This paper, a contribution to the burgeoning revisionism in Liverpool history, continues the positive re-evaluation of the city’s ethnic-sectarian political formations. 1 While cultural in approach, concentrating on the role of rhetoric in the construction and mobilization of a broad-based constituency of Tory support, the paper is by no means a post-structuralist exercise in linguistic determinism. The electoral success of popular Toryism depended on more than the appeal and resonance of its public language: it required the organizational skills of ‘culture-brokers’, political activists who could forge alliances among heterogeneous (but exclusively male) social groups, adjusting the rhetoric according to audience and context. 2 No study of popular Toryism in Liverpool can ignore


the demagogic oratory of the Revd Hugh McNeile and his ‘Irish Brigade’ of stridently sectarian Ulster immigrant Protestant preachers. However, I want to draw attention to a less dynamic and more prolix orator, Samuel Holme, a local builder and first president of the Liverpool Tradesmen’s Conservative Association. A talented organizer, Holme helped to construct a popular Tory identity based not only on Protestantism but also on protectionism, on a progressive ‘one nation’ philosophy sensitive to material circumstances and needs. It was a tribute to Holme’s efforts that temporary perception about material advantage was transformed into lasting political habit, producing what John Vincent has described as the deepest and most enduring Tory ‘deviation’ among Victorian workers.

Given its large casual labour market and proliferation of ‘pitch-pot’ masters and small employers throughout the unenclosed dock and warehouse system, Liverpool was an unlikely site for popular Toryism. Lacking large manufacturing plants in which employer paternalism was to flourish best, Liverpool, a freeman borough, possessed a pattern of liberties and endowments which sustained the Tory allegiance of riverside artisan trades, exemplifying ‘the autonomy of the political’. Born around the turn of the century (his obituary notice in Liverpool Celebrities is imprecise on this vital detail), Holme served his political apprenticeship in the 1820s, the last decade of the unreformed system. In this popular ancien régime, Tories and the freemen trades negotiated within a framework of

3 ‘McNeile has been called “the real creator” of Liverpool Conservatism. He made it unremittingly sectarian in character by condemning Popery both “as religious heresy . . . and as political conspiracy”: P. J. Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool 1868–1939 (Liverpool, 1981), p. 11.


6 In Memoriam of Liverpool Celebrities, pp. 114–117. The obituary notice in Porcupine, 9 Nov. 1872, gives no date of birth. H. Shimmin, Pen-and-Ink Sketches of Liverpool Town Councillors (Liverpool, 1866), pp. 29–34, states that Holme ‘was born, about the year 1800, “within gun-shot of the Town Hall”, as we remember him to have once stated in public’.
mutual advantage. Political support was exchanged for economic protection. The Tories, as Holme appreciated, generally ran parliamentary candidates from the West India trade, merchants who were also shipowners and hence major local employers: ‘I have always been of opinion that a West India merchant in Liverpool is rather a formidable opponent at an election, for they employ so many shipwrights, and so many in the ramification of those trades, that I believe that the person that opposes a West India merchant stands a very poor chance’. Similarly, at local level Tory mayors recognized their electoral obligations by judicious intervention in waterfront trade disputes, according the shipwrights, as Kevin Moore has shown, considerable power at the workplace. In the early 1830s, however, reform and the threat of freeman disfranchisement undermined the smooth operation of this time-honoured system.

True to his Tory colours, Holme stood forward to defend traditional liberties, upholding the independence, integrity, and virtue of the Liverpool freemen in his evidence to parliamentary select committees investigating corrupt practices. Although clearly distinguished from the merchants by his tradesman status, Holme was one of the largest employers in Liverpool. Proud of his origins as the son of a self-made tradesman, he enjoyed a ready rapport with working-class freemen, particularly in the St Andrew’s Street area where he spent the fortnight before elections canvassing the ‘very lowest generally living in courts’. ‘Being well known among the lower classes’, he explained, ‘I have always considered that I should do much more good by taking an out-of-doors department’. During such canvassing, he was occasionally asked for a little ‘allowance’ for drink, but these were casual requests, he insisted, not political bargains: ‘I am pretty well known in Liverpool by employing so many operatives, and I am frequently stopped in the street by those men, saying to me, in a jocular way, “Cannot you give us something to drink?” but that is at other times as

7 Select Committee on Liverpool Borough Elections, P.P. 1833, X, q. 4658. By contrast, merchants specializing in American trade tended to use American ships and to be Whigs and reformers in politics.
well as the elections'. Among his own workforce, normally around three hundred strong, there were some forty freemen, whom he expected ‘to poll which way they pleased; but I advised them to vote for the party that I was canvassing for’. 9

Although disfranchisement was avoided, the prompt registration of propertied electors in the wake of parliamentary and municipal reform rapidly reduced the significance of the freeman vote. The old ‘out-of-doors’ style of politics as practised by Holme—employer influence, bonhomie, and beer—lost much of its purchase: 10 in 1835, indeed, the Tories were ejected from local office, their hereditary hold on power seemingly at an end. With Holme to the fore, the Tories promptly readjusted, pursuing a number of strategies—involving a range of cultural styles—to construct a wider constituency of support beyond the diminishing freeman vote.

Sectarianism proved the most successful of the new approaches, sweeping the Tories back into municipal office by 1841. 11 Previously the preserve of Ulster immigrants and the hitherto diminutive Orange Order, sectarian rhetoric was readily appropriated by the Tory establishment when the newly-reformed Liberal council introduced the non-denominational Irish system in the corporation’s two elementary schools, restricting religious instruction to a selection of passages taken partly from the Catholic Douai version of the Bible. 12 Once again, the Tories posed as defenders of traditional liberties, upholding the Englishman’s

9 Select Committee on Liverpool Borough Elections, P.P. 1833, X, evidence of Holme, qq. 4658–4745; and Select Committee to Inquire into the Petition on Liverpool Borough, P.P. 1833, X, evidence of Holme, qq. 4436–4527. Holme admitted to giving his own workmen ‘a little allowance, perhaps on Saturday night a little to drink’.


11 ‘The clergy have done it all’, Holme proclaimed after the election victory: Liverpool Mercury, 29 Apr. 1842.

right to the Protestant Bible, open and entire, the very symbol of English religious and constitutional liberty. Holme, a prominent member of McNeile’s Liverpool Protestant Association, spread his energies across an interlocking network of new sectarian and party organizations to condemn the ‘double evil’ of popery:

It is a political evil, for it enslaves instead of giving liberty. It is a religious evil, for its creed is false and it withholds the scriptures from the people, for the Pope knows well that popery and the free circulation of God’s holy word cannot be co-existent. 13

In supporting McNeile, the scourge of ‘Romish devotion’ and Continental absolutism, Holme’s purpose was essentially conservative: radical Dissent, the real threat to the liberty and property of the Anglican establishment in church and state, was condemned by association with the Catholic cause. 14 Speaking to the Operative Conservative Association in 1836, Holme castigated the ‘fanciful theories’ of the new Liberal council, trusting that the electors would soon ‘return men who were not mere party men, but who would most zealously maintain those institutions which it was their duty to hand down unimpaired to the latest posterity’. 15

Sectarianism drew upon a narrative of libertarian struggle, invoking an inclusive rhetoric of patriotic duty to defend what

13 Report of a meeting to form a branch of the Protestant Association in Toxteth: Liverpool Standard, 30 Sept. 1840, quoted in Neal, Sectarian Violence, p. 65. See also Holme’s speeches in the Annual Reports of the Liverpool Protestant Association for 1838 and 1839, pamphlets held in the British Library at shelfmark 1608.733.
14 Barbara Whittingham-Jones, The Pedigree of Liverpool Politics: White, Orange and Green (Liverpool, 1936), pp. 34–39. There were also close business ties between Holme and McNeile: Holme’s firm built St Paul’s, Toxteth, McNeile’s new church, financed by grateful middle-class subscribers; Holme and his brother James were the architects for McNeile’s new ‘large and elegant’ house in Aigburth: Neal, Sectarian Violence, p. 63.
15 Liverpool Courier, 26 Oct. 1836, quoted in Murphy, Religious Problem, pp. 83–84. Holme took a leading role in the establishment of the Collegiate Institution, of which he was subsequently a director, to ‘provide the commercial, trading, and working classes with an education in which secular instruction should be combined with religious instruction in the doctrines of the Established Church’: ibid., p. 223; Shimmin, Pen-and-Ink Sketches, p. 34.
McNeile described as ‘the glory of England, her open bible, her liberty, her free press, her independence of mind in determining to stand by her law, and not to allow any man, sovereign or subject, to be absolute in the land’. When allied to ethnicity, Protestant sectarianism provided a solid base for popular Tory support, addressing workers’ fears not of Rome or reform but of Irish immigration. Through detailed knowledge of the local labour market, Holme appreciated the viability of a popular Toryism identified with defence of the ‘marginal privilege’ of the English Protestant worker. Confined to the bottom of the labour market, the Irish, he explained to Cornewall Lewis’s inquiry into the state of the Irish poor, found a niche in the kind of labouring jobs which native workers wished not to do themselves:

At the chemical manufactories nearly all the dirty work is done by the Irish, under an overseer, who is generally not Irish. In soaperies and sugar-houses the common dirty work is usually done by them. All the low departments of industry are filled by the Irish... I consider the Irish are of great value to the town; if it were not for the influx of them, the almost unlimited number at our command, and their willingness to do the dirtiest and the meanest work, the wages of common labour would rise considerably.

Following the long-established practice of his father, Holme relied heavily on such cheap labour in his building business, having some 130 Irish labourers on his books, mainly Catholics from Ulster and Leinster:

I have never employed any one as a server of bricklayers but Irishmen... Invariably those who come bricklayers' labourers remain bricklayers’ labourers. I scarcely ever knew them wish to get higher... We could not do very well without the Irish for hodmen. Englishmen will not carry the hod. The hoisting of large buildings may be done by machinery: I am now doing the new Custom-house in this way; but for small buildings the expense would be too great, and the labour of hodmen is indispensable. 18

As he moved between the new sectarian and party organizations of the 1830s, Holme sought to construct a popular Toryism which would protect the English worker not only from political-religious enslavement but also from demeaning labour. An indispensable economic presence, Irish immigrants were no less essential for the construction of a Tory identity in Liverpool: they were the internal ‘other’ against whom the English worker defined (and elevated) himself.

Holme’s efforts to organize the Tory vote, however, were by no means restricted to the Protestant working class. Partisan sectarianism was the defining characteristic of the Liverpool Tradesmen’s Conservative Association, of which he was the founder-president. Here master tradesmen, shopkeepers, and other members of the middle classes were enrolled in active support of loyalty to the King, attachment to the House of Lords, as one strong bulwark of the real liberties of the people, and an increasing desire to return to the Commons’ House of Parliament men of conservative principles, men who will resist the rash innovations of theoretical statesmen, and, above all, will secure to the people of Great Britain and Ireland, undiminished and unimpaired, those means of instruction in the Protestant Religion which they now so freely possess.19

A different cultural style was on display, with respectability and deference taking the place of the populist conviviality exhibited towards working-class freemen. Leading party figures, local members of the landed gentry, and other dignitaries were regularly invited to grace the society’s dinners and meetings. Judging by the collection of autograph letters in the Liverpool Record Office, few such invitations were accepted. George Hamilton, M.P. for Dublin, sent his apologies with requisite tact and politeness, stating his conviction that ‘the political regeneration of the Country will be attributable mainly to the revival of sound Constitutional feeling and principles—and to the union of all classes of Society—effected by means of Societies like yours’.20 Others, such as Hesketh Fleetwood, were less courteous, condemning the impact of party organization on true conservatism and gentlemanly independence:

19 Rules of the Liverpool Tradesmen’s Conservative Society (n. d.).
Amongst the ill effects of party it always appeared to me that the banding together of societies such as yours has had the effect of promoting the private interests of second and third rate Parliamentary adventurers for it has become proverbial in political life that party like an eel generally has its head pushed forward by the wriggling of the body and tail. Political party has tended and especially now does tend, to prevent the best public men in the country from cooperating with each other. 21

Undeterred by such haughty rebuffs, Holme continued his efforts to construct a broad-based popular Toryism, concentrating his energies on municipal improvements. As a tradesman, he did not belong to the élite institutions of polite culture, the preserve of merchant princes and the professions, but he participated prominently in the more practical and applied local societies, such as the Lyceum (of which he was president in 1839 and 1842) 22 and the Polytechnic Society, where ‘the active and vigorous character of the commercial and trading community can be inseparably united with the graces and accomplishments which distinguish the man of literature and of science’. In 1843, the year following his first election to the town council, he addressed the Polytechnic Society on the need for public improvements in Liverpool, the start of a sustained campaign to boost civic pride, commercial efficiency, and public health through ‘width of streets—beauty of elevation—harmony of parts—ventilation and drainage’. 23 As a builder and Tory, Holme’s multi-faceted urban improvement project bore a distinctive political imprint, embracing the latest technology while repudiating *laisser-faire* political economy with its ‘inordinate love’ of cheapness and competition.

It was this ‘mistaken economy’, most evident in the adjacent cost-cutting manufacturing districts, which threatened the commercial efficiency of the port, where the necessary

21 Hesketh Fleetwood, ibid., f. 55. Viscount Sandon, the local M.P., accepted Holme’s invitation to join ‘your select party in the amphitheatre’ to celebrate the second anniversary of the society: Sandon, 3 Oct. 1837, ibid., 395, f. 7a.


replacement of the old timber warehouses by fireproof brick and iron structures required regulation and control:

The warehouses throughout the town are generally loaded most heavily, and any error in construction will soon be discovered . . . hence the necessity of throwing overboard that unwise economy which saves an architect’s commission at the risk of the building, and of subjecting builders to a competition, which practically, in the majority of cases, obliges many men to execute their work in the cheapest manner, or otherwise submit to loss, instead of living by their labour. Unqualified competition, however, is now a favourite theme. It sounds well in theory, but it is vicious in practice.24

This false competition not only put safety at risk, it also sacrificed ‘judgement and taste’, thereby hindering the efforts to enhance Liverpool’s image and identity. Here Holme addressed a pervasive desire among Liverpool gentlemen. Proud of its rapid promotion to ‘second metropolis’, Liverpool merchants sought to upgrade the town’s physical fabric and cultural provision: unlike industrial Manchester, Liverpool, the ‘western emporium of Albion’, was to rival London as a centre of commerce, finance, and culture.25 Guided by Roscoe, its most distinguished scholar, Liverpool looked to Renaissance Italy, aspiring to establish its provincial supremacy as the Florence of the north.26 No less than the local Unitarian intelligentsia, Holme was an admirer of ‘that enlarged spirit which existed among the commercial princes of Italy, and which have rendered their cities the admiration of travellers, and the models from which the man of taste may draw the most important instruction’. However, while looking to the ‘great works of antiquity . . . for grandeur of architectural design, for just proportion and harmony of parts’, Holme based his

24 Report of William Fairbairn, Esq., C.E., on the Construction of Fire-Proof Buildings with introductory remarks by Samuel Holme (Liverpool, 1844). Holme was also keen to improve commercial efficiency by widening the streets: as mayor in 1853 he banned processions through ‘our crowded and too narrow thoroughfares’: P.R.O., Home Office Papers, HO 54/5128, ff. 560–562, Holme, 26 Aug. 1853.
26 Address delivered by the President at the opening of the Sixth Session of the Liverpool Philomathic Society (Liverpool, 1830), pp. 55–56.
proposals on the application of the latest British engineering skill and architectural talent to ensure quality, durability, and taste. The same methods and principles, he insisted, should be applied to sanitary reform and public health. Liverpool pride required the active exercise of civic duty:

When he looked at the magnificence of Liverpool, its splendid structures, and at the vast wealth of its public bodies,—when he found such was the enterprise of its merchants, that if a new port was opened in the furthest verge of the world, a Liverpool ship was the first to go to that port, and that Liverpool was the port at which the first cargo arrived,—when he thought of our magnificent Town-hall, and our splendid Assize Courts, and then went, in imagination, to Crosbie-street, it did appear to him most strange and anomalous that, though wealth poured in upon us, and we were in the very midst of civilization, there should be at least 30,000 of the population of this town,—a town which gave a tone to the whole world,—living in a state in which he would be sorry to place his horses.

To eradicate the social (and moral) evils of unsewered streets, pent-up courts, want of water, and neglect of ventilation, Holme was obliged to advocate municipal collectivism as 'competition' had undermined the paternal supervision previously exercised by employers like his father:

Every thing was done in the present day by 'public competition' . . . The result had been that capital was brought into competition with labour—that the small employers (he spoke more particularly of the trade he was connected with) had diminished in numbers—business had been gradually concentrating into fewer hands . . . the result had been that, where his father employed, comparatively, a few men, he was obliged to employ a great number; and whereas his father knew every man in his employment, understood their domestic circumstances, and was a parent to them, to whom they clung in their distresses, he having become a sort of monopolist—he confessed it—by the force of circumstances over which he had no control, might at that moment be

27 Holme, Public Improvements, pp. 6–7. Soon afterwards Holme had to resign his council seat as he gained a contract to undertake work on St George's Hall.

28 Holme's speech in Report of the Proceedings at a public meeting of the friends of the Liverpool Health of Towns' Association, held at the Music-Hall, Bold Street, September 29, 1845, for the purpose of adopting measures towards the establishment of a Working Men's Society for Promoting the Health of the Town (Liverpool, 1845), p. 18.
addressing a great number of workmen in his employment, living in the wretched habitations he had described, and in perfect ignorance of their domestic circumstances.29

Once committed to municipal intervention, Holme was undeterred by heated polemics with ideologues of private provision, *laisser-faire*, and ‘cheap government’, again taking pride in his socio-occupational status: ‘Having a considerable number of workmen in my own employment, and being from my peculiar engagements, brought into daily contact with all classes, from the highest to the lowest, I can speak from experience upon some subjects on which men can only theorise’.30 Private water companies were inadequate and inappropriate for the task, given that ‘self-interest is the ruling motive and the smallest supply at the highest rate produces the most satisfying dividends’:

This town will never be supplied as it ought to be while we are dependant on private companies . . . it is about as wise to permit a private company to supply us with air for respiration, as in crowded and densely populated towns to permit them to supply us with the equally essential element of water. It ought to be copious and free to all, and it never will be, so long as it is in the hands of those who make a profit by its sale.31

Active intervention, he insisted, was sensible pre-emptive politics: ‘We ought not to neglect the social condition of the poorer classes; if we do, we are laying materials for an explosion which, depend upon it, will shatter our social system to atoms’. Furthermore, proper provision, based on long-term planning and the latest technology—as in his controversial proposals of water supply from Rivington Pike—made economic sense:

29 Ibid., pp. 16–17.
I believe that wide thoroughfares, well-ventilated dwellings, well-sewered and well-cleansed streets, with abundance of water, will eventually cause a diminution of those rates of which you justly complain, and on the principles of real economy, and on the higher and holier principles of humanity, I commend the matter to your serious consideration.32

As practised by Holme, the politics of improvement were an exercise in ‘one nation’ Toryism, stressing the links, economic and organic, between the classes:

I stand here acknowledging that I am deeply indebted to the working classes of Liverpool, and I am not ashamed to acknowledge it. (Applause) I am desirous, and will be while I have life, of forwarding every measure which may ameliorate the hard condition of those who by the stern laws of nature are compelled to earn their daily bread by their daily labour (Applause).33

He looked upon the local Health of Towns’ Association as ‘a chain of communication and a link between ourselves and this community of our fellow-creatures whom we desired to reach’:

We wanted, too, all men rich and poor, the merchant, the tradesman, and the working man, to know and feel that physical benefit was most closely connected with the morals of the people; that it was impossible for us to have either a happy or a healthy community, so long as one-tenth of the population—our fellow-men—were living like pigs, and dying in despair, and misery and degradation.34

Holme’s unrestrained interventionism temporarily cost him his council seat, but while deeply embroiled in the Rivington Pike controversy35 he was also active in the wider arena of politics, engaged in rearguard protectionist action to defend the

33 Ibid., p. 20.
34 Report of Proceedings towards the establishment of a Working Men’s Society for Promoting the Health of the Town, pp. 16 and 20. Holme’s name appears first in the list of the General Committee: ‘First Annual Report of the Liverpool Health of Towns’ Association’, Liverpool Health of Town’s Advocate, no. 8, 1 Apr. 1846. He was appointed to four subcommittees: Lecture; Apparatus and Diagrams; Health of Tenements; and Water and Sewerage.
35 Derek Fraser, Urban Politics in Victorian England (Leicester, 1976), pp. 160–166, provides a useful analysis of the controversy. For an example of
Navigation Acts. 'The Navigation Laws want repealing, but the question will be almost as difficult as getting rid of the Corn Laws', Clarendon predicted in early 1847, 'for in the minds of many they are an institution, a bulwark, bound up with Church and State, and as Ricardo says, 40th article of the National Creed'.

Despite strong support in Liverpool for 'laws so vitally important to the shipowners, ship-carpenters and mariners of this port', the local protectionist campaign began auspiciously with the defeat of both Tory candidates at the general election of 1847. Cardwell, the Peelite candidate of 'Commercial Freedom and Religious Toleration', displayed skilful political dexterity, outmanoeuvring the protectionists in an election address of studied ambiguity, promising to 'support no change in the Navigation Laws calculated to interfere with the growing prosperity of the shipping and commercial interests'. Furthermore, the Tories were hampered by their unfortunate choice of candidates. Lord John Manners had impeccable protectionist credentials, but embedded within the organic idealism of his 'Young Englandism' was a penchant for Puseyite Tractarianism. Such 'Romish' ritualism aroused the wrath of McNeile and his followers, who brought forward Sir Digby Mackworth, an uncompromising Orange zealot, a 'No Popery' candidate pledged to the repeal of the Emancipation Act and the exclusion of Catholics from public office. The electoral débâcle of 1847 was an early warning of subsequent tension and dysfunction within sectarian politics. The rhetoric

anti-Pike retrenchment, seeking 'to show the cumbrous, useless, expensive, clogging and clumsy nature of the machinery by which the business of this large and otherwise highly intelligent parish, is worked; and to suggest a system of management, simple, cheap and easy of attainment', see Liverpool Burgesses and Ratepayers Magazine and Tradesmen's Advertiser, 2 June 1851.


37 Second Annual Meeting of the Liverpool Constitutional Association (Liverpool, 1850), p. 5.

38 Sarah Palmer, Politics, shipping and the repeal of the navigation laws (Manchester, 1990), pp. 109–110.

of 'No Popery', introduced to defend the Tory-Anglican establishment, was later to be stood on its head: with populist flourish, militant Dissenters were to take to the streets to condemn the ritualism prevalent in the Anglican church and the upper echelons of the Conservative party. Sectarian organizations like the Orange Order were 'Protestants First', placing religious allegiance above partisan affiliation.

Chastened by defeat in 1847, the Tories reorganized in January 1848 as the Liverpool Constitutional Association, of which Holme was a committee member, and from which the modern party traces its origins. Adopting the motto, 'The Church, the Throne and the People. Ships, Colonies and Commerce', the Association established a set of principles which placed protectionism above Protestantism, the essential aim being 'to vindicate the principles of the British Constitution, as generally held by "WILLIAM PITT AND GEORGE CANNING", securing for commerce, agriculture, manufactures, shipping and railways, due encouragement, thereby procuring for the artisan, the peasant, the operative, and the merchant-seaman, that fair reward for his labour which Englishmen have been used to enjoy'. Registration of voters was the main function, but the Association turned to extra-parliamentary agitation when the protectionists at Westminster, having secured temporary delay, failed to prevent the final repeal of the Navigation Laws in 1849.

The campaign highlighted the distinctive features of Liverpool Toryism. In terms of policy, Liverpool protectionists were 'constitutional' Tories, under which proud label H. C. Chapman, a local merchant and shipowner, promoted an alternative Bill, removing the vexatious restrictions on 'long voyage' shipping but otherwise leaving protectionism untouched. Toryism of this order—the politics of Chatham and Pitt, of Liverpool, Huskisson,
Canning, Grey, and, until his treachery, Peel—looked to economic management through a strong and responsive executive, arbitrating between the needs of government and of society in taxation and tariffs, and recognizing the interdependence of classes and interests in the distribution of national income. By contrast, ideological free traders, 'the restless politicians of the Manchester school of economists', stood condemned for their 'anarchistic' and divisive politics. Free trade, the Liverpool Constitutional Association regretted, 'has placed in hostile array class against class—the factory against the field—the Colonies against the mother country'.

Holme gave this Toryism a 'one-nation' inflexion in which protectionism, a register of patriotism and Protestantism, stood in proud defiance of the false political economy of cheap competition. The policy which had carried England forward to supremacy, protectionism was the necessary guarantee of liberty and property, ensuring the continued prosperity and security of the providential Protestant nation. Holme and his fellow Liverpool Tories propounded an inclusive rhetoric of national pride, welfare, and enterprise as they drew attention to 'the very important position which has been gained by the enemies of the British Constitution in the abrogation of those time-honoured Navigation Laws which fostered the commerce of England—secured for its flag the dominion of the seas—guarded its colonies in every quarter of the globe—made it the exalted missionary of civilization, and rendered its prosperity the envy and wonder of the world'.

At a public meeting in June 1850, jointly convened by the Liverpool Constitutional Association and the National Association for the Protection of British Industry and Capital, Holme applauded and flattered the national character of the audience, a true Tory gathering of all classes:

There he saw assembled the peer of the realm, a large number of the merchant princes of Liverpool, whose names were honourably known

44 Second Annual Meeting of the Liverpool Constitutional Association, pp. 8-10.
in every part of the world;—(hear, hear.)—he saw himself surrounded by many tenant farmers, by many of that important class, with whom he had himself the honour to be identified—he meant the tradesmen of the town. (Bravo, and hear, hear.) He saw, too, a number of spectators from amongst those men who earned their bread by their daily labour, and who were relatively as much interested in the prosperity and glory of England as the noble chairman and his family, who were the possessors of untold acres. (Great applause.) He (Mr Holme) thought that out of England it would be impossible to witness such an assembly as that. (Great applause).

Protectionism was the cement of this patriotic interdependence and social harmony:

It was the duty of England to connect all classes in a mutual phalanx of support. (Hear, hear.) No one class was to prosper on the fall or ruin of another; and, if it were so, then it appeared strange they should be placed in unjust competition with foreigners, who paid no part of the national burdens.

As he moved the first resolution, a comprehensive indictment of free trade, Holme condemned the reckless pursuit of cheapness and competition which, in failing to acknowledge England’s historic burdens and duties, threatened to undermine its hard-won constitutional liberty and prosperity:

With one swoop the legislature swept away the navigation laws, and on which he had asserted previously and again repeated it, the maritime glory of England was built (Cheers). This prevented their operative classes competing with the ill-fed and worse paid classes of the Baltic: but they must meet unprotected labour such as this, and this was called forsooth, ‘the spread of liberal opinions’. (Laughter and cheers)... Had we no taxes to pay, no poor-rates to raise, no colonies to maintain, no army and navy to support, and would other nations indeed reciprocate with us, then he said frankly he should be a free trader to the full extent of the term. Then would the skill and indomitable industry of Englishmen, placed in fair competition, be victorious over the world. But there was unfairness in the present competition, and it was that unfairness which they objected to.46

Such agitation, however, was to no avail, serving only to

46 Report of the Speeches delivered at the great meeting held in the Liverpool Amphitheatre, Thursday, June 6, 1850, for the Protection of British Industry and Capital. Published by the Liverpool Constitutional Association (Liverpool, 1850).
embarrass and antagonize the Tory parliamentary leadership, for whom protectionism was a lost cause.\textsuperscript{47} However, its local force should not be denied: indeed, its ability to attract broad support probably accounted for the halting progress of the local free trade lobby, the Liverpool Financial Reform Association, which offered an essentially negative programme.\textsuperscript{48} In its Liverpudlian inflexion, protectionism was not a matter of social stasis, nostalgia, or mercantile self-interest. As in London, where 'gentlemanly capitalists' with shipping, timber, tea, and sugar interests preferred to reap the benefits of monopoly rather than rush headlong into an open and risky market, Liverpool's merchant princes in the West India trade were staunchly protectionist.\textsuperscript{49} Some of the best debating points were scored by McNeile and other protectionist orators who exposed the double standards of liberal free traders whose policies condemned the West Indian colonies to the unfair competition of 'Slave Labor versus Free Labor Sugar':

\begin{quote}
The free traders idolize cheapness, and exalt it as a motive of action, far beyond all moral, social and political principles. In order to save one penny in the pound of sugar, these avaricious hucksterers sacrifice the transcendant glory of negro emancipation.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

The distinctive feature of Liverpool protectionism, however, was its extension beyond old, previously privileged, mercantile interests to incorporate the riverside artisan trades. Indeed, it was the last expression of the old, once dominant, Tory-shipwright alliance.

By defending freeman rights, the marginal privilege of Protestant workers, and the Navigation Laws, the Tories retained the overwhelming support of the shipwrights. Young shipwright apprentices were the most conspicuous participants

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\textsuperscript{47} Palmer, \textit{Politics, Shipping, and Repeal}, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{49} Howe, 'Free trade', pp. 396–404.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Slave Labor versus Free Labor Sugar. Speech of the Revd Dr McNeile, delivered at a public meeting held at Liverpool, 13th June 1848} (London, 1848); \textit{Second Annual Meeting of the Liverpool Constitutional Association}, p. 8.
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in sectarian violence against the Irish, ritualized clashes which
developed into an adolescent vendetta with a dynamic of its
own. In disrupting meetings of the Anti-Monopoly
Association—gatherings which attracted large numbers of Irish
dock labourers for whom free trade meant more trade through
the docks—they were joined by bricklayers’ apprentices
working for Holme. 51 The rejection of free trade, or rather the
retention of the Navigation Laws, was essential for the riverside
artisan trades. With the rapid growth of the docks, fuelled by
the expansionist fervour of Bramley-Moore and Hartley in
eager anticipation of the freeing of trade, 52 shipbuilding had
been squeezed out of the Liverpool waterfront, leaving the
shipwrights to concentrate on ship repair. An erratic business at
the best of times, this had reduced them to the somewhat
anomalous position of a skilled trade with an employment
pattern similar to that of the casualism of the docks. Repeal of
the Navigation Laws was a devastating blow, since foreign ships
made minimal use of local repair facilities. 53 ‘If it were not for
the colonial-built ships, our men would be in a state of
starvation’, the officers of the Liverpool Shipwrights’
Association testified to the special committee appointed by the
town council in 1850 to consider the state of the shipbuilding
trade in Liverpool: ‘We should be a good deal better off if you
never let a foreign ship come into this port, for they do us no
good’. 54 In a letter to Edward Molyneux, president of the
Liverpool Constitutional Association, William Dalton, a ship’s
carpenter, calculated that foreign vessels, Prussian and
otherwise, had reduced income in the graving docks to one

51 Kevin Moore, “‘This Whig and Tory Ridden Town’: Popular Politics in
p. 367–385. In the political excitement of 1848 there were rumours that
the local Irish Confederates intended to take Holme’s life: Dowling’s
52 Report of the speech of J. Bramley-Moore on the subject of dock extension addressed to
the Liverpool Town Council (Liverpool, 1846).
53 ‘Labour and the Poor: Liverpool. Letter xvii: Ship-Building and
Repairing’, Morning Chronicle, 9 Sept. 1850.
54 Shipbuilding in Liverpool. Evidence taken before the Committee appointed by the Town
Council to consider the present state of the Shipbuilding Trade in Liverpool, and the
best means which can be adopted for encouraging it (Liverpool, 1850), pp.
113–150, evidence of Linacre and Neill.
tenth of the level previously generated by the regular caulking and overhaul of colonial-built vessels.\textsuperscript{55} The decline soon spread to allied riverside trades. Betteley, one of the largest manufacturers of chain cables and anchors in the country, presented a bleak report to the annual general meeting of the Liverpool Constitutional Association in 1850:

In the year 1846 he was manufacturing 50 tons per week; in 1849 the quantity was reduced to 40 tons per week; and now they were only making 20 tons per week . . . he was obliged to propose a reduction in the wages of the workmen, and many of them were thrown out of employment. If this was to be the result of free trade, we should find our workhouses becoming enlarged and our poor rates increasing.\textsuperscript{56}

For all their economic, political, and symbolic importance, repeal of the Navigation Acts did not presage a new Liberal ascendancy in Liverpool. Merchant groups soon set former differences aside to co-operate in the newly established Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, in defiance of predictions that ‘it was impossible for gentlemen of different political opinions, having different commercial interests, and different commercial views, to meet and act for a common object and a common good’.\textsuperscript{57} In politics, Liverpool remained a Tory town, much to the consternation of merchants like George Melly, ‘a Liberal of the most advanced principles of social science’, who bemoaned the enduring Tory hegemony in ‘the largest commercial port in the world—and commerce is another word for free trade—commerce is another word for radicalism—commerce is another word for free and enlightened opinion’.\textsuperscript{58}

Protestant sectarianism doubtless contributed to the continuing Tory success, but cultural style, the persistence of the convivial populism introduced by Holme, was probably a more important factor. Having served as mayor in 1852 and become


\textsuperscript{56} Second Annual Meeting of the Liverpool Constitutional Association, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{57} Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, First Annual Report of the Council, presented to the Chamber at the General Meeting, held February 3, 1851 (Liverpool, 1851), p. 6.

\textsuperscript{58} Northern Daily Times, 28 Oct. 1857: newspaper cutting in Danson Archive, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside.
an alderman a year later, Holme retired to the magisterial bench to indulge his propensity for lengthy and homely speeches, subjecting prisoners, Porcupine observed, to a veritable ‘tongue-thrashing’.59 Toryism, however, continued to thrive in the interlocking associational network—party, popular, and sectarian—which facilitated ready interaction between the classes. Local notables continued to monopolize political positions—there was no working-class Conservative councillor before 1914—but as need arose, they were able to mingle at ease within the network, displaying a Holme-like common touch. Indeed, this soon became the distinguishing (and essential) characteristic of local Tory leadership, a style perfected in Archibald Salvidge’s electoral machine, perhaps the most remarkable example of British ‘boss politics’.60 The Liberals, by contrast, remained socially exclusive (and hence politically disabled), safeguarding the integrity of their advanced principles from contaminating contact with drink, ignorance, and vulgar prejudice.61

Furthermore, the Tories continued to honour the obligations which Holme had acknowledged, placing the needs of their working-class supporters above the policies and practices of mainstream middle-class conservatism and orthodox political economy. Forwood was drawn beyond the rhetoric of ‘Tory democracy’ into a Tory version of municipal socialism.62 Salvidge, his successor, defied local ‘business conservatism’ to

61 Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, pp. 12–16. See also B. D. White, History of Corporation of Liverpool, 1835–1914 (Liverpool, 1951), p. 28 for an interesting contrast between the cultural styles of Holme and Sir Joshua Walmsley, chair of the Tradesmen’s Reform Association.
62 Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, ch. 13. In 1870, however, Holme wrote from retirement to condemn the extravagance of municipal interventionism, a consequence of the unco-ordinated proliferation of council committees and subcommittees. As a builder, White notes, his objections to the construction of St Martin’s Cottages ‘were perhaps not based only a zeal for economy’: White, History of Corporation of Liverpool, pp. 93 and 104.
uphold Tariff Reform, championing local working-class interests against the 'lower middle-class fraud, called Liberalism or "Free Trade"'.

‘Faithfulness to constitutional fundamentals does not rule out progress’, Alderman Shennan declared as he celebrated the centenary of the Liverpool Constitutional Association in 1948 in words echoing (but not specifically acknowledging) Holme’s achievements:

Indeed, in many respects, such as public health, water supply, development of electric power, and practical encouragement of industrial enterprise, this Tory city has deservedly won fame as a pioneer of civic progress... There is, believe me, more solid substance in Liverpool's famous Tory Democracy than the scoffers have realized.

63 Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, pp. 210–213.