

THE HUGHES PAPERS  
LANCASHIRE SOCIAL LIFE, 1780-1825

BY J. R. HARRIS, M.A.

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IN 1779, at the time of his arrival in St. Helens, Michael Hughes,<sup>(1)</sup> the manager of the St. Helens copper works of the Anglesey Mines, could have been fairly described as one of the new rich, for only during the last five years had his family been enjoying the profits of its mineral wealth. The district had scarcely known his social type before, but it was soon to know it well. Significantly most of Hughes's closer friends were new industrialists, George Mackay the glass manufacturer, Joseph Churton, the surgeon, coalmine proprietor and glassworks partner, and Robert Sherbourne, manager of the great Plate Glass Works at Ravenhead.<sup>(2)</sup>

Despite the alterations in the origins and nature of national wealth, it was still commonly felt at this time that the returns from industry and commerce were no foundation for social position. Land was yet the only accepted basis, and the great families of Stanley, Bold, and Gerard maintained their pre-eminence in this part of Lancashire without effort. Knowsley or Garswood or Leoni's immense Bold New Hall had a prestige which quite overshadowed the Ravenhead House or West Park or Sherdley House built by the St. Helens industrialists, or the more ancient seats of Eccleston Hall or Hardshaw Hall inhabited by others of their number.<sup>(3)</sup> Nevertheless, some of the newcomers attempted to climb the lower rungs of the social ladder within the county by becoming landed gentlemen in little. To appreciate this ambition it must be remembered that in 1800 England was still largely an agricultural country, and even Lancashire was only slowly changing from a county of rustics to one of industrial workers. The very industrialists were would-be country gentlemen, and their conception of greatness was still to be a squire, to live in a fine house in its own park, with several hundred acres about it, and to be a

<sup>(1)</sup> Michael Hughes (1752-1825) was the youngest son of Hugh Hughes of Lleiniog in Anglesey, the secretary to the chancellor of Hereford diocese. His eldest brother, the Rev. Edward Hughes (1738-1815), by marriage into the family of Lewis of Lysdulas became owner of part of Parys Mountain, near Amlwch, where in 1768 there was a sensational discovery of copper ore. The exploitation of the mine by the Parys Co. (officially formed 1778) made Edward Hughes very wealthy. His income in the early years of the nineteenth century was estimated at £14,000. (Letters: 12 March, 1808, M. Hughes to John Hughes). For details of the Hughes industrial concerns see J. R. Harris, "Michael Hughes of Sutton; The Influence of Welsh Copper on Lancashire Business, 1780-1815." TRANSACTIONS, Vol. 101, 1949.

<sup>(2)</sup> Churton, John and George Mackay and Robert Sherbourne are dealt with in the Chapters on Coal and Glass of "Economic and Social Development of St. Helens 1750-1815", M. A. thesis, Manchester University, 1950.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ravenhead House was the home of John Mackay and later of his son-in-law Col. Fraser; West Park of Thomas West, glass manufacturer; Eccleston Hall of Samuel Taylor whose fortune came from Manchester textiles, and who is probably to be identified with the Liverpool agent of the Anglesey Companies; Hardshaw Hall of Thomas Greenall, the brewer.

J.P., Colonel of Militia, Deputy Lieutenant of the County, or possibly, as a crowning glory, High Sheriff. Paradoxically, while Hughes and his contemporaries in industry were creating forces eventually to be destructive of the old society, they were trying to carve out for themselves a place in its hierarchy.

Michael Hughes was not content therefore with being an industrialist and an investor. He began to buy estates. As manager of the copper works at Ravenhead the Parys Company provided him with a house which stood close by, and was rented from the Eccleston family. Its rather homely name *The Tickles* suited neither the dignity nor the £2,000 a year of its new proprietor, and it found itself elevated to *Sutton Lodge*. Around this house Hughes centred his early land buying, but it was the late nineties before his chief attention shifted from industrial to land investment.<sup>(1)</sup> In 1795 he purchased a Sutton estate from John Foster of Thatto Heath for £1,340.<sup>(2)</sup> In 1796 he paid £1,463 for the estate of the late Henry Ellam in Sutton,<sup>(3)</sup> in 1797 £1,373 for Whitlow's Estate,<sup>(4)</sup> in 1798 £3,150 for Sherdley Hall Estate<sup>(5)</sup>, and in 1800 £2,700 for the Leach Hall Estate.<sup>(6)</sup> In 1801 came the largest purchase of this group, that of the Manor of Penketh from Lord Lilford for £4,535.<sup>(7)</sup>

A rude shock, however, awaited Hughes. Nicholas Ashton of Woolton Hall, the son of John Ashton the leader in the Sankey Navigation project, inherited his father's interest in the salt industry, and in 1800 began one of several ventures in the St. Helens area by mining land near Sutton Lodge leased from Mr. Eccleston.<sup>(8)</sup> This necessitated the aid of an atmospheric or Newcomen-type engine, and when erected in 1801, its fumes threatened to make Sutton Lodge uninhabitable. Hughes' brother Edward wrote in February 1801:—

"I am told Mr. Ashton is without loss of time to erect a fumigator close to your door; and that the ground is already marked to open trenches and batteries against your house and castle. It will be too late to retreat in the last stages of suffocation; and however grating it may be to lament and reflect upon the expence and trouble you have been at to bring your situation to its present state of comfort, yet it will not be unbecoming in a good General to secure a place of safety before the garrison is stormed."<sup>(9)</sup>

This sound advice was taken, and Michael Hughes began looking about for a new mansion and estate. He had thoughts of moving back to North Wales, in which he was encouraged by his relatives, while Edward Hughes, the proprietor of Kinmel and Lysdulas fancying himself as a judge of property, bombarded his brother for

<sup>(1)</sup> A small estate was purchased for £693 in 1789.

<sup>(2)</sup> Estate List. February and March 1795.

<sup>(3)</sup> Accounts: 9 December 1796.

<sup>(4)</sup> " 9 October 1797. Included a pew in St. Helens Chapel.

<sup>(5)</sup> " : 21 February 1798. From Executors of Joshua Frodsham, Esq.

<sup>(6)</sup> " : 11 November 1800. From Edward Falkener Esq., who bought a copyhold West Derby Estate from Hughes for £900.

<sup>(7)</sup> : 2 November 1801.

<sup>(8)</sup> Wigan Library. Dicconson Papers (Eccleston), Lease to Messrs. Clare and Haddock 28 October 1819.

<sup>(9)</sup> Letters: Rev. Edward Hughes to Michael Hughes 1 February 1801.

a year or so with the news of North Wales estates in the market. The ideal of a house of suitable size and amenities, with an estate of 600 acres in a ring-fence was not too easily realized, and by August 1802 Michael Hughes had decided to move his situation to the other end of his Sutton Estates, and to build there.

Once this was settled Hughes was able to continue his purchases of estates in the Sutton area, to consolidate and to improve. In 1803 £1,267 was laid out for Little Burtonhead Estate, purchased from the glass manufacturer and coalowner Thomas West, who in turn had purchased it from the great mid-eighteenth century coal-owner Jonathan Case after his bankruptcy of 1778.<sup>(1)</sup> An estate of similar value was bought in the same year from another bankrupt, William Greenall,<sup>(2)</sup> and Costeth House Estate near Sherdley Hall rounded off the year's purchases at £2,555.<sup>(3)</sup> Lea Green Estate was acquired for £6,580 in 1807,<sup>(4)</sup> and two estates in Eccleston in 1810 for £5,450 and £2,100 respectively.<sup>(5)</sup> The greatest purchase comes near the end of the series, when the Sankey and Penketh Estates of Thomas Claughton, the solicitor, land and coal speculator and M.P., were bought in 1814 for £15,000.<sup>(6)</sup> Virtually all Hughes' buying was done at the highly inflated prices of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

The decision to build a new house in 1802 was accompanied by the engagement of John Harrison as architect,<sup>(7)</sup> and in 1803 Hughes was burning bricks on a large scale.<sup>(8)</sup> In 1804 he took down Old Costeth House, but spared Sherdley Old Hall, which has now outlived, as a handsome farm house, its showy supplanter.<sup>(9)</sup> These preliminaries over, in 1805 and 1806 the main work of building was carried out.<sup>(10)</sup> In the first month of 1806 the building must have been well advanced as the master mason was discharged, and in the June the architect was paid in full, the house being insured at the end of the year for £2,000 and the furniture for £500.<sup>(11)</sup> Like many who venture on building, Michael Hughes was showered with good advice, of which the most amusing came from a relative by marriage, Sir Robert Williams.

<sup>(1)</sup> Accounts: 28 January, 12 March 1803.

<sup>(2)</sup> " : 2 November 1803; 7 February 1804. For £1,225.

<sup>(3)</sup> " : 19 and 26 July 1802; 29 September, 11 November; 9 December 1803.

<sup>(4)</sup> " : 30 July 1807. The estate was of a little over 76 statute acres and contained a large house with outbuildings. It produced a rent of £130 per annum.

<sup>(5)</sup> " : 6 March; 9 April; 7 June 1810. Bought when the Eccleston estates were in the market." The main block went to Samuel Taylor.

<sup>(6)</sup> " : 10 November 1814. A pew and a threshing machine were included. Perhaps the most spectacular of the land purchases of Thomas Claughton of Haydock Lodge was his contract to buy the reversion of Thomas Johnes's Hafod Estate. (See E. Inglis Jones, *Peacocks in Paradise* (1950), pp. 230 and 240.) Claughton was not over honest. Hughes had to go to Chancery to obtain possession of the land he had contracted to sell, and in the case of Hafod Claughton seems to have avoided his contract to purchase. He went bankrupt in 1824. See correspondence between Hughes and Claughton. Lancashire Record Office, Cross Papers, DDCs 34.

<sup>(7)</sup> Letters: H. R. Hughes to Michael Hughes 28 August 1802.

<sup>(8)</sup> Accounts: 26 February, 5 June 1803.

<sup>(9)</sup> Accounts: 23 February 1804.

<sup>(10)</sup> " : 16 March 1805. "By John Harrison on acct. of his Salary for planning and superintending the building of my intended N(ew) House ... £20 0 0".

<sup>(11)</sup> " : 30 January, 11 June; 6 December 1806.

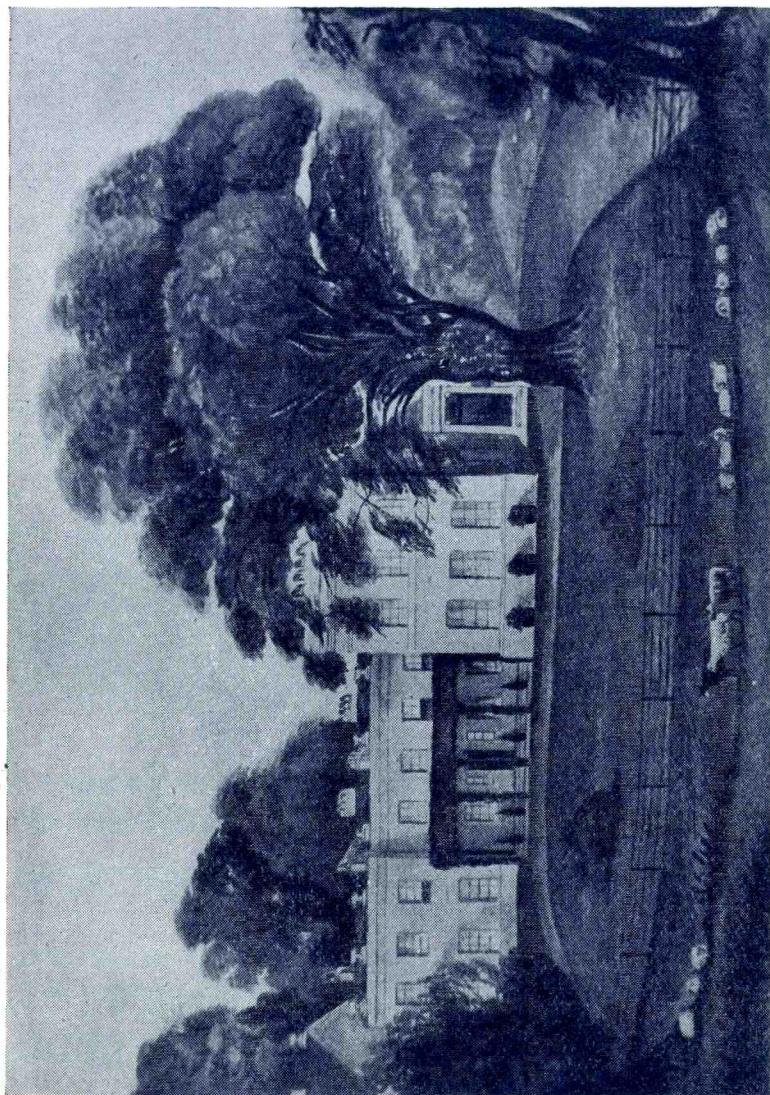


PLATE 4 : SHERDLEY HALL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.  
From a painting traditionally ascribed to Charlotte Hughes.

"London, 1 February, 1805.

"I have never altered my opinion on the point that you have acted wisely in building when you can, for a thousand reasons—and now my good Sir allow me to give you my poor advice, of all things make your new house snug and comfortable, instead of attending to great uniformity in the building, a good water closet contiguous to your Bed Chambers—and one out of your house, your rooms high, but small as you please—Carpets to take up in your bedrooms and dressing rooms; and good fire-places—these are luxuries that all the World like—[take care that] . . . you don't show this to your Brother of Kinmel."

The final caution is due to the fact that Kinmel Park was celebrated equally in the family for its magnificence and its discomfort.

The furniture was ordered through W. L. Hughes,<sup>(1)</sup> the eldest son of the Rev. Edward Hughes, who resided mainly in London. He was a Whig M.P., and a friend of Creevey. The furniture appears only to have been ordered long after the house was complete, and probably replaced furniture brought over from Sutton Lodge until something more splendid could be procured.

"Hinde St., 25th July 1807.

"My Dear Uncle

"I returned from Worthing last night and went early to Gillars (*sic*) about your furniture. I have not ceased to stimulate him to exertion ever since the first order and have given him frequent calls to warn him of your impatience. He assures me that everything that can be made at Lancaster is in a great state of forwardness and that what will remain to be sent from this town will be ready in ten days the packages will go by the Canal and be directed to the care of Taylor at Liverpool when you must send your waggon for them. I do flatter myself that your two rooms will be the neatest and most tasteful in your neighbourhood. I have ordered a neat Lantern for the dining room which will light the room sufficiently without the nuisance of candles on the table to obscure the view of your opposite neighbour. One of Gillars men is going into your neighbourhood and will be ready to put up everything in proper order. It occurs to me that you have never mentioned how your bells pull—inform me of this and tell me also whether you want grate and fenders and fire irons for the two rooms.

"As you get the glass from the Manufactory it will be handsome if it goes to the top of the room and if you will send the dimensions a neat frame may be made in this town."<sup>(2)</sup>

At the end of the year W. L. Hughes was glad to hear of the success of his buying.

"Kinmel Park, 1 Dec. 1807.

"My dr. Uncle,

"I derive great pleasure from knowing that your furniture meets with your and your friends approbation, and tho' I allow the cost will be considerable, yet I hope you will find it compensated in the comfort you will derive from it, & that on the whole little has been incurred unnecessarily as possible, in the dining room I think none, the drawing room will of course include some articles of unnecessary adornment to a man, but as I know you will like your female visitants to enjoy every comfort and luxury you can afford them, you will not

<sup>(1)</sup> He is mentioned by Creevey, sometimes as "Taffy". See J. Gore (Ed.) *Creevey's Life and Times* (1934) p. xiii and pp. 132, 293, 404. W. L. Hughes was created Lord Dinorben on the coronation of William IV. He had been in the House since 1802 when he was returned for Wallingford, Berkshire. A number of his letters survive in the Hughes collection.

<sup>(2)</sup> The goods came from London to the Mersey by canal. The present firm of Waring and Gillows states that the business originated in Lancaster in 1695. The "Manufactory" was the British Plate Glass Company's works at Ravenhead.

I conclude deem them misapplied, & as my orders were most particular that every article should be more firm and strong than they are usually made for town, I trust if they are now handsome they will be permanently so."

The final touch to the outward splendour of Hughes' new establishment was to be a new coach to replace his old one, a magnificent town-built equipage which should be the envy of his fellow provincials. However, this though ordered through Owen Williams, the son of his former business colleague Thomas Williams<sup>(1)</sup> was a great disappointment. It can be guessed, though, that the trouble was partly that Hughes was out of touch with the changing London taste in carriage fittings.

"Sherdley House 5 Augst. 1809

"... I do not exactly know the Orders wch my friend Mr. Williams gave you respecting it, but the Trimmings in the inside do not conform to my ideas of Prop<sup>y</sup> [propriety]. . . . And they are upon the whole much plainer and less showy than I could have wished—My Livery is a light Drab Colour, pretty near the Color of the Lining with Crimson and Silver. The Inside of the Carriage should have corresponded, & instead of Lace and Trimmings of the same colour, it should have been a rich Crimson which certainly would have given a much handsomer inside appearance.

"The Carriage in its appearance exhibits the Plainness of a Quaker, & is in my opinion not at all handsome. It may be of good workmanship and materials, I trust it is, but its general appearance is much inferior to my old carriage & to those made in Lpool."<sup>(2)</sup>

After a few miles on the local turnpikes, of which he was a trustee and which were excellently paved with the slag from his own copper works, the springs gave, and Hughes' anger against the unfortunate vehicle and its makers boiled over.

"... the [Carriage] you sent me is the most mean paltry thing that ever was sent out of London, & so is deemed by every Gentleman who has seen it. Whether you look at the Outside or Inside it is equally plain, mean and paltry and this much inferior to any Gentleman's Carriage. From the pompous description of it displayed on your Bill, I should have expected that the *Materials* at least of which it is made had been of very extraordinary quality. To my great Mortification & Cost they are not so, for the Springs, altho' the Carriage since I had it has not run more than 30 Miles in the whole with no other weight than my Wife and Myself, the springs have already given way and must be replaced. . . ."<sup>(3)</sup>

While here he encountered disappointment, and a blow to his pocket, in 1810 he ministered to his vanity by having his portrait painted by J. Patrick,<sup>(4)</sup> a contemporary exhibitor at the Royal Academy. In the following year he enquired the charges of a London sculptor, though it is not known whether anything came of this.<sup>(5)</sup>

As he was building up an establishment fitting to a man of

<sup>(1)</sup> For Thomas Williams see TRANSACTIONS, Vol. 101 (1949) p. 141 seq. From 1796 Owen Williams had shared his father's pocket borough of Great Marlow; after Thomas Williams died in 1802 one of its two seats was filled by Pascoe Grenfell, a colleague in the copper trade.

<sup>(2)</sup> Letters: Hughes to Messrs. Chamberlayne & Co., 5 August 1809.

<sup>(3)</sup> " : Hughes to Messrs. Chamberlayne & Co., 23 October 1809.

<sup>(4)</sup> Accounts: 22 January 1810. The portrait is reproduced in TRANSACTIONS, Vol. 101 (1949), p. 157. The same artist painted a half-length portrait of Hughes, now lost.

Accounts: 18 March 1811.

<sup>(5)</sup> , : 24 September 1811.

wealth, dignities conferred upon him were raising Hughes's social position.

"Mar. 4 (1800) Paid James Tithington for three Bottles of Claret, being what was drank at the first sessions at Prescot after my induction to the Magistracy of the County..... £1 1 0"

In 1801 Hughes was president of the Liverpool Public Infirmary.<sup>(1)</sup> Two years later with James Fraser he played a very active part in raising the St. Helens Volunteers and received as his reward a commission as Lieut.-Colonel<sup>(2)</sup> and the rank of second-in-command of that force. Hughes, who did not lay claim to any military capacity, was much bothered by his superior's frequent visits to Edinburgh and to his Scottish estates. By 1806 Hughes was taking an active interest in the work of the Turnpike Trustee,<sup>(3)</sup> and in the same year he was a subscriber to the Agricultural Meeting of West Derby Hundred,<sup>(4)</sup> one of the organizations for the encouragement of good farming through the holding of agricultural shows, which were very popular at this time. In the same year he became a Deputy Lieutenant of the county. Since 1802 at least he had been a Commissioner under the Property Act for the Prescot division of Lancashire.<sup>(5)</sup>

Hughes's first wife, the daughter of a wealthy Prescot clergyman, died in May 1798,<sup>(6)</sup> and ten years later he married Ellen Pemberton,<sup>(7)</sup> the daughter of a neighbouring Sutton landowner. He was over fifty at the time of his second marriage, and his wife long survived him. By his second marriage Hughes had four children. His only son and heir, Michael, was born in 1810; his christening was a grand affair attended by Owen Williams the M.P., H. R. Hughes the banker, and Mrs. Edward Hughes from Kinmel.<sup>(8)</sup> Thus late in life Hughes became aware of the anxieties of family.

"Paid Mr. Parkes of Lpl. Surgeon, for his attendance on my son Michl. at Bootle, when he was ill of the Hooping Cough, & also for coming here from St. Helens this day, to examine my daughter Ellen who was suspected by her mother to be growing crooked, but in Mr. Parkes opinion without cause.... £3 0 0"<sup>(9)</sup>

The duties of educating his children involved not only school fees, but such things as music and dancing lessons, and keeping Mrs. Hughes' pianoforte in tune. Occasionally the happier sides of their upbringing make pleasant reading in the father's account books as:—

"21 Jany. 1819. Paid to Mrs Hughes to go to Lpl. where she took the children to the Circus etc..... £10"<sup>(10)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Accounts: 7 July 1801.

<sup>(2)</sup> The commission, dated 28 August 1804, is preserved among Hughes Letters.

<sup>(3)</sup> Accounts: 21 January 1806.

<sup>(4)</sup> : 22 July 1806.

<sup>(5)</sup> P.R.O. E/182/500 (Income Tax) Return for Windle 25 February 1803.

<sup>(6)</sup> Accounts: 16 June 1798; and "Pedigree of the Hughes Family".

<sup>(7)</sup> : 9 February 1808.

<sup>(8)</sup> : 12 July; 7 November 1810.

<sup>(9)</sup> : 18 August 1818.

<sup>(10)</sup> The New Olympic Circus visited Liverpool as early as 1805. See *Liverpool Chronicle*, 29 May 1805.

The school reports Hughes received for his own son Michael and for a nephew, also a Michael Hughes, whom he educated, make amusing reading. They are generally from clergymen, the headmasters of various small private schools, and they are full of the masters' anxiety to persuade the parent or guardian that the boy has some talents, while almost invariably regretting his reluctance to use them to the best advantage. Replying to one of these reports, Hughes had to confess his failure to make his nephew complete his vacation task.

"7 Feby 1810

"Dear Sir

"Your report of my Nephews Progress is highly gratifying to me—and you claim and have my best thanks for your attention to him.

"Altho' I have endeavoured to enforce the Necessity of his application during the Recess—yet in this I fear I have not succeeded, for he has not done so to the extent I wish'd him to do. Indeed without the Control of a Master, it is difficult to get Boys to study during their Vacation, for they generally consider it an Interval almost exclusively devoted to Amusement and Pleasure—Of his Improvement and Acquirements, especially in his Greek, during the short period which he has been under your care, I can not but speak in the most flattering terms of Praise . . ." <sup>(1)</sup>

Hughes' own distance from his schooldays can be told from his having three attempts at spelling "Metamorphoses" during another letter to a schoolmaster.

#### THE MAGISTRACY

Perhaps the most important work of Hughes after his business activities was his services as magistrate, a task which he undertook with fitting seriousness and responsibility. His letters and orders are indeed not only to be found among his own papers but also among most collections relating to the St. Helens district in this period. Here there are two sides to the picture, displaying not so much two aspects of Hughes's own character and attitude, as two diverse and even conflicting sides of the duties of the magistrates of the time. On the one hand his duties in preserving the peace involved the welfare of the poor, interferences on their behalf on questions of Poor Law administration, wages and so on. On the other hand the magistrate represented the repressive and punitive side of the keeping of law and order, and that at a time when there was virtually no police force. Once a situation went beyond the control of a handful of part-time and sometimes unpaid constables, the only solution was to call in the nearest troops. It is therefore advisable, before judging Hughes as a magistrate, to remember the wide scope of the duties laid upon such men, their lack of legal training, apart from that which they picked up for themselves, <sup>(2)</sup> and the fact

<sup>(1)</sup> Letters: Hughes to Rev. Wm. Bordman, Warrington, 7 February 1810.

<sup>(2)</sup> Six months before he began his magisterial duties Hughes wrote to Joseph Butterworth, Law Bookseller of London, for

"Pickering's <i>Statutes at Large</i>	41 Volumes	£21	0	0
Hutcheson's <i>Excise Survd.</i>		4	0	0
Burns' <i>Justice</i>	4	1	16	0
Addington's <i>Penal Statutes</i>		1	18	0
<i>Digest of Term Reports</i>		14	0	0
Jacobs' <i>Law Dictry</i>	2	3	10	0
Box for above		4	0	0
		£29	6	0

that they were doing singlehanded, without salary, and often without thanks, what modern society deputes to many. Hughes, furthermore, had to deal with the work presented by the growing boom-town of St. Helens.

It might be thought that Hughes as an employer of labour would have adopted towards the poor the increasingly fashionable attitude of *laissez-faire*. He was, however, not among those who thought that the poor should be left to face unaided the operation of economic laws. To one overseer of the poor he wrote at a time of scarcity and high prices, "These are not times for trifling with the Distresses of the Poor". When the township of Parr had been giving an old man 7/- a week to work on the highways, it was ordered to pay 9/- a week, the former payment being described as "considerably less than his work deserves". Parr overseers were on more than one occasion ordered to appear before Hughes at Sherdley House about breakfast-time for not giving sufficient relief.<sup>(1)</sup> Writing to the overseers of Overton, Cheshire, concerning the non-resident relief of one of their certificated poor long settled in Sutton he declared, "as a Magistrate in the Neighbourhood, he required me to represent his Case to you, and in complying with his desire, I feel that I am performing one of the most important and essential Duties of my Office—I therefore hope and trust that I am appealing to the feelings of Men of Humanity and Consideration and that I shall not appeal in vain. . . . I need not tell you that the Times are beyond all Example, hard and distressing on the poorer Class of the Community, and in the strongest manner call for Liberality from all Overseers in relieving their Poor; Humanity and good Policy require it; I hope that you are of that Opinion."<sup>(2)</sup>

On more than one occasion, too, Hughes was called in to prevent men being enlisted in the army against their will.

"20 March 1813 . . . Thos. Jump of Prescot says that on Wedy Night the 7th May he was hastily enlisted at Prescot, by a recruiting party belonging to the 84th Regt. of foot. The said Thomas Jump came to me on Saturday the 20th and declared his dissent to such Enlistment, and said that all the said recruiting party had left Prescot, so that he could not procure any officer to attend him. . . . He therefore paid into my hand the sum of One Pound, being the smart Money to which the said party are entitled by Law—to be paid to them when called upon agreeably to 74th Section of 50 Geo. 3. . . . April 10th returned the said Thomas Jump the said sum of one pd he never having heard anything further."

Only a month later Hughes recorded that the wife of George Fildes of Windle, Collier, came to him and said that "on Sunday Morning last the 28th Inst the said George Fildes was enlisted at St. Helens when he was drunk, and this day declared his dissent to such enlistment." Fildes paid up his pound and his king's shilling, but in this case forfeited it, for on 30 June Hughes records that he "paid

<sup>(1)</sup> St. Helens Library: Parr Township Papers: Hughes to Parr Overseers: 1, 20, 23 April, 5 May 1801.

<sup>(2)</sup> Letters: Hughes to Overton Overseers: 20 February 1801.

the above mentioned 21s to Wm Taylor, private in the 172nd Company of Royal Marines, by order of Thos Bason, Lieut, & agit<sup>[sic]</sup>, Royal Marines."<sup>(1)</sup>

In 1807 Hughes was involved in correspondence with Thomas Chantler of Northwich, salt manufacturer, who possessed a colliery near St. Helens. He was able to secure Chantler's support in forcing his colliery agent to pay full wages to a collier from whose wages he had suddenly decided to deduct house-rent, and to secure the payment of a week's wages (14/-) to an engine boy who had been dismissed without notice.<sup>(2)</sup>

The first important occasion when the grimmer side of the magistrate's task emerged was in 1812, when in common with the other deputy lieutenants Hughes was summoned to a meeting at Preston to consider the measures needed to suppress the Luddite riots of the period.<sup>(3)</sup> In 1819, however, Hughes had a riot all to himself. In that year, following reductions of wages in a period of post-war depression, the St. Helens colliers went on strike, the first time they are known to have taken such a step. This dispute was very well reported in the Liverpool press, and one of the letters written by Hughes to the Earl of Derby on the subject found its way into Home Office papers, to be unearthed recently by Professor Aspinall. The accounts of the strike given by the letter and the newspapers are to some extent parallel and even overlapping, but as each contains information not contained in the other, it will be well to give both. On 17 February 1819, Michael Hughes and George Williams, in a letter written from the Raven Inn at St. Helens to Lord Derby said,

" . . . It is now some weeks (six or seven) since the colliers of this district indicated disturbance; that of 13 collieries within this district, the majority of the workmen from seven have withdrawn themselves to the amount of about 250, whose proceeding has thrown out of work between 300 and 400 others connected with the coal getters.

"The discontent arises from a reduction of wages having taken place about three years ago, and to which no opposition was then made, the return to which rate of wages is what they now demand of the proprietors, who on their side state that they have been employing one fourth more of coal getters during a depression of trade for those three years more than prudence would justify actually to keep their men at work; the coal getters obtaining as wages at that time (at the reduced rate) upon a general average of collieries and weeks about a guinea each man per week.

"The discontent is stated however to be insufficiency of wages, and all calculations and reasonings upon the subject we have found utterly unavailing to induce them to return quietly to their employment.

<sup>(1)</sup> Accounts: 22 and 30 June 1813.

<sup>(2)</sup> Letters: Hughes to Thomas Chantler, Northwich, 1 August 1807.

<sup>(3)</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*: 22 May 1812. Hughes is given as one of the Deputy-Lieutenants of the county present at a meeting at Wigan on 15 May, which called for energetic measures against the rioters, and thanked the military for their assistance. "We view with horror and extreme sorrow the riots, tumults, and breaches of the peace, that have occurred in the county, which disgrace civilized society, and are most dangerous to the commonwealth or public polity of the kingdom.

"[We declare] . . . that it is the bounden duty of every man to protect the community, and each individual therein, from every degree of injury and violence; and that by law, any of his Majesty's subjects, military as well as civil, without the presence of a peace-officer of any description, may arm themselves, and of course may use the ordinary means of force to suppress riots and disturbances." For the Luddite Riots in Lancashire see J. L. & B. Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer*, Chap. X. pp. 271-300.

"On the 12th instant, being here for this purpose of taking examinations, and of pacifying them, we were obliged to commit one of the conspirators for administering an unlawful oath, which threw them into such a state of exasperation that *our* safety was put to hazard, and on the 13th we thought it advisable to obtain a military force from Warrington of 80 rank-and-file. A company was also marched hither from Liverpool composed of 40 rank-and-file. On the 13th, as some outrages had taken place and more were threatened, we thought it advisable to send to Manchester for a detachment of the 7th Hussars, which arrived this forenoon, consisting of 34 horses, officers and men, commanded by the Earl of Uxbridge . . ." <sup>(1)</sup>

The dangerous situation which had arisen at the Raven Inn on 12 February is described in an article in the *Liverpool Mercury* on the 19th.

"The colliers at St. Helen's and the neighbourhood have for some time past been forming themselves into societies, for the purpose of obtaining an advance in wages. The object of this organization, we are informed, was, for the workmen of one colliery to make the demand, and if they succeeded, then it was to be made by the others in succession; but if it was rejected, then those who made the demand were *to strike*, and were to be supported in their designs by those who remained in employment. The proprietors of the collieries, however, having become acquainted with their intentions, and with the view of frustrating them in their object, came to the resolution of immediately discharging those who were engaged in the combination; and the whole of them left their work. Up to Friday everything remained quiet; on that day John Johnson *alias* Cooke, who acted as secretary to the body, was apprehended under warrant for administering unlawful oaths. Soon after Johnson arrived in custody at the Raven Inn, in St. Helen's, some hundreds of colliers assembled, and great apprehension was entertained that they would endeavour to rescue him; but very fortunately Colonel Williams and Michael Hughes, Esq., two magistrates, were there at the moment, and while the former was addressing the multitude on the impropriety of their motives, Pollitt, the constable of Warrington, succeeded in conveying his prisoner away in chaise from the back of the Inn. As soon, however, as they were acquainted with the circumstances, the mob became very clamorous, and followed the chaise, but without being able to accomplish their object. The men then dispersed; but we understand that in the evening they visited the pits in large bodies, with fire-arms, and put out the fires and discharged the engineers at the different works. Alarmed at these proceedings, the constituted authorities thought it necessary to call in the aid of the military; and on Saturday evening, a company of the 52nd regiment and the Liverpool Light Horse received orders to march for St. Helen's. A party of infantry also marched from Warrington for the same purpose. We are happy, however, to state, that up to yesterday afternoon everything remained perfectly tranquil. It is said that a meeting of the colliers is to be convened this day at St. Helen's." <sup>(2)</sup>

The strikes had not spread to Prescot or Whiston, but were confined to the St. Helens section of the coalfield, and Johnson was now safely lodged in Liverpool jail.

On the 26th the newspaper had to report that the strikes were not yet over, though some of the men showed signs of returning to work.

"The principal objects of attack by the dissatisfied workmen have been the men who have signified their willingness to resume their employment at the old rate of wages. The magistrates (Michael Hughes and George Williams Esqrs.)

<sup>(1)</sup> Aspinall, A., *The Early English Trades Unions* (1949), pp. 315-6.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 February 1819.

have, therefore, issued a notice of their determination to protect all such persons<sup>(1)</sup> . . . and of proceeding against the offenders 'with the utmost rigour of the law.' And on Saturday last the following placard was also published by the same worthy magistrates:—

"Whereas it appears that some of the peaceable colliers in this neighbourhood, who are formed into societies for benevolent purposes, have been so far deceived by the combined colliers of Windle, Sutton, and Parr, that those societies have been induced to contribute to the present and pressing wants of the discontented colliers under an idea that they are assisting men who have been unjustly, and without any fault of their own, thrown out of employ; be it now known to such members of societies, that the majority of coal-getters of Sutton, Windle and Parr have thrown themselves out of employment, and are now illegally standing out for an increase in wages, have also, most unfeelingly, thrown out and brought to distress a great number of innocent persons, such as drawers, waggoners, &c., &c., and that therefore, however humane the motive may have been in such societies to have aided those coal getters in the first instance, to continue such aid now is only to prolong the refractory spirit existing in the body, as well as the hardships and privations of those dependent persons, and is, besides, to be accessory to their guilt. Such societies are therefore apprized that if contributions are afforded after this notice of illegality, they must expect to be proceeded against with all the severity the law will justify and the magistrates [c]an exercise."<sup>(2)</sup>

The military, the paper stated, were still at St. Helens. A guard was placed nightly at the different works to prevent wrecking. Several of the most active agitators had been arrested during the past week.

There were two postscripts to the strike. On 2 March Hughes informed Lord Derby, "The most complete tranquillity has been restored to this neighbourhood, the colliers having very generally returned to their work as usual, without the smallest injury having been done to the person or property of any individual."<sup>(3)</sup> Three days later the *Liverpool Mercury* announced, "We are happy to state, that the disputes between the coal proprietors and their workmen at St. Helen's are at an end. The masters have selected such of the men as they thought proper, but without any concessions on the part of the former".

Although this was the first known strike of any importance on

<sup>(1)</sup> This read:—"Whereas unpleasant differences have and do exist between the WORKING COLLIES in this Neighbourhood and their Employers respecting the RATE of WAGES; and several of the said Collies have in open Violation of the Law proceeded to various Acts of Violence and Outrage, particularly by threatening those Collies and others who are willing to return to their Employers with personal Injury if they do so return,

"The Magistrates desirous of preventing and deterring all Persons from such disgraceful and illegal Proceedings,

"DO HEREBY GIVE NOTICE:

"That they are determined to proceed with the utmost Rigour of the Law against all Persons who shall by Threats, Intimidation, Persuasion or otherwise hinder or prevent any Person or Persons from returning to work for their respective Employers.

"And all such Persons who are inclined and willing to return to their Work as usual, are hereby informed that the Magistrates will most Rigidly put the Law in Force for protecting them from any Violence that may be offered to them or to their Property by any evil disposed Person or Persons, in Consequence of their so returning to their Work.

"And the Magistrates wish to Caution the Coal Miners against the Designs of deluded Men, who are persuading them to persevere in their unlawful Proceedings, and they wish also to convince them that AN UNLAWFUL OATH CANNOT BIND THEM TO ANY THING IN ITSELF UNLAWFUL.

"Given under our Hands at St. Helens's, the 17th Day of February, 1819.

"MICH. HUGHES.

"GEO. WILLIAMS."

<sup>(2)</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*: 26 February 1819.

<sup>(3)</sup> Aspinall, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

the St. Helens coalfield, either by colliers or others, the degree of organization was remarkable. The Combination Acts were still in force in 1819, but a widespread organization with a recognized leader brought out over six hundred men at the one time. Moreover, after three years of trade depression and short-time working, the men appear to have been out on strike for about nine weeks without capitulating. The practice by which workers for individual concerns struck successively while being maintained by the others who remained in employment is also proof that this was something more than an instinctive revolt of dissatisfied men; it anticipated by eleven years the famous tactics of John Doherty in the cotton spinners' strike of 1830, which are often thought to have initiated this technique.<sup>(1)</sup> It will be noted too, that this strike was made by men who were well paid, the aristocrats of the working class, for, when in anything like full work, colliers received almost double the wages of unskilled labourers. The strike was an attempt to win back the high wages gained during the French Wars,<sup>(2)</sup> and it occurred during a brief trade revival which followed the first rigours of the post-war slump. It only adds to the general impression that the trade union movement originated not among the most depressed workers, such as those employed on the domestic system in the weaving and light metal industries, but in those occupations where well-paid workers were thrown together in large numbers, as in the mines and the cotton factories. Such men were able to combine more easily than the scattered domestic workers, and their superior wages made it possible for them to have some savings and even strike-funds. The use for combination purposes of money placed in friendly societies, which occurred here, arouses speculation as to whether these societies were in fact a cloak for illegal trade union activities, as was often alleged during that period.<sup>(3)</sup> The evidence on friendly societies in St. Helens and neighbourhood shows that at that time, colliers' wives were amongst their most frequent sponsors, but it is difficult to tell whether there was indeed an ulterior motive, or whether the predominance of colliers' wives in such societies was due both to the margin for saving made possible by their husbands' wages, and to the necessity to insure against the appalling industrial risks faced by their breadwinners.

On the side of the magistrates, too, there are points to be noted.

<sup>(1)</sup> S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 119 and 122.

<sup>(2)</sup> A Liverpool pamphlet of 1804, in which an anonymous writer connected with the salt industry attacked the Sankey coal owners, had this to say of the local colliers at a time of rising prices, royalties and wages within that industry.

"Thus the labouring collier finding his services sought after, and instead of soliciting employment, that employment courting him, becomes fancy. His earnings permit him to idle half the week in the ale-house, which is to him enjoyment; and by this debauched state of the working colliers, double the number of hands are required to what used to be, for the same quantum of work, and have not been obtained . . . Any person who has attended to the coal trade with an observing eye for a few years past will allow that the foregoing statement is not overcharged." *Remarks on the Salt Trade . . . in reference to the Weaver Navigation the Coal Trade and the Revenue Laws*, Liverpool, 1804.

<sup>(3)</sup> See Webbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 78 and 80. During the trial of fifteen Manchester cotton spinners for conspiracy in 1819 it was stated that, "All societies, whether benefit societies or otherwise, were only cloaks for the people of England to conspire against the State."

Attempts at conciliation seem to have taken place over several weeks before any drastic action was taken. Even after it had been determined to put down the riot, the action of the magistrates, despite their calling-in the military, was not unskillful. First a deliberate attempt was made to drive a wedge between those who were willing to return to work, and those who were not, the former being assured of all the support and protection in the power of the authorities. Then in the longer placard an attempt was made to absolve the drawers and waggoners and blame the colliers, and to throw the responsibility for the unemployment of the auxiliary and less well-paid workers onto the better-paid colliers. The magistrates were also at pains to assert that the dispute was not a lock-out but a strike. It is unlikely that all the friendly societies concerned had exclusively colliers or their wives as contributors, and the latent threat to seize the "boxes" must have alarmed workers in other trades whose savings were involved. Finally, it must be remembered that all this took place while the country was in a most dangerous state, and the greatest apprehension of internal revolution was entertained by the authorities. Peterloo took place in the following August, the Six Acts were enforced in the autumn. The Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820, miserable failure though it was, was to excite quite disproportionate fears.

Although an incident of this sort was reported in the newspapers and received the attention of the Home Office, it was not typical of the ordinary working life of the magistrate, nor does the suppression of strikes and riots, which was enjoined upon him by the statutes which he was appointed to maintain, mean that the magistrate applied a cruel and vindictive attitude to the poor in general. The social history of this period, too largely derived from Home Office records, may perhaps be rewritten in a different light from other sources. Michael Hughes was certainly not regarded as either a monster or even a harsh magistrate by the people of St. Helens. On 19 September 1833, eight years after his death, the inhabitants of St. Helens, in a document signed by every person of importance in the place, and by ministers of all the religious communities, Anglican, Wesleyan, Independent, and Catholic, called upon his son, Michael, to assume the office of Justice.

"The population around us is rapidly increasing, and calls for the presence of Magistrates interested in its welfare. Your father was coeval with the rise of this place to considerable importance; and inheriting as you do, his station in society, we wish to see you seated in the judicial chair, so long, and so ably, filled by him. And we hope, sir, this expression of our wishes, will induce you to accept a Commission as Magistrate of this County; to obtain which, we feel assured, an intimation in the proper quarter, of your willingness to accept it, is only wanting."<sup>(1)</sup>

It is scarcely likely that without a sense of respect and affection for the father the people of the neighbourhood would be so eager to secure the services of a young man who had not long become of age.

<sup>(1)</sup> Hughes Letters: Petition of 19 September 1833.

On the charity of the wealthy man, and particularly of the magistrate, heavy demands were made. In 1801, the year of his Presidency of that institution, Michael Hughes gave £100 to Liverpool Infirmary,<sup>(1)</sup> and paid for the preaching of the Anniversary sermon. In 1798, when a voluntary contribution to the Government was called for, Hughes was in charge of the contributions of St. Helens and district, and himself gave £100 out of a total of £681 0 8.<sup>(2)</sup> During the grain shortage of 1800 he paid £5 for himself and £10 for the Parys Company on two separate occasions for the relief of the Sutton poor, and in the same year advanced money to the overseer to distribute until such time as he could raise a rate to defray the heavy expenditure needed during those hard times.<sup>(3)</sup> Hughes' account books show dozens of examples of small acts of charity involving a few pounds or shillings, to all sorts of people. One such entry for 1806 runs, "Gave Mr. Byron a distress'd Player £1."<sup>(4)</sup>

To outline all the social material in the Hughes account books and papers would be impossible here on the mere score of length. Perhaps from this short account, however, will have emerged something of the personality of the man, generous, irascible, very conscious of his place in society, but no less conscious of his duties and responsibilities to his fellow-men, both rich and poor. Even within his own family he acted the part of diplomat and peace-maker between his eldest brother, Edward, and his second brother, John, and between Edward Hughes and his children. His elder brother's temper, due to his chronic ill-health, was something of a trial, and occasionally, when Edward was too tight with his purse-strings, Michael Hughes lent his nephews and nieces money. The letters and even the account books are full of little details that betray the man. On one occasion he entered a serious prayer—"Slept for the first time in my New House. May God grant me good luck and his Grace to enjoy my New Habitation. Amen! Amen! Amen!"<sup>(5)</sup>—on another when he had just purchased a lottery ticket, a humorous one—"May God send the good luck—Amen!" The new age of speed, just making its tentative way, never failed to intrigue him, and he liked to remark the times in which journeys could be made. In 1799 he carefully noted that he set out one Saturday for Swansea with his Stanley Works manager and his servants, and returned home, his business completed, the following Friday at 7 o'clock.<sup>(6)</sup> Despite his status as a landowner Hughes affected neither the habits nor tastes of the fine gentleman, nor even the vices. His losses at the card table were in shillings, and, although he liked his wine, his greatest purchases were made with that most altruistic of motives, the laying down of a cellar for future generations. Pleasures, however,

<sup>(1)</sup> Accounts: 24 March, 7 July 1801.

<sup>(2)</sup> Pocket Books: 2 and 17 April, 1798.

<sup>(3)</sup> Accounts: 3 February, 5 March, 9 December 1801.

<sup>(4)</sup> " : 25 November 1806.

<sup>(5)</sup> Accounts: 14 October 1806.

<sup>(6)</sup> " : 5 July 1799. The trip cost just over £40.

do find mention; the annual visit to Newton Races, or in his younger days the coursing of a hare or two at Rainford or Crosby. Hughes never lost his interest in the countryside, and there are several notes on nature or the seasons.

"Wednesday 6 Jany 1796. Spent in coursing hares at Rainford, Mossborough etc. 7/- N.B. In returning home at abt. 4 o'clock in the afternoon, heard a Thrush singing very loud on the right hand side of the Road leading from Denton's Green to St. Helens—an extraordinary Instance of the mildness of the season."<sup>(1)</sup> Or, 16 April 1819, "Memdm. Heard the Cuckoo for the first time this year, which is sooner than I have heard that Bird before for many years."<sup>(2)</sup>

From a doctrinaire viewpoint Michael Hughes, apparently the very image of the rising industrialist and investor, is a disappointment. He fails to fit in with the social picture of the times, however neatly he may fit into the economic background. A *parvenu*, he arrived at St. Helens without any other influence than that of recently acquired wealth, yet he became in twenty years the most respected man in the neighbourhood. He accepted eagerly authority and office, though we have no evidence that he toadied for them, but he brought to all his duties and positions a seriousness and responsibility which proved him worthy to undertake them, and, if he was not without a trace of self-importance, he had no officiousness. He bought land at the inflated prices of the French Wars, but the nucleus of the estates he collected is only now breaking up, having lasted a century and a half. Himself an industrialist, his successors were landowners and Army officers. As a magistrate he appeared both as a protector of the poor, and as a suppressor of strikes. He accounted for every penny he spent, sometimes entering his expenses in three separate records, yet his gifts to charities were frequent, and sometimes on a considerable scale. It is not so much that any one of his actions and activities is untypical, as that he refuses to be summed up and labelled for posterity's benefit.<sup>(3)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Pocket Book.

<sup>(2)</sup> Accounts.

<sup>(3)</sup> I am again grateful to Lt.-Col. M. Hughes-Young, M.C., for allowing me to use the papers at Sherdley, and to Mr. Wm. V. Spencer for giving me such ready access to them. A catalogue of the most important letters is now in the hands of the National Register of Archives. In the case of the cash books, ledgers, and day books, reference in this paper is by date of the entry.