

## CLIO, CULTURE AND THE CITY: HISTORICAL SOCIETIES IN THEIR NINETEENTH-CENTURY URBAN CONTEXT

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1848 was, without doubt, an historic year. Across the continent of Europe, political revolutions broke out in one kingdom after another.<sup>1</sup> The *Communist manifesto*, the work of two young men, one of whom, Friedrich Engels, had some four years previously seen the imminence of class war in the city of Manchester, proclaimed the death knell of bourgeois capitalism.<sup>2</sup> 'Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.'<sup>3</sup>

Though Manchester, and England *pace* Engels, was spared the upheaval of revolution, it saw the revival of Chartism, of torchlit meetings on the Pennine moors, and the gallant defence of the Houses of Parliament by the aged duke of Wellington against the threat of the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor, hastening over Westminster Bridge in a hansom cab to deliver the third Chartist petition to the House of

- 1 John Saville, *1848: the British state and the Chartist movement* (Cambridge, 1987); E. J. Hobsbawm, *The age of revolution, 1789-1848* (New York, 1962), pp. 349-62.
- 2 Friedrich Engels, *The condition of the working class in England*, trans. and ed. W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (Oxford, 1958).
- 3 F. Engels and K. Marx, *The communist manifesto* (Penguin edn, Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 120-1.

Commons from the mass meeting on Kennington common.<sup>4</sup> Economic depression, caused in part by the failure of railway speculation, brought unemployment and unrest, whilst cholera, that dramatic disease of social tension, brought death to British cities, confirming the worst fears of the public health reformers.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, wrote George Kitson Clark, 'a man standing on the threshold of the new age might well have been pardoned for thinking that the work of fundamental change must now go swiftly forward, that the citadel of privilege would soon fall and the disinherited classes enter to take their rightful places in the community.'<sup>6</sup> If, in retrospect, an historic year, 1848 scarcely seemed an appropriate time to found an historic society 'for preserving, arranging and publishing such historical documents, antiquities, objects of natural history, specimens of ancient and medieval art as are connected with the Counties Palatine of Lancaster and Chester'.<sup>7</sup>

Peculiarly inappropriate, it would seem, in Liverpool, a city which, in addition to the more general urban crises of the year, had borne the brunt in 1847 of the hordes of wretched refugees fleeing from famine in Ireland. In the spring of 1847, 3,000 Irish a day were disembarking at the port of Liverpool, and 500,000 had entered by July 1848.<sup>8</sup> Although some of these were returned to Ireland or re-embarked bound for America, many remained. They constituted in 1848 a crippling burden upon the city's philanthropic resources and its select vestry's poor-relief system. In addition, they brought with them the louse-borne 'tramp fever', typhus, to add to the ravages of cholera and influenza.<sup>9</sup> In the face of these civic emergencies, it seems remarkable that the mayor of Liverpool

- 4 D. Goodway, *London Chartism* (Cambridge, 1984); D. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (London, 1975).
- 5 John Leigh, *History of the cholera in Manchester in 1849* (Manchester, 1850); R. J. Morris, *Cholera, 1832: the social response to an epidemic* (London, 1976).
- 6 G. Kitson Clark, *The making of Victorian England* (London, 1962), p. 42. The man was, of course, John Bright, not Friedrich Engels.
- 7 *T.H.S.L.C.*, I (1848-9), prospectus.
- 8 P. J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: a political history of Liverpool, 1868-1939* (Liverpool, 1981), pp. 7-8.
- 9 Frank Neal, *Sectarian violence: the Liverpool experience, 1819-1914* (Manchester, 1988), chap. 3.

should be willing to take the chair at that meeting in the board room of the Liverpool Collegiate Institution on 20 June 1848 and preside over the formation of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.<sup>10</sup>

It is not the intention in this paper to trace the history of the society from its slightly inauspicious origins to the present day. The aim here is to widen the scope of enquiry, and set the Historic Society within the context of the foundation and development of historical societies in both Britain and the United States. In doing so, it hopes to suggest some means by which these more specialist societies helped to develop an urban cultural identity, building on the base laid by the more generalist literary and philosophical and other learned societies, which, as R. J. Morris has shown, played such a crucial part in providing a non-controversial basis for the establishment of bourgeois hegemony in the early nineteenth-century industrial town.<sup>11</sup>

Some four months prior to the foundation meeting of the Historic Society, its name had been suggested at a meeting of the proprietors of the Royal Institution, when the president, the Rev. Dr Raffles, proposed that a local society be formed for the collection and preservation of documents, 'to be called the Historic Society as in numerous cases in America'.<sup>12</sup> Despite Liverpool's transatlantic connections, it seems strange that the United States should be held up as an example in this regard when earlier in the nineteenth century American scholars had bemoaned the fact that the sources for historical scholarship in the new republic were so poor as compared to the wealth of material available in the long-established libraries of Europe.<sup>13</sup> Awareness of this cultural gap, together with the urgent need of a new and insecure nation to provide

10 *T.H.S.L.C.*, I (1848-9), p. 1.

11 R. J. Morris, *Class, sect and party. The making of the British middle class: Leeds, 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1980), chap. 9; *Health care and popular medicine in nineteenth-century England*, ed. J. Woodward and D. Richards (London, 1977), chap. by Ian Inkster; *Class, city and culture*, ed. A. J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts (Manchester, 1985), chap. by M. E. Rose.

12 *T.H.S.L.C.*, II (1849-50), p. 260.

13 Leslie W. Dunlap, *American historical societies, 1790-1860* (Philadelphia, 1974), p. 5.

itself with an historical identity rooted in a discovered past, brought activity. As Leslie Dunlap shows in his study of early American historical societies, by the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 a historical society had been organized in every state east of Texas with the exception of Delaware.<sup>14</sup> Of the sixty-five state, county and city historical societies listed by Dunlap, forty had been founded before 1848.<sup>15</sup> Most senior of all was the Massachusetts Historical Society, 'the oldest, greatest and still, alas, the most exclusive historical society in the United States'.<sup>16</sup> Its founder, the Rev. Jeremy Bellknap, minister of the Federal Street Church, Boston, called together, on 24 January 1791, ten friends, including four ministers of religion, three lawyers, a physician, the librarian of Harvard College and a 'nondescript if zealous collector of books', to found a 'Historical Society', having rejected the original title of 'Antiquarian Society'.<sup>17</sup> Collecting was to be the society's primary function, but Bellknap and his fellows intended it to be 'an active not a passive literary body, not to lie waiting like a bed of oysters for the tide to flow in upon us'.<sup>18</sup> There was an awareness that given the rapidity of change in the new country, documentary and other records of the past might be ignored and lost with little hope of replacement. In South Carolina, where a historical committee of its Library Society had been formed in 1833, letters of the Revolutionary Committee of Safety were rescued from 'trash that was used to fill a mud hole' in Charleston's Calhoun Street; whilst in Indiana there were fears that historical records were 'rapidly passing into oblivion' owing to 'the absence of well directed efforts to preserve them'.<sup>19</sup> A historical society was formed in 1831, on the initiative of John H. Farnham, a corresponding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society.<sup>20</sup> 'Our first

14 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

15 *Ibid.*, part 2 ('Sketches of the societies'), pp. 137-219.

16 *Massachusetts Historical Society, 1791-1948: handbook* (Boston, 1949), p. 14.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

18 Clifford L. Lord, *New horizons: presidential address to the 20th meeting of the American Association for State and Local History* (Iowa City, 1960).

19 Dunlap, *American historical societies*, p. 10.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

duty', Peter Du Pouceau told the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1837, 'is to collect and preserve materials for future history and to elucidate historical facts which may have become obscure by the operation of time.'<sup>21</sup> Such materials were not wholly documentary. The deaths of early pioneers such as Daniel Boone led historical societies in East Tennessee, Missouri, Iowa and Ohio to plan interviews with early settlers and record their recollections.<sup>22</sup> The Chicago Historical Society, founded in 1856, proposed the investigation of aboriginal burial mounds, and focused much of its activity on establishing the early history of a new and rapidly growing city in the context of the north-west region.<sup>23</sup> It took great pride in its possession of pioneer city newspapers like the *Chicago Democrat*, containing as it did the only surviving evidence of the ordinances of the 'village town of Chicago'.<sup>24</sup> The Chicago Society, like many others, existed not merely for the purposes of collection and preservation of historical records and of artefacts in its library or its 'cabinet of curiosities', but also for 'historical inquiry' and for 'disseminating historical information'.<sup>25</sup> Meetings originally intended for the conduct of society business became the sites of discussions, reports and lectures on aspects of state or city history. The Hon. John Sherman's address to the Fire Lands Historical Society in Milan, Ohio, in 1858 brought an 'army of wagons, carriages and vehicles of every name and style' into town, so that 'every foot of standing room was occupied' in the hall in which he spoke.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to public popularity, American historical societies, especially the state historical societies, enjoyed a close relationship with their state governments and legislatures. Early in their history, many applied for and were granted incorporation by the state legislature. Although not a

21 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19; John G. Shea, 'Chicago from 1673–1725, or what is known of the first half century of its history' (paper sent to Chicago Historical Society, 1861), *Bulletin of the Chicago Historical Society*, II (2) (1936).

24 *Bulletin of the Chicago Historical Society*, I (1) (1934–5), p. 24.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Dunlap, *American historical societies*, pp. 90–6.

state historical society, the Chicago Historical Society received an act of incorporation recognizing its work as 'conducive to the public good of a State' in 1857.<sup>27</sup> It received fifty copies of all Illinois state publications free of charge provided that regular reports of its transactions were submitted to the government.<sup>28</sup> Other societies received similar favours. The Missouri Historical and Philosophical Society, founded in 1844 in the senate chamber in Jefferson City, was given rooms in the capitol building furnished at state expense, whilst the Wisconsin State Historical Society, founded in 1849 and incorporated in 1854, was voted an annual grant of \$500 by the state legislature.<sup>29</sup> Societies responded in kind, retrieving, preserving and publishing state archives and giving state governors and legislators *ex officio* membership of the society.<sup>30</sup> The foundations were laid for the emergence of the public, state-funded historical societies of the twentieth century with their dedicated buildings at state capitol or state university.<sup>31</sup> The Chicago Historical Society, although privately supported 'entirely by memberships, door fees and income from endowments', was able to recover rapidly from the loss of its building and library in the Great Fire of 1871. In 1932 it took possession of its fourth (and current) home, a fine neo-Georgian building—part museum, part library, part archive—in Lincoln Park, looking over Gauden's statue of Abraham Lincoln to the waters of Lake Michigan.<sup>32</sup>

Britain with its long and venerated past had, it would seem, less need to establish an historical identity. A national consciousness had been forged in the bitterly fought wars of the eighteenth century culminating in the titanic struggle against Napoleon and the victory at Waterloo. Britons knew

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., pp. 50–1.

29 Ibid., pp. 51, 219.

30 Ibid., p. 50.

31 By 1904, under its superintendent Reuben Thwaites, the Wisconsin Historical Society had become a 'broad programmed, Western type progressive society', which was 'publicly supported with growing largesse because it served the public with growing effectiveness': Lord, *New horizons*, pp. 5–6.

32 *Bulletin of the Chicago Historical Society*, I (1) (1934–5).

who they were and where they stood.<sup>33</sup> 1848 had seen the completion of the first two volumes of Macaulay's *History of England from the accession of James II*, chronicling the upward progress of parliamentary sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> The records of its progress were safely preserved in the libraries of ancient universities or in the British Museum and Library, completed in 1847.<sup>35</sup> An Act of 1838 (1 & 2 Vic. c. 94) laid the foundations for the creation of the Public Record Office to house, list and preserve the legal records of the nation.<sup>36</sup> The Society of Antiquaries had been revived in London in 1707, followed by a Scottish Society of Antiquaries founded in Edinburgh in 1780 and chartered two years later.<sup>37</sup>

Thus where local learned societies were formed in the first half of the nineteenth century, they tended to be of that generalist, literary and philosophical or statistical nature which Morris and others have described. Of the forty-one historical, archaeological and kindred societies in the British Isles founded before 1848 and listed by Sara Harcup in 1965, the great majority belong to the 'kindred' variety. Only fifteen, including the Surtees Society of 1834 and the Chetham Society of 1843, appear from their titles to have a specialist historical, or, more commonly, an antiquarian or archaeological purpose. Only one, the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society of 1839, carries the word 'historical' or 'historic' in its title. Few—Surtees, Chetham and the venerable Newcastle Society of Antiquaries of 1813 being honourable exceptions—had their base amidst the rapidly changing landscapes and townscapes of urban, industrial England.<sup>38</sup>

33 Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992).

34 T. B. Macaulay, *History of England from the accession of James II* (Penguin edn, Harmondsworth, 1979); W. Speck, 'Thomas Babington Macaulay', in *The historian at work*, ed. John Cannon (London, 1980), chap. 4.

35 Colley, *Britons*, p. 91.

36 J. D. Cantwell, *The Public Record Office, 1838–1958* (London, 1991).

37 Dunlap, *American historical societies*, p. 6.

38 Sara E. Harcup, *Historical, archaeological and kindred societies in the British Isles: a list* (London, 1965). Harcup, of course, lists only those still in existence in 1965, and thus omits societies such as the short-lived Lancashire Antiquarian Society of 1829; V. I. Tomlinson, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, 1883–1983', *T.L.C.A.S.*, LXXXIII (1985), pp. 1–39.

A cursory study of these 'archaeological and antiquarian', or 'architectural and archaeological' societies, and of their post-1848 successors, shows them to have their roots in rural England. Drawing their inspiration from the Romantic movement, from the novels of Walter Scott, the architecture of Augustus Pugin and the prophesies of John Ruskin, the Anglican clergy and the landed gentry presided at their foundation and dominated their committees and lists of patrons.<sup>39</sup> The Leicestershire Archaeological Society was founded at a meeting in the Guildhall, Leicester, on the basis of the interest aroused by a paper read the previous year by the Rev. G. A. Poole on the churches of Leicestershire. The archdeacon of Leicester presided, and Thomas Ingram, a leading local solicitor, was elected as secretary to the new society. Managed by the local gentry, clergy and other members of the professional upper middle class, the society established a temporary museum, organized tours of historic sites, especially churches, for its members and gave advice to clergy on church restoration. Any rural dean who joined became, *ex officio*, a member of the executive committee.<sup>40</sup> Further north, the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society was founded in 1866 at a meeting in the Crown Hotel, Penrith. William Brown of Tallentire Hall, Cockermouth, took the chair, supported by the Rev. W. J. Greenwell, F.S.A., of Durham, and some fifty ladies and gentlemen including the town clerk of Carlisle and the vicar of Kirkby Lonsdale. William, second earl of Lonsdale, agreed to become president of the new society, to be followed by the third earl in 1870, and the fourth in 1877. Among the highlights of its early years was a 'pilgrimage' along the Roman wall together with the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries, whose Dr Bruce acted as 'chief pilgrim', supported by the earl of Ravensworth.<sup>41</sup> Even the city-based Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society of 1883 gained

39 *The imagined past: history and nostalgia*, ed. C. Shaw and M. Chase (Manchester, 1989).

40 *The Leicestershire Archaeological Society, 1855-1955* (Leicester, 1955).

41 John F. Curwen, 'Notes on the early history of the society', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, XXXIII (1933), pp. 1-6.

early support from the earl of Derby, the earl of Wilton, the earl of Carnarvon and the earl of Lathom, all of whom its first secretary, G. C. Yates, circularized along with other owners of local stately homes, both to obtain aristocratic support and locate potential visiting places for the infant society.<sup>42</sup> Thus the antiquarian and the archaeological mingled with the aristocratic and the ecclesiastical to preserve a rural past, whether real or imagined. The road to the National Trust and the Council for the Protection of Rural England lay open.

It should seem that Clio in her antiquarian or archaeological guises was of limited use in forming a historical identity for a rapidly growing and changing industrial or commercial city like Liverpool. Even the Historic Society, despite its deliberate choice of that title, saw its remit as encompassing the 'counties palatine of Lancaster and Chester'.<sup>43</sup> Joseph Mayer's design for its diploma with its Gothic arches, winged angels, gallant knights, fair maidens and Good Queen Bess would seem to summon up that antique and romantic past so beloved of the early Victorians.<sup>44</sup> Yet there seems, from an all too superficial perusal of the society's early *Transactions*, something of the need not only to preserve the record of a rapidly vanishing past, but to analyse it critically to provide a proper sense of historical perspective. The apologia for the society's foundation held that 'the gradual changes which transformed this district from lands of comparatively little value to its present state are as interesting locally as it is nationally instructive to trace the rise of the great centres of manufacture and commerce within the limits of these two counties'.<sup>45</sup> Liverpool's mayor, in his inaugural address to the society, stressed the interest to the historian in seeing the development of Liverpool over two centuries from 'little more than a fishing town' to 'the present moment, with its docks, its shipping and its commerce, connecting it with every quarter of the globe'. Though it was not, he concluded,

42 Tomlinson, 'Lancs. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.' pp. 8, 11.

43 *T.H.S.L.C.*, I (1848-9), p. 3.

44 Copy of diploma in Liv. R.O., Historic Society of Lancs. and Ches. archive (unlisted); printed on cover of Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, *Anniversary programme, 1848-1998*.

45 *T.H.S.L.C.*, I (1848-9), prospectus, p. 1.

his role to enter into the details of the society's objectives, 'if it seemed likely to be the means of promoting the science, the literature or the commerce of the town, it was worthy of their support'.<sup>46</sup>

There was an urban feel to the early development of the society. Its eight vice-presidents included *ex officio* the mayors of Liverpool, Manchester, Chester and Lancaster.<sup>47</sup> Over half its original membership were recorded under Liverpool addresses, with nearly a quarter from other Lancashire towns and the rest mainly from Cheshire, including Birkenhead, although Chester itself supplied only eight of the society's initial 250 members.<sup>48</sup> Forty years later, Liverpool's share of the membership had fallen to 28 per cent, but the 24 per cent Lancashire and 16 per cent Cheshire membership reveals, on closer inspection, the drift of the middle-class members to the suburbs. Members resident in towns and cities other than those in Lancashire and Cheshire, however, had increased from eleven (4 per cent) in 1848 to thirty-eight (16 per cent) in 1888, with one member in New York and two in Boston.<sup>49</sup>

Not only the membership but also the content of the society's proceedings had an urban flavour to them. Despite a heavy leaning in the early *Transactions* towards the Roman, Anglo-Saxon and later medieval periods, discussions of the common seal of Liverpool or on mayor-making customs showed an attention to rooting the city in its more remote past.<sup>50</sup> James Kenrick, M.D., described, in 1852, his excavations at Mote Hill, Warrington, carried out because 'a few years more and the existence of the Moot or Mote-Hill at Warrington will become a mere record of history. The course of modern requirement has called for its entire demolition and removal.'<sup>51</sup> The Rev. D. Thom declared one of the

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. vii-xiii.

49 *Ibid.*, XXXIX (1888-9), pp. vii-xvi. The figures omit honorary and associate members.

50 *Ibid.*, I (1848-9), pp. v-vi; III (1850-1), pp. v-vi.

51 *Ibid.*, V (1852-3), p. 59; the activity might perhaps be compared with the Chicago Historical Society's interest in the 'aboriginal burial mounds' of its vicinity: see above.

purposes of his two-part paper on Liverpool chapels and churches to be to prepare those visitors who had gained their information from 'antiquated' sources for 'some of the alterations which time and municipal improvements had produced'. In addition an inhabitant of the town, 'if possessed of an antiquarian spirit, imbued with literary tastes, and taking an interest in religion,' might be able to 'pause and contemplate spots which, although now the scenes of commercial bustle and activity, were once hallowed by totally different associations'.<sup>52</sup>

In setting the past within the context of change, there was a concern for historical truth. Joseph Mayer in a paper on 'Alleged royal visits to Liverpool' condemned 'various writers on the early history of Liverpool, [who] after failing to make it a British, or Roman Station, boldly drag in Royalty to fill up the gap which they wished could have been occupied by a British Chieftain or a Roman Emperor'. He scornfully dismissed accounts of King John or William of Orange visiting Liverpool as being like 'a "Jack O'Lantern" leading us into quagmires', and in some way belittling 'the time just now passed when Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, was pleased to honour the town with her august presence'.<sup>53</sup>

The Queen, Mayer noted, had expressed satisfaction at the sight of 'the mighty works raised on the site of the once small fishing village and the great signs of progress still carrying on in this "city of ships"'.<sup>54</sup> Amongst its Roman and medieval discoveries, the society found time to listen to, and publish, more recent analyses of this urban progress. From the first, a section of the *Transactions* had been given over to trade, commerce and industry, which included papers on 'Cotton and the cotton trade', 'Salt and its manufacturers in

52 *T.H.S.L.C.*, IV (1851-2), pp. 137-88; V (1852-3), pp. 3-56. Several of these buildings had been destroyed as a result of the expansionary needs of railway companies. The Chicago Historical Society in 1934 published 'Early views of Chicago and Chicago churches', 'pictures . . . [which] cannot fail to be of interest to present day members of the denominations represented': *Bulletin of the Chicago Historical Society*, I (1934-5), pp. 38-49.

53 *T.H.S.L.C.*, IV (1851-2), pp. 5-6, 12.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Liverpool' and 'Porcelain and earthenware manufacture in Liverpool'.<sup>55</sup> Here too there was a concern for historical accuracy in the interests of the city. Doubt was thrown on the legend that Liverpool's cotton import trade began as the result of the accidental seizure of eight bags of cotton by a customs officer in 1784.<sup>56</sup> Joseph Mayer in 1854 sought to 'fill up the chasm left by authors in the history of ceramic art in England which, in reference to most other sites *save Liverpool* has been detailed with as much accuracy as the materials in their possession would admit of'.<sup>57</sup> 'We are greatly commercial; and the origins and ends of commerce sufficiently denote our place in the National History', proclaimed J. T. Danson in 1858 in his paper 'On the uses of learned societies and in particular of the Historic Society'.<sup>58</sup>

Danson, together with T. A. Welton, brought very recent history into the concerns of the Historic Society with a detailed three-part study of the population censuses of 1801–51, whilst the Rev. Abraham Hume, founder member and later president, mingled antiquarian interests with social investigation of the religious condition of Liverpool and of the city's charities.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, by the mid-1850s, the society's ambitions were beginning to broaden. Papers on the natural sciences of the area, its geology, entomology and zoology, together with papers on mathematics, literature and the fine arts, mingle with the archaeological and the antiquarian. A 'Letter to members' by 'One of yourselves' of March 1855 urges expansion into the field of science which would include the investigation of such topics as pauperism and crime as well as those of meteorology. 'To make the field thoroughly our own by labour as it is already ours by prior occupation, would earn for the Society a character not unfitted for comparison

55 *Ibid.*, II (1849–50); V (1852–3); VI (1853–4).

56 *Ibid.*, IV (1851–2). Mr Brooke wrote to the society to say that in the memory of his 91-year-old father the story was true, but the incident did not instigate the import of American cotton: *ibid.*, p. 43.

57 *T.H.S.L.C.*, VII (1854–5), p. 178.

58 *Ibid.*, VIII (1855–6); IX (1856–7); XI (1858–9).

59 Lucy Bosworth, 'Home missionaries to the poor: Abraham Hume and spiritual destitution in Liverpool', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXLIII (1993), pp. 57–83.

with that of any scientific body in Europe', continued the writer, raising the hope 'recently expressed by our Council' that the society might some day receive a royal charter.<sup>60</sup> Such ambitions, though pursued for more than a decade, proved in the end to be too high, flying perhaps in the face of increasing specialization which marked both historical and natural sciences in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the *Transactions* for 1878-9 appeared an advertisement under the hand of the society's secretary, C. T. Gatty, announcing a return to the original mission 'to bring together those who were interested in local and general history and archaeology'. In the face of a proposal to wind up the society, its council felt it their duty 'under altered circumstances, to concentrate the efforts of the Historic Society upon strictly historical and archaeological lines'. Gatty's note that the society was 'dependent in great measure upon support received from country members and those beyond the two counties' might seem to imply that the society had involved itself in urban (Liverpudlian?) overreach and had to be brought back to its muttuns.<sup>61</sup>

In returning to a more limited scheme of things, the Historic Society did not abandon its urban ethos. Its members and their visitors continued in their lectures and papers to write, rewrite and correct the histories of those urban communities within their boundaries, not least the city of Liverpool. In its centenary year of 1948, other Lancashire members at ninety-six outstripped the eighty-eight from Liverpool, with only three members in Manchester and none in Chester. What is particularly interesting are the (now separately recorded) library subscriptions. Five Liverpool libraries, four Manchester and two Chester libraries are listed with twenty-nine in other Lancashire and Cheshire towns, and thirty in other cities, half of them in the United States.<sup>62</sup>

60 Copy of letter (addressed to bishop of Manchester) bound in copy of *T.H.S.L.C.*, VIII (1855-6) in J.R.U.L.M.

61 *T.H.S.L.C.*, XXXI (1878-9), advertisement.

62 *Ibid.*, C (1948). These included the Library of Congress, Boston and New York Public Libraries, the Newberry Library in Chicago, and the Wisconsin State Historical Society, as well as the university libraries of Chicago, Wisconsin, Princeton, Yale and Harvard.

Professional, academic, with an international reputation, the society and its *Transactions* had become an authority to which the student of the about-to-be-born subject of urban history could turn with confidence.

For all that, the contrast of the 1870s remains. The Chicago Historical Society arose from the ashes of its building and its collections in 1871 to take the road that led to that great institution at Clark and North Avenue. The Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire saved itself from near oblivion in 1878 but retreated to narrower, if highly respectable, academic concerns. The contrast might reward further research than this short paper has allowed. Both societies, and others like them, remain with an urban mission to fulfil. Clifford Lord, director of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, in his presidential address to the American Association for State and Local History in 1960, bemoaned the way in which high population mobility and the growth of the megalopolis had created a large proportion of migrants who felt no responsibility for the community and took no part in civic affairs. In such a state of affairs, he argued, the local historical society appeared as 'the last best hope of mankind'. 'It could give the newcomer the background of present problems, knowledge of how the community had become what it had and so induce a sense of belonging. From that position to one of accepting some responsibility was a relatively short step.'<sup>63</sup>