

## THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF LIVERPOOL, 1790–1850: THE EARLY LEARNED SOCIETIES

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In 1853 delegates from four of Liverpool's leading learned societies, the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society (henceforth the Lit. and Phil.), the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, the Liverpool Polytechnic Society and the Liverpool Architectural and Archaeological Society, met to consider the feasibility of union. The committee reported 'that the position, population and influence of Liverpool authorize and require the institution of a large Society, which, without forfeiting a single advantage of the separate and smaller ones, would possess much more than their united influence and usefulness'.<sup>1</sup> The failure to bring this initiative to fruition, at a time of growing municipal involvement in cultural and educational provision, was indicative of the passing of an age in which Liverpool's intellectual life had been led and dominated by its merchant élite and the voluntary cultural organizations and institutions which they had been instrumental in founding.

Although the creation of such associations was not a new phenomenon in the first half of the nineteenth century, the increase in their number, variety and public importance has been seen as remarkable, especially after 1780. For the urban

1 *Report of the delegates from the four learned societies which publish transactions, on the subject of union* (Liverpool, 1854).

male middle classes, cultural societies in particular provided a means of asserting power, status and identity, and played an important role in helping to forge a sense of class solidarity amongst urban élites, otherwise sharply divided by their political and religious convictions.<sup>2</sup> In Liverpool such organizations also made a vital contribution to the redefinition of the image and identity of the town itself. The eighteenth century had witnessed a rapid rise in Liverpool's fortunes, from an insignificant seaport at the opening of the century to a position at its close where the town was vaunting its position as Britain's second city. However, in 1795 James Wallace's evaluation of the town's intellectual development contrasted sharply with this economic success story:

Arts and sciences are inimical to the spot, absorbed in the nautical vortex, the only pursuit of the inhabitants is COMMERCE . . . Liverpool is the only town in England of any pre-eminency that has not one single erection or endowment, for the advancement of science, the cultivation of the arts, or promotion of useful knowledge . . . the liberal arts are a species of merchandize in which few of the inhabitants are desirous to deal, unless for exportation.<sup>3</sup>

The 'typical' Liverpool merchant of the last quarter of the century has been characterized as a 'mercantilist, a materialist, and an empiricist' whose first line of self-definition was through material possessions, conspicuous consumption and spatial separation from his fellow townsmen. The merchants' preoccupation with money-making, although often criticized, was hardly surprising. From the outset, Liverpool trade, based on West Africa and the West Indies, was highly speculative, bringing riches or ruin on an enormous scale.<sup>4</sup> Before a merchant could invest his time and energy in less material pursuits, it was first necessary to acquire the security and surplus wealth which would allow him do so. Even then investment in dock-building schemes, transport links and the

2 R. J. Morris, 'Clubs, societies and associations', in *The Cambridge social history of Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge, 1990), III, p. 395.

3 James Wallace, *A general and descriptive history of the antient and present state of the town of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1795), p. 283.

4 S. G. Checkland, 'Economic attitudes in Liverpool, 1793-1807', *Econ. H.R.*, 2nd series, V (1952-3), p. 65.

new industrial undertakings all had prior claim on capital over investment in 'the more refined pursuits of a leisured class'.<sup>5</sup>

According to Ramsay Muir, it was 'the pleasures of the table' that provided the chief relaxation of Liverpool's eighteenth-century merchants 'from the exacting labours of commerce'.<sup>6</sup> If they joined a club, it was of the convivial rather than cultural variety, with drinking, dining and gossip the main activities. The Ugly Face Club (1743) and the Unanimous Club (1753) attracted 'gentlemen of the first families of the town; many of them were members of the Council, and several of whom afterwards served the offices of mayor and bailiff of Liverpool'.<sup>7</sup> The Mock Corporation of Sefton, which continued from 1753 to 1829, attracted more than three hundred Liverpool citizens during its lifetime, nearly two thirds of whom appear in *Gore's Liverpool Directory* under the title of merchants, tradesmen and gentlemen.<sup>8</sup> Unlike mock corporations in other towns, its programme was social rather than political. It had a pew in Sefton church (although this religious commitment was tempered by the members' custom of timing the sermon with a stop-watch), elaborate rituals and a distaste for party disputes.<sup>9</sup>

The branches of the arts which held most appeal to Liverpool's merchants in this period were the most public and the most social, notably the theatre. The need for a well-built theatre in Liverpool, a prerequisite for every town of any pretension, was met at mid-century. Music, too, attracted the

5 F. E. Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey: an economic history of a port, 1700-1970* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 25.

6 R. Muir, *History of Liverpool* (London, 1907), p. 186.

7 Edward Howell, *Ye Ugly Face Club, Leverpoole, 1743-1757: a verbatim reprint from the original MSS., in the collection of the late Joseph Mayer* (Liverpool, 1912); Liv. R.O., 367 UNA 1 (Liverpool Unanimous Society, 1753-78). A full account of the club is given by Richard Brooke, *Liverpool as it was during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, 1775-1800* (Liverpool, 1853), pp. 290-8.

8 D. J. Pope, 'Shipping and trade in the port of Liverpool, 1783-1793' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool Univ., 1970), II, p. 460.

9 An excellent account of the club can be found in W. D. Caroe, E. J. A. Gordon and Engelbert Horley, *Sefton: a descriptive and historical account comprising the collected notes and researches of the late Rev. Engelbert Horley, together with records of the mock corporation* (London, 1893).

patronage of the wealthy, and on occasion of the town council, from early in the century. Oratorios were performed in St Peter's church from 1766 onwards, and concerts of a more popular sort were given in the Ranelagh Gardens. Support for a building designed to reflect this musical interest attracted willing investors, and 1786 saw the erection, by public subscription, of a purpose-built music hall in Bold Street. A four-day festival of sacred music was held in 1784, and from 1799 until 1836 similar festivals were commonly held at three-year intervals, becoming a major feature of the social and cultural life of the town. They were fashionable occasions, accompanied by balloon ascents, fancy-dress balls and other attractions. The regular choral and miscellaneous concerts, performances of oratorios in local churches and visits from foreign opera companies were also important factors in the Liverpool musical scene.

For some merchants, however, rising affluence did appear to encourage a desire for intellectual self-improvement. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the beginning of public lecturing in Liverpool, a phenomenon that became common in provincial towns in the eighteenth century; 'knowledge is become a fashionable thing', claimed one top lecturer. Natural philosophy was the usual content of these lectures. The first course known to have been held in Liverpool was given by Adam Walker, a self-educated Yorkshire schoolmaster, in 1771. Such lecture courses were often accompanied by spectacular experiments and demonstrations, and they appear to have been attended mainly by the well-to-do merchants and professional men of Liverpool and their wives.<sup>10</sup> Debates in local coffee houses also attracted a good response in the town. Although there is no evidence as to the composition of the audience and the debates were free, the considerable sums raised for charity on these occasions suggest that in the main the participants were drawn from the wealthier stratum of society.<sup>11</sup>

10 Thomas Kelly, *Adult education in Liverpool: a narrative of two hundred years* (Liverpool, 1960), pp. 9–10.

11 Liv. R.O., 942 WAK (5): papers of Wallace Heaton Wakefield, 1861–1936.

An increasing demand in Liverpool for the 'amenities of civilized life' was also reflected by a growing demand for books, newspapers and periodicals. In 1758 the Liverpool Library was founded; it survived until 1941. This was not the first subscription library in the British Isles (precedence in the matter goes to Scotland), but it was the first of the English gentlemen's subscription libraries, and was widely imitated in other provincial towns.<sup>12</sup> The entry fees ensured exclusivity: initially set at one guinea with an annual subscription of five shillings, they rose steadily as the century progressed, and exclusivity remained a feature in the nineteenth century. The opening of the Free Public Library in 1852 served to ensure that membership of the Liverpool Library was somewhat less of a privilege. It is interesting to note that in contrast to the early learned societies, the library was open to ladies as well as gentlemen. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the library acted to some extent as an informal literary club when committee meetings took place, generally in the Star and Garter Hotel in Paradise Street. Here, men such as William Roscoe, Dr James Currie, the fourth William Rathbone (merchant) and Dr John Rutter met together for business, dinner and conversation.<sup>13</sup>

Efforts to found formal literary and scientific societies with less obvious advantages were not so successful. In 1779 a society calling itself the Liverpool Philosophical and Literary Society was inaugurated. Although surviving only until 1783, it is interesting in that it preceded the renowned Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society (founded at the house of Dr Thomas Percival in 1781), which became the prototype for similar middle-class societies throughout the provinces. In 1784 a new society was founded which eventually took the name of the Literary Society. Members met at each other's

12 Warrington (1760), Manchester (1765), Lancaster, Carlisle, Leeds and Halifax (1768), Rochdale and Settle (1770), Sheffield (1771), Bradford (1774). Others founded before the close of the century included Birmingham (1779), Newcastle (1787) and York (1794). The first subscription library in Britain was founded in Scotland in 1741: Thomas Kelly, *A history of adult education in Great Britain* (Liverpool, 1970), p. 86.

13 Kelly, *Adult education in Liverpool*, pp. 7-8.

houses for discussions on literary and scientific subjects. Among these were William Roscoe, William Rathbone, the Unitarian ministers William Shepherd and John Yates, William Smyth (afterwards Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge) and probably also the blind poet Edward Rushton, who was said to have belonged to a group of this kind in 1790. The society, however, came to an end in the early 1790s, when the suspicious atmosphere engendered by the French Revolution made such meetings open to the accusation of sedition.

Efforts to institute societies devoted expressly to art suffered a similar fate. Following the establishment of the Royal Academy in London in 1768, a number of attempts were made to found an academy in Liverpool, both for teaching and for exhibition purposes. A Society of Artists was formed for this purpose in 1769 but survived for only a few months. A second Society of Artists, founded in 1773, lasted two years. During this time, courses of lectures were delivered on architecture, anatomy, perspective and chemistry, and a public exhibition, the first of its kind outside London, was held in 1774. The young William Roscoe was a member of the group, reading his poem on the establishment of the academy before the exhibition and exhibiting an Indian ink sketch. The society was disbanded in 1775 (the opening year of the War of American Independence) and it was not until peace in 1783 that Roscoe and his friends could resume their efforts. Two further exhibitions were held in 1784 and 1787. The exhibitors were mainly Liverpool artists, but Reynolds, Gainsborough, Fuseli and Wright all exhibited. In 1794, because of the French wars, activities had to be suspended, not resuming until 1810, as the Liverpool Academy of Art.<sup>14</sup>

Although only short-lived, these early literary societies were significant for bringing together a group of men who were to be instrumental in founding the longer-lasting institutions which formed the mainframe of Liverpool's intellectual life in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was these men who were to take the lead in the cultural advancement of Liverpool: in politics, reformers; in religion, predominantly Unitarian or Quaker.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

An assessment of Liverpool's intellectual development by J. W. Hudson in 1851 was very different from James Wallace's fiercely critical judgement of 1795: 'There is no town in the Kingdom in which there are so many temples dedicated to the improvement of mankind as in Liverpool, nor can any city provide equal evidence of the zeal of its Merchant Princes in raising mansions for the advancement of civilization.'<sup>15</sup> Although hyperbole doubtless played its part in both appraisals, Liverpool's cultural image does appear to have undergone a marked transformation in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although the motivation for this cultural redefinition can be linked to the desire of Liverpool's merchants to create a socio-cultural identity consonant with the town's new economic prominence, it has been suggested that added impetus came from the changing national ideology in relation to the slave trade. With the inauguration of the national abolitionist movement in 1787, public opinion was altering, and Liverpool (whose share of the slave trade had previously been a source of envy) now found itself becoming increasingly isolated and facing not just a threat to its economic base but also a challenge to its cultural identity.<sup>16</sup> In 1788 Matthew Gregson (a prominent local supporter of the slave trade) was addressed by a London correspondent as 'a proper Liverpool man'; the correspondent dubbed himself 'humanity man',<sup>17</sup> clearly suggesting that to the outside world these sobriquets were irreconcilable. Although the involvement of Liverpool's merchants in the slave trade increased rather than diminished in the twenty years prior to abolition, evidence from local guides has been used to indicate a growing unease at this alleged 'stain' on Liverpool's reputation. The *Liverpool guide* in 1799 stressed the importance of the town's other commercial ties and insisted that the trade was conducted mainly by outsiders.<sup>18</sup> The strident criticism

15 J. W. Hudson, *The history of adult education* (London, 1851), p. 96.

16 Seymour Drescher, 'The slaving capital of the world: Liverpool and national opinion in the age of abolition', *Slavery and Abolition*, IX (2) (1988), p. 129.

17 Liv. R.O., 920 GRE 17/41, David Samwell to Matthew Gregson, 1788.

18 Drescher, 'Slaving capital', pp. 133-40.

which descended on the town (from neighbouring Manchester in particular) may well have been an important factor in strengthening the merchants' resolve to legitimize their status as Liverpool 'gentlemen'. This commitment was further underlined by the adoption of William Roscoe, dissenter, radical politician and abolitionist, as the architect and embodiment of Liverpool's cultural aspirations.

Born in 1753, the son of a Liverpool innkeeper and market gardener, Roscoe rose to become a renowned historian, botanist, minor poet, artist and art lover, member of parliament and opponent of the slave trade. But he was also lawyer, banker and businessman, and as such involved in and committed to the commercial success of the port. In 1971 a noted historian of Liverpool wrote: 'If a description of the spirit of Liverpool between 1790 and 1820 were to be sought, it could not be better described than by the term "Roscoe's Liverpool".'<sup>19</sup>

The publication of Roscoe's biography of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1796, highlighting the Anglo-Florentine entente between commerce and culture, has been cited as 'a turning point, if not the starting point of Liverpool's intellectual life'.<sup>20</sup> Roscoe portrayed Florence and its ruler as the apotheosis of the union between culture and commerce, and although he insisted that his interest was literary and cultural rather than political, denying that the book had any relevance for contemporary problems, it was here that Roscoe looked for a role model for his native town. His belief in the efficacy of Lorenzo's academies, schools, libraries and associations provided him with the blueprint for the construction of a similar cultural infrastructure in Liverpool.

The analogy of Liverpool and Renaissance Florence proved particularly appealing to his fellow townsmen. Roscoe had succeeded in rewriting history in a way that allowed Liverpool's merchants to celebrate themselves, and they were now willing to accept Roscoe, the man of letters, as their cultural icon, whilst at the same time rejecting Roscoe, the

19 Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey*, p. 43.

20 C. Northcote Parkinson, *The rise of the port of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1952), p. 3.

Radical politician and abolitionist. When the Roscoe circle regrouped to establish the first of the enduring nineteenth-century cultural institutions, their efforts received a very different reception from that which had accompanied their earlier efforts. The first evidence of the merchant élite's willingness to eschew religious and political animosities in the cause of cultural redefinition came in 1797 with the founding of the Athenaeum, one of the largest and most impressive of the urban gentlemen's libraries founded in Britain at this time. Useful as the Liverpool Library was in providing current publications, it was inadequate to meet the demands of a scholar such as Roscoe, being considered 'not sufficiently select in its choice of books' and to have too many subscribers.<sup>21</sup> Proposals for the new institution were drawn up and circulated to the town's leading five hundred male citizens (women were not granted full membership until 1996), eliciting an immediate and favourable response. Although the majority of the founders were men associated with reform and dissent, the oligarchic and staunchly Tory common council recognized the new foundation as a potential ornament to the town and looked on it with approval, granting it the reversionary interest in its premises. The mayor was elected an honorary member and the first president, George Case, was a member of the council. A catalogue of the Athenaeum stressed that

Although the proposal for founding the Athenaeum was brought forward at a time of great political excitement . . . this state of public feeling was not allowed to prejudice the design. On the contrary, men of all shades of opinion, political and religious, concurred with equal zeal in promoting the success of an institution designed to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

An analysis of the initial subscription list confirms that this judgement was based on fact rather than rhetoric. The newsroom opened on 1 January 1799, and the library on

- 21 Liv. R.O., 942 HOL (8), 'Outlines of a plan for a library and newsroom'.
- 22 *Catalogue of the Athenaeum Library, Liverpool* (London, 1864), preface, p. xiii. In 1800 Samuel Taylor Coleridge remarked on the way in which the founding of the Athenaeum had 'stifled party spirit' in the town: *Unpublished letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (London, 1932), I, p. 145.

1 July of the same year, with membership of the Athenaeum quickly becoming a mandatory emblem of status for the Liverpool commercial aristocracy, the value of shares tripling inside two years.<sup>23</sup>

The founding of the Athenaeum spurred the Liverpool Library into fresh initiatives, a new building, the Lyceum in Bold Street, being opened in 1803, and as a result of a disagreement among the promoters of the scheme, a rival organization, the Union Newsroom, was established in Duke Street in 1800. The Athenaeum also excited emulation in the international arena: the Boston Athenaeum (1807) modelled its laws on those of the Liverpool institution, with the intention to 'make ours as much like that as the different circumstances of the countries will admit'.<sup>24</sup> Encouraged by this success, the same intellectual coterie was instrumental in founding the Botanic Garden (1802) and the Academy of Art (1810).

In 1812 Liverpool followed Manchester (1781) and Newcastle (1793) in founding a literary and philosophical society, which was the town's leading learned society in the first half of the century. The considerable civic and cultural importance which the presence and date of foundation of such societies gave to nineteenth-century provincial towns<sup>25</sup> is illustrated by the emphasis that local historians have placed on

23 Thomas Fletcher was one of the original members. After the collapse of his business in 1833 he was forced to relinquish his share. The importance attached to membership is reflected by the action of his fellow Unitarian Charles Booth, who presented Fletcher with a share as a gift: *Autobiographical memoirs of Thomas Fletcher of Liverpool, obiit 1850, written in the year 1843* (Liverpool, 1893), p. 67.

24 Ronald Story, 'Class and culture in Boston: the Athenaeum, 1807-1860', *American Quarterly*, XXVII (2) (1975), p. 186.

25 Asa Briggs, *Victorian cities* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 47. Societies which included the words 'literary' and 'philosophical' in their title were founded in Manchester (1781), Newcastle (1793), Liverpool (1812), Leeds (1818), Sheffield, Whitby, Hull (1822), Bristol (1823), Wakefield (1826), Halifax (1830), Leicester (1835), Barnsley and Rochdale (1833). A number of other societies omitted the word 'literary' from their title, e.g. in Derby (1783), Glasgow (1802) and Yorkshire/York (1822). Dates of foundation tend to vary in different accounts according to whether the author is referring to initial moves or to some later and more formal stage of establishment.

the links between the Liverpool Lit. and Phil. and its short-lived predecessor of 1779. Of the first names enrolled in the new society, the Rev. John Yates and the Rev. Joseph Smith had belonged to the 1779 society, and six other members, W. W. Currie, William Rathbone, Richard Rathbone, Joseph B. Yates, J. A. Yates and Thomas Binns (five merchants and a broker), were the sons of gentlemen who had.<sup>26</sup>

The early literary and philosophical societies have been shown to have played an important role in the middle-class search for identity, legitimacy and power, with science being identified as the chosen mode of cultural self-expression.<sup>27</sup> The programmes of societies such as those in Manchester, Newcastle and Leeds were dominated by papers on scientific topics, the arts being firmly relegated to a subordinate position.<sup>28</sup> The gentlemen of Liverpool, however, chose to make their bid for legitimacy through a general and intellectual culture which reflected the influence of William Roscoe (president 1817–31), who, with his broad intellectual interests, belonged more to the eighteenth-century classical and humanitarian school than to the mercantilist and industrial nineteenth century. Although this wider focus meant that the Liverpool society never achieved the recognition bestowed on the Manchester and Newcastle societies by the scientific world, it none the less played an important and successful part in the intellectual life of the town, ameliorating divisions within the élite and co-ordinating a number of public cultural activities which served to enhance Liverpool's reputation on the national and international stage.

Theoretically the society was open to anyone who resided within five miles of Liverpool and who could afford the guinea

26 *The Liverpolitan*, VI (10) (Oct. 1937), p. 9.

27 Arnold Thackray, 'Natural knowledge in a cultural context: the Manchester model', *American Historical Review*, LXXIX (1974), pp. 672–709; Morris, 'Clubs, societies and associations', p. 410; R. S. Watson, *The history of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne (1793–1896)* (London, 1896), p. 36.

28 In 1924 Dr F. A. Bruton remarked 'The Literary and Philosophical Society has been so much more scientific than literary that its title is almost a misnomer': quoted in H. McLachlan, 'John Dalton and Manchester, 1793–1844', in *Essays and addresses* (Manchester, 1950), p. 68.

entrance fee and annual subscription of half a guinea, but membership of the society was drawn exclusively from the town's middle classes, with thirty-one of the first fifty-six names on the society's roll being merchants or brokers. All prospective members were balloted for, and three quarters (from 1814 increased to four fifths) of the votes had to be in a man's favour before he could join. The minutes show that not all hopeful candidates achieved the required proportion. Membership was confined to men, a circumstance that continued for most of the nineteenth century. The first women were not elected to full membership until October 1883 and even then they generally attended only the less academic lectures. No woman was appointed to the society's council until about 1927.

The initial membership of the Lit. and Phil. included a high number of reformers and dissenters—half of the sixteen founder members can be identified as non-Anglican and five had been 'Jacobins' or members of the Anti-Slavery Society. However, it elected to membership West Indian merchants, Anglican priests and a wide variety of men from established sections of the middle classes. This suggests that an important aim of the society's founders was to establish a relatively informal, congenial and non-controversial forum for the discussion of literary and scientific topics, which would help integrate the town's middle classes at a time when divisions were intensifying.<sup>29</sup> The reminiscences of the founder members confirm that the early meetings were friendly, pleasant occasions. Many years later the Rev. H. Higgins recollected that William Rathbone 'had often spoken to him of the delightful associations of those early times, when members of the Society frequently met in each others' houses,

29 Divisions between Liverpool's American and West Indian merchants had been intensifying in the years leading up to 1812 through the effects of the Orders in Council. America's Embargo Act had left Liverpool's American merchants (many of whom were Dissenters) fearing for their livelihood, while the West Indian merchants were delighted that America had cut off its own trade with Europe and the colonies: C. D. Watkinson, 'The Liberal party on Merseyside in the nineteenth century' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool Univ., 1967), pp. 48-9.

and, after spending the evening in literary and scientific discourse, concluded with oysters and porter'.<sup>30</sup> This theme of a common fellowship amongst the merchant community was central to a number of papers presented before the society in its early years. Glowing panegyrics testified to the character and worth of the Liverpool merchants and celebrated the association of the town's wealth with commerce rather than manufacturing. Presenters constantly invoked Roscoe's Florentine analogy and reiterated his belief in the compatibility of commerce and culture.

From the outset the Lit. and Phil. sought to dignify its status in the wider intellectual arena by electing as honorary members distinguished men from both at home and abroad, in particular from America.<sup>31</sup> Further links with the wider intellectual community were fostered by activities such as the collection of unusual artefacts and in particular minerals, which was begun by the Lit. and Phil. at its inception. Interest in geology was common to many of the provincial societies, which were scattered about the country in areas of widely varying geological character. Comparison of their different geological situations, by means of correspondence, provided an excellent way of establishing contact with each other and with more traditional centres.<sup>32</sup>

Invoking the support of societies in other towns on matters of national concern performed a similar function. In 1824, for example, William Rathbone mobilized the society to lobby

30 *Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society centenary roll, 1812-1912, compiled by the keeper of the records J. Hampden Jackson, under William Rathbone's name: 2 vols, Liv. R.O., 060 LIT 3/1/2.*

31 The first honorary member, a resident of Boston, was elected at the second official meeting in April 1812. Other honorary members in the early years included Peter Mark Roget (1812), Benjamin Rush, M.D. and politician of Philadelphia (1813) and William Buckland, clergyman and geologist, later dean of Westminster (1814).

32 Jack Morrell and Arnold Thackray, *Gentlemen of science: early years of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (Oxford, 1981), p. 39. When the Lit. and Phil. moved to the Royal Institution in 1817, the collection was deposited in the Institution's museum of natural history, with Lit. and Phil. members being granted free access on the day of their meeting: Liv. R.O., 060 LIT 1/1 (Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society minute book), 5 Dec. 1817.

parliament and the king for a change in the law regarding the procurement of dead bodies for medical research, and circulated the petition round the other provincial societies.<sup>33</sup> Collective action of this kind by the society not only promoted common feeling with the outside intellectual world but also helped to create a sense of solidarity within the Lit. and Phil. itself.

In its first years, meetings were held in the Freemasons' Hall in Bold Street, but in 1817 the society was granted free, permanent accommodation in the newly opened Liverpool Royal Institution, the establishment of which reaffirmed the success of cultural initiatives in rallying support from and unifying the town's middle classes. The committee set up in 1814 to oversee the new enterprise included West Indian and American merchants, clergymen from the Established Church, Unitarian ministers and members of the town council. The Royal Institution was the realization of the Roscoe dream of a prestigious cultural centre to mould a new generation of Liverpool scholar-businessmen. It offered comprehensive lecture programmes, day schools and support and accommodation for local cultural societies and the Academy of Art. Members of the Lit. and Phil. played a leading part in its foundation and the relationship between the two organizations was close and mutually supportive,<sup>34</sup> the president of the Royal Institution claiming in 1824 that 'The flourishing state of this [the Literary and Philosophical] Society affords a gratifying proof of the extension amongst the inhabitants of Liverpool of a desire for knowledge, and whilst it demonstrates the propriety and utility of its plans, is no slight panegyric upon our own.'<sup>35</sup> While many of the departments of the Royal Institution could not be said to have

33 Rathbone asked that unclaimed bodies in workhouses, hospitals and prisons should be allowed to be used for anatomical purposes, 'under proper restrictions and with a decent burial to follow': *ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1824 to May 1825.

34 Out of the twenty-one-man Royal Institution committee appointed in 1814, ten were among the founder members of the Lit. and Phil. in 1812. The Lit. and Phil. repaid the Royal Institution with gifts of specimens, books and a set of casts: *ibid.*, Feb. 1829; Feb. 1847.

35 *Ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1824.

fulfilled the high hopes of the founders, it did succeed in establishing itself as the domicile of many of the town's literary and scientific societies. A survey of local institutions in 1848 reported that the Royal Institution 'ranks deservedly high in the public esteem, from the cordial and liberal support it has uniformly yielded to numerous institutions and societies of an intellectual nature'.<sup>36</sup> In 1847 four societies were reported to be meeting in the Royal Institution,<sup>37</sup> by 1868 this had risen to nine societies with a total membership of 2,000 and by 1880 this number had doubled.

During the Lit. and Phil.'s first ten years, a total of 117 papers were presented before the society by forty individuals, the subjects showing an equal balance between science and the arts. A feature of the programme in the early years was the number of papers on architectural themes. This illustrated both the concern of the members with the physical fabric of their rapidly expanding town and the presence in the society of the architect Thomas Rickman, who delivered thirteen papers to the society, helping to inform and mould the tastes of the members.<sup>38</sup> Rickman (like many others at that time) was at work on the facts and principles of the Gothic style, and presented his findings to the members of the Lit. and Phil. In 1817 he spread the information which he had initially transmitted to the gentlemen of Liverpool more widely abroad with the publication of his book, *An attempt to discriminate the styles of English architecture, from the Conquest to the Reformation*, which became the corner-stone of the Gothic Revival.

36 *Roscoe Magazine*, I (1 Mar. 1849), p. 2.

37 In 1837 six societies had been mentioned, but were not named in the report of that year. In 1847 the societies listed were the Lit. and Phil., the Philomathic Society (which had been meeting there since 1826), the Polytechnic Society and the Union Essay Society: Liv. R.O., 060 LIT 1/1, 12 Feb. 1847.

38 Thomas Rickman was born in Maidenhead, the son of a Quaker druggist. He came to Liverpool in 1807 and was employed as an accountant by a prominent merchant, J. Ashton Case. In 1812 he was elected Professor of Architecture at the revived Liverpool Academy and delivered a course of lectures. Having joined the Lit. and Phil. in 1812, he was elected treasurer in 1817. He resigned this position and also that of assistant secretary when he opened up an office in Birmingham in 1820.

Amongst his audience at the Lit. and Phil. were wealthy men on building committees for new public buildings and churches, and although they did not repudiate the neoclassical form, Rickman's influence is claimed to have ensured that Liverpool became the birthplace of the Gothic Revival.<sup>39</sup> After Rickman left Liverpool at the beginning of the 1820s, papers on architecture became markedly less frequent. However, the platform of the Lit. and Phil. continued as a sounding board for the discussion of architectural projects for the town—it was, for example, before the society that Sir James Picton first formulated a scheme for a Liverpool cathedral.

In 1837 the Lit. and Phil. seized the opportunity to display its talents as the town's cultural ambassador when it hosted a visit to Liverpool of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (B.A.A.S.). The B.A.A.S. had been founded in 1831 at the instigation of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, with the aim of 'combining the Philosophical Societies, dispersed throughout the provinces of the empire, in a general co-operative union'.<sup>40</sup> After the success of the inaugural meeting in York, the following two years saw the traditional centres of learning, Oxford and Cambridge, play host. Competition then became increasingly lively and the Liverpool Lit. and Phil. was amongst the first of the contenders.<sup>41</sup> The B.A.A.S. did not dispense with tradition immediately, opting for Edinburgh and Dublin in 1834 and 1835, but the following year Bristol emerged victorious, much to Liverpool's chagrin. Although Bristol's success may have had as much to do with its geographical position as its

39 Quentin Hughes, *Seaport: architecture and townscape in Liverpool* (London, 1964), p. 116. According to Hughes, Liverpool also saw the death of the Gothic Revival, with the town's Anglican cathedral its death knell: 'a final blaze of Gothic, in scale unprecedented—a fitting consummation of a great period'.

40 *Proceedings of the fifth meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 10–15 August 1835* (Dublin, 1835), p. 10.

41 The first mention of the Lit. and Phil. endeavouring to bring the B.A.A.S. meeting to Liverpool comes in 1833, with the appointment of a deputation (the merchants J. B. Yates and William Lawson) to lobby for Liverpool as a venue: Liv. R.O., 060 LIT 1/1, 3 June 1833.

intellectual profile, this decision was a major blow to Liverpool. Having long outclassed Bristol on the economic front, selection would have been recognition of Liverpool's efforts to perform a similar feat on the cultural front. However, in 1837 the Lit. and Phil. succeeded in overcoming intense competition from Manchester, which was eager to become the first industrial city to be visited by the B.A.A.S.<sup>42</sup> Liverpool immediately set out to prove that anything that Bristol had offered in 1836, it could more than outmatch in 1837. Entertainment was planned on a grand scale, with visits to institutions, public and commercial buildings, churches, sculpture, gardens, shipyards and manufacturing works. Excursions ranged from a tour of James Muspratt's chemical works to a trip to view the earl of Derby's collection of animals at Knowsley. On the final morning, eighty members of the B.A.A.S. were lowered 300 feet below ground at the salt mines at Northwich. Here, they were treated to a lavish dinner and firework display; the underground spectacle was formally concluded with the singing of a psalm and the national anthem, before the visitors were returned to Liverpool in time for tea.<sup>43</sup> Fears held by leading figures in the B.A.A.S. that religious and political differences would hinder the organization of the visit proved groundless. Civic pride ameliorated old divisions, with the town council as well as the Lit. and Phil. contributing funds for the occasion. The secretary of the B.A.A.S. reported to his colleagues that 'all the notions of political feeling have been falsified by the event . . . There is good feeling among the public bodies'.<sup>44</sup>

The members of the Lit. and Phil. were congratulated by their president (the merchant Joseph Brooks Yates) for their academic as well as administrative contribution to the meeting: 'Of the scientific communications made by our townsmen to the sections, all (I believe), but one were contributed by members of the Literary and Philosophical

42 Manchester finally hosted the event in 1842, being preceded by Newcastle, Birmingham, Glasgow and Plymouth.

43 *Early correspondence of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, ed. Jack Morrell and Arnold Thackray (London, 1984), p. 160.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

Society of Liverpool'. He asserted the value of learned societies to the intellectual life of a town, and reminded the younger members that 'no idea can be more erroneous than that the pursuit of knowledge is incompatible with habits of business'.<sup>45</sup>

Despite these exhortations, signs that members of the merchant élite felt less need to invest in communal cultural provision to reinforce their status became evident in the early 1840s, with the town's medical men taking over as the dominant group within the Lit. and Phil. This changing occupational base was reflected in the society's programme, which saw the generalist approach advocated by Roscoe superseded by a growing number of papers on science and environmental themes. It was the platform of the Lit. and Phil., for example, that Dr Duncan, the town's first medical officer of health, chose to present his influential three-part paper 'On the physical causes of the high rate of mortality in Liverpool'.<sup>46</sup> Although the society could in no sense be regarded as a reform body, it could claim to have played a valuable role in disseminating such information to wealthy men, the majority of whom now lived away from the crowded and unhealthy town centre.

Criticism of the Lit. and Phil.'s changing ethos, and accusations of a lack of dynamism and inability to adapt to changing times, were voiced by the Rev. Abraham Hume in 1847.<sup>47</sup> Hume urged the society's leaders to offer a more comprehensive programme, fearing that failure to do so would result in a proliferation of specialist societies which on their own would contribute little to Liverpool's cultural profile. The difficult economic circumstances of the 1840s were, in part,

45 'Address by the President Mr. J. B. Yates, 16 October 1837', included in Liv. R.O., 060 LIT 1/1, 16 Oct. 1837.

46 Duncan had been elected a member of the Lit. and Phil. in Jan. 1837. He delivered his paper on 6 Feb., 20 Feb. and 6 Mar. 1843. For the importance and effect of both his paper and his work in Liverpool, see Gerry Kearns, Paul Laxton and Joy Campbell, 'Duncan and the cholera test: public health in mid nineteenth-century Liverpool', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXXXIV (1994), pp. 87-115.

47 Hume (1814-84), born in Ireland, first came to Liverpool as a teacher at the Liverpool Institute and then at the Collegiate Institution. Ordained in 1843, he was appointed vicar of the new parish of Vauxhall in 1847.

responsible for a decline in the fortunes of literary and philosophical societies throughout the country.<sup>48</sup> However, according to one contemporary observer, this could also be attributed to their failure to amalgamate with more practically based societies.<sup>49</sup> Acting on this judgement, Hume urged the Lit. and Phil. to consider co-ordinating a union of learned societies within the town, warning that only by this means could the Lit. and Phil. hope to retain the hegemonic status it had enjoyed for over thirty years. The history of the relationship between the Lit. and Phil. and the Liverpool Philomathic Society suggests that this advice should have been heeded.<sup>50</sup>

The Philomathic Society's recognition and acceptance of the cultural hegemony of the Lit. and Phil. was implicit in an address given by its president in 1828: 'Our institution is not presumptuous; it is formed more to collect than dispense light . . . we disclaim pretensions to rank with higher literary societies'.<sup>51</sup> Originally established in 1825 purely as a debating society, the Philomathic none the less regarded itself as a serious intellectual society, seeking 'to enjoy all the advantages arising from regular and well-conducted debate, without bringing on themselves the ridicule cast upon spouting societies'.<sup>52</sup> The Philomathic Society shared common themes with the Lit. and Phil., its central motifs being the compatibility of commerce and culture and a concern with

- 48 For example, the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society 'languished in the 1840s' although it later revived under the presidency of the Leeds solicitor John Shaw Hope: Briggs, *Victorian cities*, p. 160. The same period saw a decline in the fortunes of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society: in 1849 'the position of the Society never seemed less secure': Watson, *History of Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle*, p. 128.
- 49 Hudson, *History of adult education*, pp. 167–8.
- 50 A full history of the Philomathic Society is rendered difficult by the disappearance of the MS. journals which were its sole official record of proceedings for the first thirty years of its existence: James Kidman, 'A Philomathic retrospect', in *Proceedings of the Liverpool Philomathic Society*, XLV (1899–1900), p. viii.
- 51 *Addresses delivered by the presidents of the Liverpool Philomathic Society at the Royal Institution on the opening and closing of the sessions 1828–1831* (Liverpool, 1832; reprinted Liverpool, 1884), Sept. 1828, pp. 11–12.
- 52 *Ibid.*, Sept. 1829, p. 28.

upgrading Liverpool's cultural image: 'Liverpool, proud in all that can exalt the enterprising, should yield to none in aspirations after literary excellence'.<sup>53</sup> It also emulated the Lit. and Phil. in seeking to provide a valuable point of contact and good feeling between men of differing political and religious persuasions, 'a feeling not confined within the walls of this Society, but carried into the more active and general scenes of life'.<sup>54</sup> In his inaugural address delivered on 24 February 1826, the first president concluded with a tribute to William Roscoe (never a member), emphasizing how important the Roscoe connection was to any organization seeking to establish its intellectual credentials.<sup>55</sup>

The society aimed to attract men 'who follow the busy vocations of life, whose time is devoted to commercial, and the more active professional pursuits',<sup>56</sup> and it followed the example of the Lit. and Phil. in electing a number of honorary members. Although of the six founder members (all from the business community) only one, James Aikin,<sup>57</sup> was to play a leading role in the public life of the town, the heavy fines imposed for minor infringements of the society's rules suggest that the members, of necessity, would be drawn from the wealthier classes. It was to prove even more obdurate than the Lit. and Phil. in its attitude towards the admission of the female sex, with women not being granted membership until 1920.<sup>58</sup>

53 Ibid., Sept. 1830, p. 47.

54 Ibid., Sept. 1829, pp. 29–30.

55 F. D. Paterson, 'The first fifty years of the society', *Proceedings*, XCV (1956–7), pp. 16–27.

56 *Addresses at the Royal Institution, 1828–31*, Sept. 1828, p. 11.

57 Aikin (1792–1878). Born in Dumfries, son of a solicitor. Entered the office of a Liverpool merchant in 1806, became a West India merchant c. 1810 and later became a shipowner and broker. Elected a town councillor (Liberal) 1835–6; treasurer of the Chamber of Commerce 1856–7. One of the founders of the Sailors' Home and Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society.

58 In 1863 it was decided that the presence of ladies would not be conducive to the society's interests, a resolution reinforced in 1874. In 1900 the society's president congratulated the society on being 'one of the few remaining bulwarks against the flood of feminine invasion of men's privileges and prerogatives which has characterized the closing years of the century': *Proceedings* (1899–1900), p. xxiv. The first lady officer of the society was Miss E. M. Platt, elected as vice-president in the 1933–4 session.

However, despite its age and its common home with the Lit. and Phil. in the Royal Institution, somewhat surprisingly the Philomathic was not invited to the discussions on proposals for the union of the town's learned societies. This omission suggests that as purely a debating society it was not yet considered to have earned the status of a learned society. Had the union succeeded, it seems likely that the ensuing years would have witnessed a decline rather than a rise in the Philomathic Society's fortunes. Its failure encouraged the Philomathic to expand its activities. In 1855 a change in its laws allowed the reading of papers on literary and general subjects in the place of ordinary debates, to 'increase the interest and importance of its proceedings, and to elevate its character'.<sup>59</sup> In 1863 came the formation of a reference library and by 1879 membership had reached 300, drawn from established businessmen and from a wide range of ranks within the town's emerging middle classes.

In 1893 B. G. Orchard, in his celebration of Liverpool's leading merchants and public figures, saw the Philomathic Society rather than the Lit. and Phil. as now most likely to attract the business community. Members of the Lit. and Phil., he claimed, were 'recruited to a larger extent from the ranks of the professions'. Although the Lit. and Phil. had previously 'always been regarded as somewhat more dignified ("not a mere debating society")', the Philomathic Society was now considered to rank as a society that 'a gentleman . . . fond of intellectual excitement after business' would be equally inclined to join.<sup>60</sup>

Thirteen years after the founding of the Philomathic Society, the newly formed Liverpool Polytechnic Society, however, saw no reason to accept a subordinate position in relation to the Lit. and Phil. The chair of its inaugural meeting, held in the Medical Institution, Mount Pleasant, on 23 October 1838, was taken by Henry Booth. Despite

59 *Proceedings*, I (1855-6), p. 6.

60 B. G. Orchard, *Liverpool's legion of honour* (Birkenhead, 1893), p. 56. Guests at the annual dinner of the Philomathic Society before the end of the nineteenth century included Oliver Wendell Holmes and Lord Curzon: Kidman, 'Philomathic retrospect', p. lxxiii.

Booth's apparent affinity with the town's established cultural élite (he was the son of a leading Unitarian corn merchant and a founder member of the Lit. and Phil.), his interests were firmly fixed in the new industrial age of science and technology. The formative role that he was prepared to adopt in this new organization would suggest his personal lack of faith in the ability of the Lit. and Phil. adequately to represent the interests of the rapidly expanding field of applied science.

The Polytechnic Society was to be expressly devoted to 'encouraging improvements in the useful arts',<sup>61</sup> and it immediately attracted an initial membership of 112, of which only ten names appear on the roll of the Lit. and Phil. Of the ninety-four members whose occupations can be traced, just under half were engaged in manufacturing, building, engineering and allied trades; a quarter were small merchants and traders. The minutes record that membership of and participation in the activities of the society would 'ensure that the Holmes, Gladstones, Pilchers, Granthams, Bennetts . . . will not pass away'. Significantly, these were families representative of builders, ironfounders, small traders and engineers. The new society can thus be seen as an indication that some of Liverpool's newer claimants of middle-class status felt little empathy with a society seen as the preserve of the established merchant élite and professional classes. They sought to assert their right to middle-class status through a celebration of their identification with the new technological age, rather than as gentlemen of culture.

In 1840 the society moved from the Medical Institution to the Royal Institution. Co-operation with the Lit. and Phil. in organizing joint soirées in the early 1840s was viewed with decided caution, and initially the Polytechnic decided against fraternization: there are numerous instances in the minute books which show the determination of the Polytechnic Society to brook no condescension from the Lit. and Phil. or be treated in any way as a second-class citizen. By mid-century the Polytechnic Society's membership had risen to

61 Liv. R.O., 680 POL 1/1 (Liverpool Polytechnic Society minute book, 1838-55), 23 Oct. 1838.

167,<sup>62</sup> despite the competition from a number of new societies which were established in the town in the late 1840s. These included the Architectural and Archaeological Society (1848),<sup>63</sup> the Chemists' Association (1849),<sup>64</sup> and the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire (1848).

The founding of the last stemmed from a meeting at the house of Joseph Mayer, a local jeweller and silversmith, attended by Henry Pidgeon, artist and drawing master, and the Rev. Abraham Hume. The involvement of Hume in the new society reflected his disillusionment with the Lit. and Phil. and its continuing failure to offer a comprehensive programme to redress the balance which he saw as now being firmly set in favour of science. The three men prepared an initial circular 'to solicit the co-operation of Noblemen and Gentlemen in the two Counties whom it might be desirable in the first instance to attach to the Society as members'. Interest proving favourable, in March 1848 a circular was forwarded to around 300 individuals, who were carefully selected out of twenty-four categories (all representative of the upper and middle classes) drawn up by the founders.<sup>65</sup> The society was formally inaugurated at a public meeting held in the Collegiate Institution on 20 June 1848, its first president being the earl of Ellesmere. After five years,

62 Compared to the Lit. and Phil.'s 150 and the Historic Society's 302. In 1841 attendance at one Polytechnic Society meeting reached 200. However, in the mid-1840s it declined (in common with both the local and national trend), picking up again by mid-century.

63 The Architectural and Archaeological Society was founded to promote the improvement of architectural taste and knowledge. The report of the annual general meeting of 2 May 1849 points to a certain amount of resentment from the existing societies, which felt that their programmes already embraced architecture. By 1849 membership was 129, which would appear to vindicate the founders' claims of Liverpool's need for a specialized architectural society: *Proceedings of the Liverpool Architectural and Archaeological Society*, I (1848-9).

64 The Chemists' Association was established when Jacob Bell, one of the founders of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, came to Liverpool with the idea of founding a similar organization in the town. Membership had reached 87 by 1851, with 24 associates, i.e. apprentices of members: J. H. Hirst, *The first hundred years* (Liverpool, 1949): Liv. R.O., 615 CHE 15.

65 Liv. R.O., Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire minute books, vol. I, 23 Dec. 1847 to 16 Oct. 1854, esp. 24 Mar. 1848.

membership had reached 331, compared to the Lit. and Phil.'s 132 and the Polytechnic Society's 167. However, the Historic Society drew its membership from a far wider area than the other two societies, and only about half the membership came from Liverpool and its immediate environs.

Under the auspices of the Lit. and Phil. the societies co-operated in a joint *soirée* in 1852, an experiment repeated the following year on the occasion of the Roscoe centenary. The success of such ventures and recognition of common spheres of interest prompted the appointment of a committee of delegates from the Lit. and Phil., Polytechnic, Historic and Architectural and Archaeological Societies to consider the feasibility of a union. The aim was to be the creation of a prestigious society of similar standing to that enjoyed by the B.A.A.S. The Architectural and Archaeological Society was the only one to be immediately ruled out of the proposed amalgamation, 'being in a great measure professional'. However, the interests of the Lit. and Phil. and the Historic Society were deemed entirely compatible and despite the Polytechnic Society's insistence on its scientific and distinct profile the delegates came to the conclusion that these distinctions were based on rhetoric rather than reality and that the Polytechnic's aim of 'the promotion of the useful arts' was broad enough to allow it to join in a union.<sup>66</sup>

The delegates' report was discussed by all three societies. The Polytechnic Society, always wary of any links which it felt might undermine its status, was the first to reject the findings. Unfortunately, the report came at a time when Liverpool was preparing to welcome the annual meeting of the B.A.A.S. for a second time. The Polytechnic Society was aggrieved over the appointment of the local officials, all of whom had been selected from the Lit. and Phil. In his closing address at the end of 1854, the Polytechnic Society president, James Newlands,<sup>67</sup> reiterated his society's view that *élitism* was still

66 Joint memberships in 1853-4 amounted to 10 for the Lit. and Phil. and the Polytechnic Society, 27 for the Lit. and Phil. and the Historic Society and 7 for the Historic Society and the Polytechnic Society.

67 Newlands was the borough engineer. Despite his criticisms of the *élite* nature of the Lit. and Phil., he was one of the few members with joint membership. This, of course, might indicate that he was well qualified to offer an opinion.

the prevailing ethos of the Lit. and Phil., whereas 'Here no social distinctions separate us from each other; no party differences disturb us. We meet on the level, and the bond of our union is the brotherhood of intellect'.<sup>68</sup> The deliberations of the Lit. and Phil. and the Historic Society took somewhat longer. The Historic Society appeared to be the one with least qualms over the proposed union. As the most recently formed society, it had little tradition to sacrifice. In contrast, the Lit. and Phil. took great pride in its origins and in the formative role that it had played in the creation of the élite-led middle-class culture which had dominated Liverpool's intellectual life in the early years of the century. Its members were evenly divided over the issue, with the greatest stumbling block being the question of a name for the new society. The delegates' report had endeavoured to surmount this problem by recommending that none of the names of the existing societies should be considered. This was anathema to many members of the older society: 'This one has been in existence for nearly half a century, the other barely the twentieth part of one'. Unable to assuage the fears that amalgamation would lead to dissolution, the committee of the Lit. and Phil., somewhat regretfully, decided to shelve the idea *ad infinitum*.<sup>69</sup>

The Historic Society, which rapidly lost patience with the procrastination of the Lit. and Phil., decided to proceed alone. It determined to expand its sphere of interests and aim for national as well as local recognition. This resulted in acrimonious accusations that the Historic Society was trying to undermine the older society, with the *Liverpool Courier* lending its support to the Lit. and Phil. and assuring its readers that 'we are sure there is life in the old dog yet'. In the event both societies continued in their original format, following their own individual programmes. Although Liverpool's learned societies and institutions continued to exert their separate influences on the cultural life of the town, the Lit. and Phil. and the Philomathic Society surviving into the last third of the twentieth century and the Athenaeum and the Historic Society being still with us, none retained anything

68 Liv. R.O., 680 POL:1/1, 4 Dec 1854.

69 Liv. R.O., 060 LIT 1/1, 5 Mar. to May 1854.

like its original vigour. Unable to compete against the rising tide of public enterprise they were to become increasingly relegated to the sidelines.

The decline of the influence of Liverpool's voluntary cultural societies can be seen as reflecting the view of J. W. Hudson that 'Institutions like all great works, flourish or decay in proportion to their value and utility to the age in which they exist'.<sup>70</sup> By the second half of the nineteenth century, Liverpool's merchant élite was legitimated and secure and its concern lay more in reinforcing individual status rather than in asserting a group identity through joint cultural enterprise.<sup>71</sup> The realization that the Roscoe ideal of the businessman-scholar had not been nor seemed likely to be accomplished by the existing societies and institutions encouraged Liverpool's leading citizens to direct their energies towards co-ordinating municipal cultural provision and the establishment of a university.

In conclusion, however, it is interesting to note that in seeking to regenerate the city and change its image in the 1990s, the modern city fathers have endeavoured to utilize Liverpool's rich architectural legacy, have instigated art festivals and have attempted to win city of learning and city of architecture status. In this sense we are witnessing a return to the cultural values of, and the value placed on culture by, the founding merchant élite.

70 Hudson, *History of adult education*, p. 168.

71 B. G. Orchard criticized what he considered gifts inspired by desire for personal aggrandizement rather than by concern for the intellectual life of the town. He informed his readers that Sir William Brown's gift of the Brown Library was motivated by the prospect of a baronetcy rather than any native generosity. He was similarly critical of Sir Andrew Barclay Walker, the brewer and distiller who gave Liverpool the Walker Art Gallery: Orchard, *Liverpool's legion of honour*, pp. 213, 689.