Vicinus to conclude that, 'a philanthropy that initiated the emotional ties and obligations of one's own home was emotionally comfortable and unthreatening.'¹⁰⁹

Elsewhere has been outlined the involvement of the women of the *gentry* households in aiding local schools, the distressed and the poor,¹¹⁰ but rarely do we hear of the work of the women of the lower middle-class, whose public lives have been under-recorded. By the last quarter of the century an increasing number of single women nationally were moving into public and professional occupations, such as teaching, nursing, the civil service and clerical work, or into the position of governess which had remained a regular feature of Victorian life and had been increasingly taken up by the lower middle-class spinsters. Although the public and professional sphere of work only amounted to 5.7% of female employment in 1871, it is likely that the

¹⁰⁶ M. Vicinus, *op. cit.*, p. 5

¹⁰⁷ In P. Crawford (ed.), *Exploring Women's Past* (Australia, 1984), pp. 158-159, the author has argued that after the 1860s there was an increasing realisation amongst women that they could be independent and follow their own careers.

¹⁰⁸ C. Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-91

¹⁰⁹ M. Vicinus, *op. cit.*, p. 39

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 2

number had risen considerably by the First World War, given the expansion of such occupations in London and its environs. On the whole, single women from this class who ventured out into the world of employment, took to the relatively 'safe' and socially acceptable occupations: there is little evidence in Bromley of the female 'residential communities' established by independently minded middle-class women as highlighted by M. Vicinus, even if Bromley women may have gone to them.¹¹¹

By 1901 37.3% of women were formally recorded as being in paid employment. Of these, 685 were married or widowed, and 4,015 were single. In fact, still only 12.2% of women who were married or widowed were occupied in full-time employment.¹¹² Domestic service continued to be by far the most common occupation, involving 2,753 women, or 58.6% of 'occupied' women (see Figure 3.4). Another 511 (10.9%) were employed in laundry and washing services, suggesting a move towards the performance of 'home' services outside the client's home. In all, then, 'domestic service' employed as many as 3,264 women. The next most common occupation was dressmaking, 493 women (10.5%) being employed in business concerns such as Miss Cakebread's in the High Street. Here, above a shop near the *Star & Garter* public house, young girls worked for 13 hours a day helping to make dresses for the King's Court whilst Miss Cakebread read out long passages from the Bible.¹¹³ Apprentices started at 13 years of age, initially without pay. Once they had mastered the trade they were paid one shilling per week, with only Sunday and one half-day off. Apart from these types of employment, teaching was the only other occupation of note, involving 203 women (4.3%), whilst women clerks numbered only 75 (1.6%).

The Edwardian era brought a slight improvement in employment prospects for women, and in 1911 38.1% of women were registered as 'occupied'. Of these, 4,101 were employed in some form of 'domestic service',¹¹⁴ a small decline since 1901 from 69.4% to 66.8% of all women employed. The numbers occupied in the 'dress' trade rose dramatically to 839, but this included women employed in 'dealing' as well as dress-making'. In terms of the teaching profession, there was again an increase, but only in absolute terms, as the proportion fell to 3.9%. More striking was the rise in women clerks, who although still relatively few in number, had more than doubled their proportion over the decade to make up 3% of all 'occupied' women.

¹¹¹ M. Vicinus, *op.cit.*, p. 7ff

¹¹² *Abstract of 1901 Census, England and Wales (63 Vict. C.4) - County of Kent*. Only after the year 2001 will it be possible to identify the proportion of 'middle class' women who were 'occupied'.

¹¹³ M. V. Searle, *Bromley Yesterdays* (1983), p. 111-114

¹¹⁴ Laundry and washing services were not recorded separately in the census abstracts for this year

To understand the Victorian middle-class home means not only studying members of the family, but also the 'extended' household, including lodgers and servants. Looking back from the late 1850's, the greatest gentlemen landowner in Bromley, George-Warde Norman, described his father's old faithful servants as close friends of the family, offering not just dull domestic service but personal help and advice. By the 1850s the nature of servant-holding had changed, and members of the family and the servant class had already begun to adopt increasingly separate roles.¹¹⁵ This distinction, it is argued for the nation as a whole, became more conspicuous later on as servants took on more specialist functions. Yet generalizations about national trends can hide some very marked differences in the localities. On the one hand, on the estates of the parish gentry, servant roles in mid-century were already specialised, with the homes of the most affluent middle-class following suit. No doubt this 'mimicking' of the gentry families - if this is what it can be called - persisted throughout the century when allowed to do so by economic circumstance. However, in households with only one or two servants, service functions were less well defined, and domestics often appeared just as 'odd man', 'house servant' or 'boy'.¹¹⁶ In 1891, the main employers of servants in Bromley were the legal and medical professionals, the city merchants and finance men, and the larger business-owners.¹¹⁷ Over one third of servants worked in households where they were the only domestic help, and almost another third where they were one of two servants employed, suggesting that the multi-servant middle-class household in Bromley at the end of the nineteenth century was the experience of only a small minority.

In terms of the gender division of servant labour, M. Anderson has proposed that *domestic service per se* in 1851 was dominated by women; male servants worked on farms and only a very small fraction were 'domestics', although they tended to have more senior posts.¹¹⁸ In Bromley this requires further qualification, since although there were very few male 'house servants', there were a considerable number of grooms, footmen and gardeners working on the large landed estates and in the homes of the wealthier middle classes. By the end of the century, the proportion of male servants - of whatever description - working in an urban environment had changed dramatically. In 1851, out of a limited and not necessarily representative sample of servants, 42% were male and 58% were female; by 1891, the number of women

¹¹⁵ L. Davidoff, 'The Family In Britain', in F.M.L.Thompson (ed.), *op.cit.* (1991), pp. 81-82; J. A. Banks, *Prosperity & Parenthood - A Study of Family Planning Among Victorian Middle Classes* (1965), p. 129ff

¹¹⁶ *1851 Census, op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ *1891 Census, op. cit.*

¹¹⁸ M. Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-63

servants had risen to 86% of the sample taken. Less than a fifth of the male proportion could be classed as true servants, the majority being shop assistants and apprentices.¹¹⁹ Statistics that are available for the Edwardian era show that in 1901 there were 2,753 women domestic servants working in the town, 58.7% of the 'occupied' female population. By 1911, overall numbers had risen once more, with at least 3,418 women employed as 'personal' servants, a figure that represented a slight fall down to 55.7% of all women occupied. Whether male or female, the sheer size of the servant population in Bromley towards the end of the Victorian era is evidence of the wealth of the middle classes in the town, and a testament to the gap between the upper and lower echelons of society.

Servants were by no means the only household members outside the direct nuclear family (see Table 3.4). Although there were very few cases of middle-class families putting up boarders in 1891 - all the incidences were from the ranks of the lower middle-class - many supported either close relatives or visitors.¹²⁰ Out of a representative sample of ten middle-class households, six were likely to include an 'outsider' (excluding servants), four were looking after relatives, and only one maintained an employee. Over half the visitors and boarders were between the ages of 20 and 29, not including the various boarding schools and nursing homes, showing that large numbers of young adults had left home and in consequence had helped boost the proportion of Bromley's population within this age group. Within the household, it was the upper middle-class who sustained greater contact with non-family members, possibly acquaintances from similar professions to either the head or his offspring. A good example of such a household was that of Joseph Swan, qualified chemist who aided in the invention of the first ever electric light bulb, and who was entertaining a visit from two artist friends of his daughter Mary.

Clerks, tradespersons and shopkeepers were less likely to put up 'visitors' as such, but more likely to house relatives. Two such households were those of the bootmaker Thomas Ayling who took in his niece Elizabeth as an apprentice, and the corn merchant Daniel Grinsted who had taken in his widowed mother. Over one in four households contained at least one relative in 1891, suggesting that kin relationships were still important at this time, with some working as unpaid housekeepers. Family assistance might be given to the elderly as in the Grinsted home, or to those seeking employment opportunities or training as with the Aylings. There is no reason to suppose that Wells' experience in the 1870s and early 1880s of being

¹¹⁹ *1891 Census, op. cit.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

parcelled off to close relatives in the search to find a suitable occupation had become a rarity by 1900.¹²¹ The companionship and financial assistance which an extended family could offer must have been difficult to match in an age when both institutional and state help was limited. Whether these functions had become a thing of the past by the First World War, however, is open to further discussion and research.

	Mean Middle-Class Household		Mean Upper Middle-Class Household		Mean Lower Middle-Class Household	
	1851	1891	1851	1891	1851	1891
	Family Members	3.12	3.79	2.69	3.79	3.27
Relatives	0.47	0.42	0.63	0.37	0.42	0.49
Visitors / Boarders	0.35	0.61	0.34	0.67	0.36	0.52
Workers	0.19	0.12	0.02	0.01	0.25	0.26
Servants	1.34	1.921	3.61	2.6	0.57	1.05
Total	5.43	6.86	7.15	7.44	4.84	6.1

N.B. For 1851 N = 231; for 1891 N = 240 (1 in 4 sample)

Table 3.4: Composition Of Middle Class Households, 1851 and 1891
(Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample)

Year	Mean Household Size	Mean Middle-Class Household (1851, 1891)
1851	4.55	5.43
1861	5.05	
1871	5.05	
1881	5.65	
1891	5.55	6.86
1901	5.34	
1911	4.97	

Table 3.5: Household Size 1801-1911 (Source: Census Returns)

In terms of family size, Bromley seemed to be swimming against the national

¹²¹ H. G. Wells, *op.cit.* (1934), pp. 116-159

tide after 1870 (see Table 3.5). The smaller family unit suggested later by national historians did not seem to be materialising. Delving deeper into this issue has not been easy due to the shortcomings of the evidence available, as with health records that were first made in detail only in the early 1890s. Parish registers and census returns were also used, but again these did not always furnish the precise information required for conclusive findings about birth-rates and family size in relation to social class.¹²² Taking the rather crude figures for the number of inhabited houses and the total population of the town, we are able to come up with changes in the average household size for the whole of the nineteenth century. Starting at an average of 6.51 in 1801, the size of households fell progressively until reaching a 'century low' of 4.55 in 1851. It is worth noting that the average size of *middle-class* households in this latter year stood at 5.40. After the mid-nineteenth century low, the 'typical' Bromley household then increased in size to 5.05 by 1871, remaining steady for over a decade until rising again to 5.22 by 1891 (when *middle-class* households stood at 6.86) and to 5.34 by 1901. Only in the first decade of the 20th century did households decline once more, falling quite sharply to 4.97 by 1911. To some degree the growth recorded in the second half of the nineteenth century must have been due to more widespread employment of living-in servants, as referred to earlier, but how much were changes in family size responsible?

Excluding households with 'single' or widowed heads, or where only one parent resided at home at the time of registration, the average co-resident middle-class family stood at 4.32 in 1851, and had risen to 4.45 by 1891. Clearly families were bigger than this in reality due to offspring living away from home. If family size, then, had not fallen by the 1891, did it decline after this date? Statistics for the town as a whole would suggest that this was probably the case. By 1901 the average number of persons per inhabited building had fallen from 5.55 in 1891 to 5.34. By 1911, this figure stood at 4.97, whilst the average co-resident family size for the town's population had fallen to 4.55 (compared to 4.75 in 1901).¹²³ It might be expected that such changes would be reflected by decisive shifts in either the death-rate or the birth-rate. Unfortunately records of death-rates were not officially taken in the town until 1883, while birth records begun almost a decade later.¹²⁴ Compared with averages for England and

¹²² There is plenty of scope for further research on this topic. For example, is there any evidence of one particular class or occupational group limiting their own family size and by so doing encouraging others to imitate them? This would help test J.A.Banks' theory about the extent to which the *upper* middle class, as opposed to the *lower* middle class, suffered worst from financial insecurity after the 1870s, a theory which runs counter to the ideas of historians like G. Crossick and contemporaries like H. G. Wells

¹²³ *1901 Census, op. cit.* and *1911 Census, op. cit.*

¹²⁴ *Bromley Health Reports (Medical Officer), 1890-1914*

Wales and the 'outer' ring of London (including such towns as Croydon, Wimbledon, Uxbridge, Harrow and Walthamstow), both the number of births and deaths in the town were exceptionally low.

Before 1900, the lowest birth-rate recorded, for instance, was in 1897 at 23.1 per thousand. This was 6 per thousand lower than the national average, although interestingly 5 per thousand higher than the rate recorded for the West End of London. The same year also recorded the lowest death-rate of the century, that of only 10.2 per thousand, 7.4 per thousand short of the national figure and one that reflected upon the healthy state of the population and the environment. With some

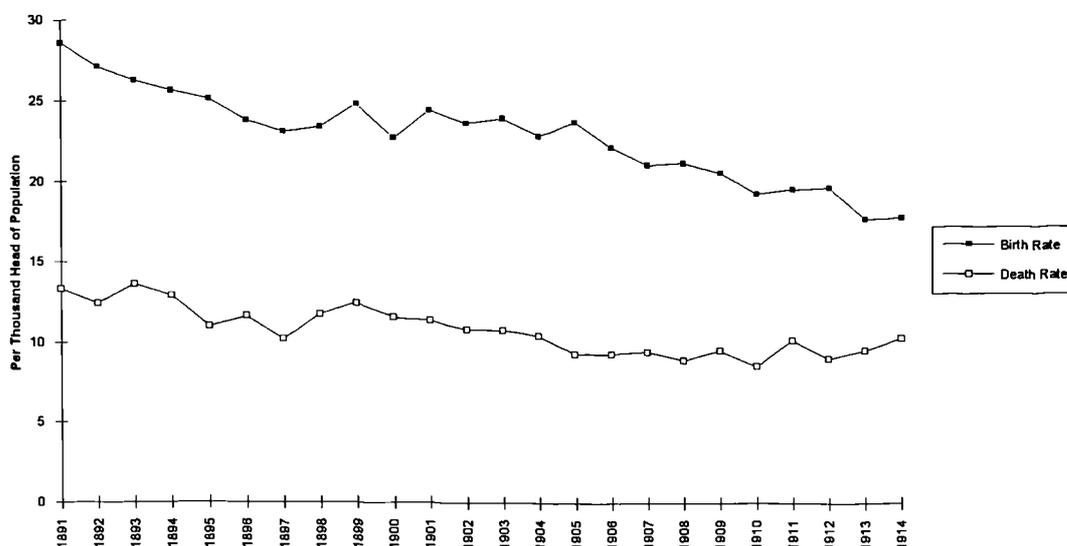


Figure 3.5 Birth Rate and Death Rate Per Thousand Head of Population, Bromley, 1891-1914. (Source: Reports of Local Medical Officer of Health)

N.B. Accurate annual figures are only available from 1891 onwards. The fact that the death rate for England and Wales in 1891 and 1914 were 19.2 per 1000 and 14 per 1000 respectively shows the relative 'health' of Bromley's population. The national birth rates for these same years were 29.7 per 1000 and 23.8 per 1000, which demonstrates that Bromley's birth rate was exceptionally low.

deviation, both continued to fall in the first decade of the twentieth century, notably the birth-rate which by 1914 stood at only 17.7 per thousand. Dr. Codd, the Medical Officer for Health, continued to put low fertility rates down to the age structure of the local population, with relatively large numbers of 'middle-aged' individuals, and a high

proportion of single women servants.¹²⁵ It is difficult to assess what effect this must have had upon the families of Bromley, except to say that out of the fewer children born in the town, more were likely to survive.

The effect of these trends was to cause fluctuations in the 'natural increase' of the local population over the period for which records exist. The rate of 'natural increase' was at its highest in 1891 and 1905, when it stood at 15.11 per thousand and 14.4 per thousand respectively. After 1908, there was a distinctive decline in the 'natural increase' in response to marked falls in the birth-rate. Calculations based on the more reliable decennial census returns suggest that between 1891 and 1911, the 'natural increase' of the population was greater than increases due to inward migration. Yet approximately 4,895 'newcomers' came to the town between 1891 and 1911, evidence of Bromley's magnetism as both place of residence and economic opportunity. The fact that Bromley's overall population had increased so rapidly after 1860, from 5,505 in that year to 33,646 by 1911, suggests the need to discover more about the social and family characteristics of 'newcomers' to the town.

Decade	Mean Birth Rate (per 1000)	Mean Death Rate (per 1000)	Overall Population Increase	Natural Increase	Inward Migration
1891-1900	25.07	12.06	6670	3200	3470
1901-1910	22.23	9.814	6292	3883	2409

Table 3.6: Decennial Mean Birth and Death Rates, Population Growth, Natural Increase in Population and Inward Migration, 1891-1910 (Source: Reports of the Local Medical Officer of Health)

Since reliable figures only exist from the 1890s, in terms of health records and a detailed census study, it makes sense to concentrate analysis on this decade. Using the 35 out of 40 cases of middle-class families where neither the head nor the wife was born in Bromley, there were 32 families who had children at home, 12 of whom had at least one child born in the town. In these dozen cases it was possible to discover the latest date at which these families must have moved to Bromley. There was only one case of a family who had come to the town over 30 years earlier, 3 cases in both the 1860s and 1870s, while the remaining 5 families were newcomers in the last ten years. Taken with the enormous numbers of 'newcomers' who came to the town in the 1890s

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, notably 1902 report. It is also worth noting that marriage rates were consistently higher in Bromley than in the nation as a whole, standing at a mean for 1901 to 1914 of 16.5 per thousand compared to 15.3 per thousand for England and Wales.

- which amounted to an estimated 2,441 individuals out of a total increase of 5,670 - late Victorian Bromley had a large proportion of inhabitants *not* locally born and bred, and therefore we can not expect to find any regular or steady trends in demographic change. For example, where a large section of the population has only recently moved into an area, average family sizes may well increase if the 'non-local' families were already well-established. After all, in the analysis of the 35 'non-local' middle-class families mentioned above, only 12 had at least one child born locally, and out of these only 5 had the majority of their children once settled in the town. From the baptism registers of two Bromley parishes - St. Peter and St. Paul and St. George's, Bickley - it does not appear that locally born children were responsible for the rise in family size between 1851 and 1891. Indeed, amongst the upper middle class, after 1870 marriages increased, yet the number of baptisms declined.¹²⁶

The ability of these 'new' families to afford the removal of their loved ones into the 'suburbs' presumably brought few thoughts of family limitation, at least until economic difficulties warranted any such action. In practice, since many of the 'newcomers' were of a higher socio-occupational status than the local population, and since it has already been established that the average age of upper middle-class heads was higher than their social inferiors, this meant that they were already advanced enough in years to have produced a sizeable family.¹²⁷ The fact that the parish registers reflect a direct correlation between socio-occupational class and age of first marriage, where the upper middle-class delayed the onset of marriage until on average 31.5 for the groom and 28 for the bride, compared to 30 and 25 respectively for the lower middle-class (during the period 1870-1890), also confirms Anderson's theory about families growing more accustomed to condensing their child-rearing life into a shorter period of time.¹²⁸ Further support for these hypotheses comes from the study of 240 families in the 1891 census survey which revealed that among the couples where the father was below the age of 35, the upper middle-class had on average only one child compared to two for the lower middle-class. However, upper middle-class heads between 35 and 55 more often than not had as many as three children, slightly more than lower middle-class heads.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *REG*; this may well of course reflect a more secular society

¹²⁷ *1891 Census, op. cit.*; *REG*

¹²⁸ M. Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 70

¹²⁹ *1891 Census, op. cit.*

	<i>Upper Middle Class</i>		<i>Lower Middle Class</i>		<i>Working Class</i>	
Years	Groom	Bride	Groom	Bride	Groom	Bride
1870-1890	31.5	28	30	25	25	25
1890-1910	31	31	28.5	26	26	25

Table 3.7: Mean Age at Marriage, Per Socio-Occupational Class .
Parish of St.Peter & St.Paul, Bromley. (Source: Marriage Registers)

There still remain too many gaps in our knowledge of family sizes and birth-control practices to draw any definite conclusions about the nature and extent of demographic change. J. A. Banks has made a well-reasoned case for the direct relationship between family size (and the need for its control) and economic circumstance, or more precisely *expectations* of standard of living.¹³⁰ This is supported by Anderson who has further qualified 'the clear relationship between family size and standard of living' by acknowledging the marked differences that existed *within* socio-economic groups.¹³¹ The link between the economic pressures of the last quarter of the nineteenth century - alongside a desire to maintain existing standards of living and status - and the decline in family size is by no means clear-cut, as has been shown with the situation in Bromley. The link may well exist, but other factors also impinge upon the correlation, including less quantifiable elements such as psychology, prestige, moral and religious motivation, or perhaps even the adoption of a 'rationalist' ideology that accentuated man's control of his own destiny. A high standard of living, or 'secure' expectation of it, may result in large co-resident families as with Thomas Davis, father of seven, or George Weeks Senior, father of six. Conversely, a struggling working-class family may have hoped that a large number of children would help support the family over the whole life-cycle of the parents, which itself was increasing in duration as the century progressed.¹³²

Using national statistics and demographic developments it would not be difficult to present a case for the demise of the Victorian family. The decline in the birth-rate, and the proliferation of spinsters must have resulted in the fall in the actual number of families relative to the growth in population. Greater migratory movements and emigration would have pushed longer distances between members of the family at

¹³⁰ J. A. Banks, *op. cit.*

¹³¹ M. Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp. 40-42

¹³² P. Thompson, *The Edwardians - The Remaking of British Society* (1975) 2nd edn. 1992, p. 276, puts forward a case against J. A. Banks' theory, suggesting that limitations upon family size resulted in a decline in domestic service rather than *vice versa*. According to P. Thompson, reducing family size had the effect of accelerating the rise in the middle class's standard of living.

a time when prolonged survival meant more of the close and extended family were alive at the same time. The existence of numerous widows and 'retired' individuals had significant repercussions for society, as it drifted towards both institutional and private benefit schemes. Such programmes for financial planning emerged as it became less likely that support could be offered by offspring who were declining in number or moving away from home at an earlier age.¹³³ It is, of course, debatable whether the emergence of these insurance plans was a cause or symptom of the decline in assistance offered by the family and nearest kin, yet they were clearly an integral part of the family crisis itself. Other forces at work in dismantling the functions once performed primarily by the family were the various clubs, societies, unions, schools, national and local government agencies which emerged *ad infinitum* in the second half of the Victorian Era. Finally, the hold that the *family* might have once asserted over its composite members began to wane with the onset of rival ideologies: self-help, socialism, communism, nationalism, imperialism, civic pride were among the main contenders for the prize of an individual's loyalty.

At the end of the nineteenth century we see the invention of the myth of the moralistic, very private, cohesive, defensive Victorian family unit, an image that persisted through to the Edwardian era and beyond in the ideology and values of the middle-class. In Wells' *Ann Veronica* (1909) the heroine struggled to break free from the restraints imposed upon her by her overbearing father and submissive aunt. They in turn were horrified at the damage such an act would bring to their respectable family image.¹³⁴ Over a decade earlier, in *Diary Of A Nobody* (1892) the Grossmiths had ridiculed the suburban clerk who was outraged by the actions and activities of his outspoken son.¹³⁵ The desire for 'respectability', spoken of by all students of the middle classes, helped inspire the myth of the Victorian family, at the very time it was reeling under the pressure of both demographic and social changes. To what degree the private, respectable image was a reality in Victorian Bromley remains difficult to assess without more *personal*, individualistic information as might be revealed by diaries, letters or autobiographic material. The rather *impersonal* evidence we have for Bromley - in the form of census returns and newspaper articles - suggests that in middle-class families daughters resided at home much longer than sons. If sons or

¹³³ Yet M. Anderson's research shows that offspring were leaving at a younger age by 1900, A. Maclaren, in *Birth Control in Nineteenth Century England* (1978), p. 254, has argued that among *upper* middle-class families it had become more common for children to stay at home until a *later* age.

¹³⁴ The actions and desires of Ann Veronica so horrified the British public that H. G. Wells initially had problems getting the book published; when it finally came out, it aroused such protest that H. G. Wells felt he would never be able to achieve the respect his works deserved. At the end of the book, H. G. Wells rather disappoints the reader when the heroine herself settles for a 'respectable' marriage.

¹³⁵ G. & W. Grossmith, *op. cit.*

daughters were being trained for an occupation, then ordinarily parents continued to look after their upkeep. Fathers in professional occupations such as doctors or solicitors, and those with local business concerns to run, were certainly not averse to extending their family's influence in their respective spheres, either by helping their offspring establish themselves, as the solicitor Robinson Latta had done, or by handing the business or practice on after death, as exemplified by the printer Edward Strong or the ironmonger George Weeks sen..

Changes in Victorian society had strengthened the father as head of the middle-class family and restricted the opportunities of its female members. This had such an impact on society in general that, in L. Davidoff's eyes, 'The powerful position of the master, husband and father was a model for most other institutions of society and state, a model summed up in the maxim: 'The world is but one great family'.¹³⁶ Paternal domination was also reflected - or to be more accurate *extended* - in the behaviour of those gentlemen squires and farmers who encouraged a family atmosphere on their estates by involving their workforce in special celebratory events such as 'coming of age' and 'harvest home'. Similar actions were adopted later by medium-sized employers who organised yearly outings for their employees, either to the nearby countryside or occasionally to a seaside resort. The ideology of paternalism persisted throughout British society, as has been noted elsewhere. It was the male heads of the gentry and middle-class households who dominated the committees of local institutions, clubs and societies. It was the male heads who ran the local railway and gas companies, who acted as trustees for charitable funds and delegates of the ratepayers' associations. In towns like Bromley, where the 'radical' tradition was virtually non-existent, the life of both the skilled and unskilled worker was in the hands not of a powerful guild or trade union but of a middle-class male patron who provided employment in good times and charity in bad.

Women in the town had few opportunities either to lead a household or dominate society. In 1891 single female heads made up only 2% of all heads of household, and were normally living off their own means - which in effect usually meant living off someone else's - or were schoolteachers.¹³⁷ Although women had access to a wider variety of occupations by the end of the nineteenth century, the process was slow and varied from region to region and class to class. The tradition of restricting women to their place in the home has persisted in the ideology of the middle-class through to modern times. Davidoff has argued that the home and

¹³⁶ L. Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', in F.M.L.Thompson (ed.), *op. cit.* (1991)

¹³⁷ 1891 Census, *op. cit.*

women's place within it was vital for moral stability.¹³⁸ Such stability could also lead to *restraint* and impose intense pressures upon women to conform. In the case of Bromley, moves towards the economic independence of women must have been disappointingly slow. Even though women from across the social spectrum contributed to an ever larger proportion of the occupied population - from 33% in 1851 to 38% by 1871 and up again to 39% by 1911 - the majority were as low-paid employees. In 1911, for instance, over two out of every three working women were domestic servants.¹³⁹

Bromley's situation offers new light on debates about the Victorian family, notably over family size. On the one hand, there were a great number of young single women in the town in the 1890s, specifically in the 15 to 30 age-group, where the 'surplus' was mostly made up of servants. This fact may have resulted in a low birth-rate but it did not itself result in small families. The relatively high number of well-to-do families who lived in Bromley at this time, most of whom were born outside of the town and who had come to the town as a place of residence rather than work, already had several children. For them, the family was not a unit of production as such, even if it may well have been a thing of prestige. Although the offspring were indeed consumers of finances in terms of their upkeep and education, this did not seem to encourage family limitation and thus had no obvious effect on family size. Perhaps the Bromley experience helps raise serious questions about the traditional link between fertility and economic circumstance, which has been used to explain the dramatic fall in family size after 1870.

There *do* appear to have been class differentials in terms of family size, and clearly the professional middle-class, by its need for training and qualifications as part of the longer-term career structure encouraging deferred gratification, had among the smallest families of all occupations. However, on the whole middle-class families in the town increased in size at the very time the national average was falling. Many 'newcomers' to the town already had established families, and their relative affluence immunised them from the worst effects of the late-Victorian economic recession. There were no signs at this time that the need to enjoy the 'paraphernalia of gentility'¹⁴⁰ had any decisive impact on the size of either family or household. This was just another example of how this once rural market town 'dragged' behind the major towns and cities of England in terms of socio-cultural developments. If Bromley was much

¹³⁸ See L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*

¹³⁹ *1911 Census, op. cit.*

¹⁴⁰ J. A. Banks, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-112

slower to show signs of an increasingly ornamental role for women, or of a large body of wealthy middle-class families, both of which occurred later in the century, then it is not surprising that in terms of family size the town also failed to conform to the historian's 'classical' mould.

Even though the middle classes of Bromley were a concoction of different backgrounds, occupations and ideals, all looked upon the town as a source of opportunity in some form or another. For the independent, the retired or the 'City' gent it may have been attractive purely as a retreat, but for many others it also brought the possibility of social enhancement. Unlike the mass of labourers, journeymen and servants who came into the town after 1850 in search of work, businessmen came in search of profit and social mobility. Mobility, of course, could work both ways, and 'rags to riches' stories were rare. Wells was one such rarity. At first an assistant at a draper's, then at a chemist's, he became a teacher before gaining a B.Sc. degree at London University. After 1890 he turned to writing and published his first book in 1893. Social enhancement itself might be inter-generational or within a specific career. Allen Stoneham, for example, who was born in Bromley like Wells, entered the civil service and gradually worked his way up to the post of Assistant Secretary. He later retired on a comfortable pension that enabled him to devote time to his duties on the Urban District Council.¹⁴¹ Two other upwardly mobile residents who also sat on the Council, though neither born locally, were William Robert Mallett and George Lawrence. William R. Mallett eventually achieved a partnership in a London firm of architects, while George Lawrence, a mere 'general servant' in Chislehurst in 1871, had by 1889 set himself up as a nurseryman in Bromley Common.¹⁴²

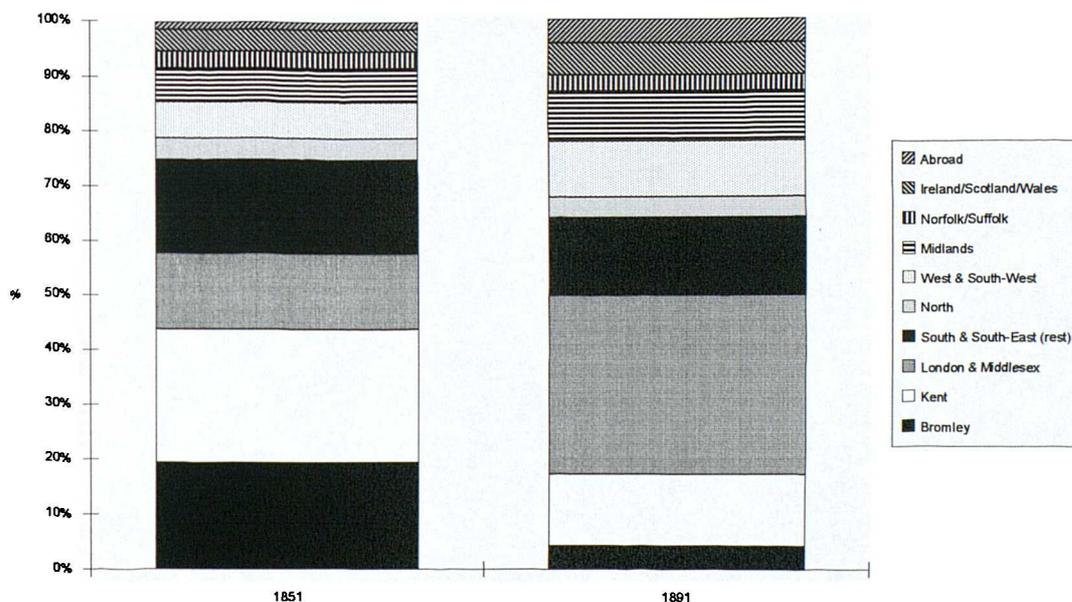
Any study of social mobility also needs to consider degrees of *geographical* mobility. Comparisons of birthplace between 1851 and 1891 revealed an enormous decline in the number of those born either in Bromley or on the Kent/Surrey border (see Figure 3.6).¹⁴³ Instead, a far greater proportion had originated either in London or Middlesex, with a further increase, albeit less dramatic, in those born abroad. In practice this meant that by 1891 Bromley's 'middle-class' population was far more diverse (and even cosmopolitan) and less local in terms of place of origin. Whether

¹⁴¹ *BR* Feb. 1895

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *1851 Census, op. cit.* and *1891 Census, op. cit.*

this meant that these classes were less attached to the town itself is difficult to say. The arrival of 'newcomers' did not necessarily mean a deterioration of its social, political and cultural life, for not all were attempting to hide themselves away in some tranquil retreat. The 'integration' which came with the improvements in communications in the Victorian era (which affected Bromley more significantly after 1858) caused the town to change its overall character and, in the eyes of outsiders, may have helped forge the appearance of the archetypal 'middle-class' suburb, but the process appears to have been a very gradual one.¹⁴⁴ There may have been aspects of London's society, culture and environment from which the middle classes were trying to escape; but there were also other features which 'moved out' with these same families and boosted the cultural life of the town.



N.B. For 1851 N = 231; for 1891 N = 240 (1 in 4 sample)

Figure 3.6 Birthplaces of Middle-Class Heads of Household, 1851 and 1891. (Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample)

¹⁴⁴ See J. M. Rawcliffe, *op.cit.* for a study of the residential development of Bromley in the Victorian era.

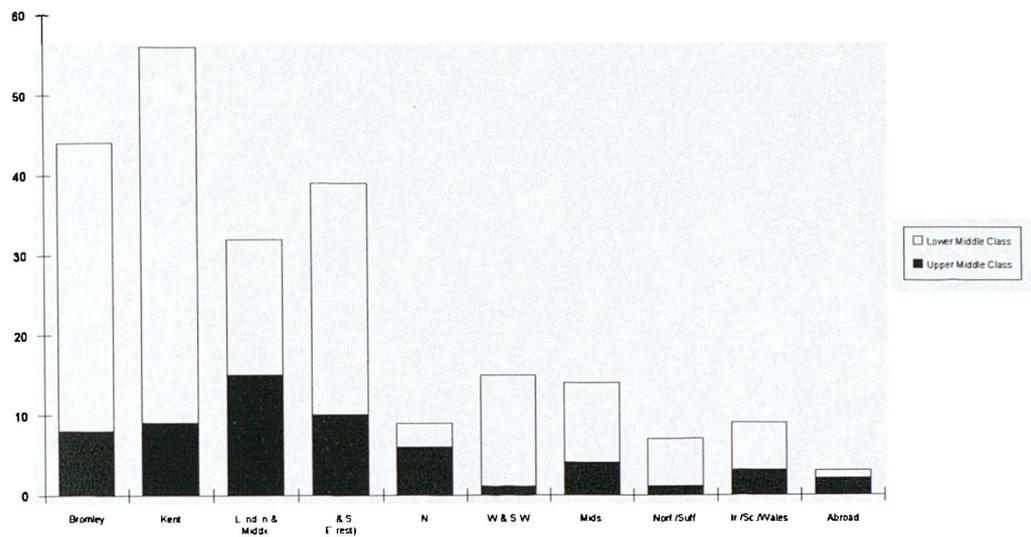


Figure 3.7 Birthplaces of Lower and Upper Middle-Class Heads of Household 1851. (Source: Census Returns)

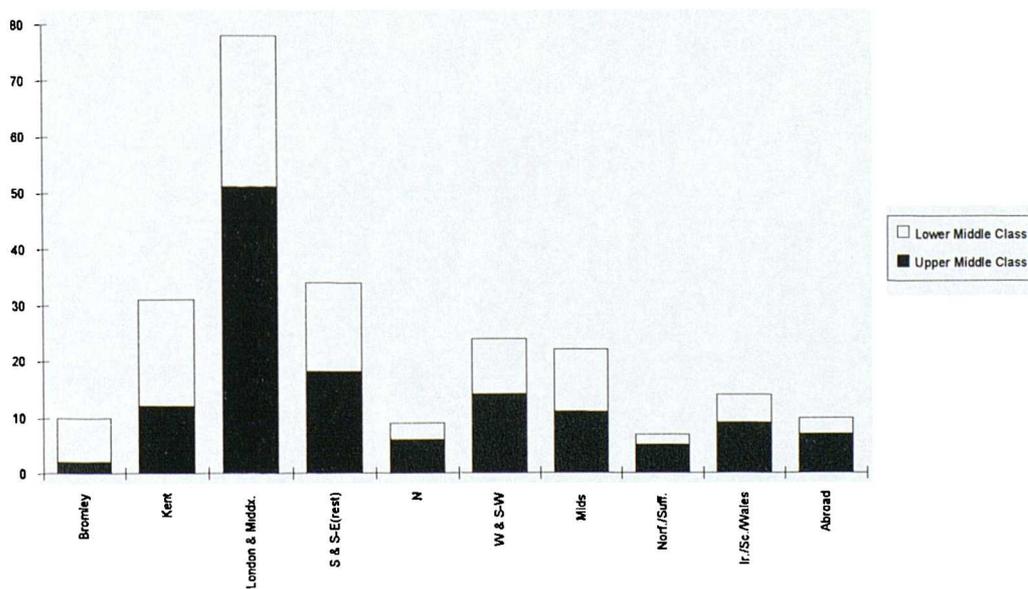


Figure 3.8 Birthplaces of Lower and Upper Middle-Class Heads of Household, 1891. (Source: Census Returns, 1891 One in Four Sample)

For some time social historians have recognised a drift away from the centre of the city, particularly by the 'middle classes' who had the means to set up new homes in the outer suburbs.¹⁴⁵ Wealth meant mobility, as reflected by the origins of Bromley's 'middle-class' population. Taking the number of servants as a crude measure of wealth, the most 'prosperous' inhabitants of the town came from *outside* the immediate locality, essentially from the metropolis (see the differences in birthplaces between the *upper* and *lower* middle class as shown in Figure 3.7 and 3.8). The two wealthiest occupational groups were the men of 'high-commerce' and the 'professionals', both of whom had 229 servants per 100 households; out of these heads of household, half of the former and a third of the latter came from London. Considering that London was the centre of business and commerce, as well as of education and academic training, this is perhaps not surprising. Yet it does reveal that many of Bromley's *upper* middle-class had come to the town to reap the harvest of their successes gained in the banking houses and the Inns of Court in London.

The tradespeople and the shopkeepers (with 122 servants per hundred households) came from less far afield. Very few had been born in the metropolis, and nearly half had come from Bromley, Kent or elsewhere in the south-east; none had come from abroad. Out of a rising number of clerks (with 130 servants per hundred households) a quarter had come from London, possibly reflecting its more extensive educational and training opportunities. None of the clerks in the survey had been born in Bromley, and over a half had originated from places over 50 miles away. The last decades of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic national increase in the numbers of clerks, particularly in and around centres of government and commerce, where the size of economic and bureaucratic operations were most impressive.¹⁴⁶ To some extent this increase was reflected by changes in the number of clerks residing in Bromley, but the proportion of clerks among the middle-class population of the town was significantly lower than could be found in suburbs like Clapham and Peckham.¹⁴⁷ The latter were closer to London, possessing both faster and cheaper access to the offices and clearing-houses of the capital. In addition, Bromley had practically limited its own influx of clerical workers by delaying the onset of 'workers' trains and by some of the restrictive conditions imposed upon late-nineteenth century residential developments.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1969), p. 118; H. J. Dyos, *op.cit.*, p. 22 *et al.*

¹⁴⁶ G. Crossick, *op.cit.*, p. 19 and G. L. Anderson, p. 116 in G. Crossick (ed.), *op.cit.*.

¹⁴⁷ G. Crossick, *ibid.*, p.33.

¹⁴⁸ The *BR* had regular reports on the demand for cheaper and better services, as well as articles on the conditions imposed by landowners on the development of their property.

Occupation	No. of Servants Per 100 Heads of Household	No. of Servants Per 100 Family Members
Professionals	229	63
Financiers / Merchants	229	54
Independent	190	69
Clerks	130	28
Tradespeople / Retailers	122	27

Table 3.8: Number of Servants Per Occupational Category, 1891 (Census Sample)

Analysis of both geographical mobility and social enhancement has more recently led sociologists and social historians to pay closer attention to the significance of 'life-cycles' and generational changes.¹⁴⁹ Given the demographic changes that occurred in the nation as a whole, as the century progressed individual family members could expect a longer life. This carried with it, in Anderson's words, 'rising predictability'.¹⁵⁰ For example, the chances of becoming a grandmother or even great-grandmother or of becoming 'retired', had significantly increased by the First World War. It was also far more likely that one's children would survive past infancy, which in some circumstances may have influenced family sizes. Until further research is done into this phenomenon across the nation as a whole, it is difficult to assess what effect increased life-spans had upon mobility. They may well have provided *greater* opportunity for mobility, both geographical and social, not simply because one's own life was extended, but because it allowed contact with a greater number of living relatives. Alternatively, the impact of 'rising predictability' may have been superseded by other socio-economic considerations.

Wells' social elevation testified to the possibilities of inter-generational mobility. His father had begun his working life as a gardener, later gaining a retail business that enabled his children to attend a private school. Social advancement also took place *within* an individual's life-cycle, as with Wells himself. Many small businessmen, farmers and shopkeepers came to Bromley in search of commercial opportunity. One of the most successful was Daniel Grinsted, the son of a Horsham farmer, who had gone into business with his father dealing in corn and coal, and then had moved to Bromley in 1865.¹⁵¹ Realising the lucrative opportunities for a corn and coal merchant's in the town, he eventually had premises in the High Street, Market

¹⁴⁹ M. Anderson, *op.cit.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.70

¹⁵¹ *BR* Feb. 1895

Square, and Bromley Common as well as a store in Beckenham.¹⁵² Such was the success and respectability that he gained in the town that he was elected Chairman of the Urban District Council in 1896, and in the same year became the very first 'retailing' magistrate. In the 1891 census he is recorded as being 51 years of age, with four children at home, one of whom was an 18-year old warehouseman, and another a four-year old daughter who was being cared for by a governess. At the time, Daniel Grinsted also had two elder sons, but since they did not appear on the census return, it is impossible to tell what form of training they were receiving, if any, or what type of occupation they had moved into.

One of the problems in analysing social mobility is that information is usually only provided on those members of society who have been successful, and this is certainly the case when it comes to contemporary material available on the families of nineteenth century Bromley. The Ilotts, Dunns, Weeks, Howards or Latters are all illustrations of families who enjoyed either continued or improved success in the Victorian era, and who regularly appeared in the columns of the local journals. Perhaps a more objective indication of social mobility can be gleaned from the census returns, in particular the occupation of offspring.¹⁵³ Even where the occupation is given - and it is appreciated that some sons and daughters, especially those with occupations, may well have been no longer resident with their family - we are not given enough information to form any conclusive findings. It was noticeable that in retailing families male offspring either followed in their father's footsteps or had become a clerk of some form or another; daughters who were 'occupied' were generally students, teachers, governesses, clerks or shop assistant-cum-apprentices. Occupations of offspring obviously varied with social class, as well as with family size and place within the family. While the children of the upper middle-class were either students or had no occupation at all, lower middle-class children were employed in a variety of retailing or clerical occupations.

There were several facets of both national and local Victorian society which could encourage movements up the social scale. The two most decisive factors appear to have been education and personal contacts. In mid-century, tradesmen and

¹⁵² It is worth noting that socio-economic background had a crucial impact upon the relative success of a business. H. G. Wells' father found little success in Bromley and was forced to sell up. This revealed the restrictions upon opportunities for social advancement for the Wells family came from servant stock whilst the Grinsteds and Medhursts were already running businesses of their own before they arrived in the town.

¹⁵³ Even where the occupation was given - and it is appreciated that some sons and daughters, especially those with occupations, may well have been no longer resident with their family - we are not given enough information to form any conclusive assumptions.

shopkeepers in Bromley sent their sons to the local High Street academy run by Thomas Morley.¹⁵⁴ Morley's Academy continued the tradition begun by Joseph Rawes, the previous proprietor, of teaching accounting and clerical skills rather than the 'classics'. Here pupils such as William R. Mallett and H. G. Wells were able to take and pass the exams of the College of Preceptors that provided a foothold to further education. Wells considered his education antiquated, portraying his old school as Dickensian-like and catering principally for the sons of the 'poorish middle-class'.¹⁵⁵ Later in the century, opportunities for education beyond the elementary stage expanded, even if status and income continued to determine the nature and quality of schooling. Elementary education for the offspring of lesser tradespeople and working class was provided by the Church of England National Schools, which in his youth Wells apparently scoffed at as socially inferior and a mark of social subordination.¹⁵⁶ Sons of the well-to-do had to seek secondary schooling outside of the town for most of the Victorian era, notably at Dulwich College and St. Dunstons. In 1897 Quernmore Boys School moved to the capacious premises of Robert Boyd's Plaistow Lodge, so improving its facilities that they successfully attracted increasing numbers of boys destined for the army, navy and Oxbridge. Daughters of the upper middle-class and wealthy retailers were able to attend Bromley High School for Girls when it was established by the Girls Public Day School Trust in 1883.

Fees at the lesser private schools may not have been high, but they were still prohibitive. Educational opportunity was determined by income and as such was a reflection rather than a determinant of social status. The success of Wells was unusual considering his upbringing, and even then the author repeatedly stressed that his background was not of the working class but of the 'petty bourgeoisie'.¹⁵⁷ The wealthiest, most respected members of the local community were those who had attended the larger private schools or who had gained skills and advancement in government service, the professions or the increasingly competitive world of business.¹⁵⁸ Amongst the upper middle-class were Walter H. Bosanquet, the City solicitor schooled at Cheltenham College and articled in a firm at Lincoln's Inn. Another individual, Gustave Loly (Quernmore's headmaster) had attended Liverpool College before achieving degrees at Zurich University and London University. Degrees had also been gained by all the town's Anglican clergy, and by the likes of Gainsford Bruce *en route* to the Bar and Queens Council. Outside of the professions,

¹⁵⁴ H. G. Wells, *op. cit.* (1934) pp. 85-93

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94

¹⁵⁸ *BR* Feb 1895

advancement was through business channels once private schooling had come to an end. At the top level, Thomas Davis had worked his way up to the position of Secretary and Adjuster of Claims to the British and Foreign Marine Assurance Company based in London. Thomas C. Dewey experienced similar rapid promotion from Manager of the Industrial Branch of the Prudential Assurance Company in 1875 to General Manager by 1904 and eventually Chairman (1910) and President (1922).

For the local tradesman or shopkeeper, success came with a blend of private schooling and business apprenticeship, with the added bonus of personal contact secured through networks of kin and community. The influence of family, kin, friends and partners could well be decisive. As L. Davidoff and C. Hall have emphasised, such contacts provided a range of experiences, from straightforward investments and loans to more complex and subtle inspirations of a religio-moral variety.¹⁵⁹ The family itself was the single most important factor in determining the fortunes of an individual. Tradesmen or retailers like William W. Baxter, H. G. Dunn, T. E. Strong, professionals like G. B. Baxter, J. W. Ilott, R. Latter, and men of commerce like T. Davis, J. Scott and T. C. Dewey's nephew all benefited from the success of close relatives, whether by inheritance or business acquaintance. The experience of the young Wells as relatives attempted to find him employment, illustrates the strength of family ties.¹⁶⁰ Once established with ample means, parents in turn could reciprocate by sponsoring their own offspring or by maintaining elderly relatives. Care must be taken not to forsake links wider than mere kinship ties, such as those that existed within groups of similar occupation or status. Descendants of local Victorians today recall how considerable inter-marriage took place between families of tradesmen and retailers, such as between the Grinsteds, Loyds and Lownds.¹⁶¹ Although business rivalry must have existed amongst those families with the same trade, elements of co-operation and collectivity clearly off-set serious division. Thus tailors, bootmakers, printers *et al* joined in entertainment at the Tradesmen's Annual Ball, or in condolence at the increasingly frequent funeral parades. Such events and contacts helped create an identity beyond the immediate family, though both were helpful in improving economic security and forging a common bond within, if not necessarily between, specific ranks of the middle classes.

The degree to which the diverse groups that went to make up the 'middle-class' identified themselves as equals has been a matter of considerable historical debate.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112, 215-219

¹⁶⁰ H. G. Wells, *op. cit.* (1934), pp. 116-159

¹⁶¹ *Collection of Oral Histories* No. 26, Chris Purnell

¹⁶² For example, see H. Perkin, *op. cit.* (1990) and W.D. Rubinstein, *op. cit.* (1977)

Two principal points of focus have been on the distribution of wealth and the extent of geographical social segregation. Wealth itself varied from the more tangible 'possessions' such as income and property to the less overt investments, shares and personal 'effects'. The difficulty in assessing wealth has meant that the fundamental question over which W. D. Rubinstein and F. M. L. Thompson differ - whether capital had become more important than land *per se* - may remain unsolved.¹⁶³ Statistics available from the nineteenth century tax returns suggest that the wealthiest Victorians continued to increase their share of the national income.¹⁶⁴ Amongst the non-landed middle classes, W. D. Rubinstein has argued that most millionaires and half-millionaires after 1880 were 'City' merchants and financiers, not industrialists and certainly not professionals.¹⁶⁵ The rich, then, were dominated by individuals from London, many of whom resided in suburbia and the home counties. Over the question of wealth distribution, W. D. Rubinstein has stressed that inequality *declined* after the late 1860s, arguing that social and economic changes had *not* created a super-rich class of entrepreneurs.¹⁶⁶ This theory does not tally with H. Perkin's most recent study which emphasises a wedge developing in the late nineteenth century, within the nation's middle-class, driven deeper by the rising inequality in wealth.¹⁶⁷

Every social historian of the nineteenth century would agree that even if purely economic divisions did not alter markedly, the middle classes did seek to create a *physical* divide in the towns in which they lived.¹⁶⁸ The 'suburb' had been a creation of a combination of a revolution in transport, changes in socio-economic practices, environmental pressures and a shift in middle-class values.¹⁶⁹ The detached or semi-detached villa was a symbol of status as well as a means of providing privacy and seclusion. The ultimate desire was the genteel dwelling with its semi-circular drive, impressive brick frontage, sash windows, slate roof, and carved lintels on the doorways.¹⁷⁰ The associated stables, carriages or gigs completed the ideal 'gigocratic' image. Such homes were scaled-down versions of prestigious country houses, and served to claim a paternalistic social standing within the local community. With their landscaped gardens hedged off or fenced in from the streets outside, they symbolized the anti-urban individualism of the middle-class.¹⁷¹ Once of an ostentatious, showy

¹⁶³ For further detail on this on-going debate, see W. D. Rubinstein and F. M. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* in *EHR* Vol. XLV No.2 1992.

¹⁶⁴ H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1969), p. 137

¹⁶⁵ W. D. Rubinstein, *op.cit.* (1977)

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1990), pp. 27-36

¹⁶⁸ See G. Crossick, *op.cit.* (1977), p. 48ff and Refs. 230 - 234 below.

¹⁶⁹ F. M. L. Thompson, *op.cit.* (1982), p. 15

¹⁷⁰ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 232, 361.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 361

Gothic design, tastes and appearances became tempered to fit in with the '*rus in urbe*' ideology that so influenced suburban residents. Instead, the more secluded and quaint cottage-style home filtered in, modelled along the lines of William Morris' 'Red House', constructed in reaction to the ugly artificiality of earlier Victorian housing.¹⁷² Style and design would have meant little if these dwellings were not set apart from the mass of society. Thus social segregation became increasingly conspicuous, a visible manifestation of the local social hierarchy. Suburbs like Bromley began to develop suburbs of their own, making the whole town a mixture of zones with distinct social status; these areas *within* the master suburb became more socially homogeneous than ever before.¹⁷³

Enumeration District	% Middle-Class Households		% Upper Middle-Class Households		% Lower Middle-Class Households	
	1851	1891	1851	1891	1851	1891
London Rd. & High St. (North)	30.3	29.4	3.9	11.9	26.4	17.5
Farwig & Plaistow	11.8	9.1	3.4	5.7	8.4	3.4
Bromley Common & Southborough	22	10.8	9.3	8.8	12.7	2
Widmore, Bickley & Sundridge	20.4	25.2	7	17.5	13.4	7.7
Market Place & High Street (South)	40.3	27.3	6.7	10.8	33.6	16.5

Table 3.9: Geographical Distribution of Middle Class, 1851 and 1891.
(Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample)

¹⁷² J. Burnett, *op.cit.*. Although William Morris' 'Red House' in Bexleyheath, Kent, is frequently used by historians to exemplify the quaint cottage style home that was constructed to blend in to its surroundings, it is often forgotten that Morris also had a high wall built around the whole property, segregating it from the surrounding inhabitants. This was social segregation in its most overt, 'physical' sense.

¹⁷³ S. M. Gaskell, 'Housing and The Lower Middle Class', in G. Crossick (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 164

	1851	1891
% Middle Class Households	24.7%	23.1%
% Upper Middle Class Households	6%	12.5%
% Lower Middle Class Households	18.7%	10.6%
Standard Deviation (From the Mean for Upper Middle Class Households)	1.94	3.56

Note: Percentages refer to the proportion of all households in the town. Standard deviation relates to the degree of divergence from the mean for the proportion of upper middle class households in the areas specified in Table 3.9, and is a useful measure for revealing the growth in social segregation, in that it highlights the degree to which certain areas were becoming more 'exclusive'. The greater the divergence from the 'mean', the more some parts of the town had less upper middle-class households, and the more others had greater numbers.

Table 3.10: Geographical Social Segregation & Changes in Composition of Middle Classes in Bromley, 1851-91.
(Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample)

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the suburb of Bromley experienced dramatic changes in the geographical distribution of its wealthiest inhabitants. Primarily, this was due to the influx of wealthy 'City' merchants and financiers alluded to earlier. Assessments of wealth can be carried out through studying type and size of dwelling, landownership, occupational status (as a guide to income), and the number of residential servants.¹⁷⁴ By 1851, a handful of prosperous areas had already emerged. Upper middle-class families were attracted to the hamlets of Bickley, Southborough, Widmore, Sundridge and Bromley Common. All were on the rural fringes of the town, though the latter two hamlets also included a number of lower middle-class and working-class inhabitants. At this time, detached properties of the well-to-do existed in relatively close proximity to the cottages of the labouring population. The majority of the lower middle-class were centred around the market place and the High Street, hardly surprising given the proportion of tradesmen and shopkeepers. As for the working classes, they were spread across the town, with a prevalence of agricultural labourers in Plaistow and Farwig. The fact that these two

¹⁷⁴ *1851 Census, op. cit.* and *1891 Census, op. cit.*; *Tithe Assessment 1841; Landownership Assessment 1873; O.S. Maps 1868-1909*

'hamlets' were located on the London side of the town demonstrated how the town itself had not yet undergone substantial suburban development.

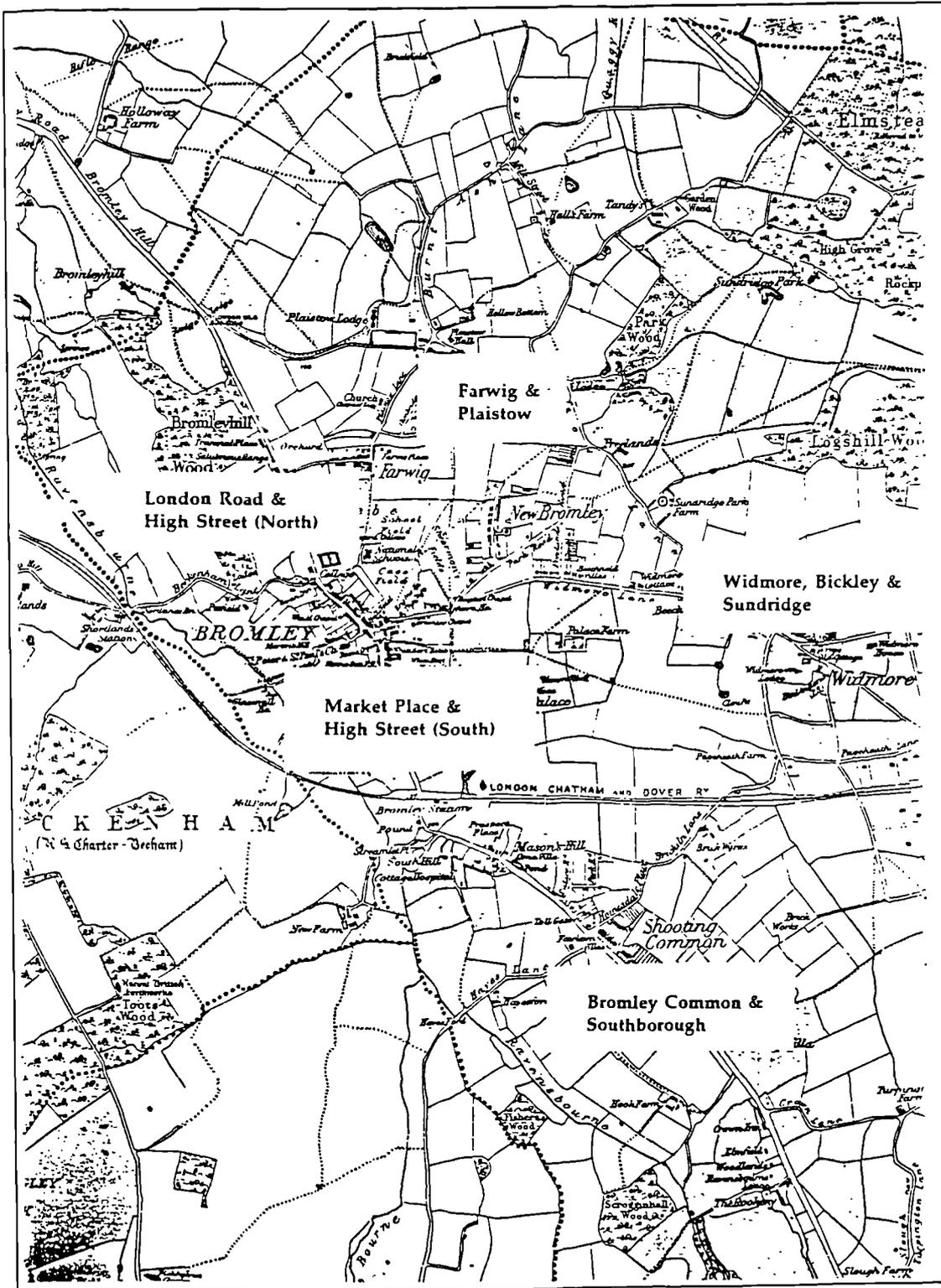


Figure 3.9 Map of Bromley showing Enumeration Districts (1851-1891), using 1868 O.S. Map.

Scale: 4 inches to 1 mile

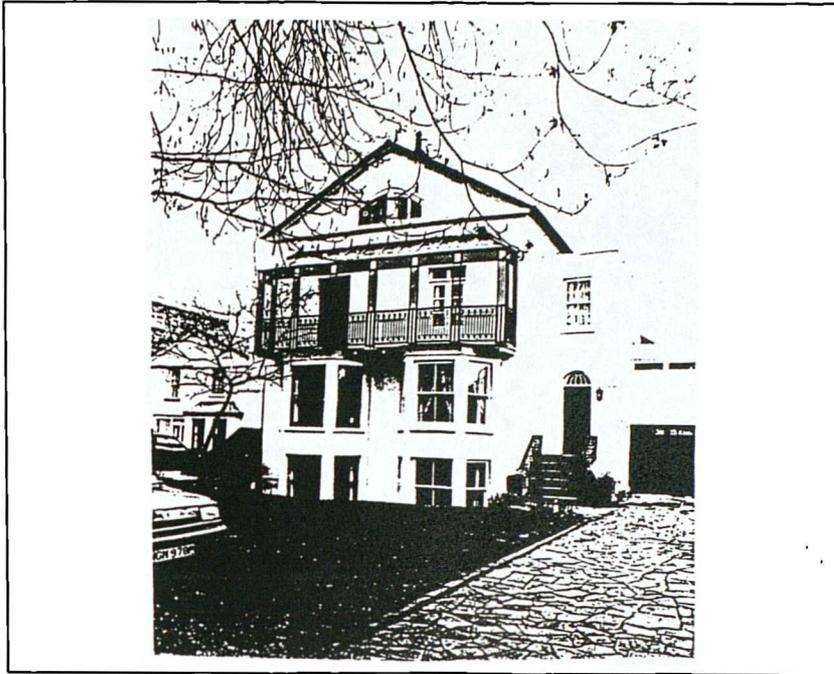


Figure 3.10 Semi-detached villa properties at 39-41 Bromley Common, some of the more sought-after houses in this part of Bromley, occupied by London tea dealers, silk merchants and members of the Stock Exchange, employing two to three servants. (Photograph taken 1981, BPL).

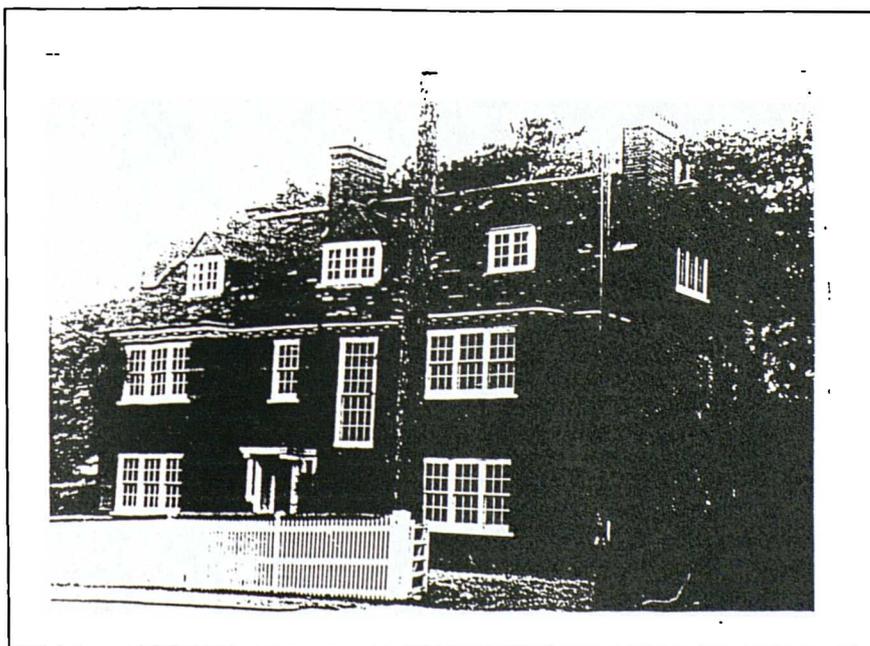
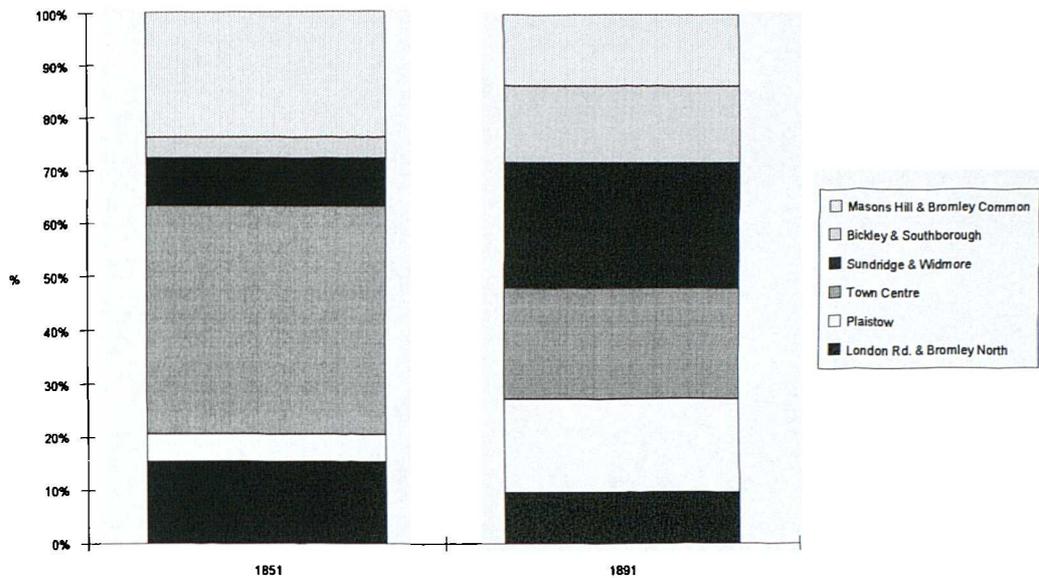


Figure 3.11 Large detached property in Page Heath Lane, Bickley, one of a number of exclusive houses in the area constructed between 1878 and 1879 on and around the estate of George Wythes, occupied by London barristers, financiers, brokers and merchants, and employing three to six servants. (Photograph taken 1983, BPL).



N.B. For 1851 N = 231; for 1891 N = 240 (1 in 4 sample)

Figure 3.12 Distribution of Middle-Class Heads of Households, 1851 and 1891 (Source: Census Returns, 1851 and 1891 Sample).

The distribution of middle-class homes in the enumeration districts (see Table 3.9 and Figure 3.11) reflects the development of two distinct zones of upper middle-class development by the end of the century, both within the area already identifiable by 1851. With the emergence of 'villa' developments between 1851 and 1891 - not to be confused with the rise of 'villadom' that was more closely associated with the lower middle-class - the prosperous families moved away from the town centre onto the old landed estates (see Figures 3.10 and 3.11). These were still close enough, if not too close, to the service provided by the new railway lines. By 1891, the two zones constituted nearly half of all upper middle-class homes, whereas in 1851 they had made up only one third. Households designated *upper* middle-class in the parishes constituting Bickley and Sundridge rose from 7% to 17.5% in this period. 'Moving out' from urban centres was part and parcel of middle-class aspiration. Sometimes it is possible to identify 'chains' of geographical mobility, as exemplified by Henry Selby, a wine merchant who moved out of the High Street into Homesdale Road, a location vacated by the famous publisher M. H. Hodder. M. H. Hodder in turn purchased the 'Carisbrooke' property at Bromley Common off J. Wheeler-Bennett, who left for the relative tranquillity of Keston. Homes like the four-storey detached and semi-detached buildings of Widmore Road were a particular attraction for doctors and solicitors, a feature of the town that persisted into the twentieth century and is recalled by older

residents today.¹⁷⁵

It would be difficult to quantify the growth of social segregation in Bromley to the accuracy achieved by R. J. Morris in his study on Leeds, since the requisite data is not available.¹⁷⁶ Information gleaned from census returns reveal that the proportion of *upper* middle-class households within each registration district was much more even in 1851 than in 1891 (See Table 3.10). The earlier returns revealed an average for *upper* middle-class households of 6% with a standard deviation of 1.9; by the final decade of the century this had altered to 12.5% and 3.6 respectively. Rating assessments for the local government wards created in 1894 help to give a deeper insight to the intensity of segregation by this time.¹⁷⁷ As already suggested, Bickley was the wealthiest ward, with a rateable value of £6 12s. *per capita* and £40 per house. Within this ward lived one of Bromley's most affluent inhabitants, John Scott of the shawl manufacturers *Kerr & Scott*, who when he died in 1899 left personal property to the value of £107,554 and real estate of £212,535. Sundridge was the second most highly-rated ward, at £6 11s. p.c. and £35 per house. This tree-lined ward was inhabited by some wealthy individuals like T. C. Dewey of the South Hill Estate, who at his death in 1924 was worth over £750,000. In the Plaistow ward, by contrast, lived many journeymen and labourers, and rateable values were only £5 10s. and £30 respectively. The 'wealthiest' wards were also those with houses more widely scattered, Bickley's 0.8 houses per acre markedly different from the 3 houses per acre found in the more congested Town ward. Density of housing, however, was not in itself an adequate measure of wealth, since the farms and tenant properties spread across Bromley Common contributed to the lowest rateable values of all Bromley's wards. As the table on population density shows, social segregation was as much a feature of Edwardian as Victorian times, with the Sundridge Ward even showing a decline in persons per acre by 1911.

This polarisation of the ranks of the middle classes into distinct residential areas was reinforced by the building projects of the second half of the nineteenth century. In particular, the late 1860s and the 1870s had witnessed the development of Plaistow and the district of 'New Bromley', alluded to by Wells as 'a multitude of uncoordinated fresh starts'¹⁷⁸ The mass 'exploitation of roads' that this entailed was home to hundreds of not just working-class families but also lower middle-class families, many of whom

¹⁷⁵ *Collection of Oral Histories* e.g. No. 17, Victor Wallis

¹⁷⁶ R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party - The Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds 1820-1850* (1990), pp. 42-43, where distribution of voters is used to give a 'segregation index'.

¹⁷⁷ *BR* July 1894

¹⁷⁸ H. G. Wells, *New Machiavelli* (1911), pp. 44-45.

sought to take advantage of the new railway line through Grove Park to Charing Cross.¹⁷⁹ Areas like Bromley Common resisted developments similar to either New Bromley or the more prestigious Bickley Park (1860s) and Kinnaird Park (late 1890s). This was partly because of the influence of the Norman family and partly because of its geographical position to the south of the town, away from railway communication to London. To a degree, in terms of social composition, Bromley Common retained the characteristics of the market town prior to the arrival of the railway. Its unique composition was preserved for most of the nineteenth century with the west side of the common unspoilt. Yet later in the century artisan and working-class terraced housing *did* appear on the east side of the Common. The fact that these were erected behind, and as separate from, the more salubrious dwellings along the front of the old turnpike road was testimony to the intensity of ideas about social rank and segregation. It was these ideas that were so important in dictating the desires and direction of the middle classes as they gained in influence within the local community.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FOUR: THE MIDDLE CLASSES - ASPIRATIONS AND DIRECTIONS

Having looked at the composition of the town's middle class, we now need to address the aspirations and values behind its constituent members, and what they sought to achieve in the local community as a whole. There have been numerous theories dealing with the causes and depth of changes that have taken place in the driving forces behind the nation's middle class. Perkin has tended to emphasise the 'values' of the middle class, heralding religion as the 'midwife of class'.¹ J. A. Banks has stressed socio-economic factors where financial pressures dictated patterns of behaviour.² The roles of the family and of gender were made paramount by Davidoff and Hall as 'domesticity' shaped lives of middle-class women.³ Morris has highlighted the role of voluntary societies in the formation of a unified culture.⁴ To these hypotheses might also be added the influences of occupation, philosophical convictions and political party, all of which held some significance in determining the nature and direction of the middle class, as well as helping to define relations with other social classes.

As a rule the middle classes were distinct from those above in that they were obliged to work, and from those below in that they rarely had to get their hands dirty. Even this definition has its limitations. Artisans and shopkeepers perceived themselves as superior to the labouring proletariat but as a matter of course were often engaged in manual work.⁵ It was essentially ownership of 'property' that brought middle-class membership. Any individual who could accumulate property, in whatever form that might be, could achieve the wealth necessary for middle-class status. A small general store, a general servant, a semi-detached villa or the skills acquired by a trainee general practitioner were all examples of 'property' to raise a family above the labouring population.⁶ The same could be said for a non-waged wife, although this was becoming

¹ H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (1969), p. 196ff

² J. A. Banks, *Prosperity & Parenthood - A Study of Family Planning Among Victorian Middle Classes* (1965)

³ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes - Men & Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (1987)

⁴ R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party - The Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds 1820-1850* (1990)

⁵ See two chapters in G. Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Classes In Britain, 1870-1914* (1977): T. Vigne & Alun Howkins, 'The Small Shopkeeper in Industrial and Market Towns', p. 186; G. Crossick, 'The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class In Britain', p. 30

⁶ S. Rowntree felt that employing a living-in servant denoted middle-class status, as cited by T. May, *An Economic & Social History of Britain, 1760-1970* (Harlow, 1987), p. 203

complicated by the increasing artisan predilection for a family wage and thus a respectable working class wife who also did not engage in employment.

Property was not the only deciding factor. As Max Weber once suggested, education too could bring wealth, and more recently Rubinstein has made much of the role of both education and wealth in the formation of social 'elites'.⁷ Training and education were at the forefront of the 'professional ideal' which Perkin has proposed challenged and effectively belittled the older 'entrepreneurial ideal'.⁸ Were these in practice rival ideals, rigorously competing for varying degrees of income, status and power? Such separation of middle-class ideals and aspirations all too easily masks those driving forces that were held in common. Furthermore, any loyalty to 'occupational' ideals was being intermittently challenged by ties of religion, party, kinship and community. Here it will be debated whether such rival foci for loyalty were enough to drive an unyielding wedge between the diverse groups that went to make up the English middle class.

It would be easy to imagine Bromley 150 years ago as a country village about to be doomed by the urban excesses brought upon it by the coming of the railway. Yet in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was already a thriving market town, servicing the needs of surrounding hamlets and villages. Although all of the landed estates were under the ownership of families from a mercantile or banking origin, there were very few other merchants or bankers living in the town.⁹ Virtually all businessmen recorded in the Census of 1851 ran *local* enterprises.¹⁰ According to the earliest surviving trade directory of 1839, about a third of these businesses were retail outlets, though many of these were producers as well, making a distinction between the two difficult and blurred.¹¹ Similarly, any professionals recorded too were also based in the town, suggesting that local interests and ties still predominated at this time.

Strong local connections exhibited themselves in the realm of both politics and religion. Bromley escaped most of the unrest and furore which visited the larger industrial towns and major cities. Of greater significance, proved to be circumstances and

⁷ W. D. Rubinstein, 'Education & The Social Origins of the British Elite, 1880-1970', *P & P*, 112, 1986.

⁸ H. Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society* (1990), p. xiii

⁹ *1851 Census of Great Britain - Enumerators' Return for the Parish of Bromley (BPL)*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Pigot & Co.'s Royal National & Commercial Directory of 1839*, but it is impossible to tell how many 'trades' involved both producing and retailing .

personalities closer to home. Sir John Lubbock, owner of the prestigious High Elms Estate in Farnborough, captured the interest and loyalty of the district's inhabitants enough to maintain a strong Liberal presence in the town, even long after the middle classes nationally had begun to desert the Liberal cause.¹² Suffering relatively little economic or social unrest in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the town lacked any vibrant radical or Nonconformist movement. Even the Chartist cause, in the midst of the 'Hungry Forties' and the town's worst recorded trade depressions, had little impact on the local community. 'Long Bob' Sutton, bailiff at the Court of Requests Commissioners (at the Old Market House), and John Cooper, Market Square tailor, stood isolated in their 'radicalism'.¹³ On the whole, the middle classes were apparently unsympathetic, with the local historian Horsburgh blaming the Chartists for the looting of bread from market square bakers.¹⁴ Whatever the occupation, whatever the religious or political persuasion, it was the distaste for, and fear of, the 'radical' which forged the common bond among the middle classes of the town. This driving force in the philosophy of a potentially divisive social group, was wrapped up in the desire to achieve, or at least maintain, the all-important objective of social status.¹⁵

The philosophy, ideology and values of the middle classes have never been homogeneous, and, given certain circumstances, could be divisive. The so-called 'professional ideal', for example, sought to achieve the general betterment of society, rather than the personal financial gain as endorsed by the commercial entrepreneur.¹⁶ Once again, such generalisation and polarisation serves only to mask more subtle characteristics and relationships. Lawyers and solicitors in particular were by no means removed from business or financial concerns, and were unlikely to take decisions which might be damaging to either themselves or their clients. Yet even where *real* differences did exist, status consciousness was enough to bridge the gap. This often meant an assertion of a family's non-manual character through dress, language or the appearance of

¹² In 1961, Eric Lubbock shocked the nation - and the Conservative Party - by leading the Liberals to victory in the Orpington by-election.

¹³ E. L. Horsburgh, *History of Bromley From Earliest Times To The Present Century* (Chislehurst, 1929) 1980 edn., p. 50

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Contemporary writers and historians stress the significance of *status*. See G. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society - Kentish London 1840-80* (1978); G. & W. Grossmith, *Diary of a Nobody* (1892), p. 245

¹⁶ H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1990); M. E. Rose, 'Social Change & The Industrial Revolution', in R. Floud & D. McCloskey (ed.), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, Vol. 1, 1700-1860 (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 262-3; G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) 1978 edn., p. 311

the family home.¹⁷ At the top end of the social scale, status became instantly recognisable by the gig, groom, or pretentious house-name at the entrance gate such as 'La Chatelaine' and 'Carisbrooke'. In the case of H. G. Wells' family, who ran an unsuccessful crockery shop in Bromley's High Street, it meant keeping up the pretence of employing a servant.

Social historians have made much of the middle-class desire for sobriety, cleanliness, orderliness and the attachment to rules of etiquette. In L. Davidoff's words:

The strict segregation by age, by sex and by social category which began to be enforced in public institutions as well as the family can also be seen as a reaction against the growing chaos in social relationships at a time of unprecedented population growth and social change.¹⁸

The importance of observing customs is exemplified by a guide to ballroom etiquette held in the archives of the Dunn family:

Young gentlemen are earnestly advised not to limit their conversation to remarks on the weather and the heat of the room.... Never be seen without gloves in a ballroom... Good taste forbids that a lady and a gentleman should dance too frequently together.¹⁹

The focal point for such moral worth was the home, arguably the most sacred of Victorian institutions.²⁰ The God-fearing cult of domesticity was set against the vices of the parasitic leisured gentleman.²¹ According to D. J. Olsen, the privacy of the home and hearth was of paramount importance, beyond whatever pleasures or rewards were on offer by social or cultural institutions.²² This helped drive the middle classes into the suburbs that were practically untainted by the evils of dancing, salons, casinos and the like to be found in London. A new 'domestic' life could then be created, part and parcel of a romantic anti-urbanism intent on keeping suburban life deliberately dull.²³

¹⁷ G. Crossick, op.cit.(1977), p. 29-31; C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class - Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 90

¹⁸ L. Davidoff, *The Best Circles* (1979),p. 33

¹⁹ *Dunn's Records and Memorabilia (BPL)*

²⁰ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, op.cit., p. 450; J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (1980), p. 99

²¹ H. Perkin, op.cit. (1969), p. 230ff.

²² D. J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London* (1979), p. 23

²³ *Ibid.*

In October 1866, the *Bromley Record* reported that life in the town was indeed dull, with effectively very little in terms of activities for pleasure, leisure or entertainment. Rather than deliberate policy, this was more likely a by-product of two further aspects of the middle-class value system. Firstly, there was the question of thrift. Mr. Pooter, that infamously dull suburban created by George and Weedon Grossmith - the first of whom lectured in Bromley on more than one occasion in the 1880s - expressed his thoughts on the need for economy and financial caution: 'I said I thought the very idea of speculation most horrifying.'²⁴ Secondly, there persisted a strict devotion to 'self-help'.²⁵ Such was the persistence and permeation of the belief in individualism and *self*-improvement that for most of the century the local authorities and townspeople did not see it as their duty to provide for public entertainment beyond the limited number of exclusive societies that existed for this purpose.

Status in the local community may well have come primarily from birth but in theory it could be attained through hard work, perseverance and thrift associated with the philosophy of 'self-help'. In a competitive environment, individual merit could help attain success in one's business or trade. Even so, throughout the nineteenth century, status remained strictly hierarchical. The wealthy City merchants who qualified for the epithet 'Esq.' were placed above High Street businessmen, who in turn gained greater public respectability than those trading in the side streets. Similar values, however, pervaded the varying levels of status or class. Hence we see the local voluntary societies such as the Mutual Benefit and Bromley & South-Eastern building societies combining corporate control with personal benefit, so typical of middle-class ethics.²⁶ Dependence upon the individual led representatives of the middle classes to advocate public or state intervention only in the most extreme circumstance, as over issues concerning health and sanitation. Towards the end of the century, such intervention was more readily accepted, but was still secondary to the belief in *private* responsibility and *private* initiative, both in business and society at large.

The desire for improving the moral worth of society's members had led the Evangelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to promote bible-reading, church-building and a stricter self-discipline. One of the strongest pressures exerted was for the abstention from alcohol. Evidence available suggests that Evangelism and support

²⁴ G. & W. Grossmith, *op. cit.*, p. 188

²⁵ S. Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859), Ch. I.

²⁶ S. M. Gaskell, 'Housing & The Lower Middle Class', in G. Crossick (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 174

for the Temperance cause came much later to Bromley than to the major cities. The number of drinking-houses and beer-shops recorded by the trade directory of 1855, 25 for a population of 5,000, reflected a far from tee-total population, even if this ratio fell well short of working-class areas of that time.²⁷ Such a characteristic persisted into the 1860s despite George-Warde Norman's reflection upon a decline in alcoholic consumption.²⁸ Concern for Temperance reform was still evident in the Edwardian era, led by the town's Congregationalists who consistently urged the government to exclude children from public houses.²⁹ Perhaps more important than the strength of the Evangelist movement in Bromley was the gradual infiltration of gendered ideals of domesticity, notions of austerity and of how salvation depended not on status *per se*, but on the efforts of the individual. Such heights were regarded by many as the mark of gentility, and could be achieved by any individual. Anglicans in the town, such as Rev. A. G. Hellicar, vicar of Bromley between 1865 and 1904, played a major role in the propagation of Evangelical virtues for which Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists are more commonly given credit. In the years prior to the First World War, both Anglican and Nonconformist ministers in Bromley were active in opposing the habit of 'Sunday trading' that was becoming increasingly common in all major towns of the nation.³⁰

The pressure for moral improvement had been part and parcel of the conviction in the progress of humanity. It had also been critical in forging a belief in the progress of the nation itself, whereby moral worth became closely associated with ideas of racial superiority, nationalism and imperialism. By the end of the century, a belief in progress was still apparent if increasingly tainted by a nostalgic, romanticised vision of the town's rustic past. New developments, new challenges and new individuals brought new ideas and values. Some were to complement and some were to challenge what had gone on before. Both Nonconformists and the Established Church were under threat from a variety of forces. Uppermost were those problems associated with the new urban society - increased geographical mobility, changes in class status and the structuring of life by a large central administration. In addition, there were the intellectual developments of the age. Rationalism, empiricism, agnosticism and freedom of thought all struck at the very

²⁷ *Kelly's P.O. Directory of Kent 1855*

²⁸ G. W. Norman, *Memoranda Regarding Bromley & Its Neighbourhood*, 1857-1880. It is worth noting here that when the residential district of Petts Wood emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, just 3 miles from Bromley, part of the planning conditions were that only one public-house could ever be built within its borders - until 1994 the 'Daylight Inn' was the only public house in the area.

²⁹ As with their protests in 1908, reported in *BR* May 1908

³⁰ *BR* Nov. 1913

heart of Christian belief. Yet the persistently high profile of the ministers of the various denominations, alongside the church-building programmes, is testimony to the strength of religious feeling - or at least *public* religious feeling - held by the middle classes of Bromley at this time. Standards of moral behaviour were still essential to the formation of 'mores' (character and manners), an ingredient vital for both social acceptance and salvation.

Religious belief in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had helped impose severe restrictions upon modes of social behaviour, particularly in terms of women in the home. According to H. McLeod, it was the lower middle-class made up of clerks, teachers and shop assistants who led this rejection of established values.³¹ The younger generation of the 1880s and 1890s were at the forefront of this rejection, no longer accepting as dutiful children the dullness of either respectability or suburban life.³² H. G. Wells' *Ann Veronica* epitomised the search for independence from social restraints, imposed at the macro-level by society and the micro-level by her father and aunt.³³ Wells was perhaps the most famed of individuals who, in moving away from the likes of Bromley towards the excitement of the metropolis, would have felt great empathy with his heroine's aspirations.

Attempting to attribute specific values to certain social groups or classes is always rather an imprecise exercise. Some historians like A. J. Reid have preferred instead to concentrate on the effects of developments over time, particularly those relating to the economy.³⁴ Yet one issue about which historians have tried to draw more convincing conclusions is that of religion,³⁵ where the debate has focused on whether sections of the middle class adopted a particular faith, organisation or morality in order to bid for status and power. The 1851 Census of religious worship is regularly cited as evidence of decline in church attendance, although it is often forgotten that Horace Mann's official analysis of the returns proposed that not all was despondency and gloom.³⁶ Expanding towns,

³¹ H. McLeod, 'White Collar Values & The Role of Religion', in G. Crossick (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.78

³² For the 'revolt' of the young, see H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (1909) and G. & W. Grossmith, *op.cit.*

³³ H. G. Wells, *op. cit.* (1909), though the book infuriated feminists with its advocacy of free love and its parody of suffrage, along with its 'traditional' ending

³⁴ A. J. Reid, *Social Classes & Social Relations in Britain 1850-1914* (1992), p. 63

³⁵ There have been many books written on the subject, but for some of the most original and perceptive see H. McLeod, *Class & Religion in the Late Victorian City* (1974); D. M. Thompson, *Nonconformity in the 19th Century* (1972); A. D. Gilbert, *Religion & Society in Industrial England - Church, Chapel & Social Change 1740-1914* (1976).

³⁶ Papers of the House of Commons, (C.89) 1852-1853, Census of Great Britain, Religious Worship

especially those with a high proportion of middle-class inhabitants such as Bromley, offered a silver lining with their programmes of church-building that kept pace with the growing population. Over 45% of Bromley's total population, including the very young, very old and infirm, attended one of the 36 places of worship that existed in the registration district. Even though this proportion takes no account of those attending on more than one occasion, it is higher than the national average (40.5%) and other areas studied thus far.³⁷ Nearly two out of every three (66.2%) worshippers attended an Anglican place of worship, of which there were seventeen, with morning services accounting for just over half the number of sittings.³⁸ The three main Nonconformist sects of Congregationalists, Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists, shared the remaining worshippers almost equally, with 10.8%, 11.4% and 11.1% respectively, including multi-attendees. No other religious denominations were recorded in the district at this time.

Before 1835 only three places of worship existed in the town of Bromley itself: the Parish Church of St. Peter and St Paul, the Congregational meeting-place in the yard behind Mr. Isard's tallow-chandling business in Market Square and the Wesleyan Chapel in the High Street. Then, in that year, a more substantial Congregational chapel was built in Widmore Road. Before the mid 1860s, a wider Anglican resurgence sought to reform the church by emphasising the pastoral role of ministers. To this effect, four new parishes were created, which the Church hoped would bring ministers into closer contact with their immediate brethren. Another two were added by 1890, bringing the total number of Anglican Churches in the town to seven. Sunday services continued to be well attended until 1914, but Anglican reports in the press criticised the poor attendance of 'ladies' at morning services held in mid-week.³⁹ By the 1890s, the number of Dissenting establishments had risen to four. One of these was Bromley's first Baptist Chapel, whose foundation stone had been laid by Rev. C. H. Spurgeon in 1864 in front of a crowd of over a thousand onlookers.⁴⁰ Church-going itself varied according to gender, age, occupation and area of the town, but statistics from 1881 reveal the number of sittings to be reasonably high, a total of 6510 for all churches. However, this still left a shortfall of 2,600 from the number of people able to attend church, leaving the Congregationalists to complain of a worrying lack of religious interest.⁴¹

³⁷ *Ibid.*; for other religious studies, see Ref.36

³⁸ *Religious Census 1851, op. cit.*, Bromley Return. This figure is relatively high compared with national attendance at Anglican worship which was around 50%

³⁹ *BR* Aug. 1868

⁴⁰ *BR* Aug. 1864

⁴¹ *BR* April 1881

Even though religious enthusiasm clearly declined during the nineteenth century, numerous lay and clerical individuals made striking contributions towards the vitality of their churches and the moral well-being of the people. In the Established Church, all ranks of the middle classes had their part to play from the Dunn family, local upholsterers and funeral directors - who even kept their own copies of burial registers - to Thomas Dewey and Thomas Davis, Chairman of the Prudential Assurance Company and Secretary of the British & Foreign Marine Assurance Company respectively. These men were among the 815 individuals who rented pews at Bromley Parish Church in 1860. Rented or 'appropriated' pews were a mark of social status, although the phenomenon gradually went out of fashion as more 'free' places were made available. In part this was to stem the growth of Nonconformity, but it was also due to an increasing dependence upon funds raised through church collections. Personal subscriptions to church-building and church-extensions were prodigious, as with the offer of £1000 from W. D. Starling, a local landowner, to construct a new Church for the Parish of St. Peter and St. Paul.⁴² The Roman Catholic faith also benefited from the financial backing of individuals when in 1892, thanks to the generosity of Mr. A. Zimmermann, Mrs. Willet *et al* the 'Religion of the Holy Trinity' order opened its first church in the town.⁴³ Landowners and the middle classes alike, then, supplemented by the money-raising efforts of the likes of Mrs. A. G. Hellicar, wife of the vicar of Bromley, contributed greatly to the provision of places of religious worship.

Nonconformists relied even more heavily upon the goodwill and generosity of their believers. By 1881, judging by the number of sittings provided, the Dissenting movement had, in 30 years, risen from 33.9% to 42% of the worshipping population.⁴⁴ Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyans seemed to enjoy new vigour in the town after 1865, while Presbyterians remained unrepresented in Bromley for the whole of the century. The major debate over the nature of Nonconformity has centred around its composition, particularly in terms of occupation and social class. On a national basis, historians have generally concluded that the Dissenting cause was primarily the monopoly of the urban middle classes, where, in theory, wealthy men of commerce supported the Quaker and Unitarian movements, smaller businessmen the Baptists and Congregationalists, and shopkeepers the Wesleyan Methodists.⁴⁵ Perkin has gone further and proposed that

⁴² *BR* Feb. 1872

⁴³ *BR* April 1892

⁴⁴ *BR* April 1881

⁴⁵ T. May, *op.cit.*, pp. 212-213

among the fundamental ideals of the middle classes lay the desire to disestablish the Anglican church.⁴⁶

Such conclusions are almost certainly more true for the major industrial towns and cities than the suburban towns of southern England. The situation in Victorian Bromley exposes the dangers of simplification. On the one hand, the middle classes of the town were predominantly Anglican. No doubt, as Rubinstein has argued, merchants from the 'City' were more closely tied to the 'old' society and thus were more likely to support the Anglican cause,⁴⁷ but the religious loyalty of Bromley's middle class made for no easy socio-economic delineation. Congregationalists, for example, included one major landowner, several East India merchants, and directors of major city financial institutions, in addition to numerous local tradesmen and retailers. Amongst them was Samuel Cawston, a City merchant who had previously been part of the Evangelical wing of the Established Church.⁴⁸ Relations between Church and Chapel were mostly harmonious, heated occasionally by disputes over church rates, burial grounds or provisions for education. In 1861 George Verrall (formerly pastor of the Bromley Congregational Chapel) refused to pay church rates since they existed only to prop up the established church.⁴⁹ His cause was supported by at least another 146 Dissenters, including James Scrutton who raised the issue several times at meetings of the parish Vestry.⁵⁰ Even so, the Vestry Minutes record that there were no hard feelings or bitterness between the Dissenters and Established Church members.⁵¹

The seeds of discontent over rates were eventually blown away by national legislation, but over the issue of Nonconformist burial grounds there was a distinct gap between national legislation and local practice. Parliament had legislated for corporations to provide municipal cemeteries in addition to Church graveyards in 1852, but Bromley's Vestry and later Local Board resisted any such move until 1866, arousing angry protest in the interim period. The most serious conflict, however, was saved for the onset of the School Board in 1888, where intense competition for places reduced Church-Chapel relations to an all-time low. The 'low' points were all relative, however, and it was

⁴⁶ H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1969), p. 350ff.

⁴⁷ W. D. Rubinstein, 'The Victorian Middle-Classes: Wealth, Occupation & Geography', *EHR*, 30, No. 4, 1977, pp. 602-623

⁴⁸ However, on erecting a temporary iron church in Bromley Common in 1872, he objected to the forms of worship practised there, shut the building down and converted to the Congregationalist cause.

⁴⁹ *BR* May 1861

⁵⁰ *Bromley Parish Vestry Minutes*, 22 April 1861

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

indicative of the strength of co-operation between the various religious faiths that harmony was quickly re-established.

A high degree of rapport between Church and Chapel in Bromley was aided by uniformity of purpose. Before 1850, in the major cities of England and Wales, the Established Church had propagated the notion that Nonconformity was a religious evil that poisoned both social and political stability. No such mood was apparent in Bromley at this time, due mainly to social conditions that made any such threat less conceivable. In any case, clergy of all faiths continually stressed the need for individual self-discipline, moral character and respect for authority which were so important in the maintenance of a stable world. Rev. A. G. Hellicar was himself an Evangelical and befriended many Nonconformists. He presided over the local branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society, established in 1866 to help propagate the gospel, in which Congregationalists such as M. H. Hodder and J. Scrutton were actively involved. Eleven years later he helped found the Church of England Temperance Society, with the support of Thomas Davis, a City financier, and the Dunn family. In effect, the Society espoused the aims and procedures of a similar society formed 20 years earlier by the town's Nonconformists. As the Temperance movement gathered pace in the late 1870s, Church and Chapel co-operated more closely, assisting each other in the running of working men's coffee rooms such as the one created at Bromley Common in 1878.⁵² In the 1880's and 1890's, Anglican and Nonconformist ministers were also seen together at the funerals of influential local notables and at the openings of new institutions. When, for instance, they appeared together at the opening of Bromley High School for Girls in 1883, it demonstrated that theological divides were not deep enough to weaken the cause of class unity.

Religion had a major impact on the ideals, values and social relations adopted by Victorian men and women. The fact that in 1903 at least 42% of Bromley inhabitants went to a church service on Sundays was testimony to the influence churches continued to exercise into the Edwardian era, or at least to a desire to demonstrate moral rectitude. Religious feeling itself had certainly encouraged if not generated the 'moral revolution' referred to earlier, serving to promote hard work and the 'self-help' image that contributed to middle-class society's adoption of the capitalist ethos, or as Perkin put it, 'the moral ideal was a highly sublimated version of its own economic interest.'⁵³ The high moral ground, claimed by both Anglicans and Nonconformists alike in Bromley, was a means by

⁵² *BR* May 1878

⁵³ H. Perkin, *op. cit.*

which the middle classes could not only raise themselves above but also set themselves apart from the lower classes beneath them. Perhaps even the middle-class ideal of exclusivity and retreat as propounded by the likes of Davidoff, Hall *et al* to help explain the growth of suburbia, was motivated by a religio-moral rejection of the demonic processes and trappings belonging to aspects of Victorian urban society.⁵⁴

Vicars, curates and ministers of Church and Chapel maintained religion as a central theme to middle-class culture, actively encouraging new building projects, Sunday schools, parochial societies and social entertainments. Places of worship were centres with important social functions, and offered status, group identity and a sense of belonging that otherwise might never have existed. This was especially true for Dissenters or the lower middle-class. A religiously-based community presented the opportunity of respectability and a distinctive identity in a society increasingly aware of social divisions. The local chapels led the way in terms of the range of activities organised for members. By the end of the century, in addition to the popular Sunday schooling already in existence, amateur dramatics, debating societies, choral societies, musical evenings and mutual improvement groups bound the fellowship of both Church and Chapel alike.

To effect greater social action, a branch of the Young Men's Christian Association was set up in the town in 1859. It remained inactive until it was publicly rejuvenated in 1885, primarily by wealthy Nonconformists like M. H. Hodder.⁵⁵ The sporting and communal activities encouraged by the Association and other groups highlighted the major paradox to be faced by all religious faiths in the last decades of the century: how was popularity to be courted without damaging religious purity? The Central Methodist Hall that was constructed in 1904-05 on London Lane combined a wide variety of functions, both lay and spiritual. It could accommodate up to 1,250 worshippers, with rooms for 400 school children, but also served as an important social centre, hosting numerous lectures, meetings and entertainments.⁵⁶ In practice, the *social* organisations were only one arm of Christ's church, while bodies such as the branch of the Christian Evidence Society (1882), the Ladies Juvenile Missionary Association (1881) and the Church of England United Mission (1897) sought to defend and even extend the spiritual life of the church against the increased scepticism and agnosticism of the age.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 361

⁵⁵ *BR* Oct. 1885

⁵⁶ *BR* Nov. 1904

⁵⁷ *BR* Dec. 1881; *BR* Jan. 1882; *BR* Feb. 1897

Adjusting the church's role in society was in the main a reaction to remarkable ideological and socio-economic changes. Such modification was essential if the middle classes of the town were to combine religious inspiration, economic interest and the image of moral superiority to effect an extensive network of paternalism in the local community. There were no large-scale industrial or commercial concerns in Victorian Bromley, and thus no examples of the complex paternal and philanthropic management as practised by the Quaker Cadburys or the Congregationalist Levers.⁵⁸ Yet the professional and commercial middle classes of Bromley adopted similar ideals of social hierarchy and responsibility, where character was formed *for*, rather than *by*, the individual. At the very heart of this conviction lay faith in an unequal yet harmonious world. Men and women of Church and Chapel initiated and supported many of the changes effected in the town in the nineteenth century, but such social reform as took place did so in order to suppress instability not to create it. When the Salvation Army first arrived in the town in 1887, there was an angry reaction against their 'vociferous testimonies and noisy march outs'.⁵⁹ Supporters of the Salvation Army took up the cause of social justice and rebuked the moral falsity of individualism, the very essence of middle-class ideology in the town. It was easy for both Church and Chapel members to make an association between these aspirations and social revolution, for 'Dissent in Bromley was respectable enough not to be associated with any form of radicalism, real or imagined.

Doing things *for* individuals in the locality resulted in a wide variety of altruistic and philanthropic works. The Temperance movement epitomised the expanded role of Church and Chapel as both undertook to offer society greater moral service. Care and benevolence might also mean imposing restrictions upon society's leisure activities, as in drinking or in playing certain sports. Although the local middle classes accepted codified football, lawn tennis and holiday resorts as respectable pastimes, in 1896 the district council saw fit to ban the playing of games on Sundays in the town's only recreation ground.⁶⁰ Similarly the attitude of Church and Chapel towards gambling, swearing and the sanctity of the Sabbath would not have endeared them to the lower classes. The provision of entertainment offered by religious centres towards the end of the century was a move not simply to control the leisure of these classes but a means of damming their exodus from public worship. To this end, the Anglican and Nonconformist denominations of Bromley worked more *for* each other than *against*. Stability was the order of the day.

⁵⁸ See C. & R. Bell, *City Fathers* (1969)

⁵⁹ *BR* Sept. 1887

⁶⁰ *BR* Dec. 1896

The socio-economic conditions that R. Trainor identified in the Black Country in the early nineteenth century - where there emerged several big firms, industrial concerns and large businesses - were not in such evidence in Bromley⁶¹ Approximately two-thirds of Bromley's middle class remained loyal to the Anglican cause. Trainor may indeed have concluded that conflict was inevitable as rising Nonconformist businessmen sought to establish themselves in local politics and society' but he was referring to a *specific* place at a *specific* time.⁶² It was not a phenomenon that was conspicuous in Victorian Bromley

Given the diverse composition of the middle classes in the town, as well as the varied religio-moral values that spurred them on, what sort of impact did they make on the lives of the local population? To what extent were the elements of division amongst them critical for their impact on society? According to R. J. Morris' most recent work, any disparity amongst the middle classes over religion, status or politics was neutralised by ideals and aspirations which they held in common⁶³ They were certainly capable of using their business and professional acumen to prove themselves as active citizens and public 'somebodies'. The local press, schools, churches, institutions and societies were all utilised to strengthen this identity by disseminating their most fundamental values⁶⁴ In this way, the myth of Samuel Smiles' self-made man became reality, based as it was within an ordered, if unequal, society in which every individual had a responsible part to play⁶⁵ It was not purely a question of domination by those with money, but rather of the infiltration of ideas inspired by those who 'seemed to hold the most influence and prestige'. Who

⁶¹ R. Trainor, 'Peers On An Industrial Frontier', in D. Cannadine (ed.), *Patricians*
Power & Politics in 19th Century Towns, pp. 69-122

⁶² *Ibid*

⁶³ R. J. Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-198

⁶⁴ H. Perkin, *op. cit.* (1969), p. 302

⁶⁵ S. Smiles, *op. cit.*

were these individuals and how did they manipulate their positions in society to effect such control?

<i>Individuals With...</i>	<i>No. Of Posts</i>	<i>No. Of Office-Holders</i>	<i>Individuals With...</i>	<i>No. Of Posts</i>	<i>No. Of Individuals</i>	<i>% Of All Posts</i>
1 Office	219	219	1 or 2 Offices	291	255	69%
2 Offices	72	36	3 or 4 Offices	80	24	19%
3 Offices	48	16	5+ Offices	52	9	12%
4 Offices	32	8				
5 Offices	20	4				
6 Offices	24	4				
8 Offices	8	1				
Total	423	287				

Note: 31% of all offices in the 75 year period were held by only 33 individuals

Table 4.1: Distribution of Office-Holding, 1840-1905

Through holding office in one of the main arms of local government, an individual could guarantee considerable power and influence over the community. There were strict limitations, however, on those who could achieve such a position. At the beginning of our period, only men could take up high-ranking official posts. Only landowners could be magistrates, and only magistrates could appoint the poor law guardians and overseers. Only burgesses or ratepayers could vote or stand for Vestry office. Finally, only those with adequate income, time and energy could afford to carry out the duties and responsibilities required of them. The system, then, was already weighted heavily in favour of the those with substantial property. All major posts in 1840, for instance, were held by local landowners: in addition to holding court at the Petty Sessions, they oversaw Parish Vestry meetings and held the presidency of the Literary Institute, the only cultural society in the town.⁶⁶ The non-landed middle classes were represented by tradesmen and a limited number of professionals. In numerical terms bodies such as the Parish Vestry and Literary Institute Committee were filled to the brim with producer-retailers such as tailors,

⁶⁶ *Office-Holding Survey, 1840-1905 (OFF)*

butchers and greengrocers. The names of Samuel Poole Acton, the wine merchant and postmaster, and William Walmisley Baxter, the chemist, appear time and time again. These were no mean tradesmen, but the most respected, successful and wealthy of their kind in several cases, they owned land as well⁶⁷ At this time, relationships with landowning Chairmen or Presidents were based on closer ties of patronage and dependence. There were few signs of any rift between members of the elite of the town, thus helping to maintain harmony in social relations as a whole.

Before 1858, the people of Bromley could remain very much encapsulated inside their protective shell, shielded from the expanding metropolis or from excessive outside political interference. Gentlemen landowners, professional men, farmers and tradesmen alike used the opportunity to consolidate or enhance their own prestige amongst the local community. At one and the same time, they could assure themselves respect through high office and a reinforcement of the patron-client relationships they had already forged. In addition, they held the sincere belief that they were serving the interests of those for whom direct representation did not exist. The advent of the railway, however, brought new considerations. Beforehand, the office-holding elite all lived and worked locally. Afterwards, City merchants and financiers gradually infiltrated official positions, initially within *non*-administrative institutions such as the committees of Bromley Cottage Hospital and the Literary Institute⁶⁸ No longer were such local offices the preserve of those with a vested interest in the local economy, a development similar - if later - to that noted in studies of Leeds, Glasgow and Kentish London.⁶⁹

In the second half of the nineteenth century, retailers, professionals and merchants all enhanced their representation within the town's office-holding elite, including within local government. By 1875, the most conspicuous development had been the influx of doctors, solicitors and other professionals⁷⁰ Individuals like Dr. William Farr held considerable influence across the whole spectrum of administrative, social and cultural institutions, reflecting a desire for a more qualified and educated personnel. This was particularly the case in local government, where greater demands were being made on the capacities of local administrators. As the more laid-back, less informed image of past local

⁶⁷ See *1851 Census, p c t Tithe Assessment 1841 and OFF*

⁶⁸ *OFF*

⁶⁹ R.J Morris, *op cit* 1990 p 318. G Crossick, *op cit*, 1978. Stana Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the urban middle classes, and the dominance of manufacturers in 19th century Britain', in *Econ.HR. XLIV*, 1 (1991), pp 66-85

⁷⁰ *OFF*

government disappeared, so too did those tradesmen who lacked the qualities and time necessary for dealing with more complex legislation. In their place came those men involved in finance or commerce on a *national* or *international* basis: In just over a decade, representation of this upper echelon of society had almost trebled. By 1885, they had infiltrated local government to the extent of securing leadership and direction of proceedings. The Chairmen of both the Local Board and School Board in this year were of this class, respectively J. Batten, tea merchant, and T. Davis, Secretary of the Universal Marine Insurance Company. Having moved or retired to Bromley, many of them sought social power and prestige in their new place of residence. Indeed, such was their penetration by 1890 that they composed nearly half of the Local Board, a remarkable contrast to the situation twenty years earlier when every Board member relied upon a 'local' source of income. In 1903, out of 18 councillors elected to the Borough Council, six were employed locally, and seven were retired or employed elsewhere.⁷¹ Yet it was a different story for the first Mayor and Aldermen to be chosen in the town, for all bar one were men of 'non-local' commerce, finance or the professions.

Within fifty years, the spreading tentacles of the metropolis had torn away the protective shell of this relatively isolated community. For better or for worse, the landowners and wealthy tradesmen no longer experienced the luxury of a virtual monopoly on power. Under pressure from a vastly increased proportion of professionals (9.5% to 20.3%) and City businessmen (1.6% to 17.8%), the whole composition and character of the local 'elite' had undergone remarkable alteration. It was the upper middle classes who took most of the limelight. Nevertheless, professionals and clerks too found their expertise in greater demand, with a subsequent growth in the numbers of staff employed in an administrative capacity: this could vary between the clerks assisting the Medical Officer of Health or those supporting the various committees under the Urban District Council. By the turn of the century, doctors, solicitors, accountants, architects and surveyors were in positions once held by whitesmiths and farmers. Along with the 'City gents', this group of professionals effectively controlled the reins of power. Unlike their landowning counterparts half a century earlier, it might be argued that these two groups - especially those employed in London and not in Bromley - held privilege without service, power without responsibility. Alternatively, it could be countered that they were not prejudiced by local considerations and could administer policies without regard for direct vested interests.

⁷¹ The remaining five were 'unplaced' in terms of occupation or place of employment.

It was not just the administration of the town that the middle classes sought to control, but the social and political life of the people. Perkin and Davidoff have claimed that many middle-class individuals, particularly corporate businessmen, centred their public activities on charitable and cultural affairs rather than on local government.⁷² They have suggested that businessmen steered clear of political concerns because they were more concerned with ideals and status and, in any case, were usually too busy. Evidence from Bromley suggests that the middle classes, *including* businessmen, were concerned with *all* aspects of local society, but not with *national* politics which seemed to hold less attraction.⁷³ T. Davis was indeed so busy with his business concerns that he was forced to absent himself from the Chair of the Council for six months, but he returned to continue his duties.⁷⁴ Others were not so fortunate and felt obliged to stand down. Yet as the study of office-holders has shown, City merchants and financiers were a decisive force in the local government of the town. In addition, they involved themselves as much in the social affairs of the town as any other socio-occupational group.

In *Ann Veronica*, Wells mocked suburbia for its lack of vitality.⁷⁵ In October 1866 the *Record* ran an article on how the well-to-do had little in the town in the form of entertainment, fearing prospective middle-class residents would be turned away. It ran, 'Complaints are frequent of the dullness of the long winter evenings felt by the gentry who have come to reside amongst us, some of whom have left in consequence.'⁷⁶ Before mid-century, the Literary Institute provided the only form of cultural entertainment in the town. The other major social organisation was the Philanthropic Society, established in 1841 by John Hall, a tallow-chandler, for the 'temporary relief of the necessitous poor residents of the parish'.⁷⁷ Yet the inactivity that had existed in 1850 was gradually supplanted by a range of clubs and societies that later emerged. This was not purely by chance. It was out of a subconscious - and sometimes conscious - desire to disseminate ideas, strengthen middle-class identity and preserve social stability.

⁷² H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1969), p. 430-2; L. Davidoff, *op.cit.*, (1973)

⁷³ Off. and various *BR* articles. National politics remained the preserve of the local gentry, mainly for historical reasons but also because these individuals appeared relatively unpoliticised

⁷⁴ *BR* Feb. 1898

⁷⁵ H. G. Wells, *op.cit.* (1909)

⁷⁶ *BR* Oct. 1866

⁷⁷ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 301-3

What functions did these voluntary societies perform? R. J. Morris has devoted much of his research to this hitherto neglected phenomenon, arguing that they succeeded in achieving cohesion and consent amongst disparate groups.⁷⁸ The emergent professional and commercial middle classes were in an exceptionally strong position since they could use their specific skills or wealth to serve new organizations. Hence the doctors who worked so hard to support the Cottage Hospital while the 'City gents' (and landowners) footed the bill through regular subscription.⁷⁹ Earlier, it was the tradesmen of the town who had led the way, setting up the Philanthropic Society, Lascoe's Tradesmen Benevolent Fund and the first 'friendly societies'. The latter were an intimate part of the ethos of the middle-class, the Orphans Lodge of Oddfellows (1859), for example, emphasising the need for good order, peace and self-reliance.⁸⁰ As with the associated Ancient Order of Foresters and Britons, these organisations existed essentially to provide for members' widows and orphans. Originally orientated towards tradesmen and shopkeepers, they were later patronised by doctors, merchants and retired gentlemen. They formed part of a cohesive force which any other form of organisation would have found difficult to match. In 1874, the Oddfellows had 180 members - the longest surviving member being the upholsterer and undertaker Edward Dunn - with a capital of £2,028.⁸¹ This was part of a wider south London membership of 6,600, with a total capital of £90,000. By 1882, taken as a whole the local friendly societies had approximately one thousand members, thus forming an influential group which no serious social history can afford to ignore.⁸²

There were fewer more effective or tight-knit voluntary societies than the Freemasons. Membership of the lodges of Bromley and the immediate environs was dominated by tradesmen and retailers, with a sprinkling of local doctors and solicitors.⁸³ Lodges provided an important meeting place where ideas could be exchanged and business contacts secured. In an atmosphere of care and friendship, they encouraged trust, honour and the promotion of charitable deeds. Unlike lodges today, membership, meetings and stated objectives were far less secretive.⁸⁴ Men like Baxter, the chemist, or Grinsted, the

⁷⁸ See R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and the British Urban Elite 1780-1850 - An Analysis, *Historical Journal*, 26 no.1, 1983

⁷⁹ OFF, C. M. Spence, *Bromley Hospital, 1869-1941* (unpublished)

⁸⁰ BR July 1859

⁸¹ BR Aug. 1874

⁸² BR Nov. 1882

⁸³ OFF

⁸⁴ See L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*, pp. 426-7. In F. L. Pick & G. N. Knight, *The Pocket History of Freemasonry* (1991), the authors - both masons - imply that there is nothing sinister behind the secrecy of

corn and coal merchant, were proud of the work performed by Bromley's new Hervey Lodge, founded to satisfy the increasing demand among small local businessmen.⁸⁵ The lodge continually declared its uncompromising support for the Established Church and regularly publicised amounts raised for local charities. With few surviving records to work with, it is impossible to say whether either the Freemasons or friendly societies had any inconspicuous, more sinister aims. Likewise, it is difficult to assess the extent of their influence over the 'brotherhood' members and beyond. Suffice it to say that among their members were many tradesmen, retailers and professionals who were closely involved in both local government and the ever-growing number of local societies. The fact that most of the town's 'voluntary' societies were composed of *local* shopkeepers and tradesmen rather than City merchants or financiers emphasised the primary reason for their existence, that is to effect control over local affairs and to maximise their own economic security.

By 1885, Bromley's lower middle-class had established a wide range of bodies to suit their social and economic needs. The Temperance Society (founded in 1859) and the Mutual Improvement Society (1865) existed not just for the purpose of social gatherings, but ostensibly for the promotion of self-discipline and the triumph of the individual will. An element of 'collective' action was added by the two main building societies, the Mutual Benefit Society (1876) and the Bromley & South-Eastern Permanent Society (1895). Both thrived on a hungry demand for shares.⁸⁶ Earlier, to overcome the 'dullness' of suburban life, the educated professionals of the town had founded the 'Friends in Council' (1870) to debate issues of high culture, notably art, architecture and religion.⁸⁷ Occasionally more controversial social issues were discussed as in February 1882, when the notion of 'national insurance' was first proposed and then rejected on the grounds of impracticality.⁸⁸ Over the longer-term, such bodies failed to stimulate the cultural awareness of the townspeople and like the Bromley Debating Society were only famous for the brevity of their survival. It appears that it was far easier to play upon the financial and economic appetite of the middle classes than it was to encourage either social or cultural entertainment. Middle-class pleasures tended to be enjoyed more in the privacy of the home than in public.⁸⁹ Significantly, it was from the relative security and purity of the

the Freemasons, either in the past or at present. This of course has been hotly disputed in S. Knight, *The Brotherhood* (1985).

⁸⁵ *BR* May 1900

⁸⁶ *BR* Feb. 1876; *BR* Jan. 1883.

⁸⁷ *BR* June 1870

⁸⁸ *BR* Mar. 1882

⁸⁹ C. More, *op. cit.*, p. 181ff

domestic environment that objections to working-class drunkenness, gambling and rowdiness were proffered.⁹⁰ It was not until the late-Victorian and Edwardian era that more facilities for entertainment were established

The philanthropic actions of the middle class must be set against this assumption of social superiority. It was not merely a love of mankind that motivated works of charity, for if this was the case then the objections to the Salvation Army's method of distributing food *without* enquiry would never have been raised.⁹¹ 'Charity' was tempered by the belief in disseminating the ideal of self-help and self-improvement among the labouring population.⁹² According to T. Davis of the Bromley Charitable Society, founded in 1868, this began with the development of 'thrift' if economy and the avoidance of waste were to be accomplished.⁹³ The need to economise was a recurring theme among those who felt paternally responsible for the poor. At a meeting of the Philanthropic Society in January 1872, James Mowat congratulated fellow members for saving on the poor rate by keeping workhouse numbers low.⁹⁴ The dilemma faced by the Society and other charitable organisations was whether the poor should be helped by others or whether they should be encouraged to help themselves.

One of the arms of benevolent paternalism to emerge was the local branch of the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS), founded in 1878.⁹⁵ Unlike the majority of clubs, societies and institutions in the town, the GFS had women as members and as committee officers. The major inspiration for the local GFS had come from two spinsters, G. L. Deedes of Hope Park, and Matilda Hay of 'Parkfield', Widmore Road.⁹⁶ Matilda Hay was the 34 year-old daughter of Caroline Hay, superintendent of the 'Mothers' Union' and widow of a former Army Commandant. After the death of her husband, Caroline Hay had moved to Bromley with her three children, 'living on her own means' in the exclusive 'Parkfield' property maintained by six servants.⁹⁷ The principal aim of the GFS led by her daughter was to aid girls in their search for posts as domestic servants. This was effected through 'associate' middle-class ladies befriending 'member' working girls in order to 'encourage

⁹⁰ Including *BR* Mar. 1868

⁹¹ *BR* reports in 1887. For more on the philanthropic work and attitudes of middle-class women, see P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect - Women In English Local Government, 1865-1914* (1987)

⁹² S. Smiles, *op.cit.*

⁹³ *BR* Mar. 1868

⁹⁴ *BR* Feb. 1872

⁹⁵ *BR* Jan. 1879

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *1891 Census of Great Britain - Enumerators' Return for the Urban Sanitary District of Bromley (BPL)*

purity of life, dutifulness to parents, faithfulness to employers and thrift' ⁹⁸ By the end of its inaugural month, the GFS had gained 59 'associates' and 90 'members'. Numbers continued to rise, aided by the influx of working-class girls arriving in Bromley on the new direct railway line from London and met by the GFS at the station. Miss Hay herself entertained ladies and girls alike with games and music at her home, in addition to providing books and parcels of clothing for needy participants. A sick club provided 'members' with a limited form of insurance. Nevertheless, this was no indiscriminate hand-out. 'Members' had to pay an annual subscription of one shilling and display a willingness to take up employment. *Self-improvement* was the keynote, although only in as much as the opportunity for individual betterment was provided for from *above*. The Society was eager to stress its disinclination towards any breakdown in social distinctions, 'The levelling or amalgamating of classes is not desired, but that all may work together for its good aims.'⁹⁹ Through their philanthropic actions, these women helped ease the adoption locally of women Poor Law Guardians in 1888, and thus involved local women more directly in the paternalistic stance embraced by their male counterparts.

One of the town's oldest societies, and one that epitomised class distinctions and a paternalistic outlook was the Bromley Literary Institute. From its foundation in 1845, local gentry all but monopolised the non-executive Vice-Presidencies. The more tedious day-to-day business was carried out by high-class drapers and butchers. The Institute's main aim was to stimulate the literary culture of the town, though it relied heavily upon gifts of books from wealthy benefactors. The executive committee carefully vetted the books that it made available for the paying public to read.¹⁰⁰ Pay they had to, at 10 shillings *per annum* in 1845 rising to 12s. 6d. by 1890. A small additional fee was required to join classes associated with the Institute, and 'guests' were only allowed to make use of the facility if they lived beyond five miles from the town.¹⁰¹ In practice, the society suffered from the lack of a suitable permanent home, lectures being held in the Town Hall or in rooms attached to public houses. William Pawley, the farmer and hotel-proprietor, frequently let the assembly rooms at the White Hart Inn in the High Street for the this purpose.

⁹⁸ *BR* Apr. 1881

⁹⁹ *BR* Feb. 1883

¹⁰⁰ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 294; *Bromley Literary Institute Reports 1873-1890*

¹⁰¹ *1877 Library Catalogue of the Bromley Literary Institute*

Occupation	No. of Donors or Subscribers
Commerce	20
Independent	1
Landowners	12
Manufacturers	3
Professions	15
Tradesmen /Retailers	0
Salaried	3
Others	6

Table 4.2: Occupational Analysis of Donors and Subscribers to Bromley Literary Institute, 1873

Membership of the Institute between 1845 and 1862 averaged out at about 170, composed mainly of professionals, City merchants and the most respected shopkeepers.¹⁰² By 1894, there were 275 members, but given Bromley's population of 20,000 this represented a very small and exclusive set. As Table 4.2 shows, subscription towards the running of the Institute was dominated by landowners, commercial men from the City and professionals. Most of those individuals who appeared time and time again as office-holders within other institutions were part of this 'clique'. It was a 'clique' that controlled the only formal cultural society that existed in Victorian Bromley: as such it helped formulate the thinking and ideology of the town's middle classes, as well as asserting a 'civilizing' effect upon the remainder of the community. The part played by the Institute and the other organisations referred to above, conjures up Morris' portrayal of the role of such societies:

The end product of the process was intended to be a society of independent, hard-working, self-disciplined owners of small units of property, created and directed by

¹⁰² E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 294.

an elite which still concentrated wealth and power in their own hands ¹⁰³

The voluntary societies of the nineteenth century were instrumental in creating the 'subscriber democracy' of the middle-class.¹⁰⁴ From the upper middle class who provided the donations and subscriptions for the Literary Institute to the lower middle class who dominated the friendly societies, this philosophy helped create a common strand that tied together men of different occupations and income. In theory, these societies were examples of collective action by individuals who lacked the necessary funds, influence or know-how to act independently. In practice, it actually meant rule by an oligarchy of those with high social status.¹⁰⁵ Prospective 'consumers' were steered clear of organisations like the Co-operative Society that propagated more radical views about social relationships. The primary rule of the Literary Institute serves as a reminder of how the importance of a common culture was elevated above divisions of party and sect, and how such organisations could act as a 'neutral' area for the formation of class action 'The object of the society is to promote literary taste and rational amusement among the Inhabitants of Bromley and its vicinity, irrespective of differences in religion and politics.'¹⁰⁶

If the voluntary societies were inspired by the need for collective action over methods of social control, then no less so were the institutions and bodies devoted to the education and welfare of the people. Nationally vast sums were expended on educational schemes and projects, including large subscriptions from landowners and middle classes alike. Even though the nation lagged behind some of its major European competitors in the provision of popular education, the latter received greater attention and finances than did problems of health or conditions of work.¹⁰⁷ Church and Chapel were heavily involved. Within Bromley, the Church of England founded the Parish schools in 1855, extending elementary education beyond just the three hundred or so children of the 'rich and middle classes' who had hitherto enjoyed the privilege.¹⁰⁸ By 1873, four further Anglican National Schools had been established in the town. Together with the local

¹⁰³ R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites', *Historical Journal*, XXVI, No. 1, 1983, pp. 95-118

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Rules of the Bromley Literary Institute (BPL)*

¹⁰⁷ G. K. Clark, *op.cit.*, p. 162

¹⁰⁸ G. W. Norman, *Autobiography* (1857 onwards, unpublished)

gentry and higher-status tradesmen, Anglican clergy sat on the committee of the Bromley Evening Schools, established in 1859 to further the education of working-class children.¹⁰⁹ They also directed the Christian Colportage Association, which disseminated 'suitable' books to an increasingly literate public, and inspired the formation of working men's institutes and reading rooms.¹¹⁰ It was significant, however, that plasterers, plumbers and carpenters were given credit for the running of these reading rooms, whilst landowners and City merchants acted as public patrons.

The very fact that the higher social classes provided the funds and leadership for those bodies dedicated to popular education placed *them* in a position of paternalistic authority and their *charges* in a state of persistent deference. The Elementary Education Acts of 1870 and 1876 brought new challenges and threats to the local 'elite' in Bromley, notably concerning the onset of a School Board and the debates it aroused within the local community. The middle classes preferred to pay for schooling which remained strictly under their control and guidance. It was not, then, purely a question of expense, but of influencing accepted values and effecting social control through the education medium. At the founding ceremony of the Addison Road (Church of England) School in 1883, Charles L. Norman stated that he 'trusted that special care would be taken to instil a sound religious training as well as a secular one, which was needed more than ever in order to combat the scepticism rampant in our lands.'¹¹¹ Anglicans and Nonconformists alike used religious justification for their interference in educational affairs, even if they disagreed upon the nature of religious instruction. The two groups were united with the majority of the town's middle-class in their desire to perpetuate the existing social order and, with the prospect of a School Board, combined on a project in 1872 to establish a 'Combined British School' in the town.¹¹² As with the attempt two years later to enlarge existing schools, the scheme failed through lack of finance.¹¹³ Even though the School Board finally came into existence in 1888, individual wealthy patrons like T. C. Dewey, already a Manager and Treasurer of the Masons Hill (National) Schools, could still use his influence to maintain distinctions in class and gender. In 1873, he helped to establish the Science and Art School in Tweedy Road, with the intention of teaching working boys how to be gardeners and builders, and working girls how to be good domestic servants.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ *BR* Dec. 1859

¹¹⁰ *BR* Sept. 1874

¹¹¹ *BR* Apr. 1883

¹¹² *BR* Dec. 1872

¹¹³ *BR* May 1874

¹¹⁴ *BR* Oct. 1874

More extensive resources and academic schooling were reserved for those families who could meet the fees of the many small private schools in the town. These institutions owed much to the initiative and energy of individuals like Thomas Morley, proprietor of the Bromley Academy. The Academy fell far short of the 'top grade' Victorian public schools, but its commercial education seemed to serve more precisely the inhabitants of a thriving market town. A similar style of education was being offered by Mr. Partridge's 'Commercial Academy' which appealed to the 'Young Men' of both 'upper' and 'middle' classes of the district, with a separate school for the 'ladies'.¹¹⁵ By the 1870s, a number of new establishments had emerged to provide for Bromley's expanding middle classes, represented by the likes of Miss Sturt's 'Morning Class for Young Ladies' and the 'Preparatory Boarding & Day School for Young Gentlemen' at Haxted House.¹¹⁶ In 1880, Morley's Academy closed down, but its functions were taken over by a new High School for Boys and a new Commercial School at the Drill Hall, East Street.¹¹⁷ Fees were from 3 to 5 guineas per term and 21 shillings per quarter respectively, but both offered a range of subjects including arithmetic, book-keeping, drawing, history, geography and science.

Along with at least three other 'Middle-Class Schools' that opened for business in the 1880s, the majority of private educational institutions were aimed at the children of the *lower* middle classes. *Upper* middle-class offspring were educated outside of the town, but this did not prevent wealthy solicitors or merchants and financiers from the City supporting local private schools. By the end of the 1880s, it was clear that a market of demand existed for higher-class establishments, and so emerged Bromley High School for Girls and Quernmore School for Boys. Again, backing of the well-to-do was readily forthcoming. Members of the School Board - one of whom was headmistress of Bromley High - sang the praises of the new private schools, even though it was their *public* duty to concentrate on the shortfall in elementary school places. It was indicative of middle-class ideals that they procrastinated where 'voluntary' education might suffer. Instead, they hoped that a limited provision of scholarships would suffice, as with the four created in August 1900 for the gifted children of working-class families.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ BR 1858 Advertisement

¹¹⁶ BR Sept. 1868

¹¹⁷ BR Jan. 1881; E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 283

¹¹⁸ BR Sept. 1900

The discussion that ensued in the second half of the nineteenth century over the standard and extent of education, was part of a wider recognition of the need to improve overall services for the people. More isolated examples of philanthropic aid to the poor had always existed, as with the sacks of coal distributed to 480 local families in 1863 on the wedding of the Prince of Wales.¹¹⁹ Incidents of private munificence continued, performed not simply on an individual basis but increasingly through corporate bodies or 'public' subscription funds. The Bromley Cottage Hospital, for instance, received regular contributions from wealthy patrons, resulting in wards like 'Dewey' and 'Jamie Wheeler Bennett'.¹²⁰ In 1897, however, a more collective effort was inaugurated over an appeal fund for a new homeopathic hospital to serve the needs of the 'sick and suffering poor'.¹²¹ The Phillips Memorial Hospital that resulted, opening in June 1900, was the product of this truly local initiative. Dr. R. E. Phillips had come to the town in 1874, and had devoted his life to dispensary work amongst the poor.¹²² By the time of his early death in 1888 - at the age of 58 - he had collected £170 towards a new hospital. When Mrs. Forster, wife of the local Member of Parliament, laid the foundation stone in April 1899, a total of £3400 had been raised. The opening ceremony itself was attended by local Councillors, Church and Chapel ministers and other local dignitaries. In his celebratory speech, Thomas Davis, Chairman of the Council, spoke of the importance of private initiative and individual contributions as opposed to reliance upon state or municipal funding.¹²³

The inspiration behind the new hospital was symptomatic of the ideology that spawned the 'corporate municipalism' that became increasingly evident in the town after 1850. As a rule, the effects of suburbanisation and a rapidly expanding population demanded greater investment in shopping facilities and local infrastructure.¹²⁴ Asa Briggs proposed some time ago that, in large cities like Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, this led to the development of the 'municipal ideal', where *public* as well as *private* capital was expended on a number of schemes of social improvement.¹²⁵ Contemporaries and historians have debated the extent, nature and sincerity of an ideal that has become

¹¹⁹ *BR* Apr. 1863

¹²⁰ *BR* Mar. 1899; C. M. Spence, *op.cit.*

¹²¹ *BR* June 1899

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ G. Crossick, *op.cit.* (1978)

¹²⁵ A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (1963), p. 48

inseparable from the notion of 'civic pride'.¹²⁶ Contrasts need to be drawn between the situation in big cities like Birmingham and developing suburbs like Bromley. Many of Bromley's middle-class inhabitants who arrived after the coming of the railway were retreating from London, hoping to become part of the more genteel 'picturesque' image, itself an *anti*-civic aesthetic. As shown earlier, these wealthy newcomers encouraged the development of distinctive villas rather than any form of 'collective' housing, in order to maintain for themselves a pleasant retreat.¹²⁷ It would have been if these very same individuals, having adopted a romantic anti-urbanist stance, then proceeded to imitate the 'civic' ideals promoted by Britain's largest conurbations.

However, it is also a question of degree and of qualifying accepted notions of the municipal ideal. The philosophy of *laissez-faire* ran concurrently with ideas of collectivism in Bromley after 1850.¹²⁸ The interests of the public were set above those of the individual when it came to defending rights of way, if not over more elaborate designs at raising standards of public health. The most energetic defender of public footpaths was Charles W. Gedney, journalist and proprietor of the *Bromley Telegraph*. On one occasion, in 1873, he hired a gang of navvies to level a fence erected by W. D. Starling, a landowner whose estate had encroached upon the turnpike road to London.¹²⁹ Five years later he helped save Martin's Hill - a favourite picnic spot and hop garden - from building development, when he encouraged wealthy inhabitants to purchase it for the town.¹³⁰ On at least two other occasions, in 1890 and then in 1896, he prevented further stopping of public rights of way.¹³¹ Yet the same individual was instrumental in preventing the Local Board from engaging on civic projects, such as drainage and sewerage schemes, that might result in undue expense. Such a stance serves to reveal the apparent contradictions in Victorian middle-class ideology: through actions encouraging reform they claimed to represent the public interest, but in practice they were unwilling to expend vast sums of their own money on 'extravagant' public programmes.

¹²⁶ D. Fraser, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the Municipal Ideal', in G. Marsden (ed.), *Victorian Values - Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Society* (1990), p. 134ff; G. K. Clark, *An Expanding Society, Britain 1830-1900* (Cambridge 1967), pp. 162ff

¹²⁷ D. J. Olsen, *op.cit.*, p. 23

¹²⁸ G. K. Clark, *op.cit.*, p. 164ff

¹²⁹ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 56

¹³⁰ *BR* July 1878

¹³¹ *BR* Aug. 1890; *BR* May 1896

This was true of the town's initial attempt to provide a public library. Influential professionals like Rev A. G. Hellicar, Mary Heppel and Gustav Loly led a movement to encourage the Local Board to adopt the powers presented to them by the 'Free Libraries' Act of 1890.¹³² The Board finally yielded in 1894 by establishing a Public Library Committee under the chairmanship of Thomas Davis. Their plans received considerable support from the public, although two thirds of the ratepayers polled on the subject registered their opposition against the scheme.¹³³ When the 'Free Library' was opened in 1895, there was great mutual admiration and celebration of the achievements of *public* money as opposed to *private* munificence. Yet the triangular site of the new public building on Tweedy Road had in fact been donated by trustees of the Science and Art School, after a location closer to the heart of the town had been rejected on grounds of cost. Private generosity also made it possible for the town to gain its first public parks: the land for Whitehall Recreation Ground was purchased cheaply in 1890 off the trustees of the Treadwell Estate, whilst Queens Gardens was donated by Coles Child jun. in 1897 as a gift to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee.¹³⁴ The latter occasion was indeed a fitting demonstration of how town festivals and leisure activities in general brought together the virtues of private benevolence and civic pride.

In the national arena, local landowners like the banker John Lubbock (Lord Avebury of Farnborough) regarded the growth of so-called municipalism as a threat to both private enterprise and private property.¹³⁵ His speeches and actions sought to inhibit further municipal reform, essentially out of fear of the threat of socialism. However, the most notable proponent of the triumph of municipalism, Joseph Chamberlain, saw the civic trading companies as exponents of a public-spirited capitalism: in practice, they stood as safeguards *against* socialism.¹³⁶ The major companies of Victorian Bromley that provided public 'utilities', the Bromley Gas Consumers Company (1853), and the Bromley Electric Light & Power Company (1897), were both businesses in which any inhabitant could involve themselves, if at a price. Shares in the Gas Company, for instance, cost £10 each in 1860, while a stake in the Cottage Improvement Company in 1877 demanded at least £4.¹³⁷ The Directors of these two companies came from the upper middle-class of the town, and it was they who reaped the greatest financial returns. In the case of the Gas

¹³² *BR* Apr. 1892

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *BR* Apr. 1890; *BR* Jan. 1898

¹³⁵ H. Perkin, *op.cit.* (1990), pp. 137-8

¹³⁶ D. Fraser, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the Municipal Ideal', in G. Marsden (ed.), *op. cit.*

¹³⁷ *BR* Nov. 1868; *BR* May 1877

Company, by 1877 this meant the highest dividend of any 'civic' company in the county: shares bought in 1860 were selling for nearly £25.¹³⁸ There was also a commercial venture that built houses for the working class, the Bromley Cottage Improvement Company, which was founded by local philanthropists in 1868. Lack of capital, however, resulted in the construction of only 27 working-class cottages out of the fifty originally planned for. Dr. W. T Beeby later recalled:

We tried when building the Improvement Cottages to set the example of small dwellings with little gardens which a labourer might afford to rent without taking lodgers, but the idea, though the cottages were always let, was rather Utopian, inasmuch as in a neighbourhood like this land is too dear to make such a plan at all generally possible.¹³⁹

As with the Electric Light & Power Company, which emerged in the 1890s out of a syndicate of local retailers with outside support, these 'public-spirited' enterprises were very much *private* concerns.¹⁴⁰ Whenever they came into contact with locally-elected authorities, as inevitably happened later in the century, their true colours were exposed. In 1898, for example, the Urban District Council had to demand an assurance from the Electric Light Company that shares would only be held by local ratepayers. Twenty years earlier, Local Board members who were also Gas Company Directors were put in a precarious position when the Gas Company sought to secure from the Board a monopoly to supply electricity to the town.¹⁴¹ The incident aroused a measure of protest against public officers holding such vested business interests, but only one member resigned and there was no guarantee against similar situations occurring in the future.

The 'civic trading' companies worked in the same way as the voluntary societies and club committees in that they united individuals from a variety of backgrounds. The 'subscriber democracy' spirit of the town's middle class helped moderate differences in occupation, status, political party and religious sect. Political and social security, even in a town that lacked social radicals and conspicuous class hostility, remained uppermost in their minds. Division and dispute were exceptions rather than the rule. Even so, 'exceptional' circumstances did demonstrate important differences amongst the middle class, as revealed by the objections of the utilitarian, Dr. William Farr, to the Local Board's

¹³⁸ *BR* Sept. 1877

¹³⁹ *BR* April 1898

¹⁴⁰ *BR* June 1890

¹⁴¹ *BR* Mar. 1879

dilatoriness over providing an acceptable scheme of sanitation. At other times, disagreements were less over ideals as over a clash of personalities, as in the libel and slander cases involving C. W. Gedney. The first case - and counter-case - took place in 1884 with Edward Strong, proprietor of the rival *Bromley Record*.¹⁴² C. W. Gedney had accused Edward Strong of 'lickspittling' the common people and 'beslaving' the wealthy who supplied the *Record's* articles.¹⁴³ Ten years later and C. W. Gedney was in court again, this time defending the slanderous claims he had made against the town clerk, R. G. Mullen. The latter had refused public access to the accounts of the Local Board after there were complaints of irregular financial proceedings.¹⁴⁴ The owner of the *Bromley Telegraph* was a fitting member of the middle-class fraternity - he could disagree with others on one issue, yet unite with those same people on others. This happened with W. D. Starling, against whom C. W. Gedney protested over the encroachment of 'public' land, but whom he befriended over plans for a direct railway line to Charing Cross.¹⁴⁵

It was over their support for the proposals for railway lines that the unity of the middle classes was most conspicuous. Unlike the Mid-Kent line, pressure for the later 'Direct' line came from amongst the growing community of commuters in the town. The majority resided in the recently developed areas of Plaistow and New Bromley, and were spearheaded by William Gurley-Smith, Secretary to the People's Land Society. Although based in Greenwich, the Society was particularly active in the northern parts of Bromley, and strove to improve travel facilities to London.¹⁴⁶ The campaigners first met in November 1863, at the White Hart Hotel in the High Street.¹⁴⁷ They agreed to press for a new station near the Market Place, to join with the SER line between London and Tonbridge at Grove Park. Having suffered disruptions and delays on the existing line - which often meant changing trains at Beckenham - proponents of the 'Direct' route to London envisaged a faster, more efficient service. A committee of City merchants as well as local tradesmen, professionals and shopkeepers drew up a petition from 'the residents of Bromley (many of whom being engaged in London) are daily travellers by railway between Bromley and the City'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² *BR* June 1884

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *BR* July 1894

¹⁴⁵ *BR* Apr. 1874

¹⁴⁶ *BR* Dec. 1863

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ J. M. Rawcliffe, 'Bromley-Kentish Market Town to London Suburb 1841-1881', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Rise of Suburbia* (1982), pp. 82-83.

The committee approached the SER for support but to no avail. The latter's stance was heavily influenced by one of their Directors, Sir Samuel Scott, who owned Sundridge Park Estate, across which the line was to run.¹⁴⁹ The SER itself was less interested in creating new branch lines than in competing with the London, Chatham & Dover Railway Company (LC&DR) for the goods and passenger traffic through the heart of Kent and on to Dover.¹⁵⁰ Major shareholders were not themselves keen to finance such projects, as William John Coles Child showed in 1864 when he advised the SER against merging with the Mid-Kent because of its poor financial footing. A second attempt to gain SER assistance in 1865 also faltered. It seemed that without the backing of either local landowners, or at least one of the existing major railway companies, the scheme would remain a dead letter.

The capital required for constructing the line, estimated at around £20,000, was well in excess of funds that might be raised by local subscription or share issue.¹⁵¹ Much, then, depended upon the intervention of a large commercial concern, in this case the SER. So long as the SER acted indifferently, local middle-class pressure groups were powerless. At a public meeting in November 1872, W. D. Starling, a local proprietor living off independent means, accused both the SER and the LC&DR of dragging their feet.¹⁵² Protesting that Bromley inhabitants were being made fools of by these companies, he added that the town was worse off than any other 'suburban town' in that it had only one station for a population well in excess of 10,000 inhabitants. Citing Chislehurst as an example, Starling explained to a packed audience how suburban lines could not only pay their way but could stimulate further villa development. On this occasion, the proposal received the full backing of the Local Board, who were concerned that an ineffective railway service might hinder the future business life of the town. In their eyes, a new railway line 'was in the interests of the town and health of those who travelled daily to the City'.¹⁵³

Again the scheme foundered on the barricade raised by the SER. As with the initial line, the solution lay in the formation of a *local* company, one that could generate

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ F. Whyler, *The Development of the Railway System in the Bromley Area 1839-1923* (1983), p. 4

¹⁵¹ *BR* Dec. 1872

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ J. M. Rawcliffe, *op.cit.*

sufficient will-power, influence and capital to make the plan a viable proposition. By the end of January 1874, Starling and the Co-Directors of the 'Bromley Direct Railway Company' had deposited monies and a Bill for the new line with Mr. Parsons, their solicitor.¹⁵⁴ At a meeting the following month, attended by 250 interested parties, a motion was carried to endorse the Bill that 'was calculated greatly to benefit the residents and traders of Bromley and largely increase the value of property in the immediate neighbourhood'.¹⁵⁵ It was a classic example of the varying ranks of the middle class, from chemist to architect, pulling together towards a common objective. Each group had something to gain. For instance, it was no coincidence that Charles Muffet - who had complained that commuters were being treated 'more like cattle than Christians' by the existing service - chaired this crucial meeting: as one of the town's leading builders, he stood to gain enormously from the influx of new residents. Robinson Latter, the well-connected High Street solicitor, was also prominent, in the same way as he had been back in the 1850's when canvassing support for the Mid-Kent line. Both commercial and professional men, therefore, could envisage the expansion of their occupational concern, whilst at the same time promoting the supposed benefits to the community as a whole. Such aspirations helped draw together the divergent groups of the town's middle class.

Nevertheless, Sir Edward Henry Scott, Sir Samuel's heir to the Sundridge Estate, continued to resist the Bill for the direct railway. This was much to the dismay of Mr. Parsons, who argued that the line would only cross common farm land that was at present let to a tenant and not occupied by Sir Edward Henry Scott himself.¹⁵⁶ Fortunately for Mr. Parsons and the clients he represented, Sir Edward Henry's stance proved to be less belligerent than his grandfather's. He must have been acutely aware of the beginnings of a decline in the agricultural value of land, coming as it did when land speculation for building purposes was intensifying in anticipation of the new rail connection. The House of Lords passed the Bromley Direct Railway Bill on 26 June 1874.¹⁵⁷ By the end of the year it had been taken over by the SER, which was eventually to aid the Bromley company in the construction of the line. The initial route of the line had been diverted after negotiations with Sir Edward Henry, and the subsequent railway was made to run along the borders of his estate. Starling, the wealthy landed proprietor, remained a major proponent of the scheme and kept alive an important 'local' interest. After his death in

¹⁵⁴ *BR* April 1874

¹⁵⁵ Quoted by J. M. Rawcliffe, *op.cit.*, p. 38

¹⁵⁶ *BR* April 1874

¹⁵⁷ *BR* July 1874

1877, however, the affairs of the Bromley Direct Railway Company were directed by those prominent in the management of the SER, which was already filtering off 50% of the net profits.¹⁵⁸

Travel on the line when it opened in January 1878, proved to be very expensive. For a yearly season ticket, first class passengers had to find £17, third class £14, described by the *Record* as 'serious items in a City man's expenditure'.¹⁵⁹ As in Sevenoaks, local representatives on the railway company boards resisted the introduction of workmen's trains. Costs alone did much to forge the social composition of Bromley's commuters. Access to London was limited to members of the gentry and middle classes, a situation perpetuated by the Local Board who repeatedly refused to advocate lower fares. It was not until the later 1890s, by which time demand for workmen's trains had intensified, that the local authorities began to sit up and take notice. It was actually cheaper at the time to go to an intermediate station and buy a ticket to London than going from Bromley direct. A petition from 1,200 ratepayers in November 1898, alongside pleas from working-class representatives from the recently developed northern parts of the town, succeeded in gaining the necessary support from the School Board, Board of Guardians and the Urban District Council.¹⁶⁰ For the time being, this was merely *tacit* support, as the Council declined to be represented at a Committee of the House of Commons discussing the affair.¹⁶¹ More positive assistance to reduce fares and introduce a 3rd class season ticket, had to wait until the summer of 1910, thirty-two years after the line had been opened.¹⁶² This delay had a substantial impact on the class composition of Bromley inhabitants and was a crucial factor in forging the very middle class image of the town.

Motivations for, and responses to, the railways reflected the extent to which vested interests took precedence over any wider, more 'public' interest. Rather typically, Mr. Constable, who chaired the meeting in 1863 to establish the new 'direct' line, came out against the idea on finding that the line came too close to his house.¹⁶³ The 'not in my back yard' scenario was the very basis of Sir Samuel's Scott's resistance to the scheme, although his grandson was to recognise new opportunities which such a project might bring. Sir

¹⁵⁸ *Bromley Direct Railway, Minutes 1877-79*, meeting of 28 Feb. 1877; *BR* Oct. 1876

¹⁵⁹ *BR* Feb. 1878

¹⁶⁰ *BR* Dec. 1898

¹⁶¹ *BR* April 1899

¹⁶² *BR* July 1910. It is also worth noting that Bromley Council was the sole (and successful) opponent of the GLC's policy to introduce cheap tube travel in the 1980s.

¹⁶³ *BR* Dec. 1863

Edward Henry's more amenable attitude was just *one* of the changes that had come about by the mid-1870s to help the scheme succeed. Working closely together, the various social groups amongst the middle-class inhabitants of the town had achieved greater co-ordination and strength of purpose than at any other juncture. Significantly, they had organised themselves without the need for either leadership or patronage by the local gentry, as had been the necessary with the earlier line.

Personal deference to landowners like the Scotts had undoubtedly declined by the last quarter of the century, even if individuals were still guarded in their more *public* opinions. The owner of the impressive Sundridge Estate found himself not just co-operating but compromising with middle-class pressure groups. Finally, the depth of *local* feeling was also decisive. As in 1858, it was left up to local initiative to furnish the plans and organisation for a new line, executed in the face of gross indifference on the part of the larger railway companies. Analysis of the most vocal proponents of both lines suggest that it was not solely a matter of improving travel for commuters, real or anticipated. Tradesmen and shopkeepers joined with City gents and local professionals in recognising the benefits of improved communication. Tailors, journalists, doctors and builders looked forward to new dimensions in the demand for their services if the project succeeded. Subsequent developments in the commercial life of the town were to show these hopes were not held in vain.

The 'railway question' had succeeded in bringing together the differing interests of the town's middle class. It showed that they had more uniting them than dividing them. To bolster these ties, there were numerous examples of contact and inter-linking both within and between differing social 'ranks'. The daughter of Thomas Morley, the school

proprietor, married Douglas Payne, the builder, Miss Ilott, daughter of one of the town's most respected doctors, married A.S Gedge, an Australian merchant, with the groom's brother leading the service. Robinson Latter's daughter married Rev. R. G. Hodgson, headmaster of Junior King's School, Canterbury.¹⁶⁴ Occasionally, marriages between distinct socio-occupational groups took place, if not necessarily between locals, as with Daniel Grinsted and the daughter of Dr. Greenwood of Southwater, Sussex.¹⁶⁵ Funerals were another opportunity for families to socialise and show mutual respect, especially in the case of local retailers and gentry. 'Tradesmen' of the town were also brought together in special sporting fixtures, notably the annual cricket match put on by Colonel Long of Bromley Hill. This fixture reflected the rigid social hierarchy that persisted at least until the end of the Victorian era, for 'tradesmen' - a contemporary term used to include shopkeepers - continued to be organized and patronised from above.

The social and economic relations that existed between the differing groups and ranks of the middle class helped provide a bonding that secured their position in relation to both the parish gentry and the working classes of the town. The fact that so many 'newcomers' arrived in the town after the building of the first railway did not seem to affect this relationship adversely. Through a paternalistic system that set the wealthy City merchants, financiers and professionals up as the 'elite' of the community, patronising local clubs, societies, charities and schools, social distinctions were further encouraged and reinforced. The 'lesser' middle class of tradesmen, shopkeepers, small businessmen and local professionals were on the whole content for this to happen, as long as the commercial livelihood of the town was secure and there remained the prospect of advancing one's own social status. It was also vital that those with influence in local government followed along these lines, especially when it came to providing the town with the facilities and infrastructure necessary for urban living. For these reasons, the middle classes of the town became increasingly wary of the need to direct and dictate the affairs and actions of local administrators. This leads us to consider the extent to which the middle classes were able to control the management and development of their local community, as well as the costs entailed.

¹⁶⁴ *BR* June 1883; *BR* Feb. 1895

¹⁶⁵ *BR* Feb 1895

CHAPTER FIVE: 'DRAINS ON THE RATE' - LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN A SUBURBAN SETTING

The strength of middle-class unity was tested by a number of controversial issues that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. The nature of relations between the landed parish gentry and the middle classes of the town, as well as between the middle classes themselves, came under ever-sharper focus. To the historian's loss, much of the evidence that remains concerning these relationships is in the form of administrative records and press reports on institutional meetings. Precious little 'personal' evidence survives, with the result that information about the lives of individuals and families must be gleaned from a mere handful of personal recollections and family records. Given these limitations, it makes sense to concentrate on those individuals and bodies who were involved in local government and the direction of local affairs. The process of sub-urbanisation, which gathered pace as the century progressed, placed burdensome demands upon those responsible for governing the local community. Their actions led to a variety of responses and reactions that characterised the ideals and intentions of the town's middle class. By looking first at the framework of local administration, within which decisions were made and challenged, it is possible to set prevailing relations between civic authorities and their local community in their appropriate historical context.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, local administration was in the hands of a collection of voluntary participants acting under the auspices of a variety of statutory institutions. In Bromley, the leading authority was the traditional body of ratepayers 'in vestry assembled', responsible for parochial expenditure relating to the church, lighting and paving, but unsure of the obligation or legality of adopting further powers. The Vestry appointed a handful of administrative officers, although formal authority for this lay with the sitting magistrates, many of whom were prominent on the Vestry itself. After the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, the Board of Guardians for the Union of Bromley assumed responsibility for poor relief; the Vestry still retained an element of control through its right to sanction Guardian expenditure. In practice the poor rate became the established form of local taxation, used not merely for poor relief but for an ever-increasing range of local administrative purposes. This quasi-legal situation was common to most towns and reflected the rather informal and ill-disciplined nature of local government at this time.¹

¹ J. Roebuck, *Urban Development in Nineteenth Century London - Lambeth, Battersea and Wandsworth 1838-1888* (1979), p. 8

The Bromley Vestry did not sit as a representative parish parliament, for only those with time and money could afford to attend its early morning meetings. These men of high financial and occupational standing determined their own agenda and direction.² Occasionally, ratepayers could requisition special meetings, as on 28 December 1866 over the issue of the town's drainage, but such practice was not a normal occurrence.³ The most prestigious positions on the Vestry were the Churchwarden, Overseers, Surveyors of the Highways and Clerk who between them carried out the most onerous tasks. At various times, they helped direct policy, managed the town's finances and represented the parish in correspondence with external bodies. The former two worked voluntarily and were well-established individuals in the town, usually tradesmen or shopkeepers. The surveyors of the highways tended to be wealthier individuals, notably landowners like Sir Samuel Scott, William Pawley and W. D. Starling. The Clerk was the only paid official of the three. In writing up minutes, balancing books and corresponding with a whole host of local inhabitants and institutional authorities, the clerk was the most trusted, experienced and informed member of the local administration. For these reasons, Clerks tended to hold office over a much longer term than other officials, whose positions were more eagerly and regularly contested.⁴

In a predominantly rural community, the Parish Vestry had sufficient powers to carry out the efficient management of local affairs, especially when supported by magistrates at the petty sessions. Vestry minutes suggest that meetings were tedious affairs, limited to decisions about rates, the upkeep of the Parish Church and parish roads, and the election of Vestry officers. Yet the rapid urban expansion that followed on from the arrival of the railway brought with it a host of new problems for the local community. Bromley's Vestry, relying as elsewhere on only voluntary service, a minimum of full-time officers and limited statutory powers, was ill-equipped to deal with the pressing problems of water supply, the draining of sewage, and the supply of gas, let alone road-building, sanitation and housing. To make matters worse, the Vestry's responsibilities remained poorly defined by a national government which on successive occasions failed to offer adequate supervision. When the Vestry attempted to establish a Board of Highways in 1863, they were challenged at the Queen's Bench

² *Vestry Minutes*, 1840-1868

³ *Idem.*, 28 Dec. 1866

⁴ In fact, between 1840 and 1914 there were only three vestry or town clerks. Robinson Latter held the post of clerk between 1841 and 1871. R. G. Mullen was Clerk to the Vestry and Local Board between 1871 and 1893. F. H. Norman - no relation to the Norman family of Bromley Common - was town clerk after 1893 and still held the post after the First World War. In April 1857 there was a particularly heated contest between William Pawley and William Dent for the post of surveyor of highways. William Dent eventually won the day after a second poll of ratepayers was called for because of disputes over the eligibility of some voters in the original poll.

and informed that they had failed to take a large enough poll of the parish.⁵ Coincidentally, in the same year central government had also abolished the town's own savings bank - replacing it with the nationally instituted Post Office Savings bank - leading to an acerbic and untypically irate comment in the *Record* :

To be brief, we believe there ought to be, and are, brains enough in 500 persons to manage our own roads, and honesty enough in the gentry of the neighbourhood to conduct a savings bank, and we may add, money enough to make another railway should it be required.⁶

Such exposure of the proverbial tongue was testimony to the lack of trust in which local authorities held central government, a theme which was to re-emerge over the question of sewage removal and educational provision. The rejection of a Highways Board must have been even more vexing for those Vestry members who met the majority of legal costs incurred out of their own pockets. Such an informal, if well-meaning and flexible approach to local management could not survive for long in an increasingly urbanised setting. Eventually, it was the potentially hazardous issue of sanitation and public health that sounded the Vestry's death knell.

The second half of the century saw a gradual acceptance of central government intervention, executed through a far reaching programme of national legislation and inspection. In 1867, the Bromley Parish Vestry made way for the Local Board, an organ of government empowered with authority that might enable new acts to be enforced more thoroughly. Electoral procedures were placed on a sounder base, with more formal and democratic procedures removing the parish gentry from their once domineering positions. After 1867, the post of Chairman was never again held by one of the major landowners. In 1870, the Board altered its time of meeting to half past four in the afternoon in order to convenience 'City' members. On average, between eight and nine members of the twelve man body sat in attendance. These men represented a wider section of the local middle classes than the old Vestry had done, and included amongst their number individuals like Dr. William Farr whose expertise was vital to accomplish effective improvements in public living standards.

As for the Vestry, this body of ratepayers continued to meet regularly, concerning itself with poor relief, ecclesiastical affairs and the appointment of Governors to Bromley's endowed schools. The once prestigious offices of

⁵ *BR* Dec. 1863

⁶ *Ibid.*

Churchwarden and Vestry Clerk were superseded by the Clerk to the Local Board, which continued to head the executive arm of local government for years to come. Indeed, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that appointing full-time, professional officers came easy to Bromley's local administrators. It was not until 1875 that the town gained its own Medical Officer of Health, Dr. C. O. Bayliss; the following year Mr. Hugh S. Cregreen became the town's first full-time - if poorly paid - Inspector of Nuisances.⁷ On the whole, Medical Officers like Dr. Codd (1889-1914) carried out their work diligently, but their efforts were hindered by squabbles over the funding for schemes of improvement. In theory, the Board had statutory powers to generate public programmes for nuisance removal, and took greater responsibility for the local supply of gas and water; in practice, petty arguments, administrative incompetence and financial mis-dealings did little to acquiesce ratepayer reservations of such expensive dreams.

The inadequacies of such Local Boards, as well as the variety and confusion of administrative bodies that existed in local government, have led some historians and contemporaries alike to speak critically of the whole system as it existed in the 1880s: 'Mr. Rathbone, an earnest and intelligent reformer, described the system of 1885 as a chaos of areas, a chaos of franchises, a chaos of authorities and a chaos of rates.'⁸ Others, however, have recognised more positive aspects of local government during the second half of the Victorian era.⁹ M Rose has proposed that the range of bodies that existed - which in the case of towns like Bromley by 1888 included a Local Board, a School Board, a Board of Guardians, a Sanitary Board and the remnants of a Vestry - provided the necessary flexibility and adaptability to cope with the diversity of demands placed upon them.¹⁰ Furthermore, their local accountability existed as a defence of localism against the growth and interference of a powerful, centralised bureaucratic government.

Whatever the truth of these arguments, it took the creation of the Urban and Rural District Councils in 1894 to place local government on a securer, more standardised footing. The parliamentary act of that year heralded an era which enhanced the prestige of local office as well as furthering the notion of public accountability. The property qualification demanded for candidature for the Local

⁷ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *History of Bromley from Earliest Times to the Present Century* (Chislehurst 1929), p. 260

⁸ A. Freeman, 'How the Town was Run', *BLHS* No. 8, 1986, quoting Bryan K. Lucas, *A History of Local Government* (2nd ed. 1970)

⁹ M. Rose, 'Social Change and the Industrial Revolution' in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (ed.), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700, Vol. 1 1700-1860* (Cambridge. 1981), pp. 268-275

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Board, which had stood at the rateable value of £30, was wiped away, making it possible for *any* elector resident in the parish for the previous twelve months to stand for office.¹¹ Local Liberals like Charles W. Gedney, proprietor of the *Bromley Telegraph*, celebrated the sweeping away of the 'petty boards' and the ending of plural voting. Local government was rationalised by granting the new Councils power to control burial grounds, rights of way, allotments and local charities. It also aimed at democratising the system for selecting Poor Law Guardians.¹² The new legislation had been instigated by a Liberal government seeking to widen the powers of local authorities, particularly relating to the provision and maintenance of civic amenities. By so doing, the Liberals also hoped to reduce further the influence of the Established Church in local affairs, notably in the administration of charitable welfare that had been traditionally based around the parish and union.

In Bromley, the introduction of new legislation brought with it the formation of political wards. The Councillors agreed to establishing five wards in all, each electing three members with the exception of the more densely populated Town Ward that elected four. However, election returns suggest that Council seats were often returned uncontested. In April 1899, for instance, when it was time for a third of the Councillors to stand down, lack of interest resulted in a poll being held in only one ward.¹³ Under the chairmanship of Walter Bosanquet, the solicitor who had voiced numerous objections against previous Board activities, the Urban District Council adopted a much more complex administrative structure than that of either Vestry or Board. To deal with the shops, houses and traffic that had mushroomed by the 1890s, Council business was divided up amongst the more specialised committees of finance, the highways, technical instruction, the public library and sanitation. In order to add greater expertise, and undoubtedly as a means of appeasement and recognition, membership of the public library and technical instruction committees was bolstered by the presence of co-opted individuals. Respected figures like Gustav Loly, Hugh J. Tweedy and Edward Packe found themselves assisting in important decisions to be taken about local affairs.

Yet with all the organisational changes, Councillors were still faced with ratepayer criticisms over financing new obligations. Questions about rates and local taxation remained unresolved even with the Incorporation of the town in 1903. However, the new Borough Council's task of administering an ever-wider range of duties was eased by powers to pass its own bye-laws and by greater numbers of full-

¹¹ *BR* March 1894

¹² *BR* April 1894

¹³ *UDC Minutes*, June 1896-Dec. 1897, meeting of 13 June 1899, pp. 3-12

time staff. The previous fifty years had seen the local rates rise enormously to cover expenses incurred in carrying out new responsibilities. In 1863, the overall local rate had stood at 1s. 2d. in the pound. By 1870, this had risen steadily to 1s. 6d. in the pound. With the introduction of a drainage scheme after 1875, this had risen dramatically to 3s. 2d. in the pound by 1882. By the mid-1890s, ratepayers were paying a third as much again at 3s. 10d. in the pound, the highest figure ever reached in Victorian Bromley. The small market town of 1850, with its population of just 5,000, had by 1900 been converted into a large, populous town of over 27,000. In the same period the number of inhabited houses had increased from under 1,000 to just over 5,000. Such expansion, alongside a growth in the overall number of ratepayers later in the century, had augmented the rateable value to almost a quarter of a million pounds. Inevitably, this aided the local Councillors as they met in their respective committees to discuss future civic projects. It also reinforced the need for more effective management of funds and local affairs. The Charter of Incorporation, which was received by Thomas Dewey, the Charter Mayor, at a special ceremony on Martin's Hill in front of existing Kentish mayors, the sheriffs of London, a mass of renowned notables and a vast crowd, provided part of the solution.¹⁴ At the same time, it raised the prestige of local government posts, encouraging shopkeepers and city merchants alike to vie for the positions of mayor and aldermen.

This being the framework of local government in the period, there emerged a number of issues that illustrated the role of local administrators and their relationship with the local population. These shed light on the extent of direction and representation demonstrated by the town's local governing elite, and the degree to which this altered during the Victorian and Edwardian era. The extent to which the local authority saw it as its duty to make provisions for local inhabitants at the time was unclear. Gentlemen landowners and middle classes disagreed amongst themselves when it came to weighty matters of drainage, burials, education, power and transport. Where the town's 'fathers' were concerned, this was eventually to call into question contentious notions of 'civic pride' and 'municipal socialism'. Where the inhabitants in general were concerned, it suggests the existence or development of distinct interest groups pushing forward their own ideals and ambitions.

The means by which the middle classes of Bromley had achieved a second railway line in 1878, against resistance from the Scott estate, demonstrated a break from more traditional ties to the local landed gentry. Deference to the handful of gentlemen landowners had already been called into question in 1867 when considering

¹⁴ *Bromley District Times*, 7 August 1903

the creation of a Local Board. In a Vestry meeting in February of that year, Charles F. Devas, a copper-smelter and owner of Bromley Lodge Estate, had proposed a motion to adopt the powers of the Local Government Act of 1858:

They [the objectors] must, however, remember that the district was fast growing from a rural into an urban district, and though the southern portion of the parish might not now be suffering from the same evils as the northern portion, it would very soon be in the same position.¹⁵

Devas had in fact foreseen one of the major problems a Board would face in effecting improvements, that of ratepayer short-sightedness. At the same meeting, George Warde Norman expressed great reservations at the creation of a Board, firstly because authorities already existed to supervise affairs such as roads and lighting, and secondly because the parish was too small to warrant the necessary administration and expense. William John Coles Child too objected to the demise of the town's traditional ruling authority. Nevertheless, the dissentients were outnumbered by those who like Dr. William Farr regarded the need for proper drainage as imperative, and urgently demanded the town follow the government's lead as signalled by the Sanitation Act of 1866.¹⁶ It was the weight attached to the local population's health that carried the day, and a Local Board of twelve elected members was agreed upon.

The changes incorporated into the town's latest form of local government affected both social relations and the balance of local power. Unlike the Parish Vestry, the Board was not elected under a system whereby the number of votes varied with the rateable value of property. Instead, ratepayers had only one vote that helped to select four members each year for a three year term of office.¹⁷ Qualification for office was fixed at property worth £500 or an annual rating of £15, with retiring members retaining eligibility for re-election. As a result of this one sudden change, the local gentry lost their prestigious position within the main arm of local government.¹⁸ Coles Child and Norman were forced to become spectators of the administrative scene, resorting to letters and legal representation to assert their influence. The Board itself adopted wider powers and responsibilities than the Vestry, dealing primarily with the matter of drainage but also with roads, lighting, night-soiling and the stopping of public footpaths. It was a period of experimentation for the local tradesmen,

¹⁵ *BR* March 1867

¹⁶ Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (1991 edition), p.208. The Act compelled local authorities to improve sanitary conditions and remove nuisances.

¹⁷ *BR* March 1867

¹⁸ The powers and function of the old Parish Vestry may have been limited, but it still gave landowners the opportunity to exert influence and direction over the parish's affairs

shopkeepers and professionals who dominated the early Boards, as a variety of demands and controversial issues tested their powers and determination. For example, in October 1873, as compelled by the Public Health Act of 1872, they agreed to the appointment of a Medical Officer of Health to represent Bromley and neighbouring sanitary districts.¹⁹ By 1878, Board members had also recognised a duty to protect the town's recreational assets from building development, by helping achieve the purchase of Martin's Hill, a local beauty spot.²⁰

However, Board members found that navigating through the uncharted waters of complex governmental administration was far from straightforward. In the final analysis, they were still inexperienced 'amateurs', even if energetic and sincere in their intentions. Ignorance and uncertainty presided when it came to disputes over the nature and extent of the Board's authority. On one occasion, the Board celebrated the appointment of a local builder as Chairman simply because he might be more aware of the practicalities of urban development.²¹ Unfortunately, incompetence often reigned when it came to questions of procedure and book-keeping. At a Board meeting in August 1868, James How, a High Street watchmaker, burst in claiming his right as a ratepayer to voice his feelings.²² After much confusion, it was decided that ratepayers could indeed attend but only with the consent of the Chairman. Four years later, there were arguments over which members of the Board had to stand down.²³ A series of refusals and objections led to the retirement of only *two* members, George Henry Payne (a local builder) and Thomas Heaysman (builders and property developer), on the grounds that they had received the least votes at the last election. In June 1873, electoral procedures were further questioned. On this occasion, Norman and Rev. A. Rawson were bemoaning the lack of a Bromley Common householder on the Board, arguing that each part of the town deserved to be adequately represented.²⁴ Two years later, the Board election process was under attack again, this time from 36 'ratepayers and freeholders' who protested against the traditional 'nomination' system that had foregone the necessity to hold elections earlier that year.²⁵

The Board was also intermittently charged with 'wastefulness' and 'dilatoriness'. In June 1875, Major-General Henry P. Babbage, son of the computer pioneer Charles Babbage, highlighted the lack of improvements the Board had carried out in the

¹⁹ *BR* Nov. 1873

²⁰ *BR* July 1878

²¹ *BR* June 1872

²² *BR* Sept. 1869

²³ *BR* April 1872

²⁴ *BR* July 1873

²⁵ *BR* July 1875

town.²⁶ Whilst the town's rateable value had risen dramatically from £58,000 to over £78,000 in the space of just two years, the Board had only managed the construction of a few needed kerb-stones. Babbage, who had served in India and made money from building projects there, had come to Bromley in 1871. He had invested heavily in property development around the Park Road area in which he himself resided, and was doubtless eager to gain a return upon his investments. This being the case, he proved to be a nagging thorn in the side of the Board during the 1870s and 1880s, sometimes working from the inside but often from without. Not only did he charge the Board with gross inaction, but he also charged them for wasting ratepayers' money. In 1883, for instance, after standing down from the Board, he accused members of incompetence in failing to collect £4,500 owed in local rates.²⁷

The mal-administration of public funds was just one of the shortcomings of nineteenth century local government exposed by ratepayers like Babbage. Another more frequent source of debate was the conflict between private and public interests. The question of vested interests held by public officials had come to the fore in Bromley in January 1870 with the resignation of Devas, then Chairman of the Board.²⁸ For centuries, townspeople had possessed the right to remove stones for building purposes from the gravel pit at the southern end of the High Street. The pit, however, was located in the grounds of Bromley Lodge Estate, owned by Devas who claimed the pit as part of his own *private* property. After months of wrangling, in which the townspeople disputed Devas's impositions, Devas's official position became increasingly compromised. As it happened, Devas *did* feel obliged to stand down at this time, but rather as a result of frustration over the drainage issue than out of any sense of guilt over gravel. In June 1870, the town lost the use of the gravel pit when, in the face of opposition from the likes of Dr. William Farr and W. W. Baxter, the Board sold the traditional digging rights to Devas for a mere £250.²⁹

Given the much more personal nature of local government at this time, it was inevitable that the issue of vested interests would remain in the public eye. In May 1876, Babbage took up the challenge. At a meeting of the Board, he objected to the their appointment of Thomas Heaysman as Assistant Inspector of Nuisances, on the grounds that Heaysman owned various properties in the town and had relatives who too were property-owners.³⁰ Babbage's disapproval was aroused by the fact that a

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Brenda Innes, 'New Bromley', Bromley Local History Pamphlet No. 8, pp. 19-25

²⁸ *BR* Feb. 1870

²⁹ *BR* July, 1870

³⁰ *BR* June 1876

small row of houses known as 'Wharton Terrace Cottages', which were owned by Heaysman, had their well and cesspool dangerously located side by side. The most acrid attacks of Babbage were saved for the time succeeding his departure from the Board in April 1882. On 21 March 1883, he chaired a meeting of ratepayers at the Town Hall to protest against Gas Company shareholders and speculative builders sitting as Board members.³¹ The ratepayers' grievances extended beyond charges of self-interest to accusations of 'the poor conduct' of local affairs, culminating in a £3,000 deficiency on a loan to finance the town's sewers. In the words of C. H. W. Biggs, one of the leading spokesmen, 'renewed prosperity was in store for Bromley, if local affairs were properly conducted.'³² For some unexplained reason, the meeting ended abruptly with the audience leaving *en masse*. Feelings were clearly running high. Later, Babbage issued a more vilified personal imputation of James Batten, Chairman of the Board, for resisting his attempts to get to the bottom of the Board's financial mis-dealings when still in office.³³

Six months later, the Board was under pressure once more. A large majority of ratepayers were clearly losing faith in Board members, whom they regarded as self-seeking and untrustworthy. The second crowded protest meeting of the year, on 13 November, voiced anger at the Board's plans to take over the running of the ancient Thursday Market.³⁴ A poorly attended public meeting back in October had voted in favour of the take-over by 36 votes to 15, ostensibly under the authority of the Public Health Act of 1875 on the grounds of preventing existing nuisances.³⁵ It was this decision that brought 1,500 inhabitants, ranging from local gentry to a large portion of rate-paying mechanics and the working classes, in such angry mood to the November rally. Spokesmen such as Babbage and Henry Nye were deeply suspicious of Board intentions, particularly as Board membership included a number of High Street shopkeepers who might fear the adverse effects of casual competition upon their trade. Opponents of Board proposals quite justly pointed out that the majority of those who had signed the requisition to appropriate the market were shopkeepers or tradesmen on or near Market Square.

The public jeered when Batten, representing the Local Board, claimed no Board member held any personal interest in the matter. Ratepayers who opposed the take-over voiced their fears that in a poll of the parish the 'one' vote of the poorer

³¹ *BR* April 1883

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *BR* Dec. 1883

³⁵ *BR* Nov. 1883

ratepayer would be swamped by those holding five or six votes.³⁶ Matters threatened to get out of hand when Babbage and other individuals began to use the meeting as an excuse to raise objections about stinking sewage, poor roads and the chaos in local public finance. In fairness to those proposing the take-over, not all were High Street traders, and amongst their number were journalists, doctors and City merchants. Yet these were wealthy individuals to whom the Market was of little benefit, unlike the poorer householder. Interestingly, this was the first time in which the feelings of working-class 'representatives' were publicly recorded, the *Record* reporting on their fears of an end to the availability of cheaper goods if the market was either to change or disappear completely. Although the feelings of only a few individuals were set down in writing, the vast bulk of those present at the meeting voted against the Board's plans. The Board had been made to suffer yet another major climb-down and the matter was indefinitely deferred.

High Street businessmen continued to raise objections to market traders, as highlighted by the *Record* in February 1889 in which the 'old market' was described as 'crowded' and 'disgraceful'.³⁷ Writing in January the following year, Coles Child jun. decried the Board's attempts to switch the timing of the weekly market over the Christmas period away from its traditional day on Thursday.³⁸ As it happened, one stall alone on the Christmas Thursday sufficed to maintain ancient market rights and custom. Coles Child jun. went on to rebuke the Board as, 'the cat's paw of a few well-to-do people, to whom the market is always obnoxious'.³⁹ It was perhaps ironic that Bromley's Lord of the Manor, whose family had resisted sanitation projects and stopped-up a number of 'public' rights-of-way, should champion the 'popular' cause. In patronising local activities, parish gentry like Coles Child jun. were upholding the paternal responsibility inherited from their predecessors. At the same time, the actions of Coles Child jun. also served to play on divisions amongst the town's middle class.

The strong support for the ancient traditions of the market reflected the strength of *local* feeling. Middle-class inhabitants identified themselves as members of a community which they believed served, or at least could be *made* to serve, their peculiar interests. This was no mere loyalty to some abstract phenomenon that was 'Bromley'. It was a devotion to a town's vitality in which they participated and for which they were rated to finance. Aspects of 'localism' emerged as part of a driving-force behind the construction of the town's two railway lines, as well as appearing in a

³⁶ *Bromley Journal and West Kent Herald*, Dec. 1883, p. 2

³⁷ *BR* Feb. 1889

³⁸ *BR* Jan. 1890

³⁹ *Ibid.*

variety of matters and disputes with central government. Perhaps most conspicuously, however, 'localism' was revealed in the provision of urban facilities, as the inhabitants struggled to cope with the difficulties besetting such a rapidly expanding town. Financing these facilities was bearable if restricted to one's own town or vicinity, but stopped short of improving the well-being of neighbouring districts. Thus in March 1877, a meeting of ratepayers under the chairmanship of Archibald Hamilton, voted against the West Kent Water Bill because of objections to *Bromley* water being pumped away from the town to a reservoir at near-by Farnborough.⁴⁰ Similarly, in March 1883, at a crowded public gathering directed by Babbage, ratepayers could not comprehend why they should pay part of the costs for sewerage Beckenham or any other neighbouring town.⁴¹

Such protests stemmed from a wider ideology and exposed one of the inherent contradictions of middle-class inhabitants: the desire for urban improvement without the desire to pay for it. It was a short-sighted and blinkered philosophy, but one that was neither unusual nor unacceptable to the majority of middle-class residents. The dichotomy itself became evident in the issue that became Bromley's most pressing problem in the second half of the nineteenth century, that of the draining of the town's sewage. Objectives and objections centring on the matter of sewage disposal showed all that was both commendable and shabby in middle-class urban management. On the ideological plane, the notion of *laissez-faire*, with its emphasis on the rights and achievements of the individual, was brought into direct confrontation with the *collective* needs of the community. In the process, the depth of middle-class unity came under increasingly intense examination.

The removal of sewage was one of the most serious issues of Victorian society, yet to this day remains very much neglected by historians. It was not merely a question of noxious gases or unpleasant aromas. As one of the great 'nuisances', sewage could bring an abrupt end to thousands of lives through its facility to spread cholera and typhoid. On the more 'political' stage, it also had the power to whip up hysteria, excite

⁴⁰ *BR* April 1878

⁴¹ *BR* April 1883

local elections and force the resignations of those who stepped out of line with the emotions of influential ratepayers. As D Fraser recognised, 'basic questions about the legitimate use of power of the urban community were involved in the mundane subjects of water and drains.'⁴² The subject even inspired townsmen to literary endeavours, as in *Bromley Bells - The Rise and Progress of the Commune of Bromville* (1872):

Once upon a time there was a town named Bromville, it was many hundred years ago but the inhabitants jogged on gently, never troubling themselves about anything. The people who demanded the taxes met in the same place four time a year. At these meetings the officers usually drank brandy and water, the cost of which was always included in the cost of collecting taxes...Some of the selected members (of the Commune) were scientific and thought they knew all about the making of a watercourse, believing that had a special mission to convert Bromville into a rewarding earthly paradise; little thinking of the cost...⁴³

Such was the satirical image presented by a local commentator on the proceedings of the Local Board in its efforts to drain the town of its effluence. The author was probably Edward Tuck, an ironmonger and close friend of Charles W. Gedney, the journalist and proprietor of the *Bromley Telegraph*.⁴⁴ Tuck made a name for himself amongst locals when he helped Gedney level Starling's fence along the main London Road.⁴⁵ Like many a local tradesman or shopkeeper, he had little time for what he considered to be the over-exuberant and extravagant sewerage schemes that had been dreamed up by local officials. The issue of drainage, with its impact upon the health and sanitation of the people, had been the primary inspiration behind the formation of the Board five years earlier. Before this, a committee dealing with 'nuisance removal' had sat since 1857, but only involved the supervision of night soilmen. By the end of 1872, the year in which Tuck's broad sheet appeared, the Local Board's plans and ideas had come to nothing. Bromley was still left without a safe or efficient system of sewage removal. Why had this situation been allowed to persist?

⁴² D.Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England*, p. 10

⁴³ Taken from a booklet published probably in 1872 entitled, 'Bromley Bells - The Rise and Progress of the Commune of Bromville'. It is hard to say whether the author intended to satirise socialist ideals in the title. The booklet itself was produced just after the 1871 Paris Commune. Whatever, he certainly opposed idealistic public schemes financed by private individuals

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*- a note on the booklet, probably written by G.H.Payne in whose collection the booklet was preserved. assumes that Edward Tuck was the author

⁴⁵ *Baxter's Newscuttings*, Book 1, 'Bromley District Times' extract, 22 April 1921

The national cholera outbreak of 1866 generated a grave concern for the general sanitation of the local district, in much the same way as the earlier epidemics of 1832 and 1848 had done in other towns.⁴⁶ In October 1867, the Vestry adopted compulsory purchase powers in order to construct a sewage outfall at 'Holloway Farm' on Lord Northbrook's estate to the north of the town.⁴⁷ Their hopes of establishing a sewage outfall here suffered a setback the following year when rejected by the Home Office.⁴⁸ Matters truly came to a head in 1869 after the inauguration of the 'Bromley Ratepayers' Association' in early March.⁴⁹ Under the chairmanship of the barrister G. F. Chambers Esq., the Association represented the views of local farmers, tradesmen and professionals who questioned both the cost and effectiveness of the Board's 'gravitational' scheme of drainage. In their attempts to fend off an excessive burden upon the local rate, the Association went above the heads of the Local Board by appealing directly to the Secretary of State. The ratepayers' estimate of £50,000 diverged widely from the predictions of the recently constituted Board by almost £30,000.⁵⁰ Yet even the Board's financial forecast would have resulted in a rate of twenty-two pence in the pound, far too much for the inhabitants of the town to swallow. At the Local Government Enquiry, held on April 2nd, the Association combined with local landowners in opposing the 'Holloway' scheme.⁵¹ Major Boyd of Plaistow made public his fears of the devastating effect a sewage outfall would have on land values; in private he must also have foreseen the potential damage to future residential development. Mr. Lloyd, the Major's legal representative at the Enquiry, accused the Board of 'buying off' Lord Northbrook's opposition at the relatively high price of £300 per acre. This charge was vehemently denied by Robinson Latter of the Board, even though land valuations carried out four years later were to reveal that such compensatory payments were indeed over-generous.⁵²

In June 1869, the Board's drainage scheme was once more rejected by the Government.⁵³ Devas, Chairman of the Board, angrily responded with an exposé of multiplying cesspits, contaminated well water and cellars drowning in sewage.⁵⁴ According to the clerk, 'the action of the Government had paralysed the Board'. The

⁴⁶ See J. Roebuck, *op.cit.*, p. 48; also A. Briggs, *op.cit.*, p. 375

⁴⁷ *BR* Nov. 1867

⁴⁸ *BR* April 1869

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *BR* May 1869

⁵² The Land Assessment of 1873 showed that on average, land in Bromley had an estimated rental value of £80 per acre; farmland itself was rated much lower than urban land, at between £1 and £4 per acre.

⁵³ *BR* July 1869

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Board had in fact been criticised for not taking into account the feelings of all parties concerned. In their defence, the clerk argued that the Board had 'denied the right of adjoining landowners to be heard on the question of a nuisance that it was only *supposed* might be created', since such persons had no *locus standi* in the case of a Parliamentary enquiry.⁵⁵ Devas flippantly suggested that the Government should provide its own scheme for the town. Eventually, a deputation of the Board met with the Home Secretary to resolve the matter, and the enquiry re-opened in August.⁵⁶ The occasion proved little more than a medium for William John Coles Child to air his own personal fantasies for overcoming the problem, magnanimously volunteering a portion of his own property as the site for the sewage outfall. As the town's highest ratepayer - he paid out a yearly sum of £1,260 - he maintained that he held the views of all ratepayers very much in mind:

...I am one of the largest ratepayers in Bromley, and would not willingly propose anything which could in any way prove detrimental to the interests of the town with which my own are so closely allied.⁵⁷

Coles Child offered to construct filtration works on one and a half acres of land, which he would then buy back in seven years time if the project failed. There were even offers of substantial loans, although the Board questioned the level of interest rate demanded. The plans of Bromley's Lord of the Manor were characteristic of the half-baked, naive ideas contemplated by local administrators and ratepayers at this time. The latter part of 1869 proved to be as disordered and chaotic as earlier months. Coles Child extolled the virtues of filtration over irrigation, boasting of a bottle of filtrated Ealing water which he kept on the mantelpiece at home.⁵⁸ A subsequent breakdown in communication between the Board and Coles Child led to unpleasant exchanges and mutual distrust that had long-lasting implications on relations between them. Part of the problem lay in the fact that the Lord of the Manor had headed a Vestry committee looking into drainage in 1866, but now his opinion carried little weight. To make matters even more complex, the Board itself became increasingly divided, resulting in as many opinions as members. At a special meeting held in September, F. W. Haigh argued that only a small portion of the town should be drained as an experiment; Dr. William Farr preferred a more comprehensive scheme, based on the process of irrigation since this had proved the best alternative elsewhere;

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *BR* Sept. 1869

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* - it is worth noting here that neither Coles Child jun., nor any other major landowner in the town, made any such claim thirty or forty years later

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Dr. J. W. Ilott spoke of the repeated failures at sewage deodorization, and the Board engineer, Mr. Jacob, protested that none of the suggested schemes would work anyway.⁵⁹ In such an atmosphere, it is not surprising that Dr. Farr proposed the press should be asked to leave the meeting in case this 'matter of public interest would suffer by publicity'.⁶⁰ To cap it all, a government enquiry the following month revealed that there was more concern for who was going to pay for the enquiry's expenses than solving the problem of sewerage.⁶¹

A government report on the state of Bromley's sanitation in December 1869, proved that the issue was becoming increasingly serious.⁶² In the past, the town's relatively low-mortality rate and clean air had always been one of its most attractive features. Between 1851 and 1861 the mortality-rate averaged at 16 per thousand. The number of deaths, however, had begun to rise in the 1860s, reaching an all-time high of 20.5 per thousand by 1868. New Bromley was picked-out by the report as in urgent need of a proper drainage to serve the expanding number of houses. The report saved its worst criticism for the Board's apparent indifference to the sewerage problem. In particular, the Board was accused of failing to acquire sufficient land on which to site a sewage farm for the whole town. For the second time, Bromley's officials responded angrily to Government castigations, especially as they offered neither advice nor alternatives.

I do not wish further to criticise the (Government) Report, but I am sorry to say that I feel no comfort, and see no ray of light in any of the suggestions contained therein, to guide the Board on their path of difficulty. I see only in the action of the Home Secretary an instance of a principle in the control of the central authority over Local Boards that may hereafter and at no distant period, lead to important discussions. An instance of prohibition without direction - of authority exercised in putting a veto upon what is thought desirable, without placing clearly before us a feasible alternative - the prospect of which may well deter others from entering upon a course which will entail great labour and expense in making the requisite preparations, and may only end in disappointment.⁶³

⁵⁹ *BR* Oct. 1869

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *BR* Nov. 1869

⁶² *BR* Jan. 1870

⁶³ *Ibid.*

It was at this point that Devas resigned as Chairman. Meanwhile, Dr. Walter Beeby, the Medical Officer of the town, was assigned the task of discovering the optimum solution.

By the winter of 1870, following on from Dr. Beeby's investigations, and a severe outbreak of diphtheria, the Board opted for dealing with sewage removal by means of irrigation.⁶⁴ The Medical officer had acted upon the advice of the 'Rivers' Pollution Commission' who had concluded, 'We are justified in recommending irrigation as a safe as well as profitable and efficient method of cleansing town sewage.'⁶⁵ Modern observers might be surprised by the significance attached to 'remuneration', but all public utilities and services of the nineteenth century were provided with one hand closely grasped on the ratepayer's purse. Profit, purification and minimal nuisance were the three key objectives of drainage.⁶⁶ The first of these could be attained by using the purified effluent water to produce abundant crop yields that would off-set the costs of drainage itself. It was this aspect of drainage that had earlier attracted the keen attention of Coles Child. Yet Dr. Beeby was not unaware of a sizeable hurdle to his plans: 'The greatest obstacle in the way of irrigation appears to be the difficulty of obtaining suitable land at a moderate price, although this obstacle is probably not insuperable.'⁶⁷

As far as the Board's own independent scheme was concerned, this proved to be a futile dream. Removal of sewage by irrigation demanded a vast area of land, something which proved impossible to come by. Landowners such as Edward Bilke, Admiral Goldsmith, and Coles Child continued to obstruct renewed Board efforts in much the same way as Major Boyd and George Warde Norman had done before them.⁶⁸ Bilke and Goldsmith then added insult to injury by threatening legal action against the local authority for failing to prevent the pollution by sewage of the River Ravensbourne as it traversed their estates.⁶⁹ The Board had actually found 160 acres of suitable land at nearby Crofton, to the south-east of the town,⁷⁰ but again the question of cost soon became a primary concern. Ratepayer hostility and serious internal division were aroused by the £27,000 capital required for the project. As local

⁶⁴ *BR* Dec. 1870

⁶⁵ Walter Thomas Beeby M.D., *Remarks On The Sewage Question With Extracts from Recent Reports of The Rivers' Pollution Commission* (c.1870), p. 7 (*BPL*)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁶⁸ *BR* April 1871

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *BR* Jan. 1871

feeling became more intense, the Board were clearly in for an uncomfortable ride as they attempted to preserve the voters' mandate.

The local election of April 1871, proved to be the most exciting in Bromley's history. A number of votes had to be discarded for fraud or non-payment of rates, but the final count resulted in the removal of half the members of the Board.⁷¹ All six of the newcomers had pledged their opposition to the Crofton scheme as wasteful of ratepayers' money. Mr. Chambers, previous nominee of the Ratepayers' Association who had taken over the chairmanship of the Board upon Devas's resignation, moved aside for Mr. Piggott, the new ratepayer recruit. Dr. Ilott, motivated by medical concerns in his support for the scheme, managed to retain his post. Dr. Farr, however, angered by the Board's protracted inaction and dilatoriness, resigned in protest.⁷² In the months that followed, Board members, the majority of whom were High Street tradesmen or local businessmen, disclosed recent excesses of expenditure. There were no earnest attempts at producing a suitable drainage scheme for the next three years. Mr. Piggott even flirted fleetingly with Coles Child's plans since they offered a seemingly cheap escape-route from the whole affair.⁷³ The Board's inactivity angered the *Bromley Record* - if not the majority of the electorate - which described the Ratepayers' Association as 'Born grumblers', who through self-interest would soon result in a compulsory Government scheme over which they would have no control and for which they would still be obliged to pay.⁷⁴ This was made even more likely when influential householders like Bilke were forced to leave their residences by the emergence of sewage in their grounds and basements.⁷⁵

Health problems, threats of a typhoid epidemic and complaints about both stinking cesspits and leaking experimental sewage tanks forced the reconsideration of the Crofton scheme in May 1874.⁷⁶ For a time, the landowner George Warde Norman - who owned large tracts of land in Crofton - allied himself with local ratepayers in resisting the project. Resistance was successful until December of that year when, as foreseen by the *Record* three years earlier, the Government intervened and proposed the town should be drained as part of a much wider scheme incorporating the entire valley of the River Cray, including both the Urban and Rural Sanitary Districts of Bromley.⁷⁷ The Board, the Ratepayers Association and local gentry all united in their

⁷¹ *BR* May 1871

⁷² *BR* June 1871

⁷³ *BR* Jan. 1871

⁷⁴ *BR* May 1871

⁷⁵ *BR* July 1872

⁷⁶ *BR* June 1874

⁷⁷ *BR* Jan. 1875

opposition to the subsequent West Kent Drainage Bill, driven by the fear of the estimated £150,000 this 'monster' scheme would entail.⁷⁸ Yet by Christmas the following year, the town had witnessed a remarkable turn of face. A public meeting held on New Years Eve 1875, at the Drill Hall in East Street, came out in favour of the 'West Kent' scheme.⁷⁹ A special committee composed of landed proprietors, professionals and City gentlemen - with the backing of hefty ratepayers - contended that a wider scheme would in practice be the most cost-effective available. Inquiries had led them to believe that the cost to the rates would only come to between ten and twelve pence in the pound, possibly as little as eight pence once other contributors had been brought in.⁸⁰ This compared favourably with present costs of emptying cesspools which stood at between one and two shillings in the pound, and the cost of interminable government enquiries that had already reached nearly £3,000.

In attempting to understand this sudden change in mood, it is necessary to analyse the social characteristics of the participants concerned. Those who emerged as proponents of the West Kent Bill, with only one exception, did *not* come from amongst the local tradesmen or shopkeepers.⁸¹ They came instead from those who resided in the town for pleasure rather than for employment. If some of these individuals had obstructed earlier drainage schemes, they were now perhaps more acutely aware of the serious health risks of poor sanitation. Respectable medical men like Dr. Farr, in his statistical work on the health of the nation that he tirelessly undertook as Registrar-General, would certainly have pressed this point home.⁸² Naturally, as ratepayers, it was they who would have to provide the bulk of the finances demanded by any drainage scheme.

However, it was more than just a realisation of the dangers of improper sewage disposal that effected such a shift in attitude. The central government had finally taken upon itself responsibility for enforcing earlier legislation regarding sanitary conditions. In 1875, the Public Health Act laid down that local authorities were obliged to ensure that their district had adequate sewerage and water drainage.⁸³ This was to be

⁷⁸ *BR* April 1875, Bromley's own share in this total was estimated to come to about £40,000

⁷⁹ *BR* Jan. 1876

⁸⁰ This expectation makes seemed reasonable at the time, because major building projects like the railways had been funded not just by locals but by outside investors. Often, these outside investors provided the bulk of the necessary capital.

⁸¹ Occupations were revealed through studies of census returns and trade directories

⁸² For more information on Dr. William Farr, see Miss G. C. Sinclair, 'William Farr M.D.', Bromley Local History Soc. pamphlet no. 1 (1976), pp. 39-43 and E. Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census*, introductory note.

⁸³ Bill for consolidating and amending Laws on Public Health and Local Government for England and Walcs, exclusive of Metropolis, 1872, Parliamentary Papers, 1872 (C49) IV.361

administered by Sanitary Authorities, which in the case of Bromley was to be the Local Board. Yet the requirements of the Act encouraged co-ordination over a wider area, laying the foundations for Sewerage Boards operating within Sanitary Districts. The Board and ratepayers in Bromley were no longer in a position where they could pick and choose sewerage schemes with such liberality. The proponents of the Bill were men of substantial income, such as Babbage and Thomas Davis, who possibly had less concern for a heavier rate charge. In any case, they had concluded that the West Kent Scheme offered the cheapest alternative. Thus the scheme, proposed by the Government and endorsed by Bromley's most influential and wealthy notables, became reality in September 1876 with the creation of the West Kent Sewerage Board ⁸⁴

The introduction of the West Kent Scheme by no means curtailed all complaints or difficulties pertaining to the disposal of sewage. For instance, the trustees of the Palace Estate - perhaps still fuming over the rejection of Coles Child's various panaceas - persisted with their own form of cesspit emptying and irrigation drainage as late as August 1877.⁸⁵ In effect this was being carried on outside of the law, for permission had been denied to them by the Board two years earlier. In October 1878, the Board were then shocked to find that the cost of the West Kent Scheme had been grossly underestimated, the actual rate coming to 1s 9d in the pound, a shilling more than original forecasts.⁸⁶ Earlier supporters like Babbage now complained of financial excesses and deliberate deception. As for the local population itself, letters in the *Record* reveal that many were still unaware if they were legally obliged to do away with their own sewage or not.⁸⁷ Eventually, many of the teething problems were overcome, and from the end of 1876 the question of drainage ceased to capture the imagination of either the Board or the public. There was indeed a further dispute in March 1886, when 146 ratepayers signed a petition opposing the Local Board's surrender of a contractual agreement with the Sewerage Board, but fears of increased rates if this went ahead proved to be unfounded.⁸⁸ Gradually, most of the town's houses were supplied with drains, and the relatively high mortality rate of 1868 was never again repeated in peace time.

The debates and delays over the 'draining' of the town exposed numerous idiosyncrasies of middle-class towns. In *The South-East From AD 1000* (1990), Brandon and Short have glorified the role of the middle-classes of Bromley: 'A vocal

⁸⁴ BR Aug. 1876

⁸⁵ BR Sept. 1877

⁸⁶ BR Nov. 1878

⁸⁷ BR Oct. 1882

⁸⁸ BR April 1886

middle-class presence stimulated the Local Board, founded in 1867, to improve public health.⁸⁹ It is arguably more accurate to say that the converse was true. Due to the often self-centred desires of the middle class, the town dillied and dallied until the Government stepped in and all but enforced an efficient system of drainage. Financial concerns over increased rates outweighed questions of health. In March 1873, for instance, the local authority was still having to deal with residents dumping the contents of cesspools down surface water drains.⁹⁰ Such widespread indifference to matters of health eventually forced the resignation of Dr. Farr, a national champion of sanitation reform. Attachment to the rates - or more accurately to minimal rating - was greatest amongst the lower middle class of the town, notably the local tradesmen, builders and shopkeepers. They were at the forefront of anti-wastefulness campaigns and the most outspoken critics of the 'monster' scheme of 1874. In attempting to represent and direct local opinion, the Board were fighting a losing battle. They were the only local body capable of imposing a widespread scheme of drainage, yet found themselves struggling over insurmountable hurdles.

The major obstruction was the body of ratepayers, amounting to about 2,000 householders during the 1867-76 period. Apart from showing a distinct reluctance to finance extravagant public projects, ratepayers also displayed a keen sense of 'localism' at the neighbourhood level. Inhabitants of Bromley Common, such as George Warde Norman, were unhappy about funding plans which looked to benefit newly arrived residents of Plaistow and New Bromley rather than themselves. The drainage issue not only split the wider community of Bromley, but could also divide families. Robinson Latter, clerk to the Board and their legal representative at the first Government enquiries, was faced throughout 1869 with the hostility of his elder brother Robert Booth Latter who helped voice the concerns of the Ratepayers' Association.

All in all, as implied by the *Bromley Bells* satire of 1872, attempts to introduce a major scheme of drainage were executed in a most 'amateurish' fashion. Edward Tuck's 'brandy-soked' officials of the Commune of Bromville symbolised a Local Board of wealthy and influential individuals who had set out to effect dramatic local improvement:

...it occurred to them that as members of the commune they would enjoy certain privileges, whereby they could improve an estate by stopping up a footpath, making a new one, or getting the inhabitants to spend money in water-courses, so

⁸⁹ P. Brandon and B. Short, *The South East from AD 1000* (1990), p. 283

⁹⁰ *BR* April 1973

that they might sell their fields and remove from Bromville with the extra money in their pockets.⁹¹

The witty and ingeniously worded publication goes on to describe all those involved in the drainage affair in a humorous and derisory fashion. Devas, Chairman of the Board in early 1870, plays the part of 'Magistrus', President of the Commune with a dream of an 'island of joy.' He chooses 'Lexanlarge', alias the solicitor Robinson Latter, as a 'technical director with a handsome salary', a move well-greeted by other Commune members since they all employed his services whenever in a legal scrape. The author portrays the ambitions and ideals of this group of middle-class suburbans when expanding on Devas' motivation:

Magistrus, who considered that he had a mission to make an earthly Paradise of Bromville, said that he saw in his mind's eye vast prairies waving with inflated grain, grown on the lubrications of the huge canal, which was to be constructed and carried from Bromville to a site many hundreds of miles away.⁹²

The scheme, however, is thwarted by a local butcher and a local builder, who achieve their goal through the 'Local Board Stakes'. In this race, the horses 'Auctioneer' and 'Licensed Victualler', representing concerned tradesmen, defeat 'Lawyer' (Robinson Latter) with the help of an 'outsider'. The latter, who 'knocked the stomach out of lawyer', symbolised the humiliating defeats suffered by the Board at a series of Government enquiries. 'Giganticus', in reality the Lord of the Manor, William John Coles Child, then joins the ranks of the Board's critics, although he too is treated scathingly by the publication:

Amongst other accomplishments he taught the art of making bricks without straw, and he had a peculiar knack of setting his foot down flat and keeping it down until he got what he wanted...⁹³

The opposition band wagon then benefits from the founding of 'The Society for Bowling Out Objectionable Members of the Commune', that is the Bromley Ratepayers Association. Their spokesman, Camerius, alias the ever-watchful G. F. Chambers, eventually becomes the new Commune president.

⁹¹ *Bromley Bells, op.cit.*, p. 1

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 1

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3

Camerius proposed to cut down a few forests for the purpose of irrigation...and a committee would be chosen from the members of the commune to report upon the land to be taken. So they appointed a committee where all the long men got the short pantaloons, and all the short men the long ones; they picked out a few men who were better judges of lamp posts than acres of land, and sent them off to stumble over the clods (of earth) to examine and report back...⁹⁴

The subsequent failure of the reconstituted Commune to come up with an acceptable solution epitomised the ineptitude and incompetence of the Board, whose members had little expertise in either matters of health or local administration. In both fiction and reality, local governors were hindered by a government that failed to offer leadership or advocate authority. Power at the local level remained ill-defined, an unknown quantity. As members of the ruling local authority vainly attempted to walk the fine line between Government demands and ratepayer reluctance...

the bells were ringing...on this occasion they gave forth one sound: *Who's to pay? Who's to pay?*⁹⁵

The cry of 'who's to pay?' was a familiar one in Victorian Bromley. Over the question of burial grounds it not only led to further exposures of self-interest but revealed evidence of religious division in the community. Nonconformists in the town had already voiced their discontent over the payment of church rates, but with the burial issue the division became more intense. After considering the need for more burial space, the Parish Vestry had initiated proceedings in 1866 to purchase a suitable site. There was, however, no consideration given to Nonconformists at this time. This had led Robinson Latter to dub Mr. Richardson, an ardent supporter of the Established Church, the 'Whalley of the Vestry' for refusing to accommodate Nonconformists and

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5

thus unnecessarily arousing religious conflict.⁹⁶ In fact it was the search for land that proved more problematic for both the Vestry and its successor the Local Board. Even those who from time to time sat as members of the Board, such as W. D. Starling, refused to sell.⁹⁷ In November 1874, the Board voted unanimously to adopt the powers of a Burial Board to save on costs of administration.

It was the local gentry who finally resolved the issue by releasing the necessary tracts of land. Both Sir Edward Henry Scott and Colonel Long allowed the sale of part of their estates in order that a new cemetery could be laid out on Bromley Hill. In March 1876, it was decided by the Local Board that much of the new burial ground would remain unconsecrated so that Nonconformists could be buried there.⁹⁸ As if to demonstrate the lack of any *deep* religious animosity in the town, the Parish Vestry fully endorsed the Board's decision. Rather than religious feeling appearing as a bone of contention, it was a sense of 'ultra-localism' that caused the most hostility, just as it did over any matter funded by the public purse. Once more local ratepayers failed to appreciate why their personal contributions should benefit others outside their immediate vicinity. In 1874, for example, Dr. Ilott and Mr. Scrutton, who had indicated their support for a new cemetery, refused to advocate one that served either Bromley Common or Plaistow since both were well away from the centre of the town where the need was greatest. Needless to say, both gentleman's families lived in or near the High Street and would have benefited from a more central location.

Protests and arguments persisted through the 1890s, albeit on a much smaller scale. The very fact that the newly created Urban District Council voted against the absorption of the local Burial Boards in February 1895 recognised the very 'localist' feelings held by the burgesses. It also reflected an awareness of the need to consult their burgesses before any major decisions were taken. As over the introduction of railway lines and drainage schemes, the provision of burial spaces had shown that the interests of the ratepayers could not simply be ignored. The same was to apply to another contentious question that was to challenge the townspeople in this period, that of the possible onset of an elementary School Board.

From the passing of the Elementary Education Act of 1870, the ratepayers and Local Board of Bromley worked hard to resist the establishment of a School Board.

⁹⁶ Mr. Whalley was an outspoken Member of Parliament at the time, renowned for raising contentious issues

⁹⁷ *BR* Sept. 1875

⁹⁸ In 1863, Gladstone spoke out in favour of dissenters over separate burial grounds. For information on this see N. Gash, *Aristocracy and People* (1985), p. 281; in 1868 church rates were abolished.

The latter, it was widely felt, would very quickly lead to an unacceptable burden upon the rates. In addition, there pervaded a general feeling that religious instruction was essential in a child's education, particularly if this instruction centred on the main tenets of the Church of England. This was already the case in the existing Voluntary Schools, but would cease to be so in schools run by a School Board. The Local Board intended to expand these church schools in order to accommodate those children aged between 5 and 10 years who were not receiving elementary education. The deficiency in accommodation at this time stood at approximately 500 places, representing one-third of all children of this age.⁹⁹ At the same time, the Board took upon itself the role of School Attendance Committee for the district.

Support for the expansion of the existing Church school system came from a number of ratepayers, including representatives of both the landowning and middle classes. Not surprisingly the main impetus came from those closely involved in the local running and financing of these schools, who immediately orchestrated an appeal to find the funds necessary for expansion. Money from 'private' sources, however, proved not to be inexhaustible. Similarly, attempts in 1872 to establish a non-denominational 'British' school in the town foundered on the lack of voluntary subscriptions, even though the proposal received widespread approval.¹⁰⁰ Greater urgency then overcame those parties intent on staving off the onset of a School Board. The threat of such an authority was held ominously over the heads of Bromley ratepayers. Middle-class gentlemen could deploy a strange form of reasoning to justify their intentions, as some did by arguing that free elementary education would disadvantage poorer families by preventing elder children from looking after their younger siblings.¹⁰¹

In January, 1874, George Warde Norman, the town's most respected gentleman landowner, offered to help finance a voluntary school at Bromley Common. In the same year local gentry, tradesmen, shopkeepers and City merchants were joined by C. H. Mills Bart., the local Member of Parliament, in subscribing to the 'Bromley Schools' Enlargement Fund'. At a concert to raise money for the project, the *Record* reported that 'the whole of the room was occupied by the 'elite' of the neighbourhood.'¹⁰² For a while the hopes and plans of these influential figures held

⁹⁹ S. Richardson, *The Development of Education in Bromley* (unpublished, 1967), p. 6

¹⁰⁰ *BR* Dec. 1872

¹⁰¹ Such sentiments were expressed in local newspapers at the time and later, as in the *Bromley Telegraph* of 25 Feb. 1888, p. 2, where School Board member and *Telegraph* proprietor, C. W. Gedney, argued that the Board would be immediately unpopular amongst the poorer classes because they would no longer be able to profit from their children's labour

¹⁰² *BR* May 1874

out. In 1877, to enforce some of the regulations laid down by Parliament relating to elementary schooling, the Local Board adopted the role of Education Attendance Committee. Nevertheless, the last hope in off-setting a School Board lay in the confines of private subscription, as forewarned by Arthur Jackson, the Honorary Secretary of the School Managers, 'Unless this effort is liberally and promptly responded to, we shall have another rate on this already heavily-rated parish.'¹⁰³ By 1883 the 'Enlargement Fund' had raised a sum of £1,262, which helped establish a school in Addison Road for 240 pupils. The venture, however, proved only a temporary panacea.

By the beginning of 1888, the establishment of a School Board had become a political necessity. New and enlarged church schools had failed to overcome the deficiency in accommodation. Opposition to a School Board was being superseded by intensifying competition and excitement over membership of this new public body. All local ratepayers could vote and the 'multi-voting' system provided minority pressure groups with the opportunity for greater representation.¹⁰⁴ There were no official qualifications for election, but in practice any individual who did not pledge 'economy with efficiency', restraining the rates within reasonable limits, was destined to obscurity. The *Record* publicly warned candidates of 'any proposals savouring of extravagance'.¹⁰⁵ Little of the rivalry between the Established Church and the Dissenters was reported in the *Record* at the time of the elections, but the following year there were a number of references made to a 'bitter and sometimes hostile contest'.¹⁰⁶ The Dissenters proposed that religious interference should be limited to readings from the Bible with no additional comments. The Established Church hoped to maintain the importance of religious education at school whilst at the same time promoting co-operation with existing church schools. Support for the latter would inevitably keep down the costs of running the Board Schools, both in the short and the long term.

It was the Established Churchmen who dominated the School Board when it first met in June 1888.¹⁰⁷ This was of little surprise since a local census of religious worship taken in 1861 had shown that 62% of the town's worshipping population were Anglican. There were only three members not nominated by the Church of England, and they all gained success as 'independents'. The three Nonconformists who stood in

¹⁰³ *BR* July 1882

¹⁰⁴ For more on changes in local government voting, see P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect - Women In English Local Government, 1865-1914* (1987)

¹⁰⁵ *BR* March 1888

¹⁰⁶ *BR* Jan. 1889

¹⁰⁷ *Bromley Telegraph* 2 June 1888

the election failed to gain selection. Progress was slow, however. In the first year and a half of the School Board's existence, with finances limited by a mere half penny rate, it had achieved the establishment of only one temporary school building. Little was done to alleviate the deficiency in accommodation that had by then amounted to 1,293 places.¹⁰⁸ In practice, a range of obstacles had been placed on the path to improvement. On the one hand, the Bromley National Schools, the Masons Hill School and the Bickley & Widmore Schools had no intention of surrendering to Board control. On the other hand, there were major problems getting hold of land for new buildings. The Shortlands Valley site, for instance, was set to cost as much as £1,500 for less than half an acre.¹⁰⁹ Even where a site was available, as with that in Hayes Lane offered by the Norman family at £300 per acre, other property owners in the neighbourhood raised vehement objections.¹¹⁰

It was evident that all was not well on the Board itself. At its first meeting Charles W. Gedney, one of the 'independent' members, argued with W. H. Bosanquet over the domineering influence of the Established Church.¹¹¹ Gedney declared it a sham that the two election agents for the Church were selected as Clerk and Attendance Officer to the School Board, and warned the public about Church candidates seeking to reward themselves on this new administrative body. In 1889, both Gedney and Mary Heppel - also an 'independent' and the only woman on the Board - complained about high fees charged by local schools, the former openly expressing his suspicions that the majority of his fellow members were pledged to preventing Board Schools competing with existing Anglican establishments. Perhaps there was some truth in this statement, for in August of the same year James Batten, a man of some standing in the local community and himself a Church of England nominee, decided that the members' 'masterly inactivity' and quibbling made it *impossible for him to carry on his duties as Chairman*. As such he gave notice of his resignation from the Board. It was nineteen years since the Elementary Education Act, and in one way or another Bromley was still resisting the full impact of the new national system of education.

Thus from its very beginning, the School Board faced serious problems accommodating the number of children who demanded elementary education. The shortage of places continued into the 1890s. The working of the School Board

¹⁰⁸ BR Aug. 1888

¹⁰⁹ BR Oct. 1888

¹¹⁰ The land assessment of 1873, and the price of land sold by auction in the 1870s and 1880s, showed that these prices were well in excess of the real value of such plots of land

¹¹¹ Bromley Telegraph, 2 June 1888

continued to suffer from internal divisions that stemmed from differences in both opinion and interest. Gedney, for instance, objected to a fellow Board member, Reverend Woodhouse, visiting schools in 1889 and holding services there under the Board's authority.¹¹² Rev. Woodhouse was vicar of St. Luke's, the Parish Church of Bromley Common, and Gedney argued that this was an attempt to enforce Anglican beliefs upon young children in their care. Relationships appeared not to improve in the ensuing years, with Gedney only just retaining the Chair of the Board in 1894 after further arguments. With all these difficulties the public began to lose patience. In April 1891, the ratepayers of the town returned only five out of the nine sitting Board members. The subsequent Board was composed of more 'progressive' individuals, notably E. Bragg, nominated by the Co-operative Society and looking to end elementary school fees and Anglican influence. In his efforts he was supported by E. Peill, a contractor and coal merchant, and J. H. Loton, a carpenter, both sponsored by a public meeting aimed at selecting 'independent' candidates opposed to the re-election of existing members.

Eventually, the new 'Raglan Road' and 'Valley' Board Schools opened in December, 1891, reducing the shortfall to 600 places. Yet this was a deficiency which Her Majesty's Inspectors still saw fit to criticise in its report on Bromley schools produced twelve months later.¹¹³ Given the restrictions within which the Board were acting - ratepayer resistance, landowners unwilling to sell off property for school building programmes, confusion as to the extent of their authority - it is perhaps not surprising that solutions were hard to come by. To make matters worse, the central government were offering seemingly conflicting advice. The Board were informed in 1894 that they must provide free places; within the same communication, they were told that they could refuse any scholar who did *not* pay the appropriate fee. At least by 1903, the Board had succeeded in providing a total of 2,500 places for elementary education, notably through the construction of Wharton Road School in 1895. Designed by Charles Bell F.R.I.B.A., an architect resident in the town, and built by a local firm, Messrs. Arnaud & Sons, at a cost of £10,252, the new school could accommodate 1,000 children. The *Record* at the time proudly boasted that this meant Bromley was providing elementary schooling at the meagre cost of £10 per head, as against the figure of between £16 and £17 per head for London Board schools. The claim was in fact inaccurate in that the cost of educating children did not simply involve the expense of school buildings, but it was further evidence of the town's obsession with the need for economy and the avoidance of waste.

¹¹² *BR* Jan. 1890

¹¹³ *BR* Jan. 1893

More light is shed upon the motivation and vested interests of Board members when considering their occupations. At least three of them were intimately involved with the running of existing local voluntary or private schools, one of whom was Reverend Woodhouse. The other two were both head teachers, Gustav Loly of Quernmore Boys School and Mary Heppel of Bromley High School for Girls.¹¹⁴ Their professional positions and responsibilities as public representatives involved an obvious conflict of interest, but not one over which either party felt unduly concerned. At times they must have found themselves in a very awkward situation. For example, when the Local Board threatened to open a secondary day school on the premises of the Science and Art evening school, all three put their names to a petition of resistance. The most vocal opposition came from Loly, who not only feared the potential competition for existing private schools, but also felt that as a heavy ratepayer he had been let down by the very people he had helped to elect: a new day school would mean more expense and hence larger rates. As the *Record* phrased it at the time, '...such an act of injustice to persons who have for years been heavily rated cannot be seriously intended.'¹¹⁵ For similar reasons, plans put forward in 1897 for a 'higher grade' school were quickly abandoned. In any case there was also the question as to the legality of educating children on public rates above the elementary level. The Board did, however, successfully press for three scholarships in 1900, valued each at £12 per annum, granted by the District Council out of its education allowance from the County authority. Yet just as significantly, a long-term member of the Board, Walter Bosanquet, added a further three scholarships out of his own pocket: clearly, private munificence liked to keep public 'extravagance' closely in check.

Responses to the 1870 Elementary Education Act revealed a conspiracy, or at very least a union, of Established Churchmen and hefty ratepayers. Initially, this was done in an attempt to ward off a School Board, and then later to direct policy when its arrival could no longer be forestalled. Once in place, those Church of England and ratepayer representatives who sat on the Board could delay or off-set both extravagant schemes and Nonconformist religious teaching.¹¹⁶ With the aid of the head teachers of the two most prestigious private schools in the town, Bromley's voluntary schools were protected from competition that might suck away the very lifeblood of their existence. Many local landowners and property-owners added their weight by withholding land for building purposes or by charging unreasonable prices. Bromley,

¹¹⁴ For information on Mary Heppel, see Chapter 3, p. 104

¹¹⁵ *BR* Nov. 1892

¹¹⁶ It is worth noting that no significant Roman Catholic or Irish population was recorded in either the two censi of 1851 or the census returns made between 1861 and 1911

however, was *not* isolated from the rest of the country, and authorities such as those in London had led the way in educational reform with the extension of educational opportunity and the removal of elementary fees. Pressure for change intensified, particularly with the gross shortage in places for which a divided Board seemed to have no answer. The competitive School Board election of 1891 resulted in a more 'progressive' membership which oversaw the construction of the first two Board schools, and added a third within three years. Their achievements were still carried out with one eye on cost, and Gedney continued to complain about members' sectarian associations,¹¹⁷ but the 1890s reflected a demise in the influence of both the Established Church and the conservative ratepayer. The age of publicly-funded projects now challenged a past based almost solely on private subscription.

Debate and division had thus been aroused by demands for improved facilities. Such appeals had become increasingly vociferous as the town's population continued to expand. It was a case of residents first, facilities to follow. In practice, the existence of public services had little influence in bringing new inhabitants into the town. Railway lines, sewers, burial grounds and elementary schools had not been initiated as part of some grandiose municipal dream. Rather they had hiccuped their way into urban life, the result of half-baked dreams, petty squabbling and unashamed self-interest. The notion of *public* health, for instance, did not sit happily amongst those driven by the ideals of self-improvement, private benevolence and *laissez-faire*. It was enough - and as it proved *too* much - for Dr. Farr to persuade fellow members of the community that sewers and sanitation were their *collective* responsibility. In response, they retreated within themselves, finding familiarity and security amongst the body of hefty ratepayers to whom they proved accountable. If there was a gradual infiltration or adoption of a 'civic ideal', where pride in the achievements of one's town - or more accurately one's class - revealed itself in the creation of public services, municipal architecture and commercial success, then it was only minutely apparent in Bromley before the 1890s.

¹¹⁷ *Bromley Telegraph* 3 Nov. 1894

The development of the town's supply of gas was a prime illustration of this deficiency, since in theory it offered the ideal opportunity for the formulation of the 'civic' project. The Bromley Gas Consumers' Company was established in 1853 after the purchase of a small-scale gas works belonging to Mr. J. Hutchinson, who had produced gas for his own private interest for a number of years.¹¹⁸ As new roads and homes followed on from the construction of the first railway line in 1858, the company continued to expand its operations. Eventually, in 1863 it purchased a new site for tanks near the station, on the southern borders of the Palace Estate. Numerous Vestry and later Board members sat as directors of the Company, although the venture itself remained a *private* concern, managed for the gain of shareholders rather than the public at large. The social class of shareholders was dictated by the cost of the shares, at least £10 each during the 1860s and 1870s. Neither did the majority of the public gain from cheap gas for prices remained artificially high when compared with neighbouring towns like Croydon.¹¹⁹

The company even produced little in terms of local rate returns. In 1872, William Pawley complained that he paid more for his dilapidated race-course stand at Bromley Common than the Gas Company did for all their works in the town.¹²⁰ His objections were upheld at the time by the Local Board, and substantiated by the Land Assessment the following year which estimated the Company's gross annual rental at £600 per acre, the highest in Bromley.¹²¹ Later, when the company introduced the 'Bromley Gas Bill' in February 1879, claiming the right to supply electricity as well as gas, the attempt aroused ratepayer dissent and split the Local Board.¹²² In effect, this would have given the company a monopoly of power supply, a prospect that frightened some members of the Board who subsequently voted against the bill. The five members who voted *in favour* of the proposal were all company shareholders. In the end, the Board decided not to endorse ratepayer objections and opposition to the bill was dropped. However, as an admission of divided loyalties over this affair, Samuel Poole Acton, long-standing member of the Board and director of the Gas Company, declined to stand at the forthcoming local elections. As for the Company's proposal, this was shelved as economically unviable.

When considering the involvement of public officials in local 'utility' ventures, the conflict of private and public interest remained a contentious issue. It was not just

¹¹⁸ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 59

¹¹⁹ *BR* March 1869. The Bromley Company claimed that they had to pay more for coal than their counterparts in Croydon.

¹²⁰ *BR* Feb. 1872

¹²¹ W. E. Baxter, *op. cit.*

¹²² *BR* March 1879

a question of divided loyalty, but also of the efficient execution of public duties. Numerous disputes that had taken place in the two decades following the creation of the Local Board in 1868 had led Board members to reconsider their roles and responsibilities. By 1889, for instance, there were no Gas Company directors left on the Local Board. The Company itself continued to run as a private business concern, making enormous profits and extending its service area. As for the various local authorities that existed in the town between 1840 and 1914, all remained aloof from commercial undertakings and not one ever sought to adopt powers that had been laid open to them by Parliamentary legislation. This was in contrast to cities such as Birmingham where municipal business ventures had been instigated as early as 1873.¹²³ In Bromley, the opportunity was not so much as lost as never seriously considered. Instead, it was the self-help ideology and short-sightedness of local ratepayers that dictated local authority action.

The question of the local 'rate', or to be more precise a collection of 'rates', was all important to the middle classes of England. Between 1840 and 1868, it eclipsed all other matters at Vestry meetings, and then continued to dominate proceedings on the subsequent Local Board. Over the country as a whole, rates increased beyond the growth in population during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁴ A. Briggs has spoken of a rates' 'explosion' in the 1890s, even though government grants to local authorities were also rising rapidly at the time. The various authorities that existed in Victorian towns all charged their own specific rate, adding to the complexity and confusion of local government. In Bromley, suggestions by Dr. Farr in 1869 that the system should be rationalised and rates combined were clearly too advanced for their time.¹²⁵ Rates and ratepayer pressure were decisive in most towns in England, if only because for the greater part of the Victorian era the ratepayers were also the electors of local government. Ratepayers in Bromley, and no doubt in other communities, consciously enforced an uncompromising check on public spending.

Individuals like Babbage, and Walter Bosanquet, the City solicitor, kept an ever-watchful eye on local administration and its finances. Under the old Parish Vestry, ratepayers from Bromley Common and Plaistow had opposed the idea of a local burial board on the grounds that cemeteries ought to be funded by *voluntary* subscription rather than the *public* purse.¹²⁶ The policies of its successor, the Local Board, were tempered by the anxieties of the town's ratepayers when it came to improving

¹²³ A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (1963), p. 217

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40

¹²⁵ *BR* April 1869

¹²⁶ *BR* Feb. 1865

amenities and education. At the same time, complaints abounded about the wastefulness of public resources and the fact that empty homes were shifting the rate burden upon existing householders. In the early 1870s, such concerns had led to the formation of the Bromley Ratepayers' Association, the 'Born Grumblers' who frustrated the Board's various drainage schemes.¹²⁷ Considering the growth in local administration, accompanied by increasingly higher rate demands, it is not surprising to find ratepayer objections assuming considerable importance throughout most towns in Britain.¹²⁸ Ratepayer pressure in Bromley was maintained throughout the final quarter of the century, often effecting dramatic U-turns and changes of local government personnel. For a while, the post of chairman remained a preserve of the ratepayers, manipulated to resist apparent waste and extravagance.

By the 1890s, the 'rates' issue began to experience a dramatic shift in emphasis, as ratepayer representation and the taxation of landed property were brought more closely into the limelight. In May 1894, the Bromley and District Electors' Association emerged to voice the demands of the wider middle class.¹²⁹ The term 'Elector' was accentuated by the association as a claim to broader representation than that offered by mere *ratepayer* organisations. The staunch Liberal, Bosanquet, had formed the association as part of the national Government's campaign to end property qualification at local elections and make representation on the Local Boards more democratic. The Electors' Association was comprised mainly of local businessmen whose primary grievance was the under-collection of rates, which in 1894 had resulted in a Council overdraft of £2,000. Having won the right to view the Board's accounts, their deepest suspicions were confirmed. A Government audit had found a serious mismanagement of funds brought about through a series of costly errors. The Association highlighted the fact that rate-collection had been far more lax for 'private' house owners than for commercial concerns. To make matters worse, the Board had also raised extra loans to cover previous mistakes. As it happened, the Board's demise was already being legislated for, and the creation of the Urban District Council allowed for a fresh start under Bosanquet's personal direction. Financial anxieties still persisted, as over investments in the Bromley Fire Brigade in December 1897, but a steady decline in local rates in the later 1890s kept protests to a minimum.¹³⁰

Whilst some of the local middle classes were coming to a gradual realisation that an improvement in living conditions and local services might indeed require higher

¹²⁷ *BR* May 1871

¹²⁸ A. Briggs, *op.cit.*, pp. 40-41

¹²⁹ *BR*, June 1894

¹³⁰ *UDC Minutes*, June 1896-Dec. 1897, meeting of 21 Dec. 1897, pp. 2-8

rates, it was the question of land tax that became the burning issue of the late 1890s. As with most major historical developments, events in the locality can not be divorced from the national scene, and no less so with the taxation of landed property. A fall in prices after 1873 had squeezed rents, profit margins and interest rates, and made the economic system of the nation appear as if it was failing. This had helped give rise to a series of attacks on landed property, notably through Henry George's proposal for a 'single tax' on land and Alfred Russel Wallace's Land Nationalisation League (1881).¹³¹ Perkin has recently claimed that, 'the land reform movement was a perfect example of the divergence of the capitalist and professional social ideals.'¹³² He has argued that the professional middle classes threw their weight behind land reform in an attempt to take back for the community what the landlord had gained in unearned rent. Although this seems something of a sweeping generalisation - many professionals continued to defend the traditional rights of landowners - there did emerge an alliance of landed gentlemen and men of commerce to counter demands for reform. The Land and Property Defence League (LPDL) that emerged after 1882 in resistance to threats of taxation and nationalisation, included spokesmen like Sir John Lubbock, wealthy banker and proprietor of High Elms Estate, Farnborough.¹³³

At a meeting in Bromley on 20 September 1898, Henry Nye, a cabinet maker and undertaker, moved a motion proposing the local taxation of ground rents.¹³⁴ Supported by the likes of J. Hutchings, a carpenter, and G. Lawrence, a fruiterer, Nye argued against a system whereby a landlord might keep his property empty for years, pay little or no rates, benefit from new roads and public amenities, and then gain an handsome reward through charging extraordinary rents. In the meantime, the Council could be receiving rates from his property, often worth in the region of £600 per acre. Only through a taxation on this property, Nye suggested, would a landlord be obliged to put his land to its best use, helping to avoid financial waste on the part of the local authority. Landlords then took a final battering from Nye for their exploitation of a leasehold system from which they reaped the benefits of their tenants' industry. Nye's grievances, if not his excitable tone, received a sympathetic hearing, but could not carry a motion that was defeated by just five votes to four.

¹³¹ The so-called 'economic depression' had also helped resurrect socialist ideas, so we see the formation of the Socialist League in 1884, and the Fabian Society in the same year.

¹³² H. Perkin, *op. cit.* (1989), p. 133

¹³³ Lord Avebury of High Elms, Farnborough, near Bromley, was prominent in political affairs in the district and was ironically often seen as a 'reformer' rather than a 'reactionary'.

¹³⁴ *UDC Minutes*, 20 Sept. 1898, pp. 3-10

Encouraged by the national Land Reform Association, Nye re-vitalised the debate the following June.¹³⁵ The Reform Association had themselves appealed to the Urban District Council in a written statement, outlining the need to rate ground values because existing urban local authority finances were insufficient to cover their new responsibilities. Only in this way, they concluded, would the local financial burden be more equitably distributed. The mood of the Councillors, nevertheless, had not altered. The protection of private property and the individual's right to utilise that property remained paramount in the minds of Councillors like W. R. Mallet, a local architect, and T. C. McIntyre, a ship owner and broker. They countered that a ground tax would be punitive on landowners who had invested heavily in their estates, especially while those with considerable *personal* wealth would suffer no such rating. To their advantage they could call upon the support of well-respected gentlemen like Sir John Lubbock (Lord Avebury) of the LPDL. In any case, they argued, taxation would discourage property development, a matter undoubtedly close to the heart of many a Council member. Nye's accompanying motion was once again narrowly lost. The fiery debate served to expose the intensity of feeling amongst Council members. In so doing, it also revealed a rift that was emerging in the ideologies of the town's resident middle classes. Yet was this rift deep enough to drive a serious wedge between them? How far, and for how long, were the middle classes prepared to put private concerns before public interest?

It was towards the end of the nineteenth century in Bromley that the issue of publicly funded projects came to prominence, where the welfare of the community threatened to come before the rights of either individuals or their property. In the Edwardian era, Councillors and influential inhabitants became even more acutely aware of questions of civic ideals and civic pride. Nevertheless, care must be taken before presuming that dramatic changes in middle-class ideology or philosophy took place. The 1890s *did* witness something of a 'new' age involving 'new art', 'new life' and the 'New Woman'. Dr. Farr's daughter, Florence Farr, epitomised these challenges to the

¹³⁵ *BR* July 1899

'old' order. She became one of the London actresses of the 1890s who was closely associated with the controversial and progressive plays of Ibsen. In Bromley itself, philanthropists like Dr. W. T. Beeby even began to question the effectiveness of 'self-help' initiatives that he had formerly supported. This was particularly the case in the area of public housing, where Dr. Beeby began arguing in favour of local government intervention:

At the same time I should like to see a little more power put into the hands of local authorities, so that they might force owners of cottage property to keep such cottages in decent repair, for if you put an untidy family into an untidy house they deteriorate faster than ever.¹³⁶

Yet even though significant developments did occur in the character of British society after the death of Queen Victoria, evidence from oral history suggests that contemporaries did not find these changes as marked as some historians would like to suggest.¹³⁷ As far as the people of Bromley were concerned, the dawn of the new century did not bring major cultural or sociological developments. Instead, their attention was drawn to two more dramatic events. Firstly, the war in Southern Africa between the British and the Voortrekkers did *not* bring the sweeping victories that had been expected. As local volunteers signed up at the Drill Hall in East Street, their families were left with meagre incomes for means of support.¹³⁸ Then came news of Queen Victoria's death. Along the High Street, shop windows displayed large pictures of the Queen, draped in deep purple. On the day of the funeral, all schools were closed and churches held special memorial services. With the death of the old Queen, the old symbols of austerity and restrictive morality came under the spotlight. Instead, in the person of Edward VII, England had a King who managed to enjoy himself, earn respect and keep a public mistress all at the same time.

Close to the 'great Metropolis', Bromley shared in the new vitality that was being bred in Edwardian London. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the town witnessed the circulation of both the motor car and the popular press 'dailies'. For the first time, the number of commuters began to challenge the proportion of workers employed locally.¹³⁹ Naturally, such changes did not reveal themselves overnight, and many Victorian customs and traditions were respected until at least the

¹³⁶ *BR* April 1898

¹³⁷ *Collection of Oral Memories* No. 18, Frederick Wakely and No. 20, W. G. Austen

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Certainly this was almost the case by 1921, when 4,350 residents worked outside the town compared with 4,768 inside it.

First World War. No moral code of ethics, however, could withstand the tide of social and economic change that had built up gradually during the second half of the nineteenth century and was now more forcibly imposing itself. New transport developments were causing an immense expansion in Bromley's population, boosting mobility and engulfing the town in increasingly heavy commuter traffic. In the first decade of the century, the population rose from 27,397 to 33,646.¹⁴⁰ In line with neighbouring towns and suburbs, Bromley could not help but be dramatically influenced by mass markets of demand, methods of mass production, mass advertising and the mass entertainment that was disseminating from London and beyond. New forms of communication, in the guise of the emergent telephone system, threatened to bring commuter towns and suburbs closer to their respective cities, just as cities themselves were being drawn together within a national network. Such 'nationalisation' was nothing new, but for Bromley its impact was more decisive in the Edwardian era than at any earlier time.¹⁴¹

The advent of Borough status in Bromley in 1903 witnessed, or at least epitomised, new ambitions and aspirations, admirably summed up in the town's recently acquired motto, 'Whilst I Grow, I Hope'. It can not be mere coincidence that H. G. Wells, in his work *Modern Utopia* (1905), spoke of the coming 'century of common man', an ideal world which would be, 'not a permanent state but a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages.'¹⁴² Even if Bromley Councillors rejected the socialist ideals contained within Wells' book, they must have identified to some degree with an optimistic philosophy that characterised much of this particular period.

Demands for 'Incorporation' had finally been achieved because of weighty and sustained ratepayer pressure. The elected representatives of the inhabitants were obliged to extend their role in the administration of the town. In addition to reasons proffered up to fifteen years earlier, the ratepayers' petition of 1903 argued that only a 'municipal borough' could regulate the growing traffic problems, because only such an authority would have the power to pass its own bye-laws.¹⁴³ An element of 'civic pride' had also crept into demands for Incorporation: as an important trading centre, petitioners felt that Bromley had earned the honour bestowed by a Municipal Charter. Finally, it was hoped that a charter would generate greater public spirit and interest in the running of public affairs. In essence, influential persons in the town felt that a

¹⁴⁰ *Abstract of 1901 Census, England and Wales (63 Vict. C.4) - County of Kent; Abstract of 1911 Census, England and Wales (10 Edward 7 and 1 George 5, Ch. 27) - County of Kent*

¹⁴¹ A. Briggs, *op.cit.*, pp. 357-358

¹⁴² As quoted by A. Briggs, 'Mass Society in Great Britain', in A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *History of the Twentieth Century* Vol. 1, Chapter 1 (1973 edn.)

¹⁴³ *Petition for Incorporation*, from 3,457 ratepayers, 1902

Charter of Incorporation would give the Council officers stronger authority to deal with matters of local government, at the same time as boosting Bromley's prestige and standing in the region, 'A Corporation would be better able to protect the interests of the Town, and at the same time to provide for the wants of the District in reference to improvements.'¹⁴⁴ There were, however, limits on the powers for which local electors were prepared to offer a mandate. When in December 1905, the recently constituted Council attempted to introduce a 'Corporation Bill' for 'further and better provision for the improvement, health, good government, and finance of the Borough of Bromley', a crowded public meeting blocked its progress on the grounds that it was unnecessary and potentially over expensive.¹⁴⁵

The Council could not escape the longest surviving legacy of the town's Victorian past - the reluctance to finance schemes of public 'improvement'. Nevertheless, ideologies and habits were changing, and the Borough Council was able to initiate a variety of municipal projects. To what extent this was inspired by new blood on the Council is difficult to conclude, but the fact that only seven members of the old Urban District Council were returned may well have been significant. The foremost of civic projects was the construction of a new Town Hall, the community's first substantial building to be financed from public funds. The town already possessed a public hall or meeting-place on Market Square, the benevolent gift of William John Coles Child, but by 1900 this hideous fake-gothic structure had become conspicuously under-utilised. In any case, it did little to symbolise the municipality's new-found prestige. In its place, a modern and more spacious structure was planned, a few hundred yards away from the town centre on the site of Widmore House on Tweedy Road.

Designs for the new Town Hall were drawn up in 1904, when Widmore House itself was purchased by the Council. The foundation stone was laid on 25 July 1906 by Thomas Dewey, President of the Prudential Assurance Company and Charter Mayor.¹⁴⁶ The 'Municipal Buildings' as they were generally known, were built in a 'Free-Georgian' style, after a competition for the best design, and were viewed as a great achievement by builders and townspeople alike. It housed a number of offices and departments, with the County and Magistrate's Court close at hand. In addition, discussions were in progress for a new fire station, also to be built from public funds. The buildings were officially opened on 25th September 1907. At the opening

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *BR* Jan. 1906

¹⁴⁶ *BR* Aug. 1906

ceremony, Mayor R. W. James revealed something of the changes in the character of Bromley and the responsibility of its official 'guardians':

There has been a recent remarkable development of the district owing to its well-earned popularity as a residential resort, and while it will be readily argued the rural character of the place is an important asset, it must not be forgotten that people of the twentieth century require something more than natural beauty - they demand, and will demand still more, good sanitation and cleanly surroundings, particularly as far as the highways are concerned.¹⁴⁷

Ironically, hopes of controlling the state of the town's highways had already been dashed with the defeat of the Corporation Bill in 1906, as this decision entailed the rejection of a municipal motor omnibus scheme that would have helped co-ordinate traffic. Earlier in 1904, the newly created Borough Council had decided that one single form of transport should be adopted in the town.¹⁴⁸ It was hoped that once initiated, an efficient network of routes could be established in discussion with relevant transport companies. On several occasions, tramways had been offered to the Council as a possible means of transport. The first proposal had come from the South-Eastern Metropolitan Tramways Company in December 1899. At a special Council meeting to discuss the offer, Thomas Davis, Chairman of the UDC, had used his casting vote to defeat the scheme.¹⁴⁹ 'Progressive' Councillors like E. Peill and J. Hutchings had been strongly in favour of the idea, but 'conservative' members like W. R. Mallett had felt that, 'There was no need for such a tramway, and the owners of better class property were against it.'¹⁵⁰

Mallett's stance had been supported by a memorial signed by 80 ratepayers who had claimed that trams 'would increase the nuisance at present experienced from benefactors and others, and would seriously deprecate the value of house and shop property.'¹⁵¹ Even Nye, the most outspoken 'progressive' on the Council, had feared tramways would halt the prosperous growth of the town.¹⁵² Three years later, the Council finally supported a tramway extension from Catford to Bromley Hill, but a public outcry and excessive demands upon the South-Eastern Company to provide for the financial costs of widening the streets had led to the plan's withdrawal.¹⁵³ The

¹⁴⁷ *BR* Oct. 1907

¹⁴⁸ *BR* May 1904

¹⁴⁹ *BR* Feb. 1900

¹⁵⁰ *UDC Minutes*, 19 Dec. 1899, pp. 3-11

¹⁵¹ *BR* Feb. 1900

¹⁵² *Bromley Telegraph* 3 Feb. 1900

¹⁵³ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op. cit.*, p. 262

affluent middle classes of the town clearly felt that trams belonged to urban sprawls, not to their image of Bromley as a semi-rural market town. Instead, Councillors had opted for a motor omnibus - or autobus - system, which they had contended was as efficient and economically viable as any tramway network.¹⁵⁴ The fact that tramways were associated with inner suburbia and an increasingly mobile working class, had no doubt helped sway their decision.

The preference for the autobus, alongside the refusal to adopt a borough-wide transport scheme directed by the municipality, paved the way for the domination of private 'bus companies. Local residents today recall the surprise and excitement when confronted by this new form of transport: 'I can remember the first motor buses going through Bromley. We stood by the beech tree off London Road, thinking it was going to be a show.'¹⁵⁵ Trams, like steam trains, ran on specific tracks and would have been more acceptable to the general public. Autobuses, on the other hand, were not restricted to rails and were thus potentially much more dangerous to a public who thought nothing of walking upon the local highways. At first, the town's omnibuses and autobuses were run by two private business concerns, the Thomas Tilling Company and the London General Omnibus Company (LGOC). Gradually, both companies phased out their horse-drawn vehicles and began to use autobuses on most routes. Once the autobus was established in the town, services slowly improved. Later, in 1909, the Farnborough Motor Omnibus Company Ltd. was inaugurated in order to conduct routes to southern rural communities.¹⁵⁶

The town's municipal authority thus played only a minor role in the expansion of the local transport network. Even the overall planning of autobus services was left to agreements between the companies concerned. The increasingly heavy traffic of the Edwardian era, nevertheless, *did* cause the Council to act, notably in road-widening schemes but also in determining new highway bye-laws and regulations. J. Driscoll recalls one of the earliest of these new laws, directed at horse-drawn traffic: 'I remember a notice at the foot and top of Beckenham Lane warning horse-drawn vehicles to be sure that a shoe was fitted to one wheel before ascending or coming down the hill, and to loosen the rein.'¹⁵⁷ Most restrictions were inevitably directed at the new motor car and autobus. Several reckless driving and speeding incidents at the time led the Council to erect a variety of sign posts in accordance with the Motor Car

¹⁵⁴ BR May 1904

¹⁵⁵ *Collection Of Oral Memories*, No. 14, Ada Muffet

¹⁵⁶ BR July 1909

¹⁵⁷ *Collection of Oral Memories*, No. 15, E. Driscoll

Act of 1903. Vehicles were only allowed to travel at 10 m.p.h. on main roads near the town centre; away from the centre, the limit was doubled.

With the development of both transport by autobus and rail, the Edwardian era witnessed mobility as yet unknown in the town's history. Bromley's influential middle class had attempted to resist working-class intrusion through its rejection of tramways and its inactivity over pressing for workmen's trains. Yet autobus fares were relatively cheap, and both the working classes and lower middle class were travelling further in search of work, friends and relatives than ever before.¹⁵⁸ Census returns and oral evidence support the notion that people could live further and further from their place of work, leaving the grey streets of London for the green residential suburbs beyond. It was due to these movements that in September 1907 Mayor James made his plea for improved amenities. The ever-growing number of inhabitants demanded power to their homes, adequate facilities for shopping and leisure, education for their children and a healthy environment in which to live.

By looking at health and welfare provision, we can see how the local authority again procrastinated in effecting wide-ranging improvements. During the last third of the nineteenth century, the town's administrators *had* begun to accept responsibility for their community's welfare, but only to a limited degree. Access to local general practitioners, hospitals, decent housing and proper sanitation was still dictated by wealth. This led Dr. 'Fishy' Codd, in 1905, to condemn the state of public health provision in his medical officer's report.¹⁵⁹ The five centres that existed for health care - Bromley Cottage Hospital, Phillips' Memorial Hospital, St. Mary's Convalescent Home, the Hospital for Infectious Diseases and the Lady Margaret's Hospital - were all private institutions dependent upon the benevolence of individual patrons and charitable societies. As for the fifteen local doctors working in the town at this time, each demanded fees which the working classes were unable to pay. Fortunately, some doctors showed more sympathy,

Health and medicine were very good, except for the very poor who found it difficult to pay and so neglected their illness until it was too late. Some doctors were good at helping these folk and had free centres for them. Churches also provided vital help ¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ See evidence of birthplace as revealed by Census returns for Bromley parish, 1891-1911, and also survey of street directories revealing 'length of stay' of randomly selected families

¹⁵⁹ *Bromley Health Report*, 1905

¹⁶⁰ *Collection of Oral Memories*, No. 15, E. Driscoll

The mortality rate in the town was relatively low compared with either national figures or outer London as a whole. In 1905 it stood at just 10 per 1000, substantiating Bromley's claim as an attractively healthy resort.¹⁶¹ This figure, however, was by no means uniform across the Borough. In the more working-class ward of Bromley Common, for example, the mortality rate was over twice that of Sundridge Park Ward that housed a large proportion of the town's middle class. The majority of the 15 fatal cases of tuberculosis, or consumption, of that year came from working-class homes. Of the 30 infants who contracted scarlet fever below the age of one year, 80% were again working-class. As the decade progressed, social distinctions were ironed out by the extension of medical services and improvements in sanitation. Of particular note was the founding of the Bromley & District Health Society in 1908, offering invaluable help to those who could not afford the fees of private medicine.¹⁶² The society helped train working-class mothers, at any one of three centres, in the art of rearing children in a healthy manner. In certain circumstances the Society hired women to clean the houses of those working-class mothers who fell ill. Through such efforts, which also included gaining admissions to hospitals and convalescent homes, it appeared the local authority were finally prepared to adopt a more interventionist stance. Eventually, the Society gained its full and proper recognition, when in 1912 Mrs. Kelf, one of its most prominent figures, became the town's first full-time, professional Health Visitor.¹⁶³

The Borough Council also achieved improvements in public cleanliness and the health of schoolchildren. Soon after Incorporation, municipal 'dust destructors' were erected, taking refuse directly from the dust-cart without the need for being handled. At local elementary schools, regular medical examinations were set in motion to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Children appearing underfed were to receive free meals at school, although in practice very few seemed to have been given out. In most cases, meals were still paid for and poor families had to rely upon small financial contributions from the Bromley Charitable Society.¹⁶⁴ Another innovation, albeit rather curious, was introduced by the Headmaster of Aylesbury Road School, near the town centre.¹⁶⁵ The school had a large working-class intake and the headmaster argued that many did not keep their teeth in a healthy condition. His rather original solution was to sell toothbrushes at a reasonable price at the school itself. The idea

¹⁶¹ *Bromley Health Report 1905*

¹⁶² *Idem.* 1908

¹⁶³ *Idem.* 1912

¹⁶⁴ See the comments of the town's Medical Officer of Health in his Health Reports, 1907-1914 and *BR* Feb. 1907, where theoretically parents paid whatever their means permitted

¹⁶⁵ *BR* May 1911

proved so successful that the Education Committee soon extended the scheme to other elementary schools in the Borough.

On the whole, Councillors did not see themselves as principal providers of social welfare. There may have been some amongst their number, who like Dr. Codd felt an obligation to raise standards of public health, but the majority would not have extended this notion beyond matters of cleanliness and sanitation. When the Liberal Government introduced their welfare legislation, the Council was obliged to administer the new old age pensions and aid the unemployed. Yet the 'labour exchange' that alleviated some of the suffering of those out of work, was late in coming (1912) despite numerous calls from the local Trades' and Labour Council.¹⁶⁶ To illustrate their lack of commitment to the well-being of individual families, Councillors consistently refused to grant money to the 'boot clubs' that were appearing from 1910 onwards in order to provide deprived children with shoes for school. The Council shared Dr. Beeby's views which he had expressed a decade earlier:

Certainly, to the entirely impecunious or to the poor who are unable to earn a complete living, boot clubs and medical societies which gave medical relief on a large scale for very small sums...have a degrading influence and encourage unthrifty habits. I think, decidedly, that medical clubs should, as a rule, be insurance clubs, that is on the provident system. People should save up and pay small sums weekly or monthly all the year round.¹⁶⁷

To the majority of Council members, it seemed that there was a duty for civic authorities to interfere in matters of sewerage, dust destruction and infectious diseases because these questions had the habit of affecting the whole community. In contrast, matters of welfare ordinarily affected only the recipient individual or family, and left those without need of help unscarred. In these circumstances, individuals were expected to help themselves.

This emphasis on self-help and individual responsibility was even more evident in Bromley's stance against interference and encroachment by the London County Council. On numerous occasions Bromley's middle-class 'elite' resisted pressures for closer co-operation. Such intractability was maintained up to and after the First World War, motivated not just by fear of socialism but also by a deeply-entrenched sense of 'localism'. As a means of preserving the status quo in society, it was essential that the

¹⁶⁶ See *BR* Nov. 1908

¹⁶⁷ *BR* April 1898

town's middle classes were in control of their own destiny. It was clear that as the nineteenth century progressed, the expanding machinery of central government was imposing greater statutory restrictions and obligations on local authorities. However, this did not inevitably lead to an absolute surrender of authority on the part of local governors. Bromley's administrative patricians made full use of unwritten powers of interpretation, discretion and delay.

It had been twenty years after the first public health act, for instance, that the town voted in its inaugural Local Board; it had been another seven years before it gained its first full-time Medical Officer of Health. Seventeen years after the 1870 Elementary Education Act, there was still no School Board, and it was to be another three years before an elementary 'Board' school appeared in the town. Later, the local authority was also slow to act in improving housing for the working classes and in providing relief for the unemployed. Those individuals in local government who represented the middle classes of the town promoted ideals of 'economy' at the expense of more widespread municipal and social reform. Through a closer look at prevailing political and social relations in the town, and how these were 'controlled' in such areas as education and entertainment, we can see why such dilatoriness had few disastrous consequences for those in positions of influence and power.

CHAPTER SIX: POLITICS & CLASS RELATIONS

The primary cohesive factor in the unity of the middle classes lay in shared ideals that were rooted in the desire for social and political security. As modern commentators have noted, throughout the nineteenth century the middle classes failed to create a political party of their own.¹ Yet neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals could afford to ignore middle-class demands, as Gladstone found to his cost over the issue of Irish Home Rule. The commercial and professional men of the middle class may well have relied politically upon a predominantly landed elite for much of the Victorian era, but this apparently 'submissive' dependence demands qualification if the true nature of political relationships at this time is to be realised. As already revealed, there was less of a divergence between the driving force of the nation's middle class and that of the great majority of landowners than has sometimes been portrayed. The fact that the lesser gentry had acquired their fortunes in business and trade, meant that they could more easily relate to those still occupied in such affairs.

After the ultimate acceptance of 'free trade', as epitomised by the Corn Laws Repeal Act of 1846, belief in the freedom of the individual and in *laissez-faire* dominated the second half of the nineteenth century. This was certainly the case in Bromley, where the preconditions for the development of such ideals may already have existed. This being the case, the full impact of government intervention - which frequently lacked compulsory obligation - could be judiciously cushioned, as happened over both drainage and education. Gradually, the town was brought into the national political arena, but it was a slow process and one that involved the intensification of party loyalties only in the last decade or so of the century. When it *did* prove necessary to enter political affairs more directly, those who had moved out to the suburbs could always foster their own desires, as through the development of an almost sub-conscious 'villa Toryism' that emerged in the latter part of the Victorian era. The large group of individuals, both men and women, who made up this 'movement' in Bromley, proved to be one of the most robust pillars of the Conservative party organisation.

In politics, the middle classes preferred to concentrate upon persuasion and extra-parliamentary pressure. It is tempting to presume that 'pressure' ordinarily came from organisations built upon radical objectives, such as those fostered by Chartists in the 1830s and 1840s. Yet the wide ranging voluntary societies identified earlier were

¹ See H. Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (1969), p.365. For a more recent analysis, in which the need for a separate 'middle-class' party is played down, see R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party - The Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds, 1820-1850* (1990)

as influential and effective as any radical movement, probably more so since radical demands remained unsatisfied for so long. Whether it was the Friendly Society of the shopkeeper, or the Literary Institute of the business executive, middle-class associations of Bromley were founded on an essentially *conservative* tradition. They may have included men like George Warde Norman, the banker and landowner who spoke out against the outdated socio-economic and political ideas of his time, but these same individuals feared the social upheaval that might result from a widespread democratisation of politics.²

There was little evidence of political agitation in Bromley in the nineteenth century, something which G. Crossick also found to be the case in Kentish London.³ Even the Chartists' cause could only drum up minimal support, the actions of 'Long Bob' Sutton in the 1840s famous for their lack of response.⁴ The townsmen who dominated affairs and middle-class society resisted any suspicion of radicalism or 'collective' action, as witness their assault on the Co-operative Society when it established its first store in the town in 1867.⁵ Dr. William Farr, the sole supporter of the Co-operative movement amongst the town's 'elite', was continuously frustrated by concerted resistance to collective projects on public health. It was a long time before his utilitarian principles became more uniformly accepted by those involved in local government. Instead, the sleepy and obstructive Local Board testified to an unswerving faith in the ideals of individualism and self-improvement. The example of Dr. William Farr merely stood as the exception that proved the rule.

The rights of the individual and his - occasionally her - property took precedence over the well-being of the wider community. This is why moves towards the end of the century to extend free trade to landed property broke down. When W. R. Mallett, architect, freemason and local company director, spoke out against the idea at the Council meeting of June 1899, he spoke for those 'middling' shopkeepers and wealthy businessmen who viewed the attempt as an attack upon property itself.⁶ These attacks, along with the growing economic insecurity of the times and the emergence of socialism, had the net effect of intensifying social segregation as middle-class families reinforced their status and 'appearance' in the community. 'Radicalism' was left to lower middle-class representatives like Henry Nye, the undertaker and cabinet maker,

² G. W. Norman, *Memoranda Regarding Bromley and Its Neighbourhood During the Residence of our family There* (c.1857-1880, hand written notes)

³ G. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society - Kentish London 1840-80* (1978), pp. 160-161

⁴ 'Long Bob' Sutton was a so-called radical butcher, whose actions were mentioned in Chapter 3

⁵ *BR* April 1867

⁶ *BR* July 1899

whose shabby treatment in the local press - and occasionally on the town Council - epitomised middle-class political disposition.⁷

The lack of a 'radical tradition' in Bromley presented the middle classes of the town with considerable stability and security, although it is difficult to verify what effect this must have had on prevailing political ideology and allegiance. Certainly the *fear* and *threat* of radicalism, even if imagined rather than real, was sufficient to play down disagreements between members of opposing political parties. Political ideals themselves never remained static, and all were affected by the circumstances of the day. Conservatives like Sir Edmund Filmer, for instance, could resolutely defend protectionism in the 1840s whilst fifty years later, those with the same party loyalties could just as forcibly advocate free trade.⁸ In Bromley, contrasts in political ideology were never deep enough to arouse significant conflict between those in positions of influence and power. The occasions in which party political strife and agitation rose to the fore were rare indeed, or at worst short-lived. The cause of the greatest disorder was the open and public registration of votes in parliamentary elections preceding the secret ballot (1872). In May 1868, for example, trouble flared up as crowds flocked into Bromley, since for many it was their first opportunity to register a vote.⁹ Shopkeepers were forced to put up their shutters and one old labourer was knocked down and trampled to death. The townspeople themselves had never seen the like of it before, since there were over four times the number of voters than in any previous election. At the Town Hall, a meeting of local Conservatives was disrupted by a group of barracking Liberals.¹⁰ Significantly, blame was laid at the door not of *local* political activists but of a gang of rowdy agitators from Woolwich and Deptford. Relationships between *local* members of rival political parties had always been relatively harmonious, and thus it was easier to aim culpability at unknown outsiders.

Until 1885, the County of Kent had been split into three parliamentary divisions - East, Mid and West - each with two members. Bromley fell into the West division. Local poll books survive for seven of the twelve elections held between 1832 and 1868, and offer an interesting insight into voting habits.¹¹ During this period, the elections of West Kent returned a total of 12 Conservatives and 8 Liberals, the most

⁷ *Bromley UDC Minutes*, 20 Sept. 1898

⁸ *BR* July 1907

⁹ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *History of Bromley from Earliest Times to the Present Century* (Chislehurst 1929), p. 70

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The surviving poll books were studied in order to discover voting habits in three 'areas': the parish, the Bromley district and the wider Parliamentary division. They also revealed that a substantial number of voters in this period had residences outside of the area in which their votes were polled.

notable being, respectively, Sir Edmund Filmer of East Sutton Park and Thomas Law Hodges Esq. of Hemsted. Sir Edmund held a seat from 1838 until his death in 1857, and was twice returned unopposed. Thomas Law Hodges spearheaded the Liberal cause for many years. He first gained success in 1832, then lost his seat between 1841 and 1847, when he was once again returned to Parliament. In 1857, he finally stood down. Thomas Law Hodges had gained from close connections with Liberal members in Bromley, notably George Warde Norman and John Wells¹² Such was the support for the Liberal cause in Bromley that Hodges regularly recorded more votes in the town than his Conservative rivals, even when the latter were victorious in both the wider Bromley district and the Kent County division.

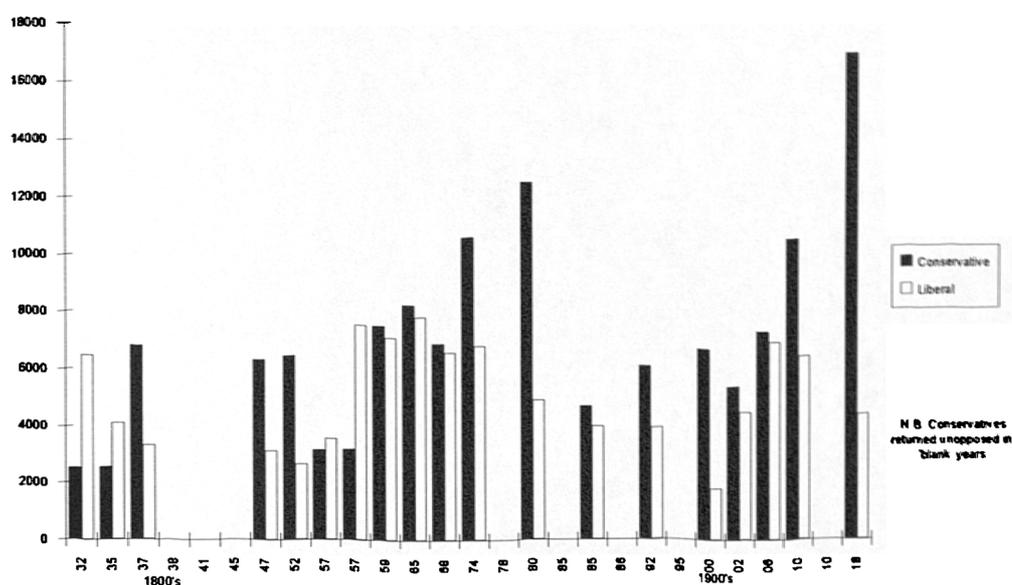


Figure 6.1 Parliamentary Election Results for West Kent (1832-1885) and Sevenoaks (1885-1918) Divisions (Source: E.L.S.Horsburgh)

In the first half of the century, Conservative landowners played upon the potentially disastrous consequences of corn law repeal in winning adherents to the cause. The West Kent division itself remained predominantly rural for much of the nineteenth century, and landed gentlemen like Sir Edmund Filmer, Viscount Holmesdale and W. Hart Dyke presented their party as defenders of the landed and agricultural interest.¹³ As for Bromley parish itself, farmers and landowners may well

¹² See G. W. Norman, *op. cit.*

¹³ *BR* June 1865

have propped up the Tory cause, but it was composed of a sufficient variety of socio-occupational groups to make the occasion of parliamentary elections more competitive. Hence the electoral returns from the parish show that between 1857 and 1868, the Liberals held the greater support. Much of this may have been due to the work and energy of George Warde Norman of Bromley Common, Sir John Lubbock of Farnborough and Archibald Hamilton of Southborough. Yet the fact that the town was becoming the home of growing numbers of commercial and professional men no doubt helped the Liberal party in their promises to deliver the local middle classes from the domination of the landed interest.

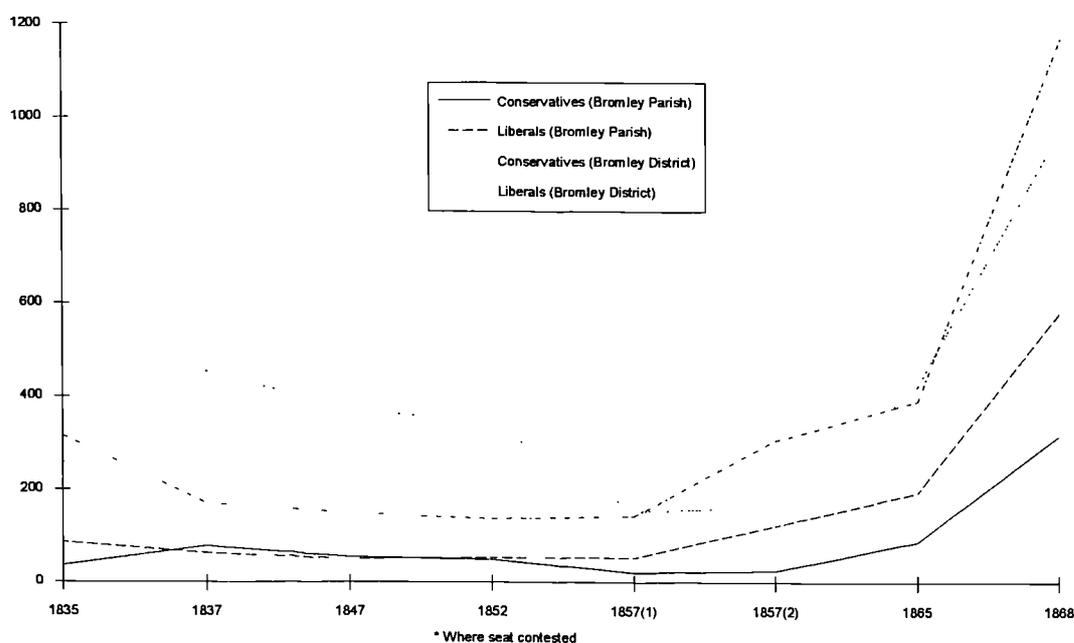


Figure 6.2 Parliamentary Election Results, Bromley District and Bromley Parish (1835-1868).*

It was the *landed* card that local Conservatives continued to play for the remainder of the century, accusing Liberals like Sir John Lubbock, honorary secretary to the London bankers, of selling out to the rapacious desires of the 'City'.¹⁴ In election addresses, Conservative candidates regularly exploited Liberal connections with both religious and political radicalism, and drew heavily on the Tory party's allegiance to the Established Church. This was a recurring theme until the First World War, alongside

¹⁴ BR Oct. 1868

increasing emphasis on the importance of the Monarchy and the Empire. In the meantime, the Liberals had become bitterly divided over the question of Irish Home Rule, leaving the Bromley Liberal Association devastated by the resignation of Sir John Lubbock and Charles L. Norman, its most prominent members.¹⁵ Matters had already been made worse for local Liberals with the reorganisation of parliamentary divisions in 1885: the fact that the new Sevenoaks division had only one Member of Parliament severely restricted the representation of Liberal interests. The growth of imperialistic fervour and the threat to property at this time, as posed by moves for a land tax and the nationalisation of land did even less to help the Liberal cause.¹⁶

In the light of the end to open voting, it is difficult either to quantify or to qualify the resulting 'drift towards Toryism' that undoubtedly took place in the town towards the end of the century. An occupational analysis of the limited number of individuals whose political loyalties could be identified, suggests no obvious pattern. Unlike Perkin's findings, based on the occupational breakdown of Members of Parliament, Bromley's results do not show that the middle classes involved in *finance* were any more likely to support the Conservatives than their *professional* counterparts. Gustav Loly and Dr. H. J. Ilott, for instance, were ardent Conservatives whilst Thomas Davis, Secretary to the Marine Insurance Company, was a long-time member of the Liberals. It is also difficult to ascertain why in the wider Sevenoaks and West Kent divisions, the 'drift' began as early as 1874.

Nevertheless, 'drift' they did. In 1900, when the Conservative candidate, Mr. H. W. Forster of 'The Hall', South End, defeated M. S. Richardson, the Tories received 78% of the votes polled.¹⁷ A temporary Liberal resurgence ran the Conservatives close in 1902 and again in 1906 - and possibly the Liberals may have gained victory within the parish itself - but the Tory stranglehold of the late Victorian and Edwardian era remained unbroken. The issues of Free Trade and public expenditure, in particular, offered reinforcement to Conservative political ideals. In 1907, Forster spoke out vehemently against the use of the protective tariff, publicly pledging support for competition and the free market place.¹⁸ The Liberals, on the other hand, believed not in the politics of *laissez-faire* but in the merits of restricted state intervention, especially on questions of social welfare. When the Liberal Party's 'budget' plans became more widely known, Forster was provided with the ideal opportunity to raise

¹⁵ *BR* March 1889

¹⁶ Bromley's one-time leading Liberal, Sir John Lubbock, himself played a part in this demise due to his work with the LPDL

¹⁷ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op. cit.*, p. 461

¹⁸ *BR* July 1907

and exaggerate the potential for great surges in taxation. He also played upon the close relations between Liberals and the emerging socialists, helping the Conservatives to gain from what Charles Masterman was to recognise in London as a whole, that 'in feverish hordes the suburbs swarm to the polls to vote against a turbulent proletariat.'¹⁹ When the people of Bromley and the parliamentary division were polled in the election of January 1910, the Conservatives boosted their majority from just 364 to over 4,000.²⁰ Thus in the 33 years following the Representation of the People Act in 1885, the Sevenoaks Division was represented by only two members, C. W. Mills and H. W. Forster, both Conservative. By the time the borough had been granted its own Member of Parliament in 1918, the Tory's monopoly of the constituency was already secured.

Elections at the time were viewed by most as purely male affairs: although women did help canvas, their voices were rarely heard. The opinion of many middle class men was adequately portrayed by the *Record* when, in its customary patronising manner, it argued against any political role for women on the grounds that they deserved to be protected against the 'heart burnings and turmoil' of parliamentary contests.²¹ On the whole, election time in Bromley was an occasion to demonstrate support for a candidate's respectable pedigree and status, leaving persuasive political arguments and opinions on the side-lines.²² This did little to help the cause of women political activists who struggled to break down barriers of ignorance, indifference and prejudice. For much of the nineteenth century, women had been increasingly marginalised from politics, acting in a merely supportive role.²³ By the 1880s, however, greater discussion and debate had brought additional adherents to the women's fight for the franchise. From 1869, unmarried and widowed ratepayers were able to vote, but not stand, in local elections. It was not until 1871, when women could sit on School Boards, that they could play a greater part in local government. By 1883, amongst other positions, women could also be elected as Poor Law Guardians and as Overseers of the Poor. In Bromley, the first woman Guardian was Isabella F. Akers, who owed her success to the activities of the local branch of the Women's Guardian Society founded in February 1888.²⁴ The Society's committee members included Miss Heppel, Mrs. Harvey and Rev. C. Green, but also received

¹⁹ C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (1909), p. 66

²⁰ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op. cit.*, p. 461

²¹ *BR* Dec. 1874

²² In D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (1976), the author suggested that in large towns and cities, candidates for parliamentary office were those with the most powerful and persuasive political arguments

²³ C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class - Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 101-103

²⁴ *Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions* Vol. XIX 1888, 15 March, pp. 120-121

personal encouragement from Miss Caroline A. Higgs, editor of *Englishwoman's Review* and a leading light in the National Society for Women's Suffrage.. The Society helped press for reforms in the Union's workhouse at Farnborough, extending medical help to inmates and reducing consumption of wines, beer and spirits.²⁵

Women may well not have played a decisive role in the politics of Victorian suburban society, but behind the scenes there were a number of women and women's groups attempting to establish or enhance their influence. Already active in a philanthropic role - which demonstrated that women could be achievers in their own right - in the last two decades a number became involved in the emergent local suffragist movement.²⁶ On 3 March 1883, the first annual meeting was held of the Bromley, Beckenham and Shortlands Branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS), under the chairmanship of Rev. C. Green who suggested that the Society should take heart from what dedication and perseverance had done in the case of the temperance movement.²⁷ There were clearly close ties between the Society and the later Women's Guardian Society, with Mrs. Harvey as Honorary Secretary and Miss Biggs offering her support in person at the March meeting.²⁸ It appears that the majority of members came from Beckenham and Shortlands rather than the more populous Bromley community. The first meeting of the society in Bromley itself took place later in the year, presided over by Walter Henry Bosanquet, the city solicitor, and Major-General Babbage.²⁹ Such 'fronting' of women's organisations was a legacy of earlier gender relations, symbolising and reinforcing the dependence of women upon male supervision.

Amongst the audiences of the initial suffrage meetings were wives and daughters from several well-to-do local families, notably those associated with the Liberal Party. Occasionally, intellectual Conservatives like Dr. Beeby and Gustav Loly, the Headmaster of Quernmore Boys School, were in attendance, perhaps because as professionals they were more eager than their middle-class business counterparts to enter ideological debate.³⁰ The two gentlemen, for example, attended

²⁵ *Ibid.*. For more detail on the work of the Women's Guardian Society in general, see P.Hollis, *Ladies Elect - Women in Local Government, 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1967)

²⁶ See A. V. John, *Our Mothers' Land - Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939*, (Univ. of Wales Press, 1991), p. 64, where, using the examples of Charlotte Guest and Rose Mary Crawshay, it has been shown that wives of industrialists did not merely reinforce their husbands' influence but could act independently as well.

²⁷ *Women's Suffrage Journal* Vol. XIV, No. 156, 1883 - 2 April 1883, p. 62

²⁸ *Ibid.*; *BR* April 1883

²⁹ *BR* Jan. 1884

³⁰ Little work has been done on men's role in the women's suffrage movement, although research being carried out at Greenwich University under Professor Angela V. John, suggests that teachers and

a meeting in June 1893 to discuss the possibility of a Women's Franchise League, something which Mary Heppel, Headmistress of Bromley High School, was eager to establish.³¹ Since no records of this branch exist, it seems that her attempts were in vain. In its place, Bromley suffragists relied upon the work done by the NSWWS, whose national leader Millicent Fawcett visited the town in October 1894 to give a talk on the 'Ideals of Womanhood'.³²

The socio-occupational analysis of women in the second half of the nineteenth century suggests several indicators that help explain the lack of women political activists in the town. Even by 1891, it was still very rare for middle-class women, whether wives, widows, daughters or older spinsters to carry out any paid occupation outside the home. The middle-class married woman of this affluent suburb was apparently domesticated, God-fearing and continually conscious of her and her family's respectability. She possibly involved herself in some philanthropic or charitable work, but either took little interest or was discouraged from involvement in local government and political affairs. Women like Heppel were exceptional, and not always justly treated by the local press or men with whom they worked.³³ Heppel was one of only a handful of women who was in a position to recognise the need for women to strive for *economic* as much as *political* independence. At a suffrage meeting in February 1885, Heppel attacked Sir John Lubbock's proposal to extend the Factory and Workshop Act to shops because she feared women would be driven out of such work.³⁴ Describing Lubbock's attitude, she commented, 'he had this advantage, that his mind, what he had of it, was masculine, and even his *ignorance* was of sounder quality.'³⁵ Her struggle for women's rights also drove Heppel to work hard at extending educational opportunities for young girls. She felt that the Girls Public Day School Trust that managed her school was 'a potent factor in the development of the movement affecting the work and position of women.'³⁶ In line with many contemporary suffragists and middle-class women, Heppel was adamant that if the vote could be extended to *non*-ratepaying men - as it was for Bromley in 1884 - then women who *did* pay rates too deserved the franchise. By implication, this shifted the emphasis to ratepayers rather than women *per se*, although it was still part of an argument that demanded votes on equal terms with men rather than universal adult

lawyers were prominent amongst the male supporters in the largest organisation of male suffragists, the Men's League for Women's Suffrage.

³¹ *BR* July 1893

³² *BR* Nov. 1894

³³ *Bromley High School Jubilee Record, 1883-1908* (Unpublished)

³⁴ *BR* March 1885

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Bromley High School Jubilee Record, ibid.*

suffrage. Her stance also illustrated a much more widespread feeling amongst the middle class at the time that the strongest political voice in the nation ought to be granted to those with the greatest financial stake.

When Millicent Fawcett returned to Bromley in February 1907, to rouse support for the suffragist cause, she lamented that fifteen years had passed since her last visit yet women were still no nearer to gaining the vote.³⁷ More radical activists spoke at the Co-operative Hall in East Street, in January the following year, meeting as the local branch of the Women's Freedom League.³⁸ The speakers here spoke of the necessity of women to become more vociferous and dynamic in their demands. This was one of two major suffragette meetings in the town in that year, both large, orderly and urging greater agitation to achieve their demands. Over the succeeding years, a series of well-mannered gatherings were held, including a debate at the Literary Institute in November 1909, in which the a motion in support of women's suffrage was defeated by just two votes.³⁹ With little progress in overcoming the nation's male-dominated traditions, the women's franchise movement sought further devotees and intensified their actions. The frequency of meetings intensified, demanding greater urgency and militancy. On 16 May 1911 a special 'intercession' was made at the Parish Room, Bromley, by Rev. C. Hinscliff, Hon. Secretary of the Church League for Women's Suffrage, with a view to establishing a local branch of that organisation in the town.⁴⁰ Eventually, in April the following year, a local branch of the Church League for Women's Suffrage was founded, holding its first meeting at the Co-operative Hall.⁴¹ Then in December, Bromley supporters of the Women's Social and Political Union met for the first time, addressed by the writer Evelyn Sharp.⁴² In addition to the franchise, she called for the opening up of the professions to women, and equality with men in the eyes of the law. Such gains would enhance women's *status*, an objective Evelyn Sharp proposed ought to be foremost in the minds of all suffragettes.

Contemporaries have recalled two events in the following year that brought the movement, especially the more militant *suffragette* wing of the movement, directly into the limelight.⁴³ The first was Emily Wilding Davison's 'sacrifice' on Derby Day 1913, when she allegedly threw herself under the King's horse, Anmer. Race-goers from

³⁷ In 1907, the unity of the women's suffrage movement was weakened when the Women's Freedom League was formed as a result of a split within the Womens Social and Political Union.

³⁸ *BR* Feb. 1908

³⁹ *BR* Dec. 1909

⁴⁰ *The Common Cause* Vol. III, No. 110, May 4 1911, p. 65.

⁴¹ *BR* May 1912. The Church League for Women's Suffrage was founded by radical clergymen and deployed relatively peaceful forms of protest.

⁴² *BR* Dec. 1912

⁴³ *Collection of Oral Histories*, No. 18 - Frederick Wakely

London and the south-east spoke of little else as they returned in their brakes, carts and omnibuses. In Bromley, the local press offered Davison sympathy tempered with admonition for the futility and senselessness of her actions.⁴⁴ The second notable incident occurred much closer to home. In July, the *Record* reported on a spate of incidents where high street pillar-boxes were set alight.⁴⁵ It was claimed that this was the work of local suffragettes, who acknowledged their actions by leaving behind notes declaring, 'Asquith, do your duty and give votes to women.' Such bad press did little to help the movement's cause amongst Bromley's respectable and law-abiding middle-class community. The fact that young boys would run next to known local suffragettes taunting not 'votes' but 'blokes for women', merely added to the peculiar image in which women activists were commonly held.⁴⁶

The pillar-box burnings were the only recorded criminal acts by local suffragettes. Ordinarily, the local women's suffrage movement was peaceful and trouble-free. Indeed, most of the women involved in pressure groups, of whatever political persuasion, operated in a relatively sedate and orderly manner. For instance, the Bromley Women's League that was founded in December 1902, declared itself to be non-sectarian and concentrated on discussing issues related to cookery, housing, gardening.⁴⁷ Occasionally, ladies like Mrs. Mann of 'Haseldene' in the affluent South Hill Park part of the town, would lend her drawing room for visitors from London speaking on women's suffrage. A far more influential band of women locally, however, operated under the direction of the Tory Primrose League.⁴⁸ Having been instituted nationally in 1883 by Conservative Party stalwarts to perform electioneering campaigns in constituencies, the middle-class ladies of the Primrose League prided themselves on organising local party affairs in both an efficient and effective manner. Funds were raised through teas, bazaars and fetes, whilst great care was taken to steer *clear of the controversial* question of women's suffrage. Bromley's branch, or 'habitation', of the League was founded in 1886 and was typically presided over by one of the town's most prominent landed gentlemen, Sir Coles Child jun.. Sir Coles Child jun. himself is interesting in that his father had always declared personal neutrality when it came to either religion or politics. His son and heir, however, was one of the most ardent supporters of both the Church of England and the Conservative Party. As for the League, it was composed essentially of the wives and daughters of local Conservatives, and operated in the town unchallenged by any branch of the Women's

⁴⁴ *BR* July 1913

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Collection of Oral Histories*, No. 18 - Frederick Wakely

⁴⁷ *BR* Jan. 1903

⁴⁸ *BR* June 1886

Liberal Association or Federation. This gave the lady Leaguers even more opportunity to work within and exploit existing social networks, bringing greater sensitivity and pleasure into political affairs.

The campaigning work of the League was particularly important because of the extension of the franchise (1867 and 1884), the introduction of the secret ballot (1872) and the legislation against 'corrupt practices' (1883). From its outset, the Bromley ladies, or 'dames', were involved in scrutinising voting lists in order to challenge registrations, resulting in numerous revisions of eligible voters. They also played on the divisions amongst local Liberals over the issue of Home Rule, by stressing the importance of the Union at their meetings and social functions.⁴⁹ Indeed, patriotism and the support for the British Empire remained the central driving force of the League well into the twentieth century. As B. Campbell has pointed out in her attempts to underline the role of the 'dames', 'Women of course could not vote, but if they could not engage in politics on their own account, as Primrose Leaguers they were to engineer an impeccable electoral machine for the Conservative Party.'⁵⁰ Unlike the suffragists or suffragettes, the Leaguers were not intent on improving either the economic or political rights of women in the locality, even though suffragists admired the way they showed themselves to be 'a formidable power in political contests.'⁵¹ Any tasks they performed were carried out under the supervision and authority of their husbands, fathers or influential male patrons. As such, they helped bolster a society dominated by men as well as reinforcing the respectable face of the suburban middle class.

The Members of Parliament who represented Bromley in the Victorian and Edwardian period were all landowners. On the surface, this suggests that the majority of the electorate appeared content with their actions, although in practice landowners were amongst the few individuals who could afford involvement in politics. The

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ B. Campbell, *The Iron Ladies - Why Women Vote Tory* (1987), p. 6

⁵¹ *Women's Suffrage Journal* Vol. XVII, No. 193, 1886 - 1 June, 1886, p. 76

reliance upon the landowning class was just one element which symbolized the bonding between landowners and the middle class, who far much of the period comprised the bulk of those permitted to vote. At local government level, after the late 1860s members of the professions and the commercial classes began to take the lead in policy-making. Nevertheless, in allowing the middle classes to undermine their virtual monopoly of local administrative power, the landed interest were by no means offering a complete surrender. In any case, the 'landed interest' in suburbs like Bromley was more akin to the values and ideology of the middle class than to the values of their more aristocratic cousins. With the exception of the Norman family, all landowners kept the capitalistic development of their estates very much at the forefront of their aspirations. Admittedly, this was more commonly the case from the last quarter of the century onwards, but even as early as the later 1840s, William John Coles Child showed that respected gentleman landowners were not aloof from making substantial sums of money.

Reference has already been made to the changing balance between the landed elite and the urban middle-class leadership.⁵² Cannadine has suggested a particular 'model' of these shifts, whereby:

...the years from the 1800s to the 1870s might usefully be seen as a time of landed power and (albeit lessening) middle-class subordination, while the period from the 1880s to the 1930s saw this relationship increasingly reversed.⁵³

In smaller towns and developing suburbs like Bromley, similar developments *did* take place, but the process was delayed and of a contrasting nature to those towns and resorts where so much land was concentrated into the hands of just one family. The relations between landowners and the middle classes were less heated and less liable to fluctuation in towns where land was more widely distributed, and where the origins of landowning families were more closely tied to business interests.

For the first six decades of the nineteenth century, the local gentry in Bromley were able to take advantage of a dependent middle class that lacked its own conscious identity. It was not until the arrival of wealthy merchants, financiers and professionals - alongside electoral reform and broad-sweeping changes in national legislation - that the power of the gentlemen landowners became seriously threatened. Even then, those middle-class gentlemen who served on the first Local Boards were renowned for their

⁵² See Chapters 2 and 4

⁵³ D. Cannadine (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 11

petty squabbling and penny-pinching rather than for any concerted *class* action. The shift from Parish Vestry to Local Board, then, did *not* automatically mean victory for the urban middle class over landowner influence. Whilst the local gentry held onto their large estates, they retained unchallenged economic leverage. It was not until the break-up of these estates, especially in the last quarter of the century, that personal and economic dependence began to wane. Even then, wealth gained from urban rents and the respect granted to gentlemen landowners by their local community, allowed them continued influence in local affairs.

If the middle classes and gentry of the town did come to blows, it was ordinarily over the question of land. In the 1850s - and again in the 1870s - this involved debates about the building of a railway. With the subsequent expansion of the town's population, there soon followed a desperate need for more burial space and an outfall for the inhabitants' sewage. By the late 1880s, land was again on the agenda as the town's authorities sought possible locations for the construction of their first elementary schools. Towards the end of the century, and on into the Edwardian era, the middle classes were searching for land to improve the town's facilities for recreation. Throughout the period as a whole, there was the interminable threat by landowners upon 'public' rights-of-way, regarded by the town's inhabitants as theirs by historic right. Yet none of these incidences can be explained purely and simply as a struggle between landowners and middle classes. In each case, both 'groups' were divided amongst themselves over what action to take. In addition, *land* was also a question of private property, and when attempts in the 1890s to introduce a land tax and land nationalisation threatened to assail rights of property, the majority of the town's middle-class leadership rallied behind their local landed proprietors.

In 1872, Edward Tuck's *Bromley Bells* had cynically portrayed the motives of property-owners by accusing them of encouraging the improvement of sanitation merely to enhance the value of their houses. Indeed, the major propagators of reforms in public health came not from amongst the local tradesmen and shopkeepers but from those who regarded the town primarily as a residential retreat. However, not all these gentlemen purchased the freehold of their property, so thus had little to gain in terms of pecuniary reward if the value of their homes was dramatically increased. On the other hand, *owners* of the land *did* have plenty to gain. The value of agricultural land fell markedly in the last quarter of the century, particularly in comparison to the elevated values to be gained on land that had undergone development. Landowners like William John Coles Child were not slow in exploiting the potential of their land. By selling off part of his estate to the Mid-Kent Railway Company, he made adjacent

parts of his land ripe for the residential development demanded by potential commuters. His son was also keen to recognise the benefits brought by the improvement of urban facilities. In 1897, the nature of his altruism shone through with a gift to the town of White Hart field on the western side of his estate, to become 'Queen's Gardens' in celebration of Queen Victoria's jubilee.⁵⁴ The civic authority was left to find the finances to develop the site. As with the railway, the completed gardens heightened the attractiveness of neighbouring land, including land belonging to Coles Child jun. himself. It was partly because landlords were indirectly receiving the benefits of such publicly-funded improvements, that individuals like Henry Nye were so vocal in their calls for the taxation of ground rents.⁵⁵

Landowners, then, were not averse to urban 'improvement'. In Bromley at least, this helps explain the lack of direct confrontation between themselves and the resident middle classes. For much of the century, landowner benevolence as illustrated by their construction of churches, schools and even town halls - the Town Hall in Market Square having been the gift of Coles Child sen. in 1868 - served as a panacea to inhabitants' demands. Until at least the onset of the Local Board in 1868, changes in the town were carried out on the local gentry's terms. Gradually, the middle classes became wealthy, self-confident and united enough to steal the initiative. To some extent, this was still very much a *private* initiative, as successful businessmen, merchants and financiers challenged the benevolent paternalism role so long monopolised by the landed classes. Towards the turn of the century, however, schools, parks and gardens emerged, funded from the public purse. Landowner co-operation was a necessary, if not essential part of this process, but by the time the new Town Hall of the Incorporated Borough was opened in 1907, it was the middle-class elite who dictated the direction of local affairs.

The men of the upper middle class adopted the paternalistic mantle that was once the preserve of the families of the local parish gentry. In so doing, they were aided by middle class women who helped cement social relations with both the gentry and working class. The paternalism of the town's middle class was effected through a combination of philanthropic works, individual munificence, voluntary subscription and the defence of private initiatives aimed at maintaining acceptable levels of public well-being. 'City gents' and prosperous local retailers began to control the committees of local clubs and societies in the same way as had been the practice of their 'landed' predecessors. By the end of the century, they had become part of an oligarchic,

⁵⁴ E.L.S. Horsburgh, *op. cit.*, p. 58

⁵⁵ *Bromley UDC Minutes*, June 1899

middle-class elite who saw themselves as the natural rulers of the town. Those individuals who came from the families of the once predominant gentry, Bromley's former patricians, continued to command respect, but were seen as increasingly remote. Instead of the extravagant 'harvest homes' on the Palace Estate, there were the Dunn Company's 'bean feasts' at Margate,⁵⁶ instead of the great army of servants maintained at Sundridge Park, there were the living-in apprentices of Frederick Medhurst's new department store. Shop assistants, secretaries, clerks and employees of all kinds were wrapped up in a complex web of patron-client relationships that advanced a 'dependency' upon their employers, in much the same way as landowners had on their tenants and labourers. By 1914, in an administrative, social and economic sense, the upper middle class had seized the upper hand from the gentry, disseminating ideals of both a 'genteel' and 'bourgeois' quality.

In terms of 'controlling' local society, it was vital that the middle class directed and dictated facilities for pleasure, entertainment and education. As far as the former two were concerned, affluent Victorian Bromley could boast a reasonably well established tradition, from the racecourse at Bromley Common to the walks on Martin's Hill. However, most leisurely activities were the preserve of the well-to-do, carried on amongst a relatively small circle of friends and acquaintances. There was also a distinct lack of cultural, leisure and sporting clubs to which *all* could attend, and where contact and communication could take place between different social classes. In 1895, Charles W. Gedney attempted to overcome this deficiency by advocating a public meeting place. In so doing, he exaggerated the extent of divisions in the town, notably amongst the influential middle classes in the town, which he argued were of detriment to the town itself:

Our lack of unity and fixed public policy, and as a consequence the want of energy and interest in the affairs of the town are frequently remarked upon by strangers. We are either Tories or Liberal, Churchmen or Dissenters, Teetotallers or Anti-teetotallers, and herd with our kind at the party clubs or religious meetings.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Dunn's Collection of Memorabilia (BPL)*

⁵⁷ *Bromley Telegraph* 12 Jan. 1895, p. 5

For most of the Victorian period, leisure facilities were provided on an *ad hoc* basis and funded by private subscription. As for strictly sporting ventures, they paid little attention to formal regulation and were usually conducted on a local basis with no accountability to regional or national authorities. Towards the end of the century, sports and pastimes became both more popular and rigidly organised. The Council took a back seat in this process, although were not amiss to enhancing the town's facilities for leisure by taking up opportunities presented by the sale of private estates. The large tracts of open land that existed in Bromley offered vital breathing spaces to a fast developing town. The vast majority were in private hands, until a small number of purchases in the Edwardian era expanded those 'lungs' available to the general public. In 1903, the three recreation grounds that existed were Martin's Hill, Queen's Mead and Queen's Gardens. In 1905, Whitehall Recreation Ground was opened at Bromley Common, with the new Library Gardens completed the following year. The latter were also known as 'Neelgherries Gardens' from the large house that stood there, the property of Emily Dowling who in 1900 had bequeathed to the town her house and all of its grounds,

...with certain lands upon trust for the purpose of a public park or public museum, or of a technical and industrial institution... and £1,000 for the keeping up thereof, and she desires all or part of the grounds shall be used as a recreation ground.⁵⁸

The new gardens were a charming adornment to the environment of the High Street. The 8,000 square yards of plants and shaded walks were aesthetically landscaped, offering a semi-rural aspect right in the heart of Bromley. In 1903, Andrew Carnegie, the wealthy philanthropist, had put forward £7,500 for the erection of a new library on the site of Mrs. Dowling's bequest. The resulting 'Carnegie Library' was well equipped and opened by its benefactor on 28 May 1906, replacing the old library housed at the Science & Art School on Tweedy Road. Once again, private munificence had fostered one of the town's principal amenities, leaving the local authority to finance later additions and improvements.

Constructing leisure facilities solely from the rates was a rare phenomenon. There were several proposals to build a public swimming baths, but although all had initially been met with sympathy, they were all ultimately rejected. In 1905, for instance, open-air baths were suggested for a corner of the Queen's Mead ground, at a cost of £1,000. The plans were soon dropped, however, when one of the Councillors

⁵⁸ *Bequest of Emily Dowling, 1900*

described the end result as likely to be 'little more than a glorified duck pond.'⁵⁹ Others agreed with him that such an inferior public facility would be an embarrassment when compared to the baths that had opened earlier that year in neighbouring Beckenham. Hence no public baths appeared in the town until the mid-1920s. Instead, the Council concentrated on extending the town's pleasure grounds, and to this end purchased nine acres of land in Bromley North in 1909. The new 'rec' was christened King's Meadow, after Edward VII, and opened on 24 June 1911.⁶⁰ The fact that the occasion was celebrated by a cricket match between two local elementary schools, Wharton Road and St Mary's, suggests that townspeople and Councillors alike did indeed take pride in new civic facilities, even when as in this case such facilities were long overdue. The provision of such recreational grounds, however, was also generated by more ulterior motives, similar to those revealed by Mayor James on 6 August 1906, when speaking to a crowd of between 8,000 and 10,000 people at the Charter Commemoration Sports: 'The provision of reasonable and rational means of entertainment for the masses was one that tended to uphold and maintain the public order.'⁶¹ In essence, a society amused, was a society content.

The municipality played a much more decisive role in the realm of education. Having been slow to adopt statutory powers to establish elementary schools,⁶² by the turn of the century the local authority had found itself legally obliged to offer free education to all children up to twelve years of age. Balfour's Act of 1902 then saw the demise of the short-lived School Boards, to be substituted by Local Education Committees. Bromley's own Committee was formed in June 1903, and came under the auspices of both the Urban District Council and the Kent County Council.⁶³ Out of the 21 members of the Committee, 12 were selected *from* the borough Council and 9 were nominated *by* the Council from those locals closely involved in education.⁶⁴ One of the nominees was Gustav Loly of Quernmore Boys School, who became the committee's inaugural chairman. Schooling was drastically re-organised under the committee, allowing for wide-ranging advances in curriculum, calibre of staff, methods of teaching and the nature of school buildings. The Church of England, whose role in education in Bromley had remained stubbornly dominant, was permitted to receive money from local rates to fund its parish schools. Subsequent debates about the role of religion in education led to a polarisation of extremes: some wished to see schools maintained wholly out of public funds and independent of church control, others doubted the

⁵⁹ *BR* June 1906

⁶⁰ *BR* Aug. 1911

⁶¹ *BR* Sept. 1906

⁶² See Chapter 5, p. 197ff

⁶³ E. L. S. Horsburgh, *op.cit.*, p. 263

⁶⁴ S. Richardson, *The Development of Education in Bromley* (unpublished, 1967), p. 25

religious conviction of those in public office and feared for the status of Christian teachings.

The new legislation by no means overcame all deficiencies in education. The log books of the town's elementary schools reveal serious attendance problems, especially for the so-called 'labour boys' who spent part of the day at work.⁶⁵ Neither did the 1902 Act cater for those families who desired for their children to continue beyond the elementary age but could ill afford the fees charged by the district's private secondary schools. In all, the elementary establishments in Bromley, most of whom were attached to a nearby Anglican church, catered for between 4,000 and 4,500 children during the Edwardian era.⁶⁶ This was a reasonable figure for a town of approximately 30,000 inhabitants, and sufficient accommodation for those of elementary schooling age. Yet compared with places like Blackheath, Dulwich, Catford, Lewisham and Sevenoaks, Bromley had an embarrassing dearth of *secondary* school places, especially for boys. The town's wealthy middle class were obliged to look elsewhere for schooling appropriate to their class and status. This caused 200 or so boys, for instance, to travel daily to schools like Dulwich College or St. Dunstan's, Catford.⁶⁷ This left nearly 300 boys, most of whom were working class, without any form of secondary education.⁶⁸ The *daughters* of the town's middle class were more fortunate in that they could attend either Bromley High School or one of the various 'Dame' schools in the immediate vicinity. The latter were typical of the multitude of small, privately run educational institutions in the area, which like the small preparatory schools of Bickley Hall and elsewhere, groomed their charges for life in respectable society.

The primary objective of Balfour's Act was to extend the provision of secondary education, and it was with this priority in mind that Bromley's Higher Education Committee first met in September 1904.⁶⁹ By the following year, a variety of proposals had been discussed and a final scheme drafted.⁷⁰ Three projects were to receive most urgent attention: the creation of two evening continuation schools, the expansion of the Science & Art School at Tweedy Road and the construction of a Public Boys Secondary School. Two continuation schools were quickly founded, providing further education to 'adult' school-leavers. Both soon became popular, supporting 200 students per day studying subjects that ranged from woodwork to

⁶⁵ Shortlands Valley School Log Book, 1899 (BPL)

⁶⁶ J. M. Hill, *Education in Bromley 1860-1920* (1967)

⁶⁷ S. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 45

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25

⁷⁰ BR April 1906

commerce, from cooking to 'History and Citizenship'. Some classes, such as dressmaking for ladies, could also be taken in the afternoon. More technical subjects were offered at the Science & Art School. Lectures here were given in chemistry, horticulture, building, book-keeping and shorthand, to name but a few, although fees such as the 10 shillings charged for telephony precluded most working class adults. Courses run by the school in electricity, plumbing, ambulance drill, as well as commercial subjects, help reveal changes in the economic characteristics of the community at this time. Attendance figures at the school shed light upon the popularity and demand for such courses, which increased unabated throughout the first decade of the new century.

However, the committee's grandest dream was for the extension of secondary education in the borough, which eventually took in mind the need for a *girls'* school as well as boys'. Their final scheme offers a revealing insight into the educational philosophy and practice of the Edwardian middle class. Pupils at the boys' school were to start at 12 years of age, sitting an Oxford or Cambridge Board examination at 16. The 'lower school' curriculum was to consist of English, Geography, History, French, Maths, Science, Art, Manual Training and German or Latin. Those who stayed on beyond the age of 16 years, were to move on to the 'upper school' to study one of two option groupings, based on either Science with Maths or English with a foreign language. Final examinations could then be taken with the London University Examinations Board, with the aim of sending successful students on to university. Fees were to be hefty, at £9 9s. per annum for the 'lower' school and £12 12s for the 'upper'. Such costs were inevitably prohibitive, but no more than an illustration of the society the schools were to serve.

In arranging for both a boys' and girls' secondary school, the local Education Committee worked closely with the Kent County Education Committee to whom they were directly accountable. It was agreed, for instance, that the county authority would maintain the boys' school and contribute towards its construction. Initially, the objective was to set up a boys' school in 1906, but the idea was postponed without any proper explanation given.⁷¹ Instead it was the girls' school that opened first, on 12 July 1905, at the premises of Widmore House in Tweedy Road.⁷² Under the guidance of Miss Walters, Bromley County Girls initially offered secondary places to 125 girls, two-thirds of whom were fee-paying, whilst the remaining third were open to scholarship pupils. The latter were drawn from elementary schools within the borough

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² J. M. Hill, *op. cit.*

and beyond, although places were set aside for bright children whose parents not only earned less than £160 per annum but also pledged to keep their children at the school for at least four years. On 26 May 1910, the County Girls moved to its more permanent home in Nightingale Lane, fulfilling a goal that had cost the borough and the county over £12,000. Nevertheless, it had helped reduce the accommodation problem, with over 200 girls attending the school at its new location in its first year

It was not until the summer of 1911 that the Bromley County School for Boys finally opened its doors.⁷³ Having purchased Hayesford Farm from Archibald C Norman in 1908, the Council had constructed a fully-equipped, spacious and decorative buildings. Throughout the premises, the style adopted reverted back to the eighteenth century, with its ornate carvings and Georgian frontage. Initially there were only 70 pupils, but numbers soon increased when the school became fully operational the following year. The delay in building the establishment helped escalate the costs from the original estimate of £14,000 to the final figure of nearly £20,000. The Borough and County authorities then had to find further funds to supply new equipment and resources for the school, just as they had to do at the County Girls' School. At the County Girls', for instance, sewing machines were provided to develop skills at dressmaking. Sports' apparatus, however, was less forthcoming, and sports' days relied upon 'curiosity' races rather than purist athletic events. The 'Catch the Train' and 'Potato and Basket' races held at the County Girls' 'Programme of Sport' in May 1914 epitomised the rather amateurish, de-regulated spirit which drove educational policy in the Borough in the years prior to the First World War.⁷⁴ The curriculum on offer at the Borough's educational establishments had been considerably broadened since the times of the mid-Victorian National Schools, as indeed had the range of local children brought into full-time schooling, but educational horizons were still generally fixed by age, gender and wealth. In practice, the provision of secondary schooling to the select few in the town merely reinforced wider class divisions.

While the majority of the men and women of the commercial and professional middle classes were forging the very social and political characteristics of their suburban retreat, the resident mass of the working class appeared to offer little in terms

⁷³ *Bromley Grammar School 1911-61* (unpublished brochure)

⁷⁴ *Programme Of Sport, Bromley County Girls' School, May 1914*

of alternatives. A number of factors stand out in demonstrating how such a situation could be maintained, even with the relative upheaval of the late Victorian and Edwardian era. Even though between 75% and 80% of the local population could be described as working class during the period, a substantial number were skilled artisans and thus belonged to the upper echelons of their class.⁷⁵ These printers, masons and smiths developed close economic ties with the local gentry and middle classes, if for no other reason than because of the nature of the services that they provided. Those in domestic service, which throughout the period accounted for the largest category of all those in employment, were also closely tied to the well-to-do. For many of the cooks, grooms, footmen and general servants, economic and personal ties created a bond of deference that went beyond any attachment to members of their own socio-economic class. Coupled with the fact that the town had none of the industries that have been traditionally associated with workers' associations, it is understandable that working-class movements in the area were markedly tame. For instance, when the Independent Labour Party emerged towards the end of the century, there was little support locally. Wages in the town were more reasonable than those to be gained in neighbouring rural areas, and unemployment was rarely a serious problem. Only in the ten years prior to the First World War, did unemployment become more pressing, resulting in the establishment of a Distress Committee that helped prevent its worst effects.⁷⁶ Poverty existed, as demonstrated by the young children lining up outside the town's bakers for stale loaves of bread,⁷⁷ but was never as widespread as in the areas investigated by Charles Booth or Joseph Rowntree.

For the servants, gardeners, journeymen, decorators and labourers who made up the bulk of the working classes in the town, standards of living were reasonable and less repugnant than the conditions to be found in the nation's urban slums. Overcrowding and dilapidated buildings still existed, as revealed by the town's first comprehensive housing survey later in 1919, but as the town's Medical Officer had reported in 1899, there was not one incidence in Bromley of 'back-to-back' housing.⁷⁸ Most homes, even the terraced cottage of the chimney sweep or coalman, could boast a small garden or extensive back-yard. It may have been some time before working-class properties received adequate water supply, water drainage and sewerage, but sanitation was adequate enough to avoid the horrors of cholera and the worst effects of typhoid. Throughout the late Victorian and Edwardian era, the healthy state of the

⁷⁵ *Census Returns*, Bromley, 1851-1911

⁷⁶ *BR* Nov. 1908. This was late in coming, since the Unemployed Workmen's Act of 1905 had instituted unemployment registers and 'distress' committees.

⁷⁷ K. E. Payne, 'Memories of Bromley 1897-1916', in *BLHS* No. 5 1980, pp. 1-4

⁷⁸ *Bromley Health Report* (Medical Officer of Health), 1899

local population, always dependent upon wealth and income, was maintained at a high level when compared with the majority of England and Wales. This fact, taken together with the extensions in voting rights, education and leisure facilities - even if both limited and long overdue - would have given little cause for grievance amongst the resident working classes. Yet life was very difficult for many of them, leading older residents today to denounce, verbally at least, any notion of the 'good old days'. Few, however, appeared to question their 'station in life'. According to contemporaries like Henry J. Belsey, the 'master and servant' philosophy that prevailed penetrated into every aspect of life, whether it be at home, at school, at church or in society at large.⁷⁹

The electoral reform of 1884-1885 had extended the vote to many more working-class men, but in Bromley it had little direct impact on voting habits. No socialist candidate stood in the Parliamentary division until after the First World War.⁸⁰ At election time the local working classes were content for both the Liberals and Conservatives to represent their views. Certainly in *local* elections, Liberal Party members like Henry Nye, the cabinet maker and undertaker, offered a medium for more radical demands. The same was true for representation outside the parliamentary arena, for Henry Nye also acted as a spokesman and leader of the South-East London Gasworkers.⁸¹ Only in the first decade of the new century did adherents to the wider labour movement begin to make their voices heard more directly, as through the Bromley and District Trades and Labour Council who regularly pressed for better wages, lower rents and an increase in working-class housing. It was also due to this pressure group that the Borough Council had finally given way to the founding of the town's first Distress Committee.

The overall political dependency of the working classes was one component of a wider deference, not just to middle-class personnel, but to middle-class values and aspirations. Families like the Wells', who balanced on a knife edge between 'middle' and 'working class', were so concerned with their public status that Wells was forced to fabricate stories about the extent of his family's domestic help. In order to maintain this facade, his mother changed after performing washing duties, whilst Wells himself was forced to keep their lack of domestic help a secret from all his friends.⁸² Such families also recognised the opportunity for social advancement, investing hard-earned money in their children's education and appearance. Schools, the press, church and

⁷⁹ H. J. Belsey, *Bromley Memories: A Working-Class Childhood* (1977)

⁸⁰ As it happened, the contest of December 1919 was a fascinatingly close one, with Mr. F. P. Hodes, the Labour candidate, losing to Lt.-Col Hon. C. James, the new Conservative representative, by only 11,148 votes to 10,077.

⁸¹ *BR* Oct. 1889

⁸² H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) p. 73

chapel all zealously promoted the ideals of respect and respectability. Some of the town's poorest families were as attentive to these values as the wealthiest of middle-class city merchants.

In existing hand-in-hand with the desire to maintain or enhance one's status, these values penetrated across the social divide, ensuring a measure of stability that helped conserve the *status quo* in social relations. The relative health and wealth of the local working classes were not enough on their own to prevent any radical, grass-roots movement, but taken with an overall dependence upon, and deference to, the middle classes of the town, then the absence of such movements becomes more understandable. Furthermore, moves to promote more radical political thought, such as Henry Nye's abortive attempt in 1890 to establish an 'independent' local newspaper, foundered on widespread indifference. As men like Dr. Farr and Nye discovered, the middle classes worked hard to resist associations which sprung from below and originated independently of their influence. Instead, they promoted an 'anti-collective' philosophy that prevailed throughout local suburban society and proved too domineering to be ever seriously threatened.

Such an individualistic stance had a profound impact on the financing of public projects, and hence on the nature of local rating. Once the duties and responsibilities of the town's local authority became more extensive, thus requiring an apparently indefinite rise in the rates, the resident middle classes might have extended local taxation to the ground rent values of landed property. The fact that they were reluctant to do so demands investigation. On the surface, the taxation of ground rent would have seemed the simplest solution to their financial straits. Nevertheless, matters were not that clear-cut, and the issue calls into question the nature of relationships between the middle classes and landowners in late Victorian and Edwardian era. Within the complex web of society, the two were intricately tied on a number of dimensions. On the one hand, the 'gentry' of Bromley were closely connected with finance and business, and still enjoyed a patronage of local society that helped maintain harmonious social relations. In addition, those shopkeepers, professionals and merchants who held local office were often themselves owners of substantial acreages of land: the thought of taxing ground (rent) values would thus have been anathema to them. In any case, extending taxation to land was regarded as an unwarranted attack on property itself, and with the Home Rule crisis of the 1880's, property rights had become inexorably tied to the fate of the Union. With the nation's expansionist and interventionist policies abroad in the later nineteenth century, property rights had also become indelibly associated with notions of Empire.

Threats to private property formed the basis of middle-class resistance to the socialist ideas that were gaining in support towards the end of the century. During the years Prince Kropotkin, the Russian aristocrat turned revolutionary, was resident in the town of Bromley (1897-1905), he noted the grave anxiety the middle classes of England held at the emergence of socialism. He applauded their willingness to discuss measures which would alleviate the worst evils of poverty, although he recognised that this was driven primarily by a desire to avoid serious class conflict. As Kropotkin claimed, 'it was upon a series of palliative concessions, gradually growing in importance, that the chief weight was laid.'⁸³ He was sufficiently astute to realise that the middle classes and working classes of the nation were not separated by an insurmountable divide, and that the social and economic links between them were enough to prevent a workers' revolution.

Even though Kropotkin was referring to social relations in England as a whole, during his stay in Bromley he visited and mingled with local inhabitants from all classes who seemingly reinforced his findings. As has been shown, the middle classes of Bromley *were* fearful of 'radical' and socialist beliefs, and concerned fundamentally with the preservation - and hopefully advancement - of their family's status in the community. The 'progressives' and 'radicals' amongst them were few and far between, and their emergence towards the end of the century was treated as something of an anomaly. Such resistance to social change revealed itself in numerous ways, but most conspicuously with the suppression of public schemes of improvement. Here, images of the extravagance of 'municipal socialism' as practised by civic authorities elsewhere in the nation, were conjured up in the eyes of the electorate. Fear of social instability was also evident in the antipathy held for the local Co-operative Society, the Salvation Army, workers' trains and tramways, as well as for the rise of the low-born, unscrupulous speculative builder. Rowdy day-trippers and 'scrumper' also came in for criticism, 'singing and making horrible noises' of an evening on their return journey home.⁸⁴ All were seen as bringing this most worthy town into social disrepute. Finally, when the 'progressives' held the balance of power on the London County Council in the 1890s,⁸⁵ Bromley's Councillors reacted by resisting, on numerous occasions, all moves at amalgamation. Such reactions were all part of a deeply entrenched sense of 'localism' and a much wider defence of individualistic values against the spread of communal or socialist tendencies.

⁸³ P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, Vol. II, (1899) p. 314

⁸⁴ *BR* Aug. 1905

⁸⁵ A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (1990 edn.), p. 339ff

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Throughout the nineteenth century, the parish gentry saw themselves as the Guardians and patricians of the local community. Their domination and direction of local affairs in Bromley was at its height in the early Victorian period, where they acted as unelected Magistrates and Poor Law Guardians, and held court at meetings of the Parish Vestry. Driven by an inbred or adopted sense of superiority, duty and responsibility, they maintained a high profile in the life of the town until at least the end of the century. It was through such events as Colonel Long's annual tradesmen's cricket match at Bromley Hill, and Coles Child jun.'s 'coming of age' (April 1883), that a formidable and extensive paternalistic stance was effected.¹ Elements of dependency - both *real* and *perceived* - were extended to all those beneath them on the social scale. Landowners could achieve this either as the wardens of formal authority or, just as importantly, in a more informal capacity through personal contact. When speaking against the Landlord and Tenants' Bill at Agricultural Association's annual dinner of 1873, Charles Mills, Member of Parliament for the West Kent Division, argued that the bill was unnecessary and that agricultural labourers could always sort out their problems *personally* with their employers.² It was also *personal* contact - and unchallengeable *personal* dependency - that wedded the likes of the Coles Childs to both their own workforce and the tradesmen of the town. The celebrations at Coles Child jun.'s 'coming of age', accompanied as they were by mutual admiration and respect, served to show the depth of these personal ties. It was not for nothing that S. Atkins of the combined local friendly societies commented on this occasion that, 'You, Sir, are a representative of capital, whilst we, for the most part, are representatives of labour, but we are convinced that...there should ever be manifested that mutual respect and confidence which is so necessary to harmonious and continuous progress.'³

Maintaining such levels of contact and dependency inevitably became more difficult with the influx of newcomers to the town, notably those who owed none of their economic livelihood or financial status to the local economy. In any case, as we have seen, many of the landowners were prepared to sell off parts of their estate, thereby making the most from the town's enhancing popularity as a 'villa' retreat. Yet it was not only the fact that the parish gentry were willing to develop their estates commercially that social relations within the town were to change so markedly after the late 1860s. The distribution of Bromley's land amongst a considerable number of landowning families, coupled with the occasional dispute between major landowners,

¹ *BR* April 1883

² *BR* Nov. 1873

³ *BR* May 1883

further explains the lack of any concerted and co-ordinated effort on their part to resist the process of urbanisation and the avaricious designs of speculative developers.

The town developed most rapidly around the two railway stations because the respective landowners were more willing to exploit the potential wealth of their estates. Much of Bromley Common, in contrast, partially due to the resistance of the Norman family, survived the nineteenth century without major building projects. By the First World War there was scarcely a building on the west side of the Hastings road. The Normans were symbolic of successful eighteenth century business families investing in country estates, but those who invested in land late in the succeeding century tended to fall into one of two categories: speculative developers - or *rentiers* - seeking to gain the sizeable rewards on offer from urban rents, or wealthy middle-class gentlemen from London searching to lease or purchase a suburban retreat.⁴ It would therefore seem that there is some justification for W. D. Rubinstein's theory that businessmen, or even landowners-cum-businessmen, had become less interested in *large* landed estates by the 1870s. His ideas are reinforced by the findings of C. H. Feinstein, who has argued that capital was increasingly directed towards industry, trade and transport rather than land.⁵ At the same time, this in itself is not enough to refute F. M. L. Thompson's conviction that 'the alleged gap between newer business magnates and older landed elite has been bridged',⁶ for the two groups increasingly mixed in similar circles, such that landowners *per se* ceased to exist as such a distinct social entity.

In 1845 Benjamin Disraeli, influenced by Augustus Pugin and both the 'Young England' and 'Oxford' Movements, sought the solution to the nation's troubles in an idealised feudal society where the church and the wealthy landowners combined to protect the rights of the people.⁷ He had clearly shown his antipathy towards those businessmen or 'snobs' who had attempted to buy themselves social status through the ownership of land, whereby 'a baronetcy has become the distinction of the middle-class'.⁸ Three-quarters of a century earlier, Sir James Steuart, a Jacobite mercantilist, had warned that if landowners supported economic development and the principles of political economy, they would eventually be rooted out because their power would be

⁴ J. M. Rawcliffe, 'Bromley - Kentish Market Town to London Suburb 1841-1881' in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Rise of Suburbia* (Leicester 1982), p. 79

⁵ C. H. Feinstein, 'Capital Accumulation and the Industrial Revolution', in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (ed.), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700* Vol. 1, 1700-1860 (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 128-142

⁶ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Stitching it together again', *EHR* XLV, 2 (1992), p. 372

⁷ B. Disraeli, *Sybil or The Two Nations* (1845)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104

lost to the wealthy industrialists.⁹ With some qualification - landowners like George-Warde Norman who supported 'political economy' found themselves in a minority whilst the *commercial* middle classes gained more in the succeeding century than industrialists - there is some justification behind this fear of landowners surrendering their traditional monopoly of power. In Bromley at least, the distinction between land and business was imprecise, and the defence of agriculture insecure.¹⁰ Financial deficits and the inability to find land for ploughing matches had forced the local Agricultural Association into liquidation, even under the leadership of the district's most respected landed gentlemen: 'times had now changed, land was laid down with grass and our district has become suburban instead of remaining rural.'¹¹

When Rawcliffe investigated the processes by which Bromley's main landed estates were developed, he highlighted both the commercial and socio-cultural aspirations of the landowners concerned. It was not *simply* a matter of profit. George Wythes personally supervised the development of his Bickley Estate in the 1860s and 1870s, ensuring plots were at least two acres in size, and building homes that would only be accessible to City merchants, bankers and professional people.¹² This may not have proved as financially rewarding in the short term as selling off numerous smaller plots of land, but it ensured the growth of a socially exclusive estate. Similarly, building leases accompanying the sale of the Bromley Lodge Estate in 1872 stipulated ground rents at between four and six shillings per square foot.¹³ This encouraged the building of large 'villa' properties with frontages of up to 140 feet in depth and width. In contrast, Coles Child gave up all control over the development of land at the Brick Kiln Lane site when he sold off the freehold in March 1869, resulting in the erection of cheaper, low-rent cottages.¹⁴

By 1880, the majority of Bromley's estates had undergone some degree of residential development. Ordinarily this had been executed outside the immediate control of the former proprietor of the estate, and usually took place through a speculative builder, land or building society. Regardless of the developer, the gentleman landowner was in effect whittling away at his own power base in the community. The processes of suburbanisation, of which estate development was both a cause and symptom, came at a time when landowners were also suffering the ill effects of agricultural recession, the reform of county government, the extension of the

⁹ As mentioned by H. Perkin, *op. cit.* (1969), p. 187

¹⁰ See *BR* Nov. 1877 for reports on the demise of agriculture and farming

¹¹ *Ibid.*, where the words are those of R. Owen, Hon. Sec. of the West Kent Agricultural Association

¹² J. M. Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 44

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 56

¹⁴ *BR* April 1869

franchise and improvements in tenants' rights.¹⁵ The influence of landowning families such as the Childs, Scotts and Normans did not simply disappear overnight, but their position was progressively weakened. As an indication of the decline of the landed interest in Bromley, in the last quarter or more of the nineteenth century local big-wigs were concerned more with the study of their family histories than their family estates. In the early years of the twentieth century a number of local mansions were sold off as golf club-houses or private schools. The local press played their part in the landowners' demise with its fascination for the lives of gentlefolk who had recently passed away, remarking upon the correlation between their deaths and the disappearance of the old market town. The fact that the 'old' gentry were dying out was incidental; the reasons for the break-up of their estates were complex and more to do with the prevailing economic climate than coincidence. Nostalgia, titles of distinction and honorary positions were all that remained.

Significantly, no landowner ever became Mayor after the town was incorporated in 1903. Landlord absenteeism became increasingly apparent in the twentieth century as even the ornamental phase of public involvement began to vanish. Between the First and Second World War, the break-up of the landed estates continued apace. 'Turpington Town' and 'Downham' emerged as corporation ventures in the 1920s and 1930s,¹⁶ whilst the development of the 'Palace Estate' in the later 1920s, on the Coles Child's former property, served to offer a more prestigious alternative.¹⁷ Only Archibald Cameron Norman's personal intervention in the early 1930s saved much of his family's property from building development, when he sold 'Norman Park' to the town on condition it be used solely for pleasure purposes.¹⁸ However, the very sale of the property was indicative of the fact that amongst the members of the local community, landowners themselves had long since called the tune.

¹⁵ See D. Cannadine (ed.), *Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth Century Towns* (Leicester, 1982), p. 10

¹⁶ For the initial plans for these 'public' schemes, see *Bromley Borough Council Minutes of 1919 and 1924*.

¹⁷ See the *Bromley Borough Council Minutes, 1927*

¹⁸ For detail and plans for the park, see *BDT*, 12 Jan. 1934

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the balance of both power and wealth in the local community had shifted towards the middle class. Belonging to the 'middle class' might have been linked closely to occupation, income, wealth or simply possessions, yet it revealed itself in people's attitudes, habits, ideals and practices. The middle classes of Bromley aspired to sending their offspring to those educational establishments regarded as socially superior to the Church of England 'National' Schools. They also developed a cult of moral worth and domesticity that transcended all classes, even if these ideals were manifested in differing ways. To them, sobriety and self-discipline, as revealed through appeals for temperance, were a mark of respectability and status. Such attention to puritanical morality was also evident in their defence of the Sabbath. In the 1890s the district council prevented the playing of sports on Sundays on the town's recreation grounds;¹⁹ in 1913, the borough council opposed Sunday trading;²⁰ after the First World War, council and public alike spoke out against proposals for opening cinemas on the Sabbath.²¹

As Wells himself confessed, the middle classes were obsessed with image²². Appearances had to be maintained even when threatened by lack of finance. This fact undoubtedly helped in the development of another of the middle class's neuroses, that of thrift. The need to promote economy pervaded both voluntary and civic projects, particularly amongst the tradesmen and shopkeepers of the town. Those City professionals, merchants and financiers who enjoyed greater affluence might have been able to display less caution when it came to matters of expense, but they were still heavily influenced by monetary concerns. Certainly in the early period, no member of Bromley's middle class could match the wealth of the local gentry, with the possible exception of Joseph Edlmann, the Austrian merchant of Southborough. This encouraged the sentiment of 'living within ones means', and helped lead to a myriad of voluntary societies geared towards collective security. Yet unlike the more radical co-operatives that emerged in mid century, societies like the Bromley and South-Eastern Building Society continued to propagate *laissez-faire* ideals. The notion of self-help, as against state intervention or communal ownership, was perpetuated by individuals who saw themselves as providing mutual benefit in a commercially insecure world.

These values had a decisive impact on the local community because they led to the rejection of potentially expensive projects aimed at public improvement. 'Expense' was the operative word. To be more exact, most middle-class contemporaries would

¹⁹ BR Dec. 1896

²⁰ BR Nov. 1913

²¹ See *Bromley Borough Council Minutes*, 1932, 1933 and 1937

²² H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*. (1934), p.70 2, p.*

have used the term 'waste', since this evoked more accurately their feelings about excessive public expenditure. Throughout the Victorian and Edwardian period in Bromley, the nature and level of public funding stood out as the most controversial issue in local administrative affairs. 'Economy' and 'efficiency' were the by-words of both elected and non-elected representatives. In their efforts, local administrators proved to be more successful in achieving the first of these claims than the latter, an eventuality made the more likely by a combination of an 'amateurish' status and ill-defined powers.

In terms of financing local institutions, voluntary subscriptions, charitable donations and benevolent gifts remained the order of the day. Resistance to funding from the public purse was a feature of local society that persisted until at least the last decade of the nineteenth century. Even after this time, so-called 'progressives' like Henry Nye objected to extravagant local authority expenditure that might increase the local rate. According to Asa Briggs' work on Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and London, such obsession with 'economy' stemmed from the socio-economic status of local administrators, most of whom were tradesmen unaccustomed to and alarmed at dealing with large sums of money.²³ However, motivations went deeper than this. They went into the very heart and soul of middle-class ideology, whether it be that of the High Street butcher or the 'City' merchant banker. Since 'thrift' had brought success in their own business lives, and since 'thrift' tied together disparate groups amongst the middle class,²⁴ 'thrift' inevitably seeped into all aspects of local government. If it ceased to do so, then there were individuals like Major General Henry P. Babbage, and organisations such as the Ratepayers' Association, to offer timely reminders.

One of the great ironies of Victorian local government is that for the majority of the period, those holding electoral responsibility were invariably amongst the highest ratepayers, and thus obliged to finance public projects from a rate that hit *them* the hardest. Records that survive suggest that a smaller proportion of the local population were paying rates by 1870 than 1850, thus imposing an even greater burden on existing ratepayers.²⁵ Another associated irony was that individuals actually aspired to be 'ratepayers' because of the degree of status this entailed through the ownership or occupation of property and the right to vote in local elections. In practice, then, by

²³ A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (1963), p. 208

²⁴ It may well be that members of the professional middle class, notably doctors, were less heavily influenced by notions of 'thrift' and 'economy', and were thus more likely to both propose and support financially 'extravagant' schemes of public improvement.

²⁵ *Poor Rate Assessment Books*, Parish of Bromley, 1850-1870.

keeping rates at a minimum, local administrators were keeping their own personal expenditure within bearable limits. Asa Briggs has inferred that this would have been more significant for the less affluent tradesman than the wealthy financier or merchant, whose personal income could afford heavier financial burdens²⁶ Thus far, more research is required before such assumptions can be made for Bromley. Even rich landowners like William John Coles Child Esq., coal merchant and proprietor of the prestigious Palace Estate, could be vehement in his demands to hold down the rates²⁷ On the other hand, less prosperous men like J. Hutchings, carpenter, and E. Peill, contractor and coal merchant, consistently advocated policies in the 1890s and early 1900s that would have necessitated much higher levels of public expenditure. In both cases, it was not simply a question of financial budgets or socio-economic background, but rather of ideological belief.

Neither the example of Bromley in this period, nor the nature of the middle classes who were attracted to the town, fit the classic 'rus in urbe' mould. The Kentish market town of Bromley was indeed irresistible to those in London who had the financial resources to exploit its most attractive features. Even if excessively romanticised, illustrations and photographs of the latter part of the nineteenth century - such as that shown on in Figure 7.1 - give vent to the appealingly rustic nature of the district. At only ten miles from London Bridge, the town was also within easy reach of the capital. Yet even before the first railway station opened in 1858, several carriage and coach companies ferried back and forth those residents who worked in the City²⁸ In truth, Bromley was 'rus *beyond* urbe', since fields of golden corn separated the town from the spreading metropolis for the whole of the period studied. By 1891, the town had increased its popularity as a place of retirement, whilst still only a third of the middle-class population of the town actually worked in London.

²⁶ A. Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.

²⁷ See Chapter 5, p. 188

²⁸ *Pigot & Co.'s Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography of Counties Kent, Surrey and Sussex*, 1839



Figure 7.1 **Labourers on Springhill Farm, c 1883 (Source BPL)**
In the 1920's, the fields disappeared under the bricks and mortar
of the Downham Estate, then London's largest public housing project.

Bromley's 'commuters' were the wealthiest members of the local middle-class community, the merchant bankers, ship brokers, exchange merchants and barristers. They rented the most prestigious properties in Bromley, employing the services of at least two or three servants, and often as many as nine or ten. This helped increase the size of the 'average' middle-class household by the end of the century, as did the fact that most families who came to the town after the 1860s were already well-established. Healthy refuges with open spaces were attractive environments in which to raise children, something hitherto neglected or disparaged by arch-cynics of suburbia and historians alike.²⁹ Landowners and contractors played upon the ambitions of these families for social enhancement, thus encouraging the development of exclusive mini-suburbs that segregated the different social classes. The illustrious home of South Hill at Sundridge Park, for a long while the residence of Thomas C. Dewey, President of the Prudential Assurance Company whose estate at his death in 1924 stood at over £750,000, was a far cry from the agricultural labourers' cottages to be found in the

²⁹ See Introduction for the cynical thoughts of Jonathan Glancey. Most historians of suburbs and suburban life have neglected the attractions that suburbs might hold for families with children.

adjacent ward of Plaistow. In City circles, Bromley became renowned for its fashionable yet genteel 'villa' dwellings, of the kind portrayed by Henry Arthur Jones in his West End play *The Silver King* (1907).

Yet Bromley was no dormitory suburb. Given its geographical position, the town naturally benefited from economic links with the City, but without ever being entirely dependent upon it. Indeed, Bromley maintained an economic vitality of its own throughout the period. The smaller towns and villages in the surrounding area, such as Shortlands, Keston, Hayes and Farnborough, looked increasingly to Bromley as a centre of commercial activity. Many of the 'craft' enterprises and the producer-retailers in the town *did* begin to die out, but the process was slow and they were superseded by a host of new enterprises. The arrival of new families, particularly those of the affluent City merchants and financiers, stimulated business by their demand for a huge array of goods and services. Judging from the 1911 census figures alone, an army of maids, cooks, grooms and gardeners resided in the town to provide the labour force for their salubrious homes.

The prospect of employment and commercial success brought in newcomers from a *mélange* of social backgrounds. Some farmers or small tradesmen who came to the town to establish retail enterprises fell by the wayside, as did H. G. Wells' father. Others, however, expanded their businesses into 'multiple' stores or department stores, as did Daniel Grinsted and Frederick Medhurst respectively. Having made the most from their opportunities, Daniel Grinsted and Frederick Medhurst involved themselves deeply in the affairs of the town, seeking to gain social recognition via business and marriage in line with their commercial success. In so doing, they forged close ties with those City merchants, financiers and professionals who were also part of the town's administrative and cultural network. Occasionally, as over drainage and the Board's vain attempt to take over the old market, the interests of the two 'groups' might diverge. Ordinarily, however, the tradesmen and retailers of the town looked up to their more affluent associates, allowing them to adopt the more prominent, conspicuous and distinguished roles in both the town's local government and its multitude of clubs and societies.

Across the nation as a whole, it was the *upper* middle class who superseded the parish gentry in calling the tune in local affairs across the nation. According to L. Davidoff, they followed in the mould already established by the landed classes, and 'in their large suburban villas with a complement of two to four indoor servants and

several gardeners, they entertained formally and patronised local events.³⁰ However, the involvement of both *upper* and *lower* middle class in the affairs of their local communities extended beyond pure patronage. As this thesis has shown, they could not afford to sit back and allow society to develop without their guidance and direction. Threats to their wealth, property, status and ideals meant that it was as important for the middle class as the formerly dominant landed gentry that they took a leading role in the administration and cultural life of their local society. This they accomplished so successfully in Bromley that they were able to nurture the fundamental social characteristics of the town with the minimum of interference.

It was essential that the middle class remained united if they were to achieve homogeneity in the cultural and social forms that they promoted. Primarily, it was common values and common ideals that wedded together these different groups amongst the town's middle class, as well as helping to cement relations between these groups and the parish gentry. In the period studied, then, Bromley society was *not* necessarily riven by division, even though Perkin has suggested that this was a national phenomenon in *The Rise of Professional Society* (1990).³¹ There was no division between an entrepreneurial and a professional ideal.³² Writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, T. H. S. Escott was at pains to draw the close relationships that existed not simply between the middle class and peerage but also between the different occupational groups within the middle class itself.³³ There may have been differences in the functions performed by the professions, the merchants and the retailers, but they were drawn together by a shared ideology. In Bromley, at least, the middle classes were soldered by mutual interest, propagated by an influential elite. Unity persisted even where uniformity did not.

The character and extent of this 'patronage' was further revealed in the nature of office-holding in the town. Concentrated as it was into the hands of relatively few individuals with senior posts held by the upper middle class, it revealed domination by an altruistic elite. In the period between 1840 and 1905, as few as 33 individuals held a third of all offices. This included official positions in local clubs and societies, where the need for money and status granted the *upper* middle class of merchants and financiers a special place in the membership structure. If the expanding middle class of the town placed their trust in this elite, then they did so because it was

³⁰ L. Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, Vol.2, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 100

³¹ H. Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society* (1990)

³² *Ibid.*

³³ T. H. S. Escott, *England: Her People, Polity and Pursuits* (1885 edn.), pp. 22-45

flexible enough to reflect changes in their own composition. In any case, a range of societies emerged after mid-century that provided a formidable base for middle-class power.³⁴ At the same time, these societies helped reinforce social distinctions across the wider community, securing the middle class against threats from below.

By the end of the century, it was these threats that provided the greatest concern. As C. F. Masterman, that eminent commentator on suburban England, concluded, 'The Rich despise the Working People; the Middle Classes fear them.'³⁵ As shown by the experience of the Wells' family, or at least Wells' recollections of this experience, the middle classes were fearful of the prospect of social degradation.³⁶ A variety of means were thus employed to separate themselves from their subordinates. The church, the chapel, the independent retail shop, the friendly society, the literary institute and the parish school all disseminated a common message about the supremacy of self-improvement, social distinction and the desire for social stability. Further edification was provided by civic ceremonies, public architecture and the increasing 'segregation' of the times, both physical and cultural. Not only did the development of exclusive zones of grand detached properties enhance this social distancing, but so also did the servants, gigs and 'trappings' of middle class 'gentility'. These brought the wealthy businessmen a measure of power, status and respect that they could never hope to gain from business success alone.

Through their institutions and activities the middle class also promoted the righteousness and morality of their cause. This ranged from the spread of temperance ideals to the closing down of traditional fairs, both reactions against perceived immorality, unruliness and impropriety. Women in particular, through their philanthropic and charity work, as well as their more limited involvement in local government, were involved in propagating the virtues of 'social purity'.³⁷ Middle class men began to assume that their contribution to society revolved around the reform of manners and morals, thus encouraging a separation of spheres and the 'gendering' of the middle class.³⁸ In effect, the drive for moral superiority was vital in shaping middle-class values and in distinguishing the middle class from both the aristocracy and the working class.³⁹ It was evident from the local press, particularly the less

³⁴ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 416-449

³⁵ C. F. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (1911 edn.), pp. 66-67

³⁶ H. G. Wells, *op. cit.*

³⁷ L. Bland, *Banishing the Beast - English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (1995), p. 112-114

³⁸ C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class - Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 86

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95

'progressive' press, that the maintenance of a strict puritan morality was vital to the stability of social order. For this reason, when the *Record* circulated reports about drunkenness and vice, as they did in explaining away the fate of Jane Maria Jackson, a domestic servant who was found dead in the bottom of a local well in January 1868, it was elevating the moral superiority of its middle-class readers, a class obsessed with threats of social revolution.⁴⁰ At the same time, the middle class recognised that it was essential for them to play their altruistic role to the full, for it was in their own interests to be seen closing the divide with the labouring population.⁴¹ The profusion of philanthropic activity, religious missions, plans for social improvement and projects for expanding popular education were all aspects of this bridge-building process.

It is perhaps surprising that this influential and paternalistic class failed to organise themselves in a political fashion, but this should not disguise the fact that they were held together by shared values. These factors helped create a cohesion perhaps unexpected in a class so wide and diverse. Unity in the nineteenth century did not mean everyone pulling in the same direction, especially since influence and direction stemmed from a small but prominent group of individuals. Yet this 'elite' was broad enough to preserve consent, faith and social harmony amongst the community of property holders whom it claimed to represent. Whatever the contrasts in income, wealth and status, the middle class were at pains to preserve social distinctions at all costs. This even led to warnings over the possible domination by the masses, due to the supposed dramatic decline in the size of middle-class families. In the case of Bromley's middle-class population, this was patently not the case, but the warnings served to show how it was always easier to unite against a common threat, that is social instability, than in favour of any commonly held objective. In 1900, there were in fact few controversial issues that could severely upset the unity of the middle classes of this affluent town.

The nature of local society in Bromley during this period was very different from that to be found in those cities and resort towns upon which historians have tended to focus their studies. There was no aristocratic landowner to dominate the

⁴⁰ *BR* March 1868

⁴¹ M. E. Rose, 'Social Change & The Industrial Revolution', in R. Floud & D. McCloskey (ed.), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, Vol. 1, 1700-1860 (Cambridge, 1981), p. 259

local economy and dictate affairs, the landed interest being represented by a number of *lesser* gentry with few qualms about developing the commercial value of their estates. This not only had a decisive impact upon the persistence of landowner influence in the local community, but it also eased social relations with the *new* wealth as personified by a growing band of *upper* middle class. These businessmen, merchants and professionals from the City had been encouraged to come to Bromley by its proximity to London, and it was they who formed the new social elite in the pattern already established - yet all but relinquished - by the parish gentry.

The arrival of well-to-do 'newcomers' in the town strengthened the self-confidence of the middle class in its dealings with the local gentry, but it also raised questions about the uniformity of interest amongst the middle classes as a whole. Throughout this thesis, it has been accepted that *disagreements* within the town's middle class, and between the middle class and the local gentry, *did* exist, but to no great depth or degree. There were certainly a number of middle-class gentlemen and women who were eagerly urging further social or administrative reform, as with Dr. Farr, Mary L. Heppel, Charles Gedney and Henry Nye. There were also times when occupational sub-groups within the middle class failed to see eye to eye. The City financier, for example, who resided in the town but had no vested economic interest in it, was more vocal in his opposition to the ending of the quaint, ancient Market than the High Street grocer whose business suffered every Thursday from associated traffic problems, congestion and competitive pricing. Finally, there were numerous middle-class families who played little or no part in either the direction of local affairs or the invigoration of local society,⁴² However, there were no deeply-rooted splits amongst those with influence in the local community, and where more outward direct local concern was absent, deeper manifestations of belief and ideology still shone through. Ideals held in common by the 'mass' of the suburb's middle class made for a unity of mind and intention that made involvement in administrative affairs barely necessary: that is, until such occasions when, as a result of threats to public health, to the local rate or even private property, these values might be seriously undermined.

Through the mechanisms of local government, and through less conspicuous, sub-conscious strategies deployed in an elaborate social network, the middle classes disseminated their values amongst the local population. In so doing, power and influence was transferred away from the landed gentry, and instead it was the middle

⁴² *Baxter Newscuttings*, Book 1, pp. 132-135. In 1898 only 36% of the electorate voted in the local election. This compared with 64% in 1894, the final election of the Bromley Urban District Council which had aroused much interest through the establishment of a Bromley District Electors Association that demanded representation according to the population of respective wards.

classes who forged the town in their own image. Bromley's own economic vitality and strength of 'community', strong as they were by the eve of the First World War, became masked by outward manifestations of exclusivity, retreat and social distinction. This was how inhabitants, or at least those in positions of power, liked to portray the town. To them, Bromley was not a 'market place' but an attractive resort, a place of temporary escape. As such, the town was set apart from the busy, hectic, socially 'inferior' suburbs of Camberwell or Catford. Innovations such as Board Schools, Free Libraries or Municipal Utility Companies were slow in coming to Bromley. Even though in close proximity to London, the town's 'modernisation' lagged behind both London's and other that of other major towns and cities. To outsiders, notably those from the capital, Bromley appeared an idyllic suburban residence from which to commute, an image exploited and reinforced by developers and estate agents within the town. In practice, Bromley's development since the early nineteenth century had been much more complex. By 1914, it had taken up a rather anomalous position of being neither market town nor suburb. There existed a disjunction between how the town was perceived by those who wanted Bromley to be another Tunbridge Wells, and the daily 'reality' of a town linked closely to the Metropolis.

The portrayal of the town as an exclusive retreat was lent greater weight by a *lower* middle class who maintained a deference to their wealthy 'City' counterparts that was to prove crucial in the future. The economic interests of the *upper* middle class were tied much more closely to London and beyond than the business fortunes of Bromley. By failing to organise themselves in any effective fashion - either politically or economically - the local entrepreneurs had put their faith in a group of individuals whose 'corporate' interests in the twentieth century were to encourage the decline of the local trader. By turning their backs on the working class of the district, both skilled and unskilled, and by glorifying the *middle class* image, in the long term the *lower* middle class were guilty of undermining their own existence. At the end of the day, the influence of the *upper* middle class, especially the values that they disseminated, was so effective that the image of the commuter's affluent retreat stuck. It was this image that encouraged later observers to adopt the town as a quintessential, middle-class suburb.

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