

SHOPKEEPERS AND SOCIETY: DOMESTIC AND
PRINCIPAL SHOPKEEPERS IN LEICESTER, 1860-1914

By

Christopher P. Hosgood

A Thesis

presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

The University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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ABSTRACT

The thesis presented in this dissertation concerns the relationship between shopkeepers and society in Leicester, England, during the period 1860-1914. Although the shopkeeping world was highly stratified, it comprised two fundamental groups: small 'domestic' shopkeepers and large 'principal' shopkeepers. These traders were confronted by a wide array of competitors. Furthermore, domestic shopkeepers also suffered from extensive internal competition, which created high turnover rates within their ranks. Yet it will be suggested that business conditions did not markedly deteriorate during the period. Indeed, the prospects of principal shopkeepers may have improved after a period of distress in the late 1880s and 1890s. Nevertheless, perceiving their livelihoods to be under attack, shopkeepers began to advocate collective action through trade associations in order to counter 'unfair' competition.

Domestic shopkeepers were firmly entrenched within the working class community. An ability to grant credit and their shops' role as a clearinghouse for gossip, ensured that shopkeepers were intimate with women's domestic culture; however, they had little contact with the formal, work-oriented, male culture. Shopkeepers' ambiguous social position was reflected in the contradictory strands of their business ideology which incorporated both a desire for independence and a sense of social duty.

In the mid-Victorian era, principal shopkeepers were co-opted into a business community over which the commercial elite exerted hegemonic

control. A fictional sense of equality was fostered as shopkeepers earned inclusion within the elite's cultural world by acting as their auxiliaries. Politically, shopkeepers formed a commercial trinity with the elite in order to run the town in a business-like manner. However, in the late nineteenth century, when shopkeepers fashioned a sub-culture around their trade associations so as to protect their interests, they began to withdraw from the elite's associational world and the political trinity, thereby forfeiting their position within the business community.

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INTRODUCTION

Shopkeepers have long been neglected by historians of Victorian Britain. It is only recently that they have become a source of new interest as social historians have begun to discuss the development and structure of the lower middle class in the period after 1870. In particular, the collection of studies edited by Geoffrey Crossick has focused attention on the ambiguities of this social stratum.¹ In his introductory essay, Crossick has cogently argued for a reassessment of their historical significance in this period of social change.² Disappointingly, the collection concentrated on the white collar stratum, and clerks in particular; only Thea Vigne and Alun Howkins' preliminary oral history, identifying the diversity of rural and urban shopkeepers, appraised the role of shopkeepers.³ In recent years John Benson, relying on literary sources and trade journals, has briefly treated small shopkeepers in his study of "penny capitalists."⁴ Michael Winstanley has examined the shopkeeper's world in more detail, and has assessed shopkeepers' attempts to counter the forces which threatened their position in the retailing community.⁵ Finally, Crossick has lately made a suggestive contribution with his analysis of small shopkeepers' relationship with the state.⁶

Crossick has remarked that historians' failure to consider the lower middle class was in large part due to "their sheer lack of heroism. They fail to do anything very striking, it seems."⁷ Unlike their counterparts on the Continent, in whom the existing order came to discover a basis for social stability,⁸ the lower middle class in

Britain did not support right-extremist political movements.⁹ Although identifying the tension which accompanied the expansion of the lower middle class, and the economic marginality experienced by some, Crossick has speculated that their lack of heroism was a result of the fundamental stability of British society in the latter half of the nineteenth century. There was no need to mobilize shopkeepers against any subversive threat to the existing order. "As a political force, they were not needed in Britain. No one tried to win, bribe, or to appease them."¹⁰ Shopkeepers, Crossick has also observed, claimed no vital social role.¹¹ Their right to survival was based entirely on their economic role within the community. As true individualists, shopkeepers kept to themselves and led isolated social existences.¹²

Despite the authority of Crossick's contributions, there are serious limitations to the accumulating body of information about shopkeepers. Foremost amongst these is that, although Crossick and Winstanley acknowledge the ambiguities and tension inherent in the shopkeeping hierarchy, there has been a tendency to consider the majority as members of a uniform occupational and social group, rooted in the lower middle class. Winstanley's work suffers from his implied position that small general shops were not really part of the shopkeeping world, thereby conferring on the remainder an unwarranted homogeneity. Although sensitive to stratification, Crossick's concerns for the whole range of small business interests have led him to include all but the most substantial independent shopkeepers in the petite bourgeoisie. Above all, however, the new history of shopkeepers has been preoccupied with what shopkeepers have not, rather than what they

have, done. As Crossick has concluded, shopkeepers and small masters were people "whose changing economic and political character seems to have been shaped by forces, movements, transformations outside their own control, even influence."¹³ It is important that in rediscovering shopkeepers, historians do not re-marginalize them by suggesting that they were simply embattled little men and women who were incapable of effectively reacting to external pressures.

This study has not set out to resurrect shopkeepers as forgotten heroes; it does, however, offer a more intensive and thorough reconstruction of their life and culture. It opens with a consideration in Chapters One, Two and Three of the occupational differentiation which characterized the shopkeeping community, the external and internal forces which increased the level of trade competition, and the economic condition of the shopkeeping hierarchy. Chapters Four, Five and Six chart shopkeepers' various responses to the development of 'unfair' competition: their adoption of collectivist principles; their attempts to fashion bonds of allegiance with their customers; their efforts to regulate retail prices; and the evolution of campaigns to regulate shop opening hours. Finally, Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine trace shopkeepers beyond their occupational boundaries by recreating their network of relationships within the wider community and by examining their ideology and politics in the transactions and crises of daily life. In order better to assess the changing experience of shopkeepers, the study begins in 1860, at a time when many shopkeepers appeared firmly entrenched within the social and political fabric of the community.

This examination of shopkeepers suggests that they did not form a cohesive occupational world; there existed an extremely diverse hierarchy, within which were many subtle gradations based on size, the goods and the produce handled, and the skills required of the trader. Yet within this hierarchy a basic division can be identified; shopkeepers certainly became increasingly aware of a polarization within the shopkeeping world between small 'domestic' shopkeepers and large 'principal' shopkeepers. Moreover, as the perceived business pressures mounted in the latter years of the nineteenth century, and as trade associations emerged, institutional conflict developed between the shopkeeping fractions, thereby reinforcing the rift between domestic and principal shopkeepers.

Shopkeepers did not constitute a cohesive social stratum which was located within the lower middle class, and only shaded into the middle and working classes at its upper and lower boundaries. It is evident that domestic shopkeepers were firmly grounded within the working class constituency, and that principal shopkeepers, for much of the period, were integrated into the middle class world. Throughout much of the Victorian era, shopkeepers identified with the business interests of the commercial elite, and attended to trade matters within this environment. Yet, principal shopkeepers were later prepared, individually and collectively, to initiate action devised to protect their interests. They were not passive dependants who simply reacted to external stimuli. Furthermore, although it is not disputed that family life and independence were important to shopkeepers, neither small nor large shopkeepers were socially isolated. The reciprocal social and

ideological relationship which each fraction enjoyed with their customers and neighbours ensured that both were dynamically involved in the culture of the community.

The late nineteenth century political role of shopkeepers has also been misunderstood. In the mid-Victorian period shopkeepers dutifully participated in the political process--as voters, party activists and office-holders. Their alliance with the commercial elite enabled business interests to dominate local politics. However, in the 1890s shopkeepers began to abdicate from their prominent political position. Their growing reliance on trade associations, and the shopkeeping sub-culture which was oriented around them, caused shopkeepers to reject partisan politics. To understand shopkeeping politics is not to trace the movement of shopkeepers from one political party to another, but to recognize their withdrawal from the relationship which had allied them with the middle class elite. That shopkeepers were not active on the local or national political stage by the early twentieth century should not be taken to imply that the period generated no identifiable shopkeeper politics.¹⁴

While these findings modify a number of the tentative conclusions of Crossick, Winstanley and Benson, this study is not intended as a revisionist work; rather it is offered as a constructive response to their call for greater sensitivity to small business interests. Crossick has suggested that a finer mesh than that provided by literary and impressionistic sources is needed to further the knowledge of groups such as shopkeepers.¹⁵ This is an attempt to provide such a mesh by examining shopkeeping in one provincial town: Leicester. H.P.R.

Finsberg, formerly professor of local history at the University of Leicester, which established the first such department in Britain, has suggested that local history "brings us nearer to the common run of chaps than any other branch of historical study."¹⁶

Local history has become an important component of social history. Robert Gray, Geoffrey Crossick and John Foster have employed local studies to illustrate the nature of class in Victorian society, with particular reference to the concept of the labour aristocracy.¹⁷ This method has also been used by Stephen Yeo to examine the relationship between religion and voluntary organizations, and by Patrick Joyce to assess the role of the workplace in shaping working class culture.¹⁸ Gray has argued that only by narrowing the focus of the study of society can the field of vision be broadened.¹⁹ By subjecting shopkeepers to a detailed local examination, using quantitative and qualitative sources, it is hoped that both the experience and the consciousness of shopkeepers can be reconstructed. In particular, a study of shopkeepers in one town facilitates the explication of the economic, social and ideological ambiguities inherent in the shopkeeping community.

Leicester, a middle-sized town which had a population of 227,000 in 1911, is situated in the geographic centre of England, some 150 kilometres northwest of London. Despite its antiquity as a Roman town, Leicester has rightly been considered a "product of the nineteenth century--a century that turned a partly industrialised market town into a great centre of manufacture, a town of red-bricked terraced houses."²⁰ The early nineteenth century was not, however, an auspicious time for Leicester. Indeed, it was a period of economic distress and

stagnation. Built upon one trade, the hosiery industry, the town's economy had enjoyed its 'golden age' between 1781 and 1811. However, the industry, and Leicester's economy, collapsed after the Napoleonic Wars. It was not until the 1860s and the establishment of the boot and shoe trade that Leicester shrugged off its dependence on hosiery and entered a half-century of almost unchecked prosperity.

To a great extent the hosiery and shoe industries complemented one another: the former employed a predominantly female workforce while in the latter the majority of shoehands were male. In both industries the emergence of the factory system was slow and incomplete. As Pritchard has explained, the structure of manufacturing, with specialist firms concentrating on particular stages of the process, encouraged small companies.²¹ Despite the emergence of a few large factories, such as Corah's, Freeman, Hardy and Willis and, later, the British United Shoe Machinery Company, the vast majority of firms were small units run by families.²² With the growth of the light engineering industry at the end of the nineteenth century, Leicester had a broad industrial framework which helped to cushion it from periodic trade slumps in selected industries. Furthermore, one unidentified commentator astutely observed: "Leicester makes no luxuries. That is one reason why it grows and thrives."²³ Consequently, Leicester's diversified industrial base, featuring small-scale production, provided employment for men and women, and maintained a middle class which retained local control of the economy.

In the period after 1860, as a consequence of its position at the hub of the railway network in the Midlands, Leicester built upon its

established position as a county town to become a leading service centre. New services in the areas of education, communication, banking, technical professions such as engineering, entertainment and sport augmented the services provided by the old professions of divinity, law and physic.²⁴ In particular, Leicester emerged as an important centre of the retail and wholesale trades. By 1909 Leicester was advertising itself, not entirely unjustifiably, as the shopping centre of the Midlands.²⁵

Notes, Introduction

¹ Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914 (London, 1977).

² Geoffrey Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: A Discussion", in Crossick (ed.), The Lower Middle Class in Britain, pp. 52-53.

³ Thea Vigne and Alun Howkins, "The Small Shopkeeper in Industrial and Market Towns", in Crossick (ed.), The Lower Middle Class in Britain, pp. 184-209.

⁴ John Benson, The Penny Capitalists: A study of Nineteenth-century working-class Entrepreneurs (Dublin, 1983).

⁵ Michael J. Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, 1830-1914 (Manchester, 1983).

⁶ Geoffrey Crossick, "Shopkeepers and the state in Britain, 1870-1914", in Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe (London, 1984).

⁷ Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain", p. 1. Arno Mayer has been less kind. He contemplates that scholars' neglect of the lower middle class in Europe is in large part a consequence of social scientists' hesitancy to expose the aspirations, life-style, and world view of a second class in which so many of them originated and from which they seek to escape. Arno Mayer, "The Lower Middle Class as Historical Problem", Journal of Modern History 47 (1975), p. 409.

⁸ Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, "Shopkeepers, master artisans and the historian: the petite bourgeoisie in comparative focus", in Crossick and Haupt (eds.), Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe, p. 5.

⁹ Geoffrey Crossick, "The petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain", in Crossick and Haupt (eds.), Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe, p. 77.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 76.

¹¹ Crossick, "Shopkeepers and the state in Britain", p. 247.

¹²Crossick, "The petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain", p. 79.

¹³Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁴Crossick, "Shopkeepers and the state in Britain", p. 264.

¹⁵Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain", p. 51.

¹⁶H.P.R. Finsberg and V.H.T. Skipp, Local History: Objective and Pursuit (Newton Abbot, 1967), p. 13.

¹⁷Robert Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford, 1976); Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840-1880 (London, 1978); John Foster, Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in three English towns (London, 1974).

¹⁸Stephen Yeo, Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis (London, 1976); Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics: The culture of the factory in later Victorian England (Brighton, 1980).

¹⁹Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh, p. 7.

²⁰R.H. Evans, "The Expansion of Leicester in the Nineteenth Century", in A.E. Brown (ed.), The Growth of Leicester (Leicester, 1970), p. 63.

²¹R.H. Pritchard, Housing and the Spatial Structure of the City: Residential mobility and the housing market in an English city since the Industrial Revolution (London, 1976), p. 113.

²²Jack Simmons, Leicester Past and Present, vol. 2: Modern City, 1860-1974 (London, 1974), pp. 3-4.

²³Ibid., p. 61.

²⁴See R.M. Hartwell, "The Service Revolution: The Growth of Services in Modern Economy, 1700-1914", in Carlo Cipolla (ed.), The Fontana Economic History of Europe, vol. 3: The Industrial Revolution (Glasgow, 1973), pp. 358-396.

²⁵Midland Free Press, 4 December 1909.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHOPKEEPING COMMUNITY IN LEICESTER, 1860-1914

The stratification which characterized the shopkeeping world in the latter half of the nineteenth century did not go unnoticed by some contemporary writers. Arthur Morrison commented on the variation which existed on the same shopping road: some shops "were prosperous, brilliant with gilt and plate glass; others, which had started even with them, stood confessed failures, poor and mean, with a pathetic air-- almost an expression of disappointment in every window."¹ The most vivid differentiation existed, however, between the successful High Street shopkeepers and the back street general traders. Individual examples of such diversity can easily be obtained.

In Leicester the business career of J. Herbert Marshall can be contrasted with that of G.H. Locke. The former, following a career as a commercial traveller, started a shop selling sheet music and, later, pianos. He was also one of the first shopkeepers to introduce the hire purchase system to the town. His business prospered and expanded until, by 1897, a potted biography could state: "In all the Midlands of England there is no establishment devoted to the sale of music, musical instruments, and musical requisites generally, that is better known than Marshall's Midland Musical Depot ... with its splendid stock, valued at no less than £20,000."² Marshall was a Freemason, the founder of the Leicester Philharmonic Society, a noted philanthropist and Chairman of the Leicester Conservative Association. He was elected to the Town Council in 1888; he became a magistrate in 1892; and he attained the

mayorality in 1896. Finally, in 1905, he received a knighthood. When Marshall died in 1918 he left a personal estate worth nearly £50,000.³

G.H. Locke was also a Leicester shopkeeper. He and his wife started up a small grocery business in a poor neighbourhood in 1891 on £10 and a beer licence. Mr. Locke was a hosiery operative and his wife ran the business for the first 2 years, although she, like her husband, had no knowledge of shopkeeping. By 1896, they had contracted liabilities of £100, while their assets amounted to only £7, at which time a receiving order was granted on their own petition.⁴

Both of these businesses, that of the affluent Sir J. Herbert Marshall, and that of the unfortunate Mr. and Mrs. Locke, were a part of Leicester's shopkeeping community, the former a successful large or 'principal' trader, and the latter struggling small or 'domestic' shopkeepers. Is it correct, however, to isolate this division between small and large traders, and thereby perpetuate such stereotypes, or was the structure more subtle than such a basic distinction allows?

A number of variables, such as residential patterns, servant keeping, stock valuations and annual shop rentals, will be examined in order to establish the degree of stratification within the shopkeeping community. A discussion of shopkeepers' relationships with wholesalers--the commercial politics of retailing--will also shed light on structural differentiation. However, it is important to identify shopkeepers' perceptions of the structure of the retail world. It will be seen that, whereas a catalogue of tangible measurements indicates that shopkeepers occupied a hierarchy in which each member was slightly different than the next, an examination of the subjective perceptions of

shopkeepers suggests that within this subtle hierarchy there existed a fundamental division between small and large shopkeepers.

The shopkeeping hierarchy in Leicester

An examination of the residential patterns of shopkeepers introduces the divisions which existed within and between the various shopkeeping trades. Catherine Hall's study of the Cadbury family has illustrated the process by which certain shopkeepers left the apartments above the shop for more salubrious suburban regions;⁵ yet, it must be stressed that in Leicester, throughout the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the majority of shopkeepers remained tied to their shops: a survey of commercial directories indicates that less than 10 per cent of the listed shopkeepers resided at a separate address from their place of business in 1880 and that this proportion remained constant over the following years. Table 1:1 suggests that it was extremely rare for certain traders, such as greengrocers, fishmongers, bakers, newsagents, tobacconists and general shopkeepers, to live anywhere but above their shop. However, drapers, chemists, wine merchants and the principal grocers featured most prominently amongst those proprietors who moved out of the central shopping districts into the developing suburban environs. A few of these shopkeepers were able to maintain homes in the fashionable region to the south of the city, on the slopes of the surrounding hills, known as Stoneygate. Chemists such as Walter Clarke and Samuel Cleaver, and a leading ironmonger such as Henry Cornick, could count the most prominent manufacturers and professional men of the town as their neighbours.

The majority of shopkeepers who had moved from the town centre,

Table 1:1 Residences of Leicester Shopkeepers¹

	1880		1906	
	Shop Residence No.	Private Residence No.	Shop Residence No.	Private Residence No.
General Shopkeepers	112	1	236	2
Butchers	51	4	65	7
Haberdashers	22	1	13	2
Fishmongers/Poulterers	18	1	53	3
Drapers	29	9	57	16
Ironmongers	3	3	3	3
Grocers	25	5	48	8
Bakers	39	3	39	2
Booksellers	3	-	2	-
Fruiterers/Greengrocers	78	-	87	4
Wine Merchants	1	3	1	4
Tobacconists/Newsagents	38	2	59	5
Confectioners	25	2	81	6
General Dealers	6	-	24	-
Shoe Dealers	4	-	4	1
China Dealers	6	-	12	-
Pawnbrokers	3	1	2	6
Chemists	7	9	8	8
Piano Dealers/Music	-	1	7	-
Fancy Goods Dealers	-	-	7	1
	<u>470</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>808</u>	<u>78</u>
	% 91.3	% 8.7	% 91.2	% 8.8

¹ 25 per cent sample of the alphabetical name index of the trade directories.

Source: Leicester Trade Directory, 1880, 1906.

however, settled for rather more economical, if still relatively genteel, surroundings in the red-bricked villadom of Leicester which stretched interminably behind the arterial roads leading out of town. Shopkeepers filled out a world in which skilled workers, clerks and commercial travellers, along with minor professionals, lived cheek-by-jowel in streets in which the distance between pavement and doorstep, or the size of a bay window, became a crucial determinant of position and rank.⁶

One further source which highlights the variations between shopkeeping trades is the ubiquitous census enumerators' books. Even a brief investigation for the year 1861 illustrates their usefulness in determining extremes and differences within the shopkeeping community. In Table 1:2 the data relating to drapers is compared to that concerning greengrocers; the contrast is particularly stark. Servant keeping has frequently been used as a measure of affluence or as a sign of membership within a particular social class. Of the drapers enumerated in 1861, 81 per cent kept servants; of these, 10 per cent were able to budget for as many as 3 servants. On the other hand, greengrocers, not surprisingly when the evidence from other areas is considered, featured much less prominently in the servant keeping class. In fact, only 8 per cent kept a servant.

Table 1:2 1861 Census, Drapers and Greengrocers, Leicester

	Male	Female	Number of Servants				Number of Apprentices				
			0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	4
Drapers No.	55	2	11	27	13	6	40	9	5	1	2
%	96.5	3.5	19.3	47.4	22.8	10.5	70.2	15.8	8.8	1.8	3.5
Greengrocers No.	18	18	33	2	1	0	36	0	0	0	0
%	50	50	91.7	5.6	2.8	0	100	0	0	0	0

Source: Census Enumerators' Books, 1861.

Another source of differentiation is seen in the numbers of apprentices within the two trades. By this time, apprenticeship in the shopkeeping world was already on the decline; moreover, only those apprentices living in the shop were included in the census books. Despite this, nearly one-third of all drapers kept an apprentice. No greengrocer, however, kept one, or at least one who slept on the premises.

One of the most important differences between drapers and greengrocers was that one-quarter of the latter worked at another trade besides keeping a shop. This is significant because it suggests that some traders did not see their shops as their sole source of income, and consequently their reasons for setting up as shopkeepers were different from those who relied entirely on retailing to make, as they referred to it, 'a living profit'. This point will be discussed more fully later.

Census data is particularly important because it also reveals the divisions which existed within trades. It is often difficult to find data which enables distinctions to be drawn between the various strata

of a single trade. Therefore, it is interesting that, whereas in the commercial directories of the town, grocers were differentiated from general shopkeepers, in the census books the two groups were categorized as grocers. A comparison was artificially constructed by dividing this large group of grocers into two sections: those classified as grocers in both the census and the directory, and those classified as grocers in the census and as shopkeepers in the directory. Consequently, Table 1:3 provides a rough differentiation between small, general or domestic shopkeepers and larger, principal grocers which, although inadequate, makes clear the variations. If servant keeping is examined once again, it is evident that general shopkeepers were far less likely to have a servant than were grocers. Sixty per cent of grocers, as compared to only 4 per cent of general shopkeepers, had at least one servant. While one-quarter of grocers kept an apprentice, no general shopkeeper ran to those lengths. All grocers devoted all of their working energies to their shop; on the other hand, one-quarter of all general shopkeepers held other jobs. The majority of these were skilled occupations--as cabinet makers, engine drivers, tailors and framework knitters--but outside jobs nevertheless. The evidence would also seem to indicate that general shopkeeping was attractive to widowed or deserted women who had a few pounds to invest. In fact, one-quarter of all greengrocers were women.

Table 1:3 1861 Census, Grocers and General Shopkeepers, Leicester

	M No.	F No.	Number of Servants				Number of Apprentices					Other Employment
			0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	4	
Grocers ¹												
No.	88	5	37	36	16	4	70	15	8	0	0	0
%	94.6	5.4	39.8	38.7	17.2	4.3	75.3	16.1	8.6	0	0	0
General ²												
Shopkeepers												
No.	67	23	86	4	0	0	90	0	0	0	0	22
%	74.4	25.6	95.6	4.4	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	24.4

¹Grocers - Those catalogued as grocers in both the 1861 Census and the Trade Directory.

²General Shopkeepers - Those catalogued as grocers in the 1861 Census and as shopkeepers in the Trade Directory.

Source: Census Enumerators' Books, 1861; Leicester Trade Directory, 1859, 1861, 1863.

Census material suggests, therefore, that there were indeed divisions within the shopkeeping world which separated small traders and large proprietors. However, although distinctions between those who kept servants or apprentices and those who did not indicate that there were gradations, they give little idea of the many subtler divisions which existed and which are illuminated by other sources. These suggest that it might well be more accurate to view the shopkeeping world as a continuum, moving from the smallest trader scratching a living from a basement shop to the largest grocer or draper with an establishment in the Market Place and a home in the most affluent neighbourhood of the town. Between the two stretch all other shopkeepers, each one slightly different from the next. Some idea of such subtle differences can be gathered if the financial requirements of the various shopkeeping trades

are examined.

An important determinant of a shop's position within the retailing hierarchy was its geographical position in the town. Shopkeepers were well-aware that the success of their business ventures was dependent on attracting customers into their shops; consequently, a location with a guaranteed flow of potential customers passing before their door was considered essential. This point was emphasized by the winner of a competition sponsored by The Grocers' Journal on the subject of opening a grocery shop on £100. "I would select a shop in a good medium-class neighbourhood and in a good thoroughfare. My object in choosing a thoroughfare would of course be to be in a position of commanding a good trade."⁷ A similar point was implicit in the analysis of the business of the hero of the story, The Draper's Shop: "Mr. Simpson was not one of the principal drapers in the town of M_____. His shop was, however, situated in a wide street leading out of one of the best; and occasionally the gentry made purchases from him."⁸ Shopkeepers were expected to pay for the privilege of a location which suited their needs, as the level of the rents in Leicester suggests.

An examination of the businesses for sale in Leicester in the early months of 1880 indicates that there was considerable variation in rentals: on one of the principal shopping streets, rents were commensurately high; a shop in the Market Place which had previously housed a grocery business was advertised with a rent of £50 per annum; a shop situated in the front parlour of a house in All Saints Road, however, warranted a rent of only 6s a week or £15 12s per annum. The range of rents for those shops advertised in The Leicester Daily Mercury

during January, February and March 1880 are listed in Table 1:4.

Although there was a concentration of shops with rents at around £16 or £18, or about 6s to 7s per week, there was still a clear variation in the rents charged throughout the town.

Table 1:4 Annual Rents of Shops Advertised in January, February and March, 1880, Leicester

	<£15	<£20	<£25	<£30	<£40	<£50
No. 28	1	18	4	3	1	1

Source: The Leicester Daily Mercury, January, February, March, 1880.

The amount of shopkeepers' rents also determined the level of the stock turnover which they would have to maintain in order to meet their bills. It was a rule of thumb stressed by commentators that a shop's weekly turnover should equal, at the very least, its annual rent.

Richard Beynon, author of Drapery and Drapery Accounts, observed that this was a wide but effective guide in determining the soundness of a business.⁹ Unfortunately, aside from a few business records, there is little evidence extant which gives an exact register of stock turnovers of various trades. The annual retail sales of H. and A. Bennett, household goods suppliers, amounted to £14,458 in 1911, compared to a turnover of £969 in 1911 for E.G. Stone, outfitter.¹⁰ However, such isolated examples, although indicating the difference in the scale of various businesses, do not indicate the pattern which existed throughout the entire shopkeeping community. Some idea of the pattern can be determined by examining the weekly turnover of businesses advertised for sale in the trade press; it must be remembered that these were claims,

and that prospective purchasers were warned to examine the records of a business thoroughly before making a decision. Table 1:5 enumerates the turnovers of 37 butchers' shops listed in The Butchers' List on 7 September 1907. It is evident that the distribution was once again fairly even, primarily between the butcher doing £25 a week and the butcher doing £100 or £150 a week.

Table 1:5 Weekly Turnover of Butchers' Shops Advertised in 1907 - National

		Turnover - Weekly								
		<£20	<£25	<£30	<£40	<£50	<£75	<£100	<£150	<£400
No.	37	1	5	4	8	6	3	6	3	1

Source: The Butchers' List, 7 September 1907.

While information concerning the annual returns of the various shopkeeping trades is sparse, data which illustrates the value of shopkeepers' stock-in-trade is more plentiful, particularly for the mid-century years which are covered by the policy records of the Sun Insurance Office. A 50 per cent sample of all those shopkeepers in England, excluding those in London, who took out a policy with the Office in 1861 indicates the tremendous variation in the size of business which existed between and within trades.¹¹ It might be argued that insurance records are unsatisfactory because they concern, by definition, only those shopkeepers who could afford, or who felt it necessary, to take out insurance, thereby ignoring all the very small businesses which undoubtedly went uninsured. Consequently, it is interesting to compare the proportion of those trades which comprised

the insured sector with the proportion which comprised the entire shopkeeping world. Table 1:6 indicates that, while 30 per cent of shopkeepers taking out insurance were drapers, this trade accounted for only 5 per cent of the shopkeeping community in Leicester. On the other hand, general shopkeepers, who represented one-third of all shops in the town, formed only 5 per cent of those insured. Grocers were also overrepresented on the insurance files, while chemists, pawnbrokers, ironmongers, booksellers and wine merchants were equally represented. Butchers and bakers, like general shopkeepers, however, were underrepresented.

Perhaps the most interesting data extracted from the policies of the Sun Insurance Office are that relating to the insurable value of shopkeepers' stock-in-trade. Table 1:7 again clearly indicates the wide variation that existed within the trading community. The records are least useful in determining the status of butchers and bakers, who relied on the quick turnover of perishable goods to maintain their businesses. Both maintained limited stocks compared to other specialist trades, which may explain their underrepresentation as policy holders. Virtually all general shopkeepers had stock valued at under £200, and half had stock valued at £100 or less. The even distribution of grocers' stock suggests that grocery, more than any other specialist trade, was composed of the widest selection of shopkeepers, from those with under £50 worth of stock up to those with over £1,000. Other specialist traders were not as likely to include small traders amongst their ranks, although it is true that there were a few with limited means, particularly in ironmongery. Nevertheless, the majority of

Table 1:6 Shopkeepers Insuring Stock with the Sun Insurance Office,
1861¹

	Insured Shopkeepers, 1861		Traders in Leicester, 1861 ²	
	No.	%	No.	%
General				
Shopkeepers	20	5.4	266	33.8
Bakers	39	10.6	121	5.4
Grocers	98	26.6	129	16.4
Chemists	22	6.0	40	5.1
Pawnbrokers	9	2.4	9	1.1
Butchers	22	6.0	118	15.0
Ironmongers	16	4.3	15	1.9
Booksellers	13	3.5	26	3.3
Wine Merchants	13	3.5	17	2.2
Drapers	<u>116</u>	31.5	<u>45</u>	5.7
	368		786	

¹ 50 per cent sample.

² Shopkeepers listed in Drake's Directory of Leicestershire, 1861.

Source: Sun Insurance Office, Country Series, Policy Ledgers, 1861;

Drake's Directory of Leicestershire, 1861.

Table 1:7 Value of Policy Holders' Stock-in-Trade with the Sun
Insurance Office, 1861 - Cumulative¹

	No.	<£50 %	<£100 %	<£150 %	<£200 %	<£500 %	<£1000 %	>£1000 %
General								
Shopkeepers	20	15	50	65	85	100		
Bakers	39	30.8	51.3	69.2	76.9	97.4	100	
Grocers	98	8.2	19.4	30.8	40	71.6	88.9	100
Chemists	22	0	0	18.2	22.7	63.6	86.3	100
Pawnbrokers	9	0	0	0	0	33.3	44.4	100
Butchers	22	36.4	77.3	86.4	90.9	100		
Ironmongers	16	6.2	18.7	18.7	24.9	49.9	68.6	100
Booksellers	13	0	7.7	15.4	30.8	61.6	92.4	100
Wine Merchants	13	0	7.7	7.7	7.7	15.4	61.5	100
Drapers	116	0	2.6	5.2	12.9	36.2	70.7	100

¹50 per cent sample.

Source: Sun Insurance Office, Country Series, Policy Ledgers, 1861.

drapers, chemists, ironmongers, pawnbrokers, booksellers and wine merchants were members of trades dominated by shopkeepers with extensive stock-in-trade.

A useful corrective to the data concerning the insurable value of shopkeepers' stock is that which relates to the value of policy holders' household goods, for personal rather than business use. Table 1:8 suggests that bakers and, in particular, butchers, enjoyed greater personal comforts than the value of their stock may have implied. The material also confirms that general shopkeepers were virtually all located at the bottom of the hierarchy if household possessions are held as the basis for comparison. Grocers were, once again, evenly distributed throughout the hierarchy, whereas the other specialist traders, such as drapers, ironmongers and chemists were more securely located towards the top of the retail hierarchy.

Table 1:8 Insured Value of Policy Holders' Household Goods, 1861 - Cumulative¹

	No.	<£50 %	<£100 %	<£150 %	<£200 %	<£500 %	<£1000 %
General							
Shopkeepers	19	57.9	94.7	100			
Bakers	39	33.3	61.5	87.1	94.8	100	
Grocers	83	37.3	77.1	85.5	95.1	100	
Chemists	18	11.1	55.5	66.6	72.2	88.9	100
Butchers	23	17.4	69.6	78.3	82.6	95.6	100
Ironmongers	13	23.1	76.9	84.6	84.6	100	
Drapers	91	23.1	54.8	63.6	86.7	97.7	100

¹ 50 per cent sample.

Source: Sun Insurance Office, Country Series, Policy Ledgers, 1861.

The pattern illustrated by insurance records is reinforced by the

findings of an examination of shopkeepers' personal wealth at the time of their death. The information from both the 1870s and 1890s, enumerated in Tables 1:9 and 1:10, suggests that drapers, ironmongers, wine merchants and chemists were amongst the wealthiest of the shopkeeping community. John Allen, a wine merchant who died in September 1873, left £30,000; Joseph Pickering, an ironmonger, a similar amount. Hugo Minors, Robert Baker, John Oswin and Henry Morgan, all of whom were drapers, left £5,000, £6,000, £10,000 and £16,000, respectively, in the period 1872-75. A similar pattern emerges in the period 1900-03. In this period two chemists, Alfred Berridge and Samuel Cleaver, left considerable estates: £18,646 and £7,829, respectively. It is also apparent that some specialist shopkeepers, in trades noted more usually for the limited means of their proprietors, could amass considerable fortunes. Stephen Skillington, a tobacconist who catered to the needs of country society and the urban middle class, left £43,124. Needham Shelton, a butcher who died in 1874, left £9,000.

The data also suggests that grocers were among the most evenly distributed throughout the hierarchy in both the time periods, with butchers and bakers rather less so, although some, as has been seen, left larger amounts. Probate records are more useful for indicating the wealthier members of the shopkeeping community than the poorer elements because the latter are clearly underrepresented. Their possessions were likely scant enough not to warrant the writing of a will, and many died intestate. Furthermore, when the lifespan of shopkeepers' businesses is examined at a later point, it will be shown that the turnover rate amongst small shopkeepers was so high in some trades that many

Table 1:9: Shopkeepers' Wealth at Death, Leicester, 1872-75

	No.	£ <100	£ <200	£ <300	£ <500	£ <1000	£ <1500	£ <3000	£ >3001
General									
Shopkeepers	0								
Grocers	12	3	4	2	1	1			1
Bakers	10	5	3			2			
Milk Dealers	2	1	1						
Butchers	12	6	2		2	1			1
Drapers	9				1	2	1	1	4
Chemists	3						1	2	
Hosiers	1	1							
China Dealers	2	2							
Ironmongers	2								2
Confectioners	1						1		
Haberdashers	1							1	
Stationers	1					1			
Wine Merchants	1								1
Pawnbrokers	2					1			1
Music Dealers	1							1	
Chandlers	1							1	
Saddlers	1				1				
Fruiterers	1		1						

Source: Probate Ledgers, Leicester, 1872, 1873, 1874, 1875.

Table 1:10: Shopkeepers' Wealth at Death, Leicester, 1900-03

	No.	£ <100	£ <200	£ <300	£ <500	£ <1000	£ <2000	£ <3000	£ <4000	£ >4001
General										
Shopkeepers	5			1	1	3				
Drapers	12		1			2	5	1		3
Grocers	29	2	6	1	2	10	5	2		1
Bakers	5	1	1	1		1				1
Chemists	4					1			1	2
Furniture Dealers	4			1		1	2			
Butchers	3	1					1		1	
Greengrocers	5	2		1		2				
Shoe Dealers	2				1		1			
Florists	2						2			
Milk Dealers	2				1	1				
Tobacconists	2					1				1
China Dealers	1									1
Booksellers	1								1	
Piano Dealers	1							1		
Jewellers	1									1
Poulterers	1						1			
Confectioners	3		1			1			1	
Pawnbrokers	1						1			
Ironmongers	2					1				1
Saddlers	1					1				
Chandlers	1						1			
Fancy Goods Dealers	1								1	

Source: Probate Ledgers, Leicester, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903.

shopkeepers no longer had any connection with trading at the time of their death.

It is not surprising, considering the foregoing findings, to discover that those trades which were dominated by or contained a large proportion of members in the upper echelons of the hierarchy were also those which supplied the shopkeeping representatives amongst the shareholders in the Leicestershire Banking Company. Table 1:11 indicates that in 1868 the majority of shareholders were independently wealthy; shopkeepers, however, were an important minority, more important, indeed, than manufacturers and merchants. Those shopkeepers represented included grocers, chemists, wine merchants, drapers and ironmongers.

The records which have been examined suggest that there were indeed divisions between and within the various trades which comprised the shopkeeping community. The evidence has indicated that the shopkeeping community was a hierarchy ranging from the trader in a very small way of business to the trader who operated a very large business. Between these two there existed a multitudinous variety of shopkeepers, each slightly different from the next, although it is true that the number who operated a business at the lower end of the scale outnumbered those at the top. Part of the problem with the records employed thus far is that the data produced is a distillation of information pertaining to tangible goods or effects. Much of it represents a catalogue of material possessions held or enjoyed by shopkeepers. It is also necessary to examine shopkeepers' relationships with other members of the community.

Table 1:11 Shareholders of the Leicestershire Banking Company, 1868

Shareholders' Occupations		
	No.	%
Spinsters/Widows	65	31.7
Gentlemen	53	25.9
Farmers	21	10.2
Manufacturers	5	2.4
Merchants	9	4.4
Clergy	9	4.4
Professionals	14	6.8
Publishers	1	0.5
Shopkeepers	23	11.2
Wine Merchants	3	
Grocers	6	
Drapers	2	
Booksellers	3	
Chemists	5	
Ironmongers	2	
Butchers	1	
Jewellers	1	
White Collar	3	1.5
Skilled Trades	<u>2</u>	1.0
	205	

Source: Leicester Journal, 21 February 1868.

The commercial politics of retailing

Shopkeepers did not exist in isolation in the business world; many relied on wholesalers to supply them with their stock-in-trade. An examination of the relationship between shopkeepers and wholesalers, or the commercial politics of retailing, also indicates that there were many subtle gradations within the shopkeeping hierarchy.

It is true that not all retailers relied on wholesalers for their stock. Butchers and provision dealers were well-served by the Leicester Cattle Market and the neighbouring farming community. Greengrocers and fruiterers bought from the local wholesale market. These relationships between shopkeepers and the markets will be examined in Chapter Two; however, at this point grocers' business dealings with their wholesalers will be discussed. The firms with which grocers traded, the size and frequency of their orders, and the nature of their financial relationship all provide information on the differentiation within the shopkeeping hierarchy.

An examination of the creditors of bankrupt grocers suggests that the majority of the larger concerns, as well as the local wholesalers, did much of their business with firms in London, and, to a lesser extent, Liverpool, although some went further afield. J. Cliff, a provision dealer, dealt with wholesalers in Antwerp and Rotterdam, as well as in British centres.¹² Similarly, W. Powell, a grocer and provision dealer, purchased his margarine directly from the manufacturers in Rotterdam, but ordered his eggs from West Hartlepool.¹³ The correspondence of J. Hardyman, a provision dealer who catered to some of Leicester's wealthier families, as well as to the

gentry of the county, indicates that specialist shopkeepers, at least, were prepared to spend no little effort in order to obtain the choicest produce. In late 1872 and early 1873, Hardyman obtained price lists for butter and eggs from Castle Blayney; bacon, ham and lard from Bristol; bacon, ham and lard from Calne, Wiltshire; butter from Somerset; and bacon from Birmingham.¹⁴

The different levels of stock turnover of some of the Leicester concerns can be gathered from their orders placed with the London wholesale house of James Budgett and Sons. This company's Sugar Sales Ledgers provide a glimpse of the purchases of grocers over a number of years. In 1865, Swain, Almond and Latchmore were placing orders worth nearly £2,000 per annum.¹⁵ The purchases of Samuel Baines, another leading grocer, amounted to over £1,000 in 1862, and nearly £3,000 by 1865.¹⁶ On the other hand, the accounts of other grocers list orders which ranged from £10 to as little as 10s. Indeed, in February and March 1862, C. Willey placed orders worth only 9s 11d and 9s 7d, respectively.¹⁷

It would appear that in the majority of cases Budgett and Sons would allow credit to virtually any size shop as long as its proprietor was deemed credit-worthy. However, the smaller the business of a potential customer, the more rigorous was the investigation into the business. One application for samples was received from the British and Colonial Grocery, Provision and Fruit Stores. Alderton, Budgett and Sons' traveller in Leicester, wrote to London: "No good--I gather from two of my customers upon whom I can rely, that this firm occupy a cottage formerly rented at 6/- or 6/6 per week, it has been turned into

a shop and they have been there about a fortnight. Their stock appears to consist of little else beside $\frac{1}{2}$ a consignment of oranges and 1 peck of onions. Have not room for more than one bag at a time."¹⁸ 'Cash only' was the terse comment of the London manager after reading this report. Alderton was also sent to enquire after Henry Turner, who placed an order in December 1898. He reported that he was not "favourably impressed with the proprietor, to my mind he does not appear to know his business."¹⁹ Furthermore, "the shop he has taken has been a dead horse (so to speak) for 20 years (or so I am told) and no one has done any good in it. I should advise leaving them alone entirely."²⁰ In this instance Alderton's advice was well-placed, for Mr. Turner was declared bankrupt in June 1901 with liabilities of £532.

Financial considerations were not always the sole criterion for trade agreements. In 1896 the Mawke brothers opened a grocery shop in Clarendon Park, a respectable if not salubrious suburb, with some money left to them by an aunt. Alderton was not, however, impressed with their prospects, and observed: "if they write us be careful they are supposed to be very unsuited to the district."²¹ In this case Alderton was not quite so perceptive for, 9 years later, Arthur Mawke was still carrying on the business.²² In 1909, A. Hirst discovered that the previous history of the shop he had bought, which had been operated by a bankrupt, Mr. Hill, told against him. Despite advice from an informant that Mr. Hirst "is reported to be paying satisfactorily."²³ Budgett and Sons demanded that cash should be forwarded before the goods would be delivered; however, no remittance or reply was received, the order was cancelled and their traveller was advised not to call on Hirst.²⁴

It was the practise of Budgett and Sons to contact other wholesale

houses in order to solicit information about potential customers. Consequently, if necessary, a detailed dossier of a shopkeeper's credit rating could be built up. The other wholesalers were frequently referred to by number rather than by name. Therefore, following a check on the rating of Mr. C. Twigg, Leicester, in 1898, it was reported that "31, 33, 34, 43, 45 and 48 don't know (him)...50 say had the a/c about a year, pays very well and consider good for a credit of £100."²⁵ Similarly, in 1895 correspondence concerning William Crofts was instigated, despite the fact that Alderton reported: "I hear he is a very good man and worth doing with."²⁶ The London office discovered that

43 and 41 don't know, 35 have had no order since September 94 and he was slow then. 45 say 1 Mo. a/c but comes to nearly two before he pays - 46 don't like the account have had several enquiries... he was so irregular and they have since stopped a/c. Some weeks after he came up and tried to be very indignant, but did not induce them to alter their opinion.²⁷

If it was decided that a shopkeeper was capable of receiving credit, then the size of a shopkeeper's business appears to have been the principal criterion for determining the extent, both in time and money, of the credit. The usual terms indicated by the wholesalers in their correspondence with Budgett and Sons were 14 days in the first instance. Thus, Mr. Joyce was considered good "for a small credit, up to the present have bought all at 14 days."²⁸ A.M. Hill, the son of a long-standing customer, William Hill, was offered 14 day terms when he first opened and only one amount was to be allowed on the account at one time.²⁹ Tebbett and Bett, two young men who had formerly been employed

as commercial travellers for J. Welford and Co., were offered 14 days' credit by Alderton in 1903, following a very thorough check into their business intentions.³⁰ He reported to London that the men had £400 of their own and had command of a further £200 if required, that they were only calling upon the best of Welford's cash customers, and that they had no intention of working on borrowed capital.³¹ London concurred with Alderton's original offer and authorized 14 days' credit.³² A.O. Wagstaff, however, who had purchased the business of his former employer, G. Newsome, from the Official Receiver, was given a trial credit by one wholesale company, number 42, which limited his credit to £50 because they did "not think his financial position was any too sound."³³

Unlike the small grocers, who had to initiate business dealings with the wholesaler and then convince the wholesaler that they were creditworthy, it was frequently the wholesaler who had to try to convince the larger or principal grocers to deal with them. There was clearly great competition to secure the business of some grocers. Budgett and Sons were pleased to include the Consumers' Tea Company, operated by G.H. Johnson in the Market Place and Eastgates, Leicester, among their customers. In 1889 the Leicester correspondent of The Grocer noted that Mr. Johnson "is still doing the largest trade in town", although it was suggested that his business might well be hurt by the recent arrival in town of a Lipton's shop.³⁴ In 1902 Alderton advised London: "You will perhaps be surprised to hear that Johnson and Co., Lester [sic], have disposed of their business, to Burton and Sons, Nottingham. We are very sorry for this, as by it we shall lose a good

a/c, Burton and Sons buying mostly on the market."³⁵ The following week, however, Budgett and Sons were relieved to receive a letter from Mr. Kenyon, the buyer for Johnson and Co., who advised them that although the two companies had been amalgamated he would continue to deal with them as he had before.³⁶

In 1899 Alderton was asked by the London office to call on Simpkin and James, one of the largest grocery concerns in Leicester, which had recently purchased the two Loughborough businesses of their old customer, Thomas Mayo. Mayo informed Budgett and Sons that at the time of the sale his annual turnover was about £30,000 and that his stock was worth about £4,000.³⁷ Clearly this was an account that London did not want to lose and explains their concern that Alderton should contact Simpkin and James. Alderton reported back: "These men are perfectly sound, but unfortunately, have never been of much use to us. They do practically all their trade with Petty, Wood and Co. whose man spends the best part of two days with them every month or three weeks. They also do a little with Hanson and Travers. I have repeatedly called, but they will not see me, stating they have already as many a/c's open as they require."³⁸ In 1903 Alderton was apparently asked to enquire again with another of Leicester's principal grocers, John Sarson, who had briefly opened an account with Budgett and Sons in 1895. At that time Alderton had commented that J. Sarson and Son were "very old established and thoroughly reliable and do with the principal London Houses."³⁹ Indeed, when John Sarson died in 1904, at the age of 94, his estate was valued at £36,115.⁴⁰ However, it was apparent that in 1903 Alderton had no luck in re-opening the account, and he reported, somewhat testily:

The only reason I have for not doing business with J. Sarson and Son is that I cannot. I know Mr. Kendrick the manager well, and opened an a/c with them but afterwards Mr. Sarson decided that he had already more accounts open than he could give orders sufficient to make it worth their while serving him well, and Mr. Kendrick told me that as I was the last a/c opened he would be obliged if I would consider the a/c closed for the time being, and cease calling.⁴¹

In 1906 the grocery and provision side of J. Sarson and Son was purchased by Simpkin and James, and J.B. Kendrick, who had managed the former business, took the opportunity to set up his own grocery shop in the Market Place. Kendrick was, it would seem, highly thought of by Budgett and Sons for, although his trade was considered to be "very small at present"⁴², it was expected to grow and their new traveller in Leicester was asked to call on him to solicit an order.⁴³

This discussion of the relationship between wholesalers and their customers confirms the existence of extensive differentiation within the shopkeeping community. The preferential treatment accorded some shopkeepers was a consequence of their position within the hierarchy. If the records examined to this point were the sole criterion of an attempt to determine the structure of this community, then it would be necessary to reject as simplistic the notion that there was one basic division separating the hierarchy into small and large shopkeepers. However, Geoffrey Crossick has warned the investigator of small business interests about the use of single-figure measures, such as rents, stock turnover, or wealth, in any attempt to understand stratification; it might, he suggests, "lead us in search of over-simplistic definitions of the group."⁴⁴ This is a salutary warning, although heeding this advice should not result in the rejection

of the evidence employed to this point. Rather, it will be argued that in order to comprehend the nature of the shopkeeping world more fully, it must be understood that the structural differentiation was also moulded by the subjective perceptions of the shopkeepers.

'Us and them'--'principal' and 'domestic' shopkeepers

Although the present day observer can note all the various gradations within their world, it is apparent that shopkeepers were conscious of a fundamental division within the retailing hierarchy; a division which separated the small from the large shopkeeper. There was indeed an 'us and them' mentality amongst shopkeepers, although, unfortunately, they were not always sure exactly where this division lay.

The existence of this split was frequently evident in shopkeepers' rhetoric. On one occasion a spokesman for the Leicester Grocers' Association reported in the trade press that their branch had quickly developed "into a strong and vigorous body, composed of a large number of the principal traders."⁴⁵ In fact, the Association was so concerned that only the principal grocers were members that they took *care* care that their benefits, such as the combination buying of margarine, did not unduly increase membership. According to the Secretary of the Association, it would not have been difficult to get 20 or more new members, but he and others questioned whether they ought to accept them; "...it did not seem advisable that they should take in the small shopkeepers, who often followed another occupation, merely to share the benefits of the margarine scheme, while he would probably cut the genuine trader on other articles and keep his shop open all hours of the

day and night."⁴⁶

On the other hand, William Leavis, the editor of the Small Trader and Shopkeeper: Hands Off the Little Man, was well aware of his potential audience. In 1915, echoing the rhetoric of The Shopkeeper a few years before, Leavis argued in 'The Paper for the Small Shopkeeper':

On all sides the small trader is subjected to keen competition. The burden of rates and taxes bears heavily upon him. His rent is frequently excessive. Worried by an army of none too civil inspectors, and irritated beyond measure by the interference of Parliament and local bodies, he finds it extremely difficult, even at the best of times, to make ends meet.⁴⁷

Leavis was undoubtedly expecting the support of small shopkeepers such as Frank Bullen who, in his autobiography, recounted the toil required of a small shopkeeper in order to survive in business.⁴⁸ John Parker, of the Off-Licence Holders' Association had no doubts that the large shopkeepers were determined to crush the small shopkeeper by introducing early closing legislation. When asked where his sympathies lay, with the small or the large trader, he replied: "I represent what may be called domestic shopkeepers..., where the business is conducted entirely by the members of the family at home."⁴⁹

Frederick Harris, of the Islington Traders' Defence Committee, was of the opinion that the agitation for early closing was carried on "in the interests of those who have large shops, and who apparently desire to close up the shops of poor widow-women, and other places where no assistants, or very few assistants are employed and who are struggling to get a living."⁵⁰ The editor of the Small Trader and Shopkeeper argued that, although it was difficult to say where the line between the

small and the large trader should be drawn, it nevertheless existed. His definition, which he admitted was a rough one, was that the small trader was the one shop proprietor who was engaged the whole or greater part of the time in serving customers.⁵¹ The important point is not, however, the definition, which was indeed a fair one, but that the writer felt that such a division could be fairly made.

It is therefore apparent that shopkeepers themselves were increasingly aware of a fundamental division between the small, or 'domestic' shopkeeper, and the larger, established or 'principal' shopkeeper, despite the fact that an examination of the material baggage of the individuals who comprised the shopkeeping hierarchy indicated that there were many gradations within this world. Clearly, there were a number of levels at which distinctions could be drawn, and to understand the structure of the hierarchy it is necessary to examine the psychological distinctions as well as the material distinctions. Although speculative, it may be suggested that one factor which reinforced shopkeepers' conceptions of their status within the hierarchy emerged out of the expectations which they pinned upon their business careers. It is apparent that the concept of 'success' differed within the shopkeeping world. In order to consider these differences it is first necessary to understand some of the reasons which prompted individuals to become shopkeepers. They, like all members of the community, expected to derive material, social, and psychological rewards from their endeavours.

Notwithstanding the material gradations which existed amongst the ranks of the large or principal shopkeepers, there were a number of

values and expectations which helped to reinforce their common identity. It will be seen at a later point that shopkeepers played an active role in the social and administrative world of the middle class elite. Continued commercial success could eventually enable an individual to retire from business, either by passing the interests on to another family member or by selling the business. This in turn would enable a shopkeeper to participate more fully in the affairs of the town and, more importantly, to make that important step from 'shopkeeper' to 'gentleman', the usual title for an individual who had retired from active business duty. Arthur Bennett, of H. and A. Bennett, Market Street, Leicester, proposed in 1897 to retire in June 1900, in favour of his son John, and in order to facilitate this procedure stipulated: "I desire that from now to the time of my retirement that John makes a point of being at Bussiness [sic] at Nine O'clock in the morning."⁵² Arthur clearly did not want to have to return to the shop because John was not fully trained in all aspects of the business.⁵³

To become a gentleman, following a business career as a shopkeeper, was the clearest indication to the general public that an individual had been successful. Mary L. Pendered observed the importance of retirement in her novel about a shopkeeper in Market Grazen.

According to her inherited prejudices, a tradesman was a tradesman; he could never perfectly emerge from the chrysalis of shop, even by retiring. She was astonished, therefore, to find that in Market Grazen the abdication of a successful business often led to the ignoring of old friendships and, sometimes, ties of blood. It seemed preposterous that a man should renounce all social intercourse with his own brother on this account, but Nanny Rolf assured her that it was so in the case of certain individuals who had built large houses on the outskirts of the town, leaving their shops to younger members of the same

families, whom they now refused to recognise as equals...⁵⁴

Retirement remained an ideal, rather than a reality, for the majority of shopkeepers, particularly for those who did not cater to the wealthiest customers and, consequently, could not expect to command large sums for the 'goodwill' of their businesses. Furthermore, as it became customary by 1900 for commentators on the retail trade to advise prospective shopkeepers against purchasing an established business, it became harder to sell and retire. W.H. Simmonds quoted the advice of one experienced grocer: "Had I my time over again...I would not buy the goodwill of my business, but should look out for a vacant shop in a good neighbourhood and work up my own trade."⁵⁵

If many shopkeepers could not expect to retire to a gentlemanly life, it is apparent that the majority of the principal shopkeepers did expect to enjoy a living profit. During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, this concept grew to represent considerably more than the maintenance of a minimum profit margin. To many, the attainment of this goal was the best, indeed often the only, signal of success; unfortunately, in order to maintain it many had to sacrifice all else. More than this, however, the concept became a central feature of principal shopkeepers' business ideology. It will be seen in Chapter Eight that their belief in making a living profit was indicative of their concern that the retail market should be controlled so that all 'legitimate' traders could achieve a comfortable competence.

The maintenance of a living profit was considered a notable achievement throughout the late nineteenth century when business failures were perceived to be on the increase. The wise old Scottish

grocer in J.J. Bell's Thou Fool put the matter into perspective: "It's nae easy to start a business nooadays especially in this tred. The competeetion's awfu', an' it's no' merely fair competeetion ye've got to face. The grocer wi' a single shop has a puir chance."⁵⁶ The same can also be said for bakers, as John Blandy, a London baker, portrayed in his novel about Jackson Brandon, the ideal citizen shopkeeper: "Work, heart-breaking work, he had plenty. What with having to earn increasing taxes, to pay for constant repairs and for insurance for another man's property...the provision of food and raiment for his family, and the arbitrary demands of religion and politics, little time had he left except for a few hours sleep."⁵⁷ It was widely held that hard work could, given the absence of unfair competition, sustain a living profit; success was thus achieved. Many shopkeepers could undoubtedly have taken comfort from the thoughts of Samuel Budgett, founder of the large Bristol wholesale house, who had started out as a small village shopkeeper. "He would have it," stated his biographer, "that a business was limited only by the energy of its conductors."⁵⁸

The continued demand for an equitable return on their stock was clearly a fundamental concern of shopkeepers, their associations and their supporters in the trade press. The editor of The Grocers' Journal observed in 1901:

Every article a grocer sells should be made to carry a fair living profit; that is a primary consideration for retailers, and if this course was resolutely and unwaveringly carried out we should not hear of so much bankruptcy and distress in the trade.⁵⁹

Tobacconists similarly argued that with the growth in popularity of proprietary articles, the shopkeeper was finding it increasingly

difficult to derive a living out of the trade. Six and a quarter per cent may be sufficient margin when transactions of £30 to £50 are concerned, lamented one observer, "but it is utterly inadequate where the individual transactions only run into pence."⁶⁰ Within the grocery trade there was considerable debate as to what represented a fair living profit. The Grocery Committee of the Proprietary Articles Trade Association felt that a minimum gross profit of 12.5 per cent on every article sold should be its ultimate goal.⁶¹ 'An Old Grocer' angrily replied to those manufacturers of proprietary goods who claimed that 12.5 per cent was an exorbitant profit to demand. He noted that after deducting working expenses which amounted to 10 per cent on his receipts, "the grocer gets the handsome sum of sixpence in the £ of his receipts to provide food, etc., for himself and family. Would the proprietors be content with such a meagerly pittance?"⁶² The editor of The Grocers' Journal came once more to the defence of the independent grocer. He agreed that different businesses required varying percentages of profit on the turnover in order for the trader to make a living, but he argued that "for all practical purposes fifteen percent is the minimum price at which a grocer can run his business and keep his family."⁶³

It is not difficult to understand why shopkeepers attached such importance to the need for a living profit; without it they would eventually fail. Yet the implications of gaining a living profit went well beyond remaining in business. The bankruptcy records for Leicester indicate that there were a number of shopkeepers who staggered on from one year to the next, either getting deeper into debt or reducing their

capital every year in order to remain in business. One such grocer was John Cawney, in business for 20 years, who was deemed bankrupt in 1900. For the "the first few years he did well," he was reported as telling the Court, "but seven or eight years ago his trade began to fall off through keener competition, and he had been going down ever since."⁶⁴ Henry White, a Cheltenham tea dealer, described the problem succinctly, albeit with a masterful stroke of understatement: "I struggled on," he recalled, "until I found I was getting short of cash, which was a great difficulty."⁶⁵

H.G. Wells, whose father had been a retail china dealer in Bromley, Kent, was well aware of the true financial state of many domestic shopkeepers. A great proportion of them, he observed in The History of Mr. Polly,

are people who have...been thrown out of employment, and who set up in needless shops as a method of eking out the savings upon which they count. They contrive to make sixty or seventy per cent of their expenditure, the rest is drawn from the shrinking capital. Essentially their lives are failures, not the sharp and tragic failure of the labourer who gets out of work and starves, but the slow, chronic process of consecutive small losses which may end, if the individual is exceptionally fortunate, in an impoverished death-bed before actual bankruptcy or destitution supervenes.⁶⁶

Clearly, gaining a living profit implied more, therefore, than scratching a subsistence living out of a shop. Rather, it suggested to the community that the proprietor was running his concern on sound business principles which, in turn, enabled him to gain a certain foothold on the rungs of Leicester's social ladder, and respect from middle class society. Michael Rolf, a grocer in the novel An Englishman, dared not contemplate the prospect of failure. "You don't

know what it is to have a ghastly nightmare wake you up in the night when you dream of being surrounded by creditors all yelling 'your money or your life!' And then the talk, the pity, the scorn--'poor fool, couldn't get a living--!'"⁶⁷ Success indicated stability; it was proof that a shopkeeper had a degree of business acumen, and the ability to husband resources and use money and credit wisely.

The shopkeeping community's belief in its right to a living profit can be gauged, in part, by the opprobrium in which it held any fellow shopkeeper who practised the art of 'cutting'--selling goods below recommended or even cost prices. A retail trader who initiated a round of cutting was considered a speculator, rather than a businessman carving out a respectable career; to 'cut' was to act after the fashion of a multiple shop, or a desperate domestic trader, rather than a reputable member of a trade.

The Leicester Grocers' Association considered the suppression of cutting to be its most important duty and, sporadically, its leading success. The Secretary noted with some satisfaction in 1908 that the "suicidal policy of selling an article at a loss in order to gain additional patronage has proved itself both useless and unprofitable..."⁶⁸ Similarly, a commentator on the ironmongery trade was able, by 1911, to rejoice at the success of local associations in reducing "price-cutting and unfair competition."⁶⁹

The expectations of small or domestic shopkeepers were frequently rather different than those prevalent amongst the ranks of the principal shopkeepers; the independence shopkeeping provided, however brief, could be as important as the financial security which might follow. There is

no doubt that a few domestic traders viewed their first small shop as but a stepping stone to greater things. C.T.T. Beeching, who wrote Grocery Business Organisation, Management and Accounts, could not resist observing, after he had documented the success of such capitalists as Whiteley and Lipton: "It must be remembered that each of the biggest businesses sprang from small beginnings. From a small seed what mighty oaks do grow."⁷⁰ Similarly, an anonymous writer on the subject of establishing a small business opened his pamphlet with the observation: "Ambition helps a man on in every way. To get on in life, as it is called, is the natural result of ambition."⁷¹ This feeling was also emphasized by another commentator who noted:

To a very large number of people the purchase of a business is the event of their lives. The natural desire to 'get on', to be their own masters, spurs them forward for years. The most rigid economy is practised, hard work and sacrifice of comfort are cheerfully borne, in order that the much coveted ambition may be finally realised.⁷²

The important feature of this statement is the implication that, in the ideal shop, to 'get on' did not necessarily mean to enlarge one's business; rather, for many prospective shopkeepers the crucial and attractive feature was the independence which they expected to enjoy as a consequence of their investment.

In Chapter Two it will be suggested that the reality of domestic shopkeeping was such that only a minority remained in business long enough to enjoy this independence. Frank Bullen, more bitter than most, recalled that during his brief and disastrous experiment as a shopkeeper he never knew a carefree hour.⁷³ It is very probable that those domestic shopkeepers who enjoyed the greatest success, psychological if

not material, were those who formed the large group which also pursued regular wage employment. H.G. Wells noted that, unlike Mr. Polly, who did little other than read, many other tradesmen in Fishbourne sought alternative sources of income.⁷⁴ R.H. Peel, Secretary of the Shopkeepers' and Small Traders' Protection Association, observed in 1915 that many small shops were run by women during the day while their husbands were at work.⁷⁵ As a consequence, the purpose of shopkeeping for these traders was not to provide a living profit, but to supplement their families' income.

It is evident that some individuals opened small shops on credit in an attempt to survive periods of underemployment or unemployment, thereby ignoring the advice of Thomas Lidgett who advised prospective shopkeepers that "it is better to have a basket and hawk goods from door to door, than cut a show on borrowed money."⁷⁶ Although bankruptcy records seldom deal with the very smallest of traders, the testimony of some debtors suggests that a few entered shopkeeping as a last resort in an attempt to escape poverty. J. Cox was a general labourer who turned to selling provisions when he lost his job. Initially he was successful and he did well enough to maintain himself for 12 or so years before he lost £20 worth of pigs to swine fever, a financial blow from which he could not recover.⁷⁷ W. Hithersay opened a small grocery business, although he had no capital, which was operated by his wife except when he was out of work; however, after struggling along for 5 years he had managed only to contract liabilities of over £100.⁷⁸ The Charity Organisation Society also dealt with the occasional destitute shopkeeper. Charles Jones was a tailor who had been unemployed for

18 months and had resorted, with his wife's help, to retailing. A Charity Organisation Society visitor noted: "They keep a general shop but the sale of newspapers is the chief source of income. Ten shillings a week is quite all they clear out of the shop."⁷⁹ Pittance that it was, it nevertheless kept the family alive.

One consequence of the supplemental nature of domestic shopkeeping, and the fact that it may rarely have provided a living profit, was that if the proprietor did lose his alternative employment, often the shop could not support the family for very long, as H. Belfield, a grocer in a poor neighbourhood, soon discovered. In 1896 he observed that in the past he had worked while his wife managed the business. However, he had lately been out of work and they had been forced to live off the shop, which was not enough.⁸⁰ Retailing was therefore of little use in providing anything other than a very limited stopgap against poverty. However, retailing was undoubtedly a good source of added income to families who could also rely on regular employment. Furthermore, shopkeeping provided these people with a sense of independence because, although on the one hand they were still tied to the wage packet, on the other they could derive satisfaction from their own business venture. James Glass attempted to recapture the feelings which he experienced on his first day in business: "...as I ate my humble lunch, a feeling of proprietorship came over me...I could talk about 'my office' and 'my firm'."⁸¹ There is little doubt that for successful domestic shopkeepers the psychological rewards of remaining in business were as important and attractive a feature of shopkeeping as the remuneration which, it was to be hoped, also accompanied them.

It would appear that throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century the consciousness which existed amongst shopkeepers and divided their hierarchy into 2 camps was latent, and only surfaced during periods of stress. The existence of an 'us and them' mentality emerged quite clearly during the struggle for early closing legislation. It will be seen in Chapter Six that in Leicester this issue acted as a catalyst which polarized the shopkeeping community and highlighted the fundamental division between the domestic and the principal shopkeepers. The rhetoric which accompanied the early closing and Sunday closing debates neatly divided the shopkeeping hierarchy into 2 camps.

This discussion of the varying conceptions of success, and the emergence of an 'us and them' mentality, suggests that the subjective view of shopkeepers was as important in moulding the structure of the shopkeeping world as material considerations. There were many variables which determined the rank of shopkeepers within the hierarchy and modified their perception of that position. When some of these are considered they indicate that this hierarchy was a complex structure, containing many strata. However, a division of this world into 2, ^{two} that is small and large shopkeepers, based upon their experiences and expectations, should not be considered an attempt to over-simplify this intricate world. Rather, the difference between a domestic shopkeeper and a principal trader can be taken as a fundamental division within this world, which was a consequence of conceptual differences between shopkeepers, and which was recognized to exist by both parties.

Notes, Chapter One

¹ Arthur Morrison, To London Town (London, 1899), p. 75.

² Anon., Men of the Period: Selected from Centres of Commerce and Industry (London, 1897), p. 99.

³ See Henry Hartopp, Roll of the Mayors and Lord Mayors of Leicester, 1209 to 1935 (Leicester, 1936).

⁴ The Grocer, 21 March 1896.

⁵ Catherine Hall, "The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker in the shop and the family in the Industrial Revolution", in Elizabeth Whitelegg (ed), The Changing Experience of Women (Oxford, 1982).

⁶ See S. Martin Gaskell, "Housing and the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1914", in Crossick (ed), The Lower Middle Class in Britain, pp. 159-183.

⁷ The Grocers' Journal, 5 June 1891.

⁸ W.G.L., The Draper's Shop; or Parents' Example (London, 1865), p. 29.

⁹ Richard Beynon, Drapery and Drapers' Accounts (London, 1909), p. 163.

¹⁰ E.G. Shore, Outfitter, Receipts Ledger, 1908-1911; H. and A. Bennett, Balance Sheet, 1911.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion on the Sun Insurance Policies see S.D. Chapman, "Business History From Insurance Policy Records", Business Archives 32 (1970), pp. 10-16. See also Eric Hopkins, "The Trading and Service Sectors of the Birmingham Economy, 1750-1800", Business History 28 (1986), pp. 77-97; L.D. Schwarz and L.J. Jones, "Wealth, Occupations, and Insurance in the late Eighteenth Century: The Policy Registers of the Sun Life Office", Economic History Review XXXVI (1983), pp. 365-73. For an introduction to business records in Leicester see David Wykes, "Sources for a Study of Leicester Trade, 1660-1835", Business Archives 45 (1979), pp. 7-17.

¹² The Grocer, 12 July 1884.

¹³ Ibid., 26 October 1895.

¹⁴ J. Hardyman, Correspondence, 1872-73.

¹⁵ James Budgett and Sons, Ltd., Sales Ledger - Midlands, 1857-1867, p. 545.

- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 263; p. 439.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 269.
- ¹⁸Budgett and Sons, Credit Ledger, vol. 2, 24 January 1896.
- ¹⁹Budgett and Sons, Credit Ledger, vol. 3, 21 December 1898; 31 December 1899.
- ²⁰Ibid., 31 December 1898.
- ²¹Budgett and Sons, Credit Ledger, vol. 2, 5 December 1896.
- ²²Ibid., 12 September 1905.
- ²³Ibid., 4 September 1909.
- ²⁴Ibid.
- ²⁵Ibid., 4 November 1898.
- ²⁶Ibid., 18 May 1895.
- ²⁷Ibid.
- ²⁸Ibid., 23 August 1898.
- ²⁹Ibid., 23 June 1908.
- ³⁰Ibid., 5 May 1903.
- ³¹Ibid., vol. 4, 5 May 1903; 9 May 1903.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Ibid., vol. 2, July 1909.
- ³⁴The Grocer, 21 December 1889.
- ³⁵James Budgett and Sons, Partnership Records Ledger, vol. 1., 30 May 1902.
- ³⁶Ibid., 2 June 1902.
- ³⁷James Budgett and Sons, Credit Ledger, vol. 1, 18 February 1899.
- ³⁸Ibid., vol. 3, 21 February 1899.
- ³⁹Ibid., 7 May 1895.
- ⁴⁰The Grocer, 25 March 1905.
- ⁴¹James Budgett and Sons, Credit Ledger, vol. 2, 28 May 1903.

⁴²Ibid., 12 March 1907.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Geoffrey Crossick, "The Petite Bourgeoisie in Nineteenth Century Europe: Problems and Research", Klaus Tenfelde, Hg., Die internationale Forschung zur Geschichte der Arbeiterschaft und Arbeiterbewegung (Oldenbourg, 1983).

⁴⁵The Grocer, 15 July 1905.

⁴⁶Ibid., 4 December 1909.

⁴⁷Small Trader and Shopkeeper: Hands Off the Little Man, 15 January 1915.

⁴⁸Frank T. Bullen, Confessions of a Tradesman, London, 1908.

⁴⁹Report from the Select Committee on Shops (Early Closing) Bill, P.P. 1895, XII, Q3571, p. 142.

⁵⁰Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Early Closing of Shops, P.P. 1901, VI, p. 145.

⁵¹Small Trader and Shopkeeper, 15 January 1915.

⁵²Arthur Bennett, Retirement Statement, May, 1897.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Mary L. Pendered, An Englishman (London, 1899), p. 25.

⁵⁵W.H. Simmonds, The Practical Grocer: Volume 1 - The Trade of Today (London, 1904), p. 50. Max Rittenburg, a critic of old sales techniques, noted: "Goodwill built up by doing years of trading is undoubtedly a valuable asset but valuable only so long as it is daily renewed." Max Rittenburg, Selling Schemes for Retailers (London, 1911), p. 12.

⁵⁶J.J. Bell, Thou Fool (London, 1907), p. 7.

⁵⁷John Blandy, The Tax Earner: A Tale from Life (London, 1899), p. 57.

⁵⁸William Arthur, The Successful Merchant: Sketches of the Life of Mr. Samuel Budgett (London, 1852), p. 140.

⁵⁹The Grocers' Journal, 3 August 1901.

⁶⁰Tobacco Trade Review, 1 May 1889.

⁶¹The Grocers' Journal, 10 February 1900.

- ⁶²Ibid., 29 June 1901.
- ⁶³Ibid., 18 January 1902.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., 29 September 1900.
- ⁶⁵Henry White, A Record of My Life (Cheltenham, 1889), p. 127.
- ⁶⁶H.G. Wells, History of Mr. Polly (London, 1963), pp. 130-1.
- ⁶⁷Pendered, An Englishman, p. 235.
- ⁶⁸The Grocer, 25 July 1908.
- ⁶⁹Francis, Ironmongery, p. 183.
- ⁷⁰C.T.T. Beeching, Grocery Business, Organisation, Management and Accounts (London, 1911), p. 37.
- ⁷¹Anon., How to Make a Small Business Pay (London, 1913), p. 1.
- ⁷²H.A.S., How to Purchase a Business (Liverpool, 1904), p. 7.
- ⁷³Bullen, Confessions of a Tradesman, p. 101.
- ⁷⁴Wells, History of Mr. Polly, p. 123.
- ⁷⁵Small Trader and Shopkeeper, 15 January 1915.
- ⁷⁶Thomas Lidgett, The Life of Thomas L. Lidgett (Lincoln, 1908), p. 42.
- ⁷⁷The Grocer, 26 April 1890.
- ⁷⁸The Grocer, 28 November 1903.
- ⁷⁹Leicester Charity Organisation Society, 1905 Case Reports. Case Number 607. Note: names have been changed on the request of the Society.
- ⁸⁰The Grocer, 21 November 1896.
- ⁸¹James Glass, Chats Over a Pipe: A Tale of Two Brothers (London, 1922), p. 102.

CHAPTER TWO

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL COMPETITION

It is apparent that in the late nineteenth century many shopkeepers, irrespective of their standing in the shopkeeping hierarchy, believed that their position as retailers was being undermined by 'unfair competition'. Spokesmen for domestic and principal traders alike bemoaned the success of those who sought to strip shopkeepers of their 'legitimate' trading rights. The President of the Leicester Chemists' Association pointed out to his fellow shopkeepers, at a soiree held at the Co-operative Hall--an irony which did not go unnoticed by the speaker--that chemists had to support their Association, the object of which was to protect, amongst other things, their trade interests "which at present were attacked on all sides. They had every day to meet the encroachments of the stores, which had done an enormous injury not only to the retail chemist, but to every retail trader in the country."¹ The similarity of the rhetoric unleashed to articulate the fears of domestic shopkeepers is readily apparent. "On all sides the small trader is being attacked. The first to feel the effect of bad trade, often finding it extremely difficult to make ends meet, crushed by excessive rents, weighed down by the weight of taxation, he needs protecting."² Before it can be determined if these fears were indeed well-founded, it is first necessary to identify the sectors of the retailing world which provided the competition which so annoyed and disturbed shopkeepers.

Shopkeepers had to contend with a number of forms of competition in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. External competition, originating outside of the independent shopkeeping community, came from older sources such as hawkers and wholesalers, and from more recent establishments such as multiple or chain stores, department stores and co-operative societies. Internal competition, originating within the independent shopkeeping community, raged within specific trades, between trades, and between the various strata of the hierarchy. It will be suggested that, although shopkeepers and their spokesmen expended considerable energy criticizing the above examples of external competition, the worst cases of distress in the shopkeeping community were a result of unchecked internal competition.

Shopkeepers and market trading in Leicester

Shopkeepers were not averse to all other forms of retailing. Throughout the late nineteenth century they accepted the right of stallholders in the town's markets and fairs to earn a living, although they periodically complained of the rowdiness which accompanied the markets. This recognition was due, in part, to the fact that the markets had been in place since medieval times; however, it was also due to the shopkeepers' realization that the markets complemented their own trade. Despite the Corporation's desire to reform the markets toward the end of the nineteenth century, they remained popular, and they continued to provide the town with a handsome profit. In 1888, managing the markets cost the town £3,000 a year, while the rental of stalls created an annual income of £7,000.³

Local traders, supplemented by stallholders from the outlying villages, continued to set up their wares in the market. In 1907 the

Superintendent of Markets reported that only 75 of the 800 stalls were unoccupied.⁴ Market days were exciting events featuring produce, goods and entertainment. George Thorpe, the son of a Leicester shoe manufacturer, has recalled with delight that his walk home from school would take him through the market; sometimes his mother would ask him to do some shopping and he was able to linger among the stalls.⁵ Mrs. Ellis, the wife of a successful hosiery manufacturer, long-remembered her visits to the fair in Humberstone Gate: they provided "a glimpse of Paradise."⁶

The bustle associated with the fairs and markets did create a certain amount of friction between the shopkeepers whose premises adjoined the markets and the stallholders. In Leicester the markets were owned by the Corporation, and their management was the responsibility of the Toll Committee.⁷ Shopkeepers frequently complained to the Committee about minor problems which needed attention. For example, in 1895, Simpkin and James, grocers, complained that the stall in front of their shop was blocking out their light.⁸ On another occasion, shopkeepers informed the Committee that the Market Place was not swept and cleaned sufficiently well following the Saturday market.⁹ A common grievance was that the market generated too much noise and bad language. In 1886 there were complaints from Messrs. Johnson and Johnson and Messrs. J. and T. Spencer about the language coming from the butchers' stalls.¹⁰ In the latter instance, the Clerk of the Market admitted to the Committee that there had actually been a fight the previous Saturday night amongst some of the butchers; consequently, 10 stallholders were given notice that their leases had been terminated.¹¹

Shopkeepers in the Market Place were concerned that the Committee should impose a greater amount of order over the market, particularly after the introduction of the Wednesday General Market in 1886. More decorum, the shopkeepers argued, would benefit all concerned. In 1902 the owners and occupiers of property adjacent to the fish market, which was located on the south side of the Market Place, protested against the presence of large covered stalls in front of their premises. We have, they argued, "distinct traces of serious injury to our business, of the letting value of the premises, inconveniences to our customers, as well as great loss to ourselves."¹² They could not understand why the fish dealers could not keep within their stipulated boundary. On other occasions deputations appeared before the Committee to complain about flower sellers blocking the pavement and accosting their customers.¹³

There were a number of incidents which indicate that shopkeepers considered markets beneficial to their trade. In July 1892 the Toll Committee received a letter from the stallholders who conducted their business in the centre of Cheapside, a street which connected the north side of the Market Place with Eastgates and the High Street. These traders had been removed from their regular spots when it became necessary to make street repairs, and they wanted to know when they could return to Cheapside. In this matter they had the support of the leading shopkeepers in the street. Richard Morley, a prominent draper, and Alfred Berridge, a successful chemist, informed the Committee that they missed the activity which spilled onto their street from the market when the stalls were set up in front of their shops.¹⁵

The Town Clerk implicitly acknowledged that the Corporation was

working with the shopkeepers to civilize the market. He informed the Royal Commission on Markets and Tolls that "twelve months ago we had to get rid of a few unsatisfactory tenants, butchers not of the highest class."¹⁶ Now, he noted, matters were improving and shopkeepers were increasingly supporting the market by setting up as stallholders themselves. "I believe almost all the men who do a large trade in butchers' shops have a stall in the market and they send meat there although they are carrying on a good trade in the town."¹⁷ Shopkeepers did not consider markets to be a challenge to their supremacy in the retailing world.

'Unfair competition' in the retailing world

Shopkeepers accepted the right of market stallholders to earn a livelihood, but they had little sympathy for other businessmen, small or large, who represented 'unfair competition'. Wholesalers, department stores, multiples and co-operative stores were all perceived as enemies by shopkeepers. However, no external source of competition annoyed shopkeepers more than the ubiquitous street hawker who, it was argued, most certainly did not complement a shopkeeper's business.

Hawkers

Domestic shopkeepers were particularly upset at hawkers' activities, and their anger was fuelled by the fact that hawkers frequently received their goods from principal shopkeepers who dabbled in minor wholesaling transactions. A.V. Christie, the son of an ironmonger in Kilmarnock, recalled that his father supplied many pedlars with smallwares, such as boot laces, stay laces, knitting needles,

sewing needles, pins and combs.¹⁸ Hawkers' sales were unlikely to cause shopkeepers too much financial hardship; nevertheless, small fixed-outlet traders spent considerable time complaining about the real or imagined wrongs inflicted upon them by the itinerant seller. No doubt this was a consequence of the fact that hawkers, the one component of the entire retail hierarchy which were less organized than shopkeepers, were less able to defend themselves.

Leicester's greengrocers and fruiterers were the traders affected more than most by street sellers, and they provided the most vocal opposition to the continued activities of hawkers. The anger of greengrocers and fruiterers culminated in 1901 when they organized a deputation to notify the Watch Committee of the Leicester Corporation of their complaints about street trading. The Committee heard their testimony and agreed to consider the matter; however, apart from expressing concern about the prevalence of 'street cries' on a Sunday, no action was taken.¹⁹ Undaunted, the greengrocers and fruiterers next approached the Markets Committee of the Corporation, and suggested that, at the very least, legitimate hawkers should be licenced. A hawker, the shopkeepers contended, "uses the public thoroughfare as his market or shop, he pays neither rent, rates or taxes, he is a public nuisance: He buys fruit which the Sanitary Inspector would not allow to be sold in the open market or in a shop. Result. Diarrhorea [sic] and a large increase in the Infant Mortality."²⁰ These complaints were echoed at a later date by the editor of The Grocers' Journal, who in 1911 attacked the Government's decision to exclude hawkers, or costermongers, from the Sunday closing provisions of the tentative Shops Bill. The Government's

sympathy was misplaced, the editor argued, and the coster

ought really to be despised...The 'poor coster' is often much better off than the tradesman in front of whose shop he places himself, whose light he uses, and whose customers he tempts away. He starts often with a capital which would not stock the window of a grocer and becomes affluent in a short time by reason of the absence of those expenses which weigh his competitors down. He pays no rent, the taxgatherer never calls upon him, the trader even pays for the removal of the refuse he leaves at his door.²¹

A 'shopkeeper' informed The Leicester Daily Mercury that it was "time the small retailer should be protected" from hawkers, who, it was observed, paid neither rent nor taxes.²² The Retail Dairyman chided wholesalers for supplying 'Cheap Jacks' with surplus milk, and argued that they were unmindful of the 'bona-fide retailers'.²³

The formal complaint of Leicester's shopkeepers in 1905 was the direct result of an incident in Outram Street which occurred after a shopkeeper pointed out to a lady who had just bought $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of cherries from a hawker that she had actually been given only 6 oz. of fruit. "Result. The hawkers pitched their barrows each side of the shop for some days, undersold the shopkeeper and annoyed her in every way possible, they stood for hours at a time, and were not moved on by police."²⁴ The following year, the small shopkeepers approached the Watch Committee once again; 120 fruiterers and greengrocers signed a letter which repeated their call for the annual licencing of hawkers.²⁵ However, although the Committee agreed to consider their suggestion, the matter was never successfully resolved, and the shopkeepers were still complaining about hawkers in 1910.²⁶ Unlike market stallholders, with whom shopkeepers had a symbiotic relationship, each attracting custom for the other, hawkers were considered to be a nuisance by shopkeepers.

Nevertheless, in the late nineteenth century there were sectors of the distributive system which were offering a far greater challenge to the shopkeeper than street sellers.

Wholesalers

Shopkeepers were also quick to attack any perceived encroachment upon their retailing territory by the wholesalers, a number of whom were not averse to dealing directly with the general public. The Leicester Grocers' Association speedily wrote to a local wholesaler who, by canvassing the town with leaflets, was attempting to bypass the shopkeepers, thereby "taking business from the legitimate trader."²⁷ Similarly, grocers were also angry at the growing practise amongst commercial travellers of calling upon grocers' best customers. It "is a long way from fair," argued The Grocers' Journal, "that a firm should induce a grocer to stock its goods, and then go to one of its best customers--or, at any rate, a possible one--and deprive him of the chance of disposing of his purchases."²⁸ Leicester's grocers were even more upset in 1912 when a jam manufacturer employed a large number of lady canvassers to sell its goods from door to door. A resolution was passed unanimously by the Grocers' Association protesting against the "methods of certain manufacturers in introducing goods to householders."²⁹

Fishmongers in the market also complained that fish wholesalers were increasing their trade with the public which, consequently, "greatly damaged the retail trade of the market."³⁰ They requested that the Corporation provide a separate building for the wholesalers, a request which was acceded to despite opposition from the wholesale

dealers, and the new wholesaler market opened in Halford Street in 1902. In December of the same year, the retail fishmongers were complaining bitterly to the Corporation: "Since the removal of the Wholesale Trade to the new Market the business done at the Old Fish Market is not nearly as large or profitable as before."³¹ The members of the Markets Committee, given their 10 year effort to separate the wholesale and retail traders, may be forgiven for ignoring this letter and moving on to the next item on the agenda.

A further complaint levelled at the wholesalers in the market was that they frequently sold off, at much reduced prices, any goods which might be left at the end of the day. Stallholders and shopkeepers in the fruit and vegetable trade were particularly concerned about this custom which, they argued, undermined their daily trade.³² Not surprisingly, when the decision to move the fruit and vegetable wholesalers to the new fish wholesale market in Halford Street was announced, the wholesalers protested the ruling although they could not get it reversed.³³

The extent to which shopkeepers opposed the entry of wholesalers into the retail market can be determined by the reaction of grocers and tea dealers to the decision of the Mazawatee Tea Company, one of the largest tea wholesalers in the country, to enter the retail business in 1905. The Secretary of the Federation of Grocers' Associations described the news as a bombshell.³⁴ Referring to the company's decision, one observer noted: "There is not a grocer in England or Wales who is not inimical to the Company."³⁵ Mazawatee's foray into the retail trade, however, proved disastrous. The original plan called for

the opening of 500 shops at small rentals with fitting-up costs of £200 per shop. After 18 months, however, only 164 shops had been opened, with an average rental of £160 per annum, and the cheapest to be fitted out had cost £500. In 1905 alone 70 shops were opened for an average of only eight weeks, losing the company £8,602.

J. Lane Densham, who was brought in as the new Chairman of the Board to rescue the finances of the company, immediately terminated their retail trading operations. Densham disassociated himself from the previous Board's decision to open retail outlets, although he admitted that, if their original policy of opening cafes which also sold the company products as a sideline had been implemented, then the venture might have had some success. However, he continued, the decision to change course and compete with the established grocery business was a fatal mistake; by selling tea and butter at a loss to attract custom the shops lost money and destroyed much of the company's wholesale trade. It had been wrong, he concluded, "to try to get trade away from their old and loyal agents, who had helped to build up this company's business."³⁶

The Mazawatee venture was only one example, however unsuccessful, of the entry into the retail trade of individuals or companies which had large sums of capital at their disposal. Shopkeepers noted with dismay the number of capitalists who contemplated retailing as a new ground for competition. By 1911 a commentator on the grocery trade felt able to announce, with some relief, that the "desire of the companies to crush out the individual grocer has not advanced any further in the year under review."³⁷

Department stores

The department store in Britain emerged first in the London drapery trade in the 1860s; a new evil to rival that of the co-operative system had arrived. Twenty years later trade observers were still attacking the "tendency of many of the London drapers to convert their establishments into general stores."³⁸ Small drapers were right to display unease about the advent of a few 'mammoth establishments', the editor of The Draper's Record argued in 1888, but really they should cause the modestly-sized shop no "more than a passing uneasiness."³⁹ The "floodmark of success of the exceptionally large concerns," he concluded, "has already been reached," and the drapery trade would not be "swallowed up in one vast impersonal emporium."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as Michael Winstanley has noted, the emergence of department stores such as Harrods, Selfridges and Whiteleys in the West End of London did indeed cause many drapers, and other traders, great unease, particularly as they appealed primarily to customers who lived off incomes rather than wages. The policy of department stores, Winstanley has added, "was to convince the well-to-do, usually female customers that shopping was no longer an unavoidable chore but a pleasurable social activity."⁴¹

Although stores to rival the large West End concerns were seldom built in the provinces prior to 1914, smaller versions did begin to emerge, as in London, primarily out of the drapery and clothing trades. The expansion of a specialist shop into a department store has been outlined by J.H. Porter in his short study of Broadbents of Southport,⁴² although it would perhaps be more correct to refer to Broadbents, and its counterparts in Leicester, as specialist department

stores rather than as general department stores, such as those in the West End. One specialist department store in Leicester was H. and A. Bennett's of Market Street, which was one of the principal shopping streets of the town according to one writer. It was a street which was convenient, yet secluded "so that purchasers could linger before shop windows without being continually jostled by passers-by."⁴³ The Bennett brothers started business as brush makers and dealers in the 1860s, and by 1869 the retail side of their venture was producing a yearly profit of £116 14s.⁴⁴ Their retail sales rose from £653 in 1869, to £1,117 in 1884,⁴⁵ to £14,458 in 1911.⁴⁶ Over the decades, Bennett's gradually expanded the range of their stock. By the 1880s they were dealing in all manner of household goods, and by 1911 four separate departments had been established: fancy goods, which produced the largest turnover, household goods, toys, and wickerware.⁴⁷

Similar specialist expansion was also evident in Leicester's drapery trade. Newspaper advertisements indicate that drapers such as Morgan, Squire and Co., Brown, Clarke and Morris, Adderly and Co., Robert Baker and Son, and Joseph Johnson were all expanding their stocks of clothing goods. Aside from general drapery, they were also incorporating shoes, millinery, haberdashery, smallwares and hosiery, as well as ready-made garments, into their stock.⁴⁸ However, although a number of ancillary trades were now housed under one roof, the addition of dissimilar trades had not yet occurred. There were no entrepreneurs in Leicester who could truthfully approximate William Whiteley's claim to be able to provide anything from a pin to an elephant.⁴⁹ The absence of huge department stores did not, however, cushion Leicester's

shopkeepers entirely from the effects of this rival for their trade.

Provincial shopkeepers reacted with horror when the Post Office appeared to support a proposal to inaugurate a Cash On Delivery (C.O.D.) system. They were particularly upset because their wealthier customers already showed an inclination to travel down to London to shop at the large shops. One commentator observed that ladies of the middle, upper and professional classes considered it bad form to be seen entering a provincial shop. "To be the mode, the goods they require must come from London or the nearest big city."⁵⁰ The large general and specialist department stores in the West End were only too willing to cater to the fads and whims of wealthy provincial women, and it was not surprising that they came out in support of the C.O.D. system when it was proposed in 1903. Provincial shopkeepers argued that, as a consequence, "fraud would increase by leaps and bounds."⁵¹ Their main concern, however, was that more of their 'high class' trade would be siphoned off by the London traders. The Draper agreed, criticizing the avarice of the West End shopkeepers.⁵² The same journal also advised the provincial draper to "do his part, by renewed endeavours to meet the wants, wishes, and tastes of his local public, and thus, as far as possible, neutralize the new devices of his formidable competitors."⁵³ This was, in turn, a reference to a plan supported by Harrods and a number of the West End department stores to deliver their goods free of charge anywhere in the country.⁵⁴ There is little doubt that, although the physical presence of large department stores attracted comment from the press, trades and public alike, their impact was limited outside of London and the largest provincial cities. James Jefferys' findings have indicated that

department stores accounted for only 1 to 2 per cent of sales in the retail trade in 1900, and 1.5 to 3 per cent in 1910.⁵⁵

Multiple shops

In the provinces, and certainly in Leicester, observers of the retail trade believed the impact of multiple shop retailing to be considerably more disruptive to the trade of the independent shopkeeper than department stores. R.H. Peel, Secretary of the Small Traders' and Shopkeepers' Protection Association and a Leicester shopkeeper, observed in 1915 that multiples had hit the small shopkeeper very hard, particularly grocers. The rise of the multiple shop firm has been documented by James Jefferys, who has estimated that, whereas in 1875 there were 39 firms with over 10 branches each, by 1910 there were 544 firms with at least 10 branches. He has argued that, prior to 1914, there were two phases in the development of multiples. The first phase, from the early 1870s to the mid-1890s, included development in the footwear, grocery, meat and household stores' trades, as well as the arrival of railway bookstalls. The second phase, down to 1914, included the continued development of multiples in those trades in which it had already gained a foothold, and an extension into clothing, chemists' goods, tobacco and confectionery. Multiple shop trading featured low prices, cash transactions and vigorous advertising. Furthermore, to develop and extend their operations, practically all of the largest firms were public companies by 1914.⁵⁶

Merchant princes such as Thomas Lipton and Jesse Boot were glorified in books such as Roads to Riches: The Romance of Money-Making (1909) which examined the lifestyles, foibles, eccentricities and lavish

expenditures of the wealthy. Yet such books also held out to the common people a shred of hope that they might also share in the division of the spoils of commerce. Thornton Hall observed that his collection of biographies of the rich acted as "a guide post to the avenues of thrift, shrewdness, and industry which lead to that most coveted of human goals, the attainment of wealth as the result, not of accident, but of high personal endeavour."⁵⁷

Lipton opened his Leicester branch in 1889, at which time a correspondent observed:

Mr. Lipton has been trying during the past fortnight to create a kind of furore in the town by advertising to an extent which has certainly had no parallel in the history of the trade here. Twenty men in Indian dress, with coloured umbrellas, have been parading the streets; every available hoarding in the town has had its half-dozen or more illustrated posters; and a column advertisement has been appearing every day in the local papers.⁵⁸

The success of Lipton, who dealt primarily in tea and provisions, hurt grocers because tea had long been considered "the chief glory of a grocer's business."⁵⁹ Grocers, and their spokesmen in the trade press, complained bitterly of the price cutting campaigns which well-financed multiple shops resorted to in order to gain the shopkeepers' trade. In 1910 a particularly fierce round of cutting broke out. The editor of The Grocers' Journal bravely attempted to turn the battle to his trade's advantage: "If any evidence were wanting to prove that the multiple shop companies feel that their position is not quite unassailable by the energetic single shopkeeper, it is afforded by the extreme cutting tactics to which they have recently been resorting."⁶⁰ Over the following weeks grocers were warned not to enter into price

competition with the multiples.⁶¹ "Let not the grocer be deluded into entering into this insane competition. Let him keep up his standard of quality, keep his blend high, maintain his prices at a point where they show him a fair living profit, and at the same time exhibit to his customer value for money."⁶²

It is both interesting and important to note that, compared to their sustained and passionate opposition to co-operative retailing, the complaints directed against multiples and department stores by shopkeepers were spasmodic and muted. Shopkeepers may well have grumbled amongst themselves about the implications of the arrival of a new multiple in the town,⁶³ but they seldom did little more than offer a token resistance. The tireless co-operative propagandist G.J. Holyoake was puzzled by the shopkeepers' position. He referred to the multiple shops, such as 'Boots Cash Chemists', as "the conspirators in [shopkeepers'] own households."⁶⁴ Holyoake concluded that to be silent about the growth of multiples "is like calling on the landlord to re-paint the front of the shop while the premises are on fire behind."⁶⁵

Yet even the trade press could rouse itself to denounce multiples and department stores on only a few occasions. In 1901 The Grocers' Journal did observe that if "disaster should ever overtake the small trader and he is rendered a memory of the past only, it will be by giant monopoly crushing unfairly the life out of him, and not the distributive co-operation."⁶⁶ The same journal noted a few years later that big business was like an octopus, "seizing the custom which in happier days belonged to the legitimate trader."⁶⁷ By 1900 however, it is apparent that the members of the Leicester Grocers' Association had accepted the

multiples as an entrenched, if bothersome, element of the retail hierarchy.⁶⁸ Indeed, in April 1905 the Association went so far as to thank a number of multiple stores, including the Home and Colonial Stores, Pearl's Stores, and Burton and Co., for sending in donations to the Association.⁶⁹

It would appear that shopkeepers in Leicester grudgingly accepted the arrival of department stores and multiples, and attempted to incorporate their proprietors or managers into the shopkeeping network. This process was made easier by the fact that during this period a number of the multiples were local companies, with only a few branches, operated by men who had emerged from the shopkeeping hierarchy. This trend was observed by a commentator in Leicester as early as 1889. Ten or 12 years before, it was noted, "excepting the Co-operative Society, only one firm in town--Smith's--had more than one shop. What do we find now? Mr. G.H. Johnson has two, Mr. John Barrs three, Mr. M.F. Goodall four, Mr. Henry Raiment two,... and Mr. Simeon T. King has two shops."⁷⁰ Many of the principal grocers may well have harboured their own ambitions to expand in this way and felt constrained not to offer too much criticism about their former peers.

Smaller shopkeepers were, however, less charitable. The anonymous author of a pamphlet published in 1912 regretted that there was a common belief that the multiple shop would eventually "oust out of existence the little man, the individual shopkeeper, the man who by his integrity, tenacity and dependability has helped in the making of BRITAIN'S COMMERCIAL GREATNESS."⁷¹ Accusations that the multiple shop was the greatest threat to entrenched retail establishments were prevalent even

in the co-operative trade press. "The multiple shop," argued one co-operator, "is forcing the small shopkeeper out of the distributive field--and threatening the co-operative movement."⁷²

Leicester's grocers' assistants also recognized that multiples were becoming entrenched within the retailing world. Assistants, urged on by writers such as Oscar Berry, Treasurer of the Grocers' Federation and a chartered accountant in the City, continued to aspire to become grocers in their own right. It "is the right and laudable ambition of the efficient and business-like assistant, now as ever, to be 'his own master'."⁷³ However, organizers of the shop assistants' fledgling trade unions urged their potential members to be realistic and to accept that the opportunities to open a shop were not as good as they had been in the past. Consequently, after 1900, assistants began to adopt a new definition of the term grocer: a proprietor of a shop was transformed into an individual skilled in all aspects of the grocery business. It became reputable for assistants to aspire to manage a multiple grocery shop and still claim the title 'grocer'. "The way into the trade has been far too easy of late years..." wrote the editor of The Grocers' Assistant. "Let us have a better regulated entrance into the trade,... better opportunities of really learning the trade, and thus it will come about that there will be few grocers, but those grocers indeed."⁷⁴

Co-operative stores

It is clear that throughout the period under examination shopkeepers considered distributive co-operative societies to be their greatest opponents. Indeed, the horror with which they observed the growth of these societies perhaps explains shopkeepers' partial lack of

interest in the rise of other forms of competition. The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, the journal which offered support to the traders of St. Helens, who initiated a boycott of the local co-operative society in 1902, contained a number of examples of the loathing that shopkeepers and their supporters had for co-operative societies. The editor contended,

We are not quite clear as to the best method of scotching the giant fiend which is withering the individual trader in the North of England, and whose progress we are desirous of stopping... Be that as it may, this we know, and this is the colour we nail to the mast, that the Industrial Co-operative Stores, by a subtle scheme of unfair trading, specially organised for the benefit of the rapacious few, are surely and rapidly ruining and expatriating the individual trader.⁷⁵

It is true that this editorial was intended as a battlecry to rouse the various trades into action; nevertheless, such rhetoric, without quite the same passion perhaps, was also evident in the pages of other journals during less heated moments. "The avowed object of co-operation," observed The Grocers' Journal, "is the elimination of private enterprise in business--the enterprise, let it not be forgotten, upon which the nation's position has been built."⁷⁶ Co-operative distribution was an anathema to shopkeepers not just because it threatened to hurt sales and profits, but because its philosophy explicitly considered private retailing to be redundant. In the co-operative movement's vision of industrial society there was no place for the shopkeeper. George Stanton, a Leicester co-operator, observed: "It is a long time since the co-operative movement had cause to fear the small shopkeeper: as an economic factor of any consequence he has ceased to count."⁷⁷ G.J. Holyoake, who referred to private shopkeepers

as the "petulant pigmies of commerce,"⁷⁸ felt that it was hardly surprising that so many shoppers should choose to belong to their local co-operative rather than put money in the pocket of their neighbourhood shopkeepers. He joyfully pointed out that, despite "a century of opposition, co-operation has made its way; its adherents have multiplied... They are the richest party that ever arose out of the working class. Their business exceeds that of any private trader in the country."⁷⁹

Not unnaturally, shopkeepers rejected the claim that they were no longer a necessary part of the distributive system. In Simpletown's Folly (A Modern Parable), H. Hodges of Hampshire articulated in 1910 feelings undoubtedly held by many independent traders. Hodges opened his essay by quoting, with some relish, a statement attributed to George Harwood, M.P.: "It would be a sad day for the trade of the country, and for the character of England, should the small trader be crushed out of existence, for he is one of the most valuable members of the community."⁸⁰ Hodges then proceeded in his attempt to uphold this statement by marshalling enough evidence to indicate that 'Simpletown' would never recover if its shopkeepers were financially ruined. Who would pay the rates? Who would take over the public duties and services? Who would replace the money extracted from the community by avaricious absentee retailers? What of the old shopkeepers?⁸¹ "So there was nothing for them but the shelter of the Simpletown workhouse, or existing upon the charity of others."⁸²

Initially, co-operative trading by public officials, or Civil Service trading, caused shopkeepers the greatest anguish. In the 1870s,

particularly in London, the fear of such companies as the Army and Navy and the Civil Service Supply Association first sparked off calls for a grocers' or shopkeepers' trade union. Writing in 1876, 'Drastic' advocated the formation of a Tradesman's League to organize shopkeepers, to gain direct Parliamentary representation for trading, and to marshal support from the Press. Was it fair, he argued, that public servants were allowed to co-operate and then trade with the public for considerations of profit? The government employee already had a handsome salary and could afford to accept a meagre return on his goods. "The simple truth is that the retail dealer is handicapped clean out of the race, by having to carry heavy weights which are not imposed on his rival."⁸³ As things stood, he continued, the present situation could "only result in one end--gradual extermination of ordinary retailers, and the establishment of a privileged trading oligarchy with whom competition would be hopeless."⁸⁴ In conclusion, he admonished shopkeepers to forget "wretched rivalries and petty animosities."⁸⁵

The concern over the inroads made into the retailing market by Civil Service co-operatives was given a public airing at a meeting in London in January 1879, a meeting to which Leicester's grocers sent a letter of support. It was at this time that shopkeepers argued that the Civil Service stores should be made to pay the full amount of assessed and other taxes and rates extracted from private dealers.⁸⁶ Shopkeepers were particularly upset at the Civil Service stores because they attracted the custom of the middle class and the growing white collar stratum, which was emerging as an important sector of the purchasing community.⁸⁷ Private traders were incensed when the clergy,

under the title 'The Universities Co-operative Association', entered the retailing world. "The hostile criticism," remarked The Grocers' Journal, "...has been succeeded by a feeling akin to disgust and has, we venture to say, done incalculable harm as regards the respect and attachment that should exist between tradespeople and their pastors."⁸⁸ One grocer wrote in to the trade press in an attempt to refute the arguments of any who supported co-operative trading. Civil servants and the clergy "are well paid, and I say they have no right to trade; if they prefer trade let them come out, and depend upon trade like an honest tradesman."⁸⁹ Observers also warned provincial shopkeepers against apathy because Civil Service stores were centred in London: "if something is not done..., similar institutions will soon spread through all of the provincial towns to the practical suspension of shopkeeping."⁹⁰

Provincial shopkeepers were already well-aware of the effects upon their trades of co-operative retailing societies, which were attracting committed support from certain strata of the working class, particularly in the industrial centres of the North and the Midlands. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, retail journals wearily catalogued the advances of co-operative trading. The Trader and Consumer observed in 1902 that co-operation had lately advanced by "leaps and bounds",⁹¹ a statement reinforced by the data in Table 2:1. The Leicester Co-operative Society also began to diversify: a bakery was opened in 1867; a drapery branch soon followed; and, in 1874, the first of 16 butchery outlets was opened.

Unfortunately, no continuous detailed information on the relationship between shopkeepers and the Leicester Co-operative Society

Table 2:1 Membership and Retail Sales of Co-operative Societies,
England and Wales

Year	Number of Members	Total Retail Sales £
1881	547,212	15,411,185
1885	746,772	19,872,343
1890	961,616	26,887,638
1895	1,274,994	33,900,674
1900	1,707,011	50,053,567
1905	2,153,015	61,086,991
1910	2,541,734	71,861,383
1915	3,264,811	102,557,779

Source: James Jefferys, Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950
(Cambridge, 1954), p. 461.

is extant, although those pieces of evidence which do exist suggest that the pattern of complaints in Leicester was similar to that articulated in the national trade papers. J.T. Stephen, the first historian of the Leicester Co-operative Society, observed that the formation of their earliest shop in Belgrave Gate, the centre of Leicester's shopping district, caused much opposition from rival traders.⁹² Similarly, during the Society's 25th Anniversary celebrations in 1885, "allusion was made to the strong opposition offered by traders in the town."⁹³ Occasionally, opponents of the co-operative stores aired their grievances in local newspapers. In 1896 a letter from 'Live and Let Live' appeared: "Seeing the heavy rates which shopkeepers have to pay there does not appear to be much consideration in the conduct of those people who deal at Co-operative Stores, which compete with them so unfairly."⁹⁴ Another letter, this time from 'Hard Hit', agreed with 'Live and Let Live' that the buying public was not acting honourably: "The working classes are loud in their cry for a living wage for

themselves; but it does not show much consideration for others when so many of them do their best to leave the shopkeeper to starve."⁹⁵

Another contributor observed that trade unionists were the greatest supporters of co-operative societies, and yet, because the prices of goods were often so low, it was clear that they were the product of 'sweated' labour.⁹⁶ The working class, so the argument ran, was defeating itself through co-operation. Supporters of the co-operative societies, safe in their knowledge of the success of their venture, did not rise to the bait and failed to respond to these criticisms. The one-sided discussion ended with the claims of 'Lazarus' that the only people who benefited from co-operative stores were the employees who, he argued, could work in any shop anyway. Society, he continued, was really the loser because co-operative stores greatly handicapped the shopkeeper, thereby reducing the number of shopkeepers, and raising the rates.⁹⁷

There exists the possibility, however, that after the initial successes of the co-operative societies, which undoubtedly hurt the sales of private traders, circumstances combined to dampen the effect which the growing sales of the co-operatives had on shopkeepers. It may have been that many of the customers who frequented the co-operatives' various branches were new additions to the shopping community, rather than customers stolen from the private retailer. Unlike many of the towns in the north of England, where co-operatives were rapidly superimposed upon communities which had already experienced their most rapid periods of growth, the Leicester Co-operative Society may be said to have grown with the town. Consequently, while the population of Leicester tripled in the last four decades of the nineteenth century,

from 68,000 to nearly 219,000, the Leicester Co-operative Society gradually established and expanded its membership. Table 2:2 indicates that between 1860 and 1900 the Society grew to number just over 11,000 members, and yet in this period the largest annual increase was 1,346 in 1871. Similarly, during this 40 year period economic conditions in the city underwent a considerable improvement. Despite a few periodic slumps, commentators were able, by the end of the century, to observe the general financial health of Leicester. In 1897 The Wyvern made note of the "abounding evidence of the town's increased prosperity... I have spoken to a good many local shopkeepers since the great day [Christmas], and all agree that they never had such a good Christmas as this year."⁹⁸ In 1900, A.C. Evans, speaking on behalf of the Leicester Master Bakers' Association stated that Leicester was "lucky to have more than one staple industry." and that trade in Leicester was now in an "exceedingly healthy condition."⁹⁹

Table 2:2 Leicester Co-operative Society, 1860-1910

Year	Members	Capital £	Sales £	Profit £
1860	-	133	2,596	70
1865	309 ¹	766	3,563	230
1870	1,697	3,734	26,972	2,494
1875	5,942	27,337	138,008	14,499
1880	6,388	29,437	126,504	10,918
1885	7,481	73,830	150,711	20,949
1890	7,292	65,562	123,801	7,962
1895	8,578	93,311	159,221	13,860
1900	11,013	-	243,173	24,186
1905	19,005	-	448,355	49,324
1910	19,031	-	461,692	40,489

¹Figure for 1866.

Sources: 1860-1895 - Distributive Co-operation in Leicester, Leicester, 1898, p. 13; 1900-1910 - Annual Reports of the Chief Register of Friendly Societies.

As a consequence, evidence suggests, Leicester's population enjoyed one of the best standards of living in Britain by 1900. From a town in which, according to A. Temple Patterson, 17,000 people, or one-quarter to one-third of the townsfolk, required relief from the Poor Law Commissioners during the winter of 1847-48,¹⁰⁰ Leicester emerged as a prosperous industrial city. Poverty, often of an appalling quality, remained; the case reports of the Charity Organisation Society testify to the squalor in which some families were forced to live. Sidney Campion, a Leicester lad, recalled the difficulties which his family encountered because his father, an ex-soldier turned labourer, suffered from chronic underemployment.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, as Malcolm Elliott has documented, there were numerous improvements to the urban landscape after the mid-century, particularly in the areas of sanitation, street improvements, transport and housing.¹⁰² The Board of Trade's enquiry into the cost of living of the working classes indicated that improvements in Leicester were such that by 1905 Leicester's inhabitants enjoyed one of the better standards of living in the country. The investigation concluded that, relative to other large provincial towns, the wages-level in Leicester was high;¹⁰³ the inhabitants benefited from good housing at a relatively low cost, resulting in an "exceptionally low death-rate"; and, although prices in the country varied far less from district to district than either rents or wages, prices in Leicester compared favourably with other towns.¹⁰⁵

The intention of the foregoing discussion has not been to dismiss the intensity of the impact of co-operative trading on the shopkeeping community in Leicester. However, the manner in which the emergence of co-operative retailing paralleled both the growth of Leicester and the

improvement in the economic condition of the town cushioned the private retailer from the worst effects attendant upon a sudden loss of trade. Such was not the case, however, during the first few years of the new century, when the Leicester Co-operative Society increased its membership extremely rapidly at a time when the population growth of the town had stabilized. Between 1900 and 1905 the membership of the Leicester Co-operative Society all but doubled, from 11,013 to 19,005, and the sales rose from £243,173 to £448,357.¹⁰⁶ It is not surprising that it was during this period that shopkeepers in Britain were launching their most direct attacks on co-operative distribution, although it will be seen in Chapter Five that traders in Leicester did not feel threatened enough that they were tempted to employ the boycotting tactics chosen by shopkeepers in the North, such as St. Helens.

Competition within the shopkeeping hierarchy

There can be little doubt that the greatest threat to the financial well-being of independent traders lurked within the shopkeeping hierarchy. James Jefferys' findings indicate that the relative share of the retail market that was controlled by the three primary external competitors of independent retailers--co-operative societies, department stores and multiples--increased from about 2 to 3 per cent in 1875, to 17 to 21 per cent in 1914.¹⁰⁷ Clearly, this represented a dramatic increase in the amount of trade lost by shopkeepers, particularly in some regions and trades where the proportion was higher. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that around 80 per cent of all retail trade in the nation remained in the hands of the independent trader. Prior to 1914, it will be argued, internal competition was a more significant factor in

determining the economic condition of the independent retailing hierarchy than was external competition.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, internal competition in the shopkeeping world was unavoidable. Competition was prevalent between specific trades, and it was prevalent within trades. Indeed, it was commonplace for some shopkeepers to imply that everyone was attempting to siphon off trade which was legitimately theirs. Nevertheless, however much shopkeepers might have grumbled about the evils of competition, most recognized that they could not expect a monopoly. Traders found it difficult, however, to tolerate competition from any other than their immediate peers. Such feeling was well-portrayed in a short story, about one shopkeeper's attempt to open a new business, which appeared in the first issue of The Trader and Consumer in 1902.

It was only natural that the opening of a new grocery establishment in the neighbourhood should have a more than passing interest for the tradesmen who had hitherto catered for the wants of the public in that street, and both Mr. John Brown, the grocer on the right-hand of the street, and Mr. T. Smith on the left-hand side of the street, regarded this intrusion upon their domain of business as somewhat akin to impertinence.

They both, therefore, without consulting each other, came to one conclusion, viz., that by hook or by crook the intruder should be made to pay the penalty of encroaching upon their preserves by being wiped out, and each resorted to the time-worn system of cutting to achieve this aim.¹⁰⁸

Cutting, it was generally agreed, was the greatest evil to come out of the competition which raged within the shopkeeping hierarchy. Cutting benefited no one, except those retailing institutions which were seeking to wrest the retail trade away from the independent shopkeeper. Conversely, although experts warned against it, newcomers to the

shopkeeping world commonly resorted to cutting in order to make a name for themselves in the neighbourhood. One Leicester grocer and tea dealer, T. Woods, attributed his ultimate failure to this practise. "When I first started I had to make a connection, and sold a large part of my goods at little or no profit. When I attempted to make a fair profit my trade fell off."¹⁰⁹

Specialist shopkeepers were particularly sensitive to any encroachment upon their trade by other sectors of the shopkeeping community. Leicester's bakers frequently complained about the activities of local grocers who, it was argued, would cut prices unfairly or drop the price of a loaf to attract custom.¹¹⁰ At the 1908 annual meeting of the National Association of Bakers, A. Hailwood argued that, along with the co-operative society, the cash-grocer and the baker-grocer were the two greatest evils with which bakers had to contend. The cheap cash-grocer in poor districts was "a pest to the trade".¹¹¹ When buying their stock from the baker these traders would "resort to any and every device possible to get as much out of the baker as... [they] can."¹¹² Consequently, the speaker concluded, the small baker, who relied on grocers to buy his bread and to thus stay in business, was completely under the thumb of the cash-grocer.

Baker-grocers were considered an even greater problem. They were often backed up by a considerable amount of capital, had modern well-equipped bakehouses and, importantly, sold only for cash, whereas the baker usually delivered his bread and accepted credit. These traders, Mr. Hailwood concluded, would always undersell the legitimate baker.¹¹³ The solution, suggested one baker, was to stop supplying grocers with bread; however, the grocer would then start purchasing his

stock from the large bakeries instead of the independent man.¹¹⁴

Another observer argued that "the grocer was the enemy, not only of the baker, but of practically every trader, because he was always ready to place upon his counter the goods properly belonging to other lines of business."¹¹⁵ However, he could offer no solution to the problem.

Mr. Hailwood could only conclude with the popular argument that "if attention be paid to quality rather than price... the baking trade will be able to hold its own."¹¹⁶ Mr. Kinton, a member of the Leicester Master Bakers' Association, argued that the growth of proprietary articles was driving the bakers' trade to the grocers. "Should the trade quietly sit down to be middlemen?"¹¹⁷ He also could not offer a solution to their dilemma, beyond fulminating at the "impertinence of their competitors."¹¹⁸

Greengrocers and fruiterers were also angered by the growing tendency of grocers to stock their products. According to the organ of the fruit and vegetable shopkeepers, The Fruit Grower, grocers were the principal cause of bankruptcy in their trade. "We must consider our relations with those in the fruit and vegetable markets who supply grocers," argued the editor in 1908.¹¹⁹ It was later suggested that traders boycott any fruit brokers or wholesalers who, by putting the grocer on equal or preferential terms with the greengrocer or fruiterer, injured their business.¹²⁰ This proposal did not receive the support of the National Federated Association of Fruiterers, Florists and Greengrocers, whose leaders argued that, as a trade, they could not oppose legitimate competition. The Association did, however, condemn the practise common to many grocers of giving away fruit in order to attract custom.¹²¹

Butchers were concerned that the increasing availability of tinned meat, particularly in poorer neighbourhoods, was benefiting the provision merchant and grocer at their expense. "Butchers can look with no friendly eye on the extensive shipments of foreign tinned goods to this country."¹²² Ironmongers also complained about the unfair competition from other traders which they had to fend off. Indeed, according to one writer on the trade, competition from the large department stores was overestimated; far worse were the effects of 'the dabblers', as he referred to them, such as oilmen, drapers and 'domestic stores'. The cheap holloware, tinned or galvanized, which grocers and general dealers sold could be ignored; however, the profitable items, such as brass, iron and copper goods, which drapers stocked were a serious matter with which ironmongers would have to concern themselves.¹²³ Nevertheless, the same author was also able to note, compared to other trades, the "comparative freedom of ironmongers from fierce competition, whether it be as between themselves, or the dabbling or encroachment of other retailers."¹²⁴

Particularly after 1900 a number of traders sought to improve their share of the retail market by expanding into other areas. Grocers were the most prominent, but tobacconists, confectioners and drapers were also guilty of poaching in other territories. The Retail Trader originated in 1910 as a journal whose specific aim was to popularize the concept of expanding a trader's selection of stock. The editor made it clear where the paper stood on this matter:

The old adage about the cobbler sticking to his last has been SWEPT AWAY by the stress of competition, smart retailers are every day looking for new lines to sell. OUR OBJECT is to put before you a collection of announcements which will always merit your consideration.¹²⁵

The editor later continued:

Almost every retailer has to face the fact that a number of tradesmen in other branches of trade encroach upon his preserves by stocking and selling side lines which are not legitimately pertaining to their particular trade. This makes it hard work for the retailer if he decides to stick rigidly to his particular line of business...But why not follow suit?¹²⁶

It is apparent that journals such as The Retail Trader directed most of their rhetoric towards the small shopkeeper whose business was not large enough to warrant specialization "in the narrow confines of one particular trade."¹²⁷ The small traders were bombarded with directives to expand into new trades; this, in turn, brought them into conflict with the established specialist shopkeepers who resented the competition offered by untrained or unskilled neophytes. It was this struggle--the fight for custom between the small and the established or large trader--which was the fiercest and which caused the greatest anguish within the shopkeeping community.

The nature of the battle between small and large shopkeepers will be discussed in Chapter Six. For now it is necessary to indicate that each group, particularly that composed of the principal traders, believed that the other group was harming its own trade. J. Chambers, a Leicester grocer, complained bitterly in 1889 that his takings had declined to the point where they did not even cover his expenses. "I have suffered severely," he moaned, "from the competition of the new cheap provision shops."¹²⁸ Spokesmen for the small shopkeepers argued the opposite:

What is the so-called enterprise of the present-day--the flashing wall advertisements, too costly for the poor man, the great crush sales, the vast stocks, the

ceaseless puffery of over-blown concerns--but a defrauding of others? The big concerns draw trade to themselves like a magnet, and care not a jot who sinks so long as they continue to swim. Much as we think of our wonderful business developments, there is too much of the beggar-my-neighbour spirit about it. The object of traders is now no longer that of making a comfortable competence, and leaving the rest of the trade for others to do, but of how big a fortune can be piled up. In face of this, is it unreasonable to plead for the little man that he should be allowed to add ten or twenty shillings--a flea bite, perhaps, to his neighbour--to his scanty takings?¹²⁹

The intensity of internal competition will be discussed once again in the following chapter. Now that an understanding of the structure of the shopkeeping hierarchy has been gained, and the competitors who were seeking to capture its trade have been identified, it is necessary to assess the true state of trade and to determine the extent to which the business of private traders suffered, if at all, in the years prior to 1914.

Notes, Chapter Two

- ¹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 29 November 1888.
- ²The Shopkeeper, September 1908.
- ³Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls, Minutes of Evidence, Vol. VIII, P.P. 1890-91, 38, p. 32.
- ⁴Markets Committee, Minute Book, 16 September 1907.
- ⁵George Thorpe, "Recollections of Leicester in the Early 1900s" (Leicestershire County Library, 1971), p. 21.
- ⁶Quoted in Jack Simmon, Life in Victorian Leicester (Leicester, 1976), p. 32.
- ⁷The Toll Committee becomes the Markets Committee in 1902.
- ⁸Toll Committee, Minute Book, 2 December 1895.
- ⁹Ibid., 19 June 1888.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 19 June 1888.
- ¹¹Ibid., 20 July 1886.
- ¹²Markets Committee, Minute Book, May 1902.
- ¹³Toll Committee, Minute Book, 6 May 1890.
- ¹⁴R.C. on Market Rights and Tolls, P.P. 1890-91, p. 36.
- ¹⁵Toll Committee, Minute Book, 15 July 1892.
- ¹⁶R.C. on Market Rights and Tolls, P.P. 1890-91, p. 36.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 35.
- ¹⁸A.V. Christie, Brass Tacks and a Fiddle (Kilmarnock, 1943), p. 87.
- ¹⁹Markets Committee, Minute Book, 19 March 1901.
- ²⁰Ibid., 29 July 1905.
- ²¹The Grocers' Journal, 8 April 1911.
- ²²The Leicester Daily Mercury, 11 September 1903.
- ²³The Retail Dairyman, May 1910.

- ²⁴Markets Committee, Minute Book, 29 July 1905.
- ²⁵Watch Committee, Minute Book, 18 December 1906.
- ²⁶Ibid., 5 July 1910.
- ²⁷The Grocer, 25 March 1911.
- ²⁸The Grocers' Journal, 17 January 1903.
- ²⁹The Grocer, 8 June 1912.
- ³⁰Toll Committee, Minute Book, 6 January 1892.
- ³¹Markets Committee, Minute Book, 15 December 1902.
- ³²The Leicester Daily Mercury, 23 February 1888.
- ³³Toll Committee, Minute Book, 30 March 1896.
- ³⁴The Grocers' Journal, 4 March 1905.
- ³⁵Ibid., 16 December 1905.
- ³⁶The Times, 28 March 1906.
- ³⁷The Grocers' Journal, 7 January 1911.
- ³⁸The Grocers' Daily Review, 24 October 1881.
- ³⁹The Drapers' Record, 28 April 1888.
- ⁴⁰Ibid.
- ⁴¹Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, p. 35.
- ⁴²J.H. Porter, "The Development of a Provincial Department Store, 1870-1939", Business History, XIII (1971), pp. 64-71.
- ⁴³Anon., Market St., 1927, Leicester, n.d., p. 3.
- ⁴⁴H. and A. Bennett, Balance Sheet, 1869.
- ⁴⁵H. and A. Bennett, Annual Sales Notebook.
- ⁴⁶H. and A. Bennett, Balance Sheet, 1911.
- ⁴⁷Ibid.
- ⁴⁸See for example Leicester Journal, 17 December 1886; Ibid., 24 December 1886; Ibid., 31 December 1886.
- ⁴⁹Michael Miller, The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920 (London, 1981), p. 30.

- ⁵⁰The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, 3 September 1904.
- ⁵¹Ibid., 2 January 1904.
- ⁵²The Draper, 31 November 1903.
- ⁵³Ibid., 6 May 1905.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., 4 March 1905.
- ⁵⁵James Jefferys, Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950 (Cambridge, 1954), p. 29.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 21-29.
- ⁵⁷Thornton Hall, Roads to Riches: The Romance of Money-Making (London, 1909), p. IX.
- ⁵⁸The Grocer, 21 December 1889.
- ⁵⁹The Grocers' Journal, 18 May 1901.
- ⁶⁰Ibid., 29 January 1910.
- ⁶¹Ibid., 5 March 1910.
- ⁶²Ibid., 29 January 1910.
- ⁶³The Grocer, 21 December 1889.
- ⁶⁴The Co-operative News, 8 April 1905.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
- ⁶⁶The Grocers' Journal, 31 August 1901.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., 16 May 1908.
- ⁶⁸See Chapter Five for a discussion of grocers' attempts to form price agreements with multiples.
- ⁶⁹The Grocer, 8 April 1905.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 21 December 1888.
- ⁷¹Anon., 'Dips': or the Art of Buying - The Little Man Crossing Out the Multiple (Scunthorpe, 1912).
- ⁷²Leicester Co-operative Record, October 1913.
- ⁷³Oscar Berry, The Grocer and his Trade (London, 1913), p. 65.
- ⁷⁴The Grocers' Assistant, January 1909.

⁷⁵The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, 16 August 1902.

⁷⁶The Grocers' Journal, 16 May 1908.

⁷⁷Leicester Co-operative Record, August 1913.

⁷⁸The Co-operative News, April 1905.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰H. Hodges, Simpletown's Folly (A Modern Parable) (Christchurch, 1910), p. 3.

⁸¹Hodges was in fact reiterating arguments which had first surfaced in The Traders' Herald 30 years earlier.

With the extermination of the shopkeepers the independent middle class of our towns would disappear...And what does this mean? It means a ruined nation. The capital--...that which is sunck [sic] in premises, fittings, ornaments, and all the gear and tackle necessary for carrying on the business of a shop, would be lost...Streets without shops! Rents, rates, taxes unpaid. A pleasant outlook surely! The destruction of an incalculable amount of capital, the dislocation of the entire financial arrangements of the world.

The Traders' Herald, 4 October 1879.

⁸²Hodges, Simpletown's Folly, p. 7.

⁸³Drastic, Trading By Government Officials, the Bane and the Antidote (Addressed to Tradesmen) (London, 1876), p. 10.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 28.

⁸⁶The Grocers' Journal, 24 January 1879.

⁸⁷The Butcher, 28 September 1888.

⁸⁸The Grocers' Journal, 5 September 1879.

⁸⁹Ibid., 29 August 1879.

⁹⁰Ibid., 10 January 1879.

⁹¹The Trader and Consumer, 23 August 1902.

⁹²J.T. Stephen, Social Redemption (Leicester, n.d.), p. 5.

⁹³The Leicester Daily Mercury, 10 November 1885.

⁹⁴Leicester Journal, 8 May 1896.

⁹⁵Ibid., 15 May 1896.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., 22 May 1896.

⁹⁸The Wyvern, 31 December 1897.

⁹⁹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 1 February 1900.

¹⁰⁰A. Temple Patterson, Radical Leicester: A History of Leicester, 1780-1850 (Leicester, 1954), p. 349.

¹⁰¹Sidney R. Campion, Sunlight on the Foothills (London, 1941), p. 11.

¹⁰²Malcolm Elliott, Victorian Leicester (London, 1979). See Chapters Three through Seven.

¹⁰³Cost of Living of the Working Classes: Report of an Enquiry by the Board of Trade into Working Class Rents, Housing and Retail Prices, P.P. 1908, CVII, p. 265.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 266.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 267.

¹⁰⁶See Table 2:2.

¹⁰⁷Jefferys, Retail Trading in Britain, p. 29.

¹⁰⁸The Trader and Consumer, 23 August 1902.

¹⁰⁹The Grocer, 2 April 1892.

¹¹⁰The National Association Review, 6 January 1905.

¹¹¹Ibid., 3 July 1908.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

117¹¹⁷Leicester Master Bakers' Association, Minute Book, 23 October 1907.

118¹¹⁸Ibid.

119¹¹⁹The Fruit Grower, 7 May 1908.

120¹²⁰Ibid., 21 May 1908.

121¹²¹Ibid., 28 May 1908.

122¹²²The Butcher, 21 September 1888.

123¹²³Francis, Ironmongery, p. 175.

124¹²⁴Ibid., p. 3.

125¹²⁵The Retail Trader, 27 September 1910.

126¹²⁶Ibid.

127¹²⁷Ibid., 25 October 1910.

128¹²⁸The Grocer, 15 June 1889.

129¹²⁹The Drapers' Record, 11 April 1896.

CHAPTER THREE

BUSINESS CONDITIONS IN THE SHOPKEEPING HIERARCHY

Comments in the trade press offer conflicting testimony about the state of the independent retail trader in the decades prior to 1914. Opinions varied considerably from year to year, careering from the occasionally ebullient to the frequently depressive. Recent writers have noted that grocers were subject to the greatest examination by the trade press because they were viewed as the most likely casualties in the battle for the retail market.¹ In 1892 the editor of The Grocers' Journal concluded his summation of the preceding year with a thought for the independent grocer. "When all this is taken into account the individual trader, working for himself alone, and not as a part of one vast machine of distribution whereof he is but an infinitesimal item, has just reason to congratulate himself that he is here at all."² Yet, in early 1903, in a rejoinder to those who speculated about the demise of the grocer, the editor felt it possible to conclude that "the passing of the grocer, of which we heard a deal last year, is yet but a chimera, and will remain an idle phantom so long as the leaders of thought in the trade are true to themselves and their cause."³ Similarly, in 1907, The Grocers' Assistant addressed the question as to the advisability of assistants opening a business of their own. It was the writer's contention that despite serious pitfalls

there is a well-defined feeling in the trade that the day of the single-shop grocer is not yet done, ie., of the man who can give his individual and undivided attention to his business, study his trade, make the personal acquaintance of his customers, and bring to

the building up of his business that indefinable and unique influence which centres in the ego, and cannot be possessed in the same measure and degree by a company or aggregation.⁴

In order to gain some picture of the business condition of the shopkeeping world, and to make some sense of the conflicting rhetoric of the trade press, it is necessary to examine data relating to shop turnover and bankruptcy records. Are there signs that the shopkeeping community was suffering from a deterioration in its position within the wider retailing network, and, if it was, which segments of this shopkeeping hierarchy were affected, and to what extent?

Unfortunately, any attempt to determine the business performance of shopkeepers is hindered by the limitations of the available evidence. In Chapter One it was argued that the divisions within the hierarchy were determined by psychological as well as material criteria. However, neither bankruptcy records nor the trade classifications in commercial directories take account of the subjective aspects of a trader's business outlook. It is not possible to recreate the hopes and aspirations of individual shopkeepers in sufficient enough numbers to determine whether or not their dreams became reality, and then to determine if there were any variations in subsequent decades. Consequently, in order to examine the condition of the strata within the shopkeeping world, the historian is forced, reluctantly, to rely on records which take into account only tangible indicators of business success, such as measurements of the length of time shopkeepers remained in business and the annual failure rates in the shopkeeping world.

More precise methods of measuring the business performance of the various strata and trades which composed the shopkeeping community are

as yet unavailable. Census material contains valuable information; however, it is not yet available for the period following 1881 and, furthermore, the 10 year intervals are too great to measure the lifespan of the majority of shops. It will be seen shortly that very few shops remained in business for as long as a decade. Trade or commercial directories can be employed to gain some idea of the rate of turnover amongst shops, as they eventually appeared regularly, often every 2 years. Unfortunately, directories must be used cautiously as they are by their nature concerned with the trades of shopkeepers rather than the size or standing of their businesses. Eventually, when all of the census enumerators' books prior to 1914 are available, the solution will be to link the information stored in directories and census enumerators' books so that it can be better determined which types of shops remained in business.

Shop turnover rates in Leicester

For the present it is necessary to make do with the turnover rates of shops listed in the Leicester trade directories as an indicator of business conditions over time. In this study, 3 years were chosen as points of departure: 1861, 1882 and 1906.⁵ The shopkeepers were first identified by their trade and then, for each year, the subsequent directories, in each case 2 years later, were consulted to determine which of the shops remained listed. The results are enumerated in Table 3:1.

It is apparent that in the majority of trades the proportion of shopkeepers who stayed in business remained fairly constant for each of the periods examined. There was, in fact, a dramatic increase in the

Table 3:1 Shop Turnover Rates, 1861, 1882, 1906, Leicester

	Shops Listed in Directory 1861			Shops Remaining in Directory 1863			Shops Listed in Directory 1882			Shops Remaining in Directory 1884			Shops Listed in Directory 1906			Shops Remaining in Directory 1908		
	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%
Bakers	121	105	86.8	146	121	82.9	140	117	83.6									
Butchers	118	110	93.2	182	145	79.7	259	204	79.1									
Chemists	40	36	90	49	42	85.7	48	40	83.3									
Drapers	45	36	80	106	86	81.1	207	157	75.8									
Fishmongers	8	7	87.5	83	56	67.5	186	108	58.1									
Fruiterers & Greengrocers	41	23	56.1	429	269	62.7	326	196	60.1									
Grocers	129	107	82.9	124	107	86.3	203	147	72.4									
Ironmongers	15	15	100	29	27	93.1	32	28	87.5									
Confectioners	35	28	80.0	74	38	51.4	268	166	61.9									
General Shopkeepers	266	186	69.9	759	520	68.5	1157	724	62.6									
Wine Merchants	17	15	88.2	23	21	91.3	29	25	86.2									
Haberdashers	35	23	65.7	101	71	70.3	83	60	72.3									
Newsagents	14	11	78.6	-	-	-	162	112	69.1									
General Dealers	-	-	-	77	57	74.0	101	74	71.1									
Tobacconists	17	13	76.5	186	124	70.3	104	85	81.7									

Sources: Leicester Trade Directory, 1861, 1863, 1882, 1884, 1906, 1908.

turnover rate in only 2 trades between 1861 and 1906--fishmongers and confectioners. The deterioration of the business prospects for fishmongers was probably a result of the great increase in their number, due, in turn, to falling prices as fish became readily available in inland regions; this was a result of improved railway facilities and fishing techniques, and, in the 1860s, the introduction of cheap icemaking facilities.⁶ Fishmongers came to play an active role in the latter area and, in 1894, 28 shareholders, all but 2 of whom were fishmongers, formed the Leicester Pure Ice and Storage Co. with a nominal capital of £10,000. The group purchased the old Eagle Brewery in Northampton Street and set up as ice merchants, manufacturers and storage operators.⁷ The impact of these advances was reflected in the number of fish retailers. Whereas in 1861 there were only 8 fishmongers, all of whom were situated in the principal thoroughfares of the town, by 1906 there were 186 fishmongers in the town, as well as a separate fish market, adjacent to the general market. Consequently, whereas, in 1863, 87 per cent of fishmongers remained after 2 years, by 1908 the proportion had dropped to 58 per cent.

Confectioners also witnessed a huge growth in their numbers, from 35 to 268, and the nature of their trade was also transformed. In mid-century they were principally concerned with the production, or creation, of cakes and delicacies, but by 1900 the confectionery trade as such had been usurped by bakers, and confectioners became more specifically hard confectioners, selling mainly sweets and chocolates, and in many cases cigarettes, tobacco and newspapers.⁸ While 80 per cent remained in 1863, 61 per cent remained in 1908.

The surprising, although not considerable, growth in the turnover rate of drapers, can most probably be accounted for by the growth of small and back street 'off-the-peg' outfitters and clothiers--traders who cannot always be separated from legitimate drapers in the directories. "The ready-made clothing trade," observed the editor of The Outfitter in 1887, "has sprung from an insignificant beginning into one of great importance....The main point to be borne in mind is that people prefer to buy a garment ready made."⁹

The turnover rate of the remaining trades remained fairly static, but it is also apparent that some trades retained consistently good rates and others were perpetually poor. Chemists, ironmongers, and wine merchants were particularly well-established, as over 80 per cent of them remained in business after 2 years throughout the half century examined. On the other hand, greengrocers and fruiterers, and general shopkeepers in particular, lost around 40 per cent of their members over the same periods.

The distinction between those trades which suffered from high rates of failure and those with better chances for success becomes even more apparent if shops are examined every 2 years for an entire decade, rather than for just the 2 years. Starting in 1882 shops were followed through the directories until 1892;¹⁰ the results provided in Table 3:2, are in some cases quite startling. Only one-quarter of fishmongers, general dealers, haberdashers, greengrocers and confectioners remained listed after a decade. In fact, for greengrocers the survival rate was as low as 14 per cent. Seventy per cent of confectioners were gone after only 4 years. The situation in a number of the other trades was

not that much better. Of the general shopkeepers nearly 30 per cent remained after 10 years. Thirty-nine per cent of butchers were still in business. However, at the end of the scale were chemists, with a 55 per cent survival rate and, in particular, wine merchants and ironmongers, with 74 and 72 per cent remaining, respectively.

Table 3:2 Proportion of Shopkeepers Remaining in Business, 1882-1892, Leicester

	1882	1884	1886	1888	1890	1892
	%	%	%	%	%	%
General Shopkeepers	100	68.5	53.6	43.9	34.7	27.7
Chemists	100	85.7	73.5	59.2	59.2	55.1
Bakers	100	82.9	74.7	63	58.2	50.7
Butchers	100	79.7	68.1	56	48.9	39
Drapers	100	81.1	66	52.8	40.6	34.9
Fishmongers	100	67.5	51.8	38.5	30.1	22.9
General Dealers	100	74	58.4	45.5	37.7	25
Greengrocers & Fruiterers	100	62.7	44.3	22.8	19.3	14.2
Haberdashers	100	70.3	47.5	29.7	19.8	16.8
Wine Merchants	100	91.3	82.6	82.6	78.3	73.9
Confectioners	100	51.4	32.4	28.4	27.0	18.9
Grocers	100	86.3	71	64.5	56.5	50.8
Ironmongers	100	93.1	93.1	86.2	75.9	72.4
Tobacconists	100	70.3	53.2	43.5	33.3	26.9

Sources: Leicester Trade Directory, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1888, 1890, 1892.

Information gathered from directories also indicates that a shopkeeper's chance of disappearing from the trade columns was greatest during the first 2 years of its listing. This can be seen from an examination of the figures for the period 1906-08, listed in Table 3:3. It is clear that those shops which were new listings in 1906 showed considerably less likelihood of appearing again in 1908 than those which had also been listed in 1904. Except for wine merchants, all trades,

including ironmongers and chemists, could expect to lose at least 30 per cent of their new members by the time of the next directory. For example, fishmongers and greengrocers lost 62 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively.

Table 3:3 Turnover Rates of New Shops, 1906-08

	All Shops, 1906-1908 % ¹	All New Shops 1906-1908 % ¹
General Shopkeepers	62.6	52.8
Newsagents	69.1	58.9
Ironmongers	87.5	62.5
Greengrocers & Fruiterers	60.1	43
Butchers	79.1	58.1
Chemists	83.3	50
Drapers	75.8	65.8
Grocers	72.4	69.5
Bakers	83.6	56.7
Confectioners	61.9	54.5
Haberdashers	72.3	44.4
Wine Merchants	86.2	100
General Dealers	71.1	60.6
Fishmongers	58.1	38.1
Tobacconists	81.7	65.6

¹Percentage of shops listed in 1906 that still existed in 1908.

Sources: Leicester Trade Directory, 1904, 1906, 1908.

The turnover rates examined here would seem to imply that principal shopkeepers, represented by those trades containing a majority of such traders--chemists, ironmongers and wine merchants--had a far better chance of remaining in business than domestic shopkeepers, represented by trades such as greengrocery and general shopkeeping, which had high turnover rates. Such a conclusion is, however, only partially correct because one point to emerge from a study of directories is that survival

for shopkeepers was not wholly dependent upon the physical size of a shop, the number of its employees, investment in stock or, indeed, the aspirations of the proprietor. The relative success of bakers and butchers, most of whom were not large shopkeepers, suggests that there were other considerations involved which must also be identified. Both of these trades maintained survival rates of around 80 per cent after 2 years throughout the period.

One possibility is that those trades which suffered most were those which had to combat increasing internal competition. It was the view of the economist L.G. Chiozza Money that shopkeepers were in fact a waste to society because they were responsible for a "vast amount of wasted labour. In each trade in each district there [were] a quite unnecessary number of tradesmen hunting for profits."¹¹

An examination of the number of shops which served Leicester in the latter half of the nineteenth century, based upon the listings in trade directories, indicates that the number increased substantially. The problems associated with the use of directories have been noted, although the similarity in the number of 'off-licences' reported by the Chief Constable in 1881--287¹²--and the number of 'off-licences' listed in the 1882 trade directory--240¹³--suggests that the omissions do not invalidate their use. Table 3:1 indicates that the growth of the shopkeeping world was not uniform. A number of the specialist trades which, it was noted in Chapter One, were dominated by the principal or large shopkeepers increased their numbers only slightly between 1861 and 1906. Chemists added only 9 new members to their trade. Ironmongers doubled their numbers, an addition, however, of only 17. Wine merchants rose to number 29 in their trade, an increase of 12. Bakers added only

19 to their numbers over the period, and the number listed exclusively as bakers actually decreased between 1882 and 1906. Trades which contained both large and small traders, such as grocers, butchers and drapers, increased their numbers rather more considerably. However, the trades which were subject to the greatest increase were those which were predominantly composed of small domestic shopkeepers. It has already been noted that fishmongers substantially increased their numbers, as did newsagents, confectioners, tobacconists, general dealers and, most dramatically, general shopkeepers. The number of trades in the latter classification rose from 266 in 1861 to 1,157 in 1906.

Unfortunately for many of these shopkeepers, the growth in the number practising their trade was not matched by a proportionate rise in the size of the town's population, despite the fact that Leicester grew rapidly in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the population rose from 68,000 in 1861 to 219,000 in 1901.¹⁴ While the number of shops in the 15 trades enumerated increased by 267 per cent, in that same period the population rose by 222 per cent. Table 3:4 indicates that, whereas there was one shop for every 75 people in Leicester in 1861, there was one shop for every 66 people by 1906. Furthermore, an examination of the ratio of shops to the population suggests that those trades with a decreasing ratio were those which were also suffering from high business turnover rates; the decrease in the ratio was not, therefore, uniform throughout the shopkeeping community. Specialist dealers such as wine merchants, ironmongers, chemists, bakers, butchers and grocers all improved their customer ratio. Drapers, whose ranks were swelled by outfitters selling ready made clothing were not, however, as fortunate. Shopkeepers in those trades

which were dominated by domestic traders suffered from the greatest increase in the ratio of shops to population. This increase would appear to have come in two surges. In the first there was a large relative growth in the number of greengrocers, fishmongers and general shopkeepers, which stabilized in the early 1880s. The increase in the number of confectioners and newsagents appears to have continued into the early twentieth century. All told, the ratio for the entire shopkeeping world decreased between 1861 and 1882, and then improved slightly up to 1906, although at this time it was still worse than in 1861.

Table 3:4 Population Per Shop in Leicester

	1861	1882 ¹	1906 ²
Grocers	527	983	1,078
Bakers	561	835	1,564
Butchers	576	670	845
Drapers	1,511	1,150	1,057
Greengrocers & Fruiterers	1,658	284	671
Haberdashers	1,942	1,207	2,638
General Shopkeepers	255	160	189
Chemists	1,700	2,489	4,562
Ironmongers	4,533	4,206	6,843
General Dealers	-	1,584	2,168
Newsagents	4,857	1,820	1,351
Confectioners	1,942	1,648	817
Wine Merchants	4,000	5,304	7,551
Tobacconists	4,000	655	2,105
Fishmongers	8,500	1,469	1,177
All Shops	75	53	66

¹Based upon Leicester population in 1881.

²Based upon Leicester population in 1901.

Sources: Leicester Trade Directory, 1861, 1882, 1906.

Why, however, were some trades more susceptible to internal competition than others? One answer may be that those shops which required little capital outlay and, importantly, no particular skill beyond that of salesmanship, suffered from the heaviest levels of entry into their trade. In Chapter One it was seen that wine merchants, chemists, drapers, ironmongers and specialist grocers were members of trades which contained the shopkeepers with the largest stocks-in-trade and were the least likely to be under-capitalized. S.W. Francis noted in 1911 that the ironmongery trade "offers but a poor career for the man without some capital, or who has little expectation of possessing a few hundred pounds within a few years of completing his apprenticeship."¹⁵ However, the author felt that for those with between £500 and £1,000 the trade offered as good an opening as anything; indeed, it had the advantage that "as a branch of business it is not overcrowded. People are not rushing into it."¹⁶ In his study of retailing between 1800 and 1850 David Alexander has concluded that, in the cities, the producer/retailer structure had been largely eroded by the mid-century.¹⁷ Certainly he is correct to argue that there was a far greater separation of the preparation of goods and produce, and the selling of them. Nevertheless, skills were still required in many trades and this fact precluded newcomers from entering the trade of their choice. The editor of one ironmongery journal lamented the death of some shopkeepers' businesses in 1910, but noted the "ironmonger, however, has this advantage over many other shopkeepers in that he is engaged in a highly technical trade."¹⁸ On the other hand, the editor of The Tobacco Trade Review observed in 1911 that the "tendency of the present-day tobacconist is to become solely a distributor of other people's goods, and knowledge of his trade and skilled salesmanship

count for little or nothing."¹⁹ Consequently, anyone with a little capital could at least attempt to enter the trade.

Some observers blamed the decline of skilled shop work on the deterioration of the apprenticeship system. In 1906 the editor of The Grocers' Journal argued that technical education was necessary as much for grocers as for their assistants, and blamed this on the decline of apprenticeship.²⁰ Whether or not there had in fact been a golden age in which all grocers emerged out of apprenticeship and assistantship, it is clear that some observers believed this to have been the case, and if it was not true then it should have been. In his introductory book on the grocery trade, Oscar Berry envisaged a progression from apprentice, to junior, to assistant, to shopwalker, to shopkeeper.²¹ A similar progression up the hierarchy was considered advisable by the author of a short story which highlighted the evils of price cutting in the shopkeeping world. James Thompson started as an apprentice in a Welsh town and graduated to junior assistant. After 9 years he went to London for a another 3 years "to further acquaint himself with the trade. Only then was his training considered sufficient to equip him for a position as a trader."²²

The decline of apprenticeship, however, was more likely a consequence, rather than a cause, of the gradual disappearance of skilled work. The death of many skills was a result of the changing patterns and methods of wholesale distribution and food production over which shopkeepers had no control. Foremost amongst such changes was the growth, after mid-century, in the availability of proprietary, or manufactured, goods. It was this step which, according to some

observers, would turn grocers into "penny in the slot machines".²³ The emergence and subsequent popularity of proprietary articles, whether it was a tin of fruit or a bar of soap, was an important and symbolic event. It marked the decline of the old craft skills and the emergence of the new retailing techniques. Soon, success in some trades would in part be dependent not on who blended the best tea, but who dressed the best shop window. It was the emergence of proprietary articles, above all, which enabled the expansion of general shopkeepers, most of whom relied extensively on the sale of tins, bottles, and cartons, as well as beer, for their livelihoods. One writer on the grocery trade complained that the windows of small off-license shops were "nothing more nor less than a cheap advertisement for various proprietary brands."²⁴

Grocers were particularly concerned about the growth in proprietary articles, so much so that the National Federation of Grocers' Associations created a Committee to report on the subject. It concluded that the only possible solution for independent grocers was for manufacturers to fix a minimum price which no trader could lower. Proprietary articles were also opposed because the profit margins which they allowed were not considered large enough to give grocers a living profit. This debate over proprietary articles continued and it indicates the extent to which, by 1900, many shopkeepers had rejected the concept of open competition in the marketplace, a point which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Yet the trade of bakers and butchers, many of whom were small shopkeepers, did not suffer to the same extent as some other shopkeepers. It should be noted that neither suffered a deterioration of skills prior to 1914 of a level sufficient to allow

unskilled shopkeepers into their trades, although it is true that changes detrimental to their standing were on the horizon.

Clearly, more research is necessary in this area; however, the data gathered from the directories suggests that the condition of most principal shopkeepers remained fairly stable throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thus far there is little evidence that there was a serious deterioration in their business prospects. Small or domestic shopkeepers were not as fortunate, however, as many of their trades appear to have suffered from extremely high turnover rates. Nevertheless it must be said that, as bad as the shop turnover rates were in 1863, they only deteriorated markedly in a few trades over the years. The data also indicates that some small traders, who still maintained a certain level of skill and who consequently did not suffer from the same expansion in the number entering their trade as some others, could expect reasonable business opportunities into the twentieth century.

Bankruptcy rates in Leicester

Bankruptcy records can be used to verify some of these tentative findings. In particular, they suggest that the economic prospects of the principal shopkeepers did not deteriorate as the turn of the century approached, and they reinforce the findings which suggest that certain trades were more susceptible to hardship than others. As with most sources there are certain pitfalls associated with the use of bankruptcy records. They do not take into account all business failures, for in order to initiate bankruptcy proceedings there had to exist a debt or debts amounting to £50. The editor of Kemp's Mercantile Gazette also

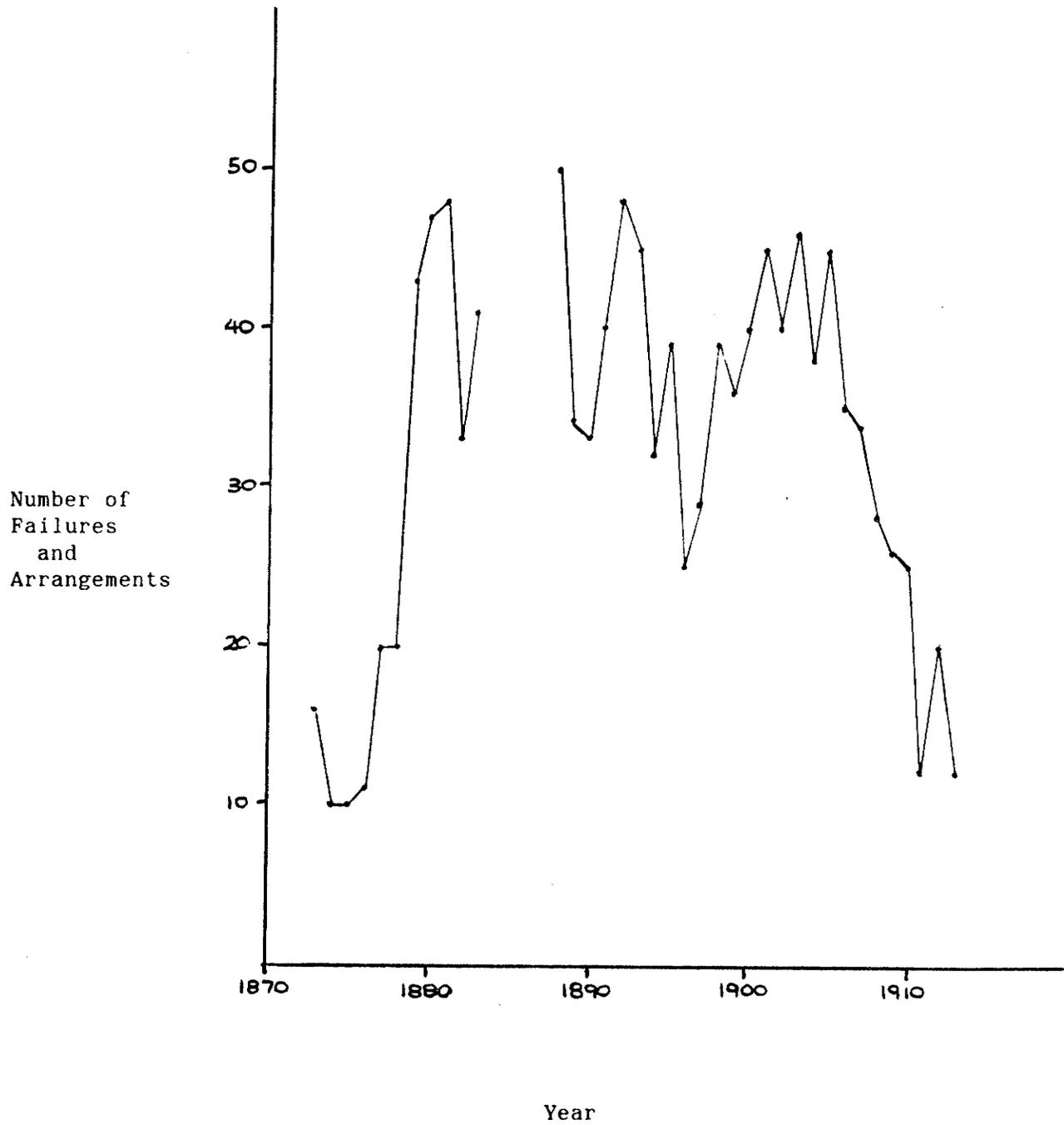
noted in 1889:

It must not be forgotten that there are many cases of failure of which no record is to be found, simply because no proceedings were taken of a public character. This is the large class of poor traders and debtors who owe so much more than £50 that they cannot go through the County Court, and yet whose assets are so small that it is not worth their while, and still less worthwhile for their creditors, to press into bankruptcy. The result is that either a private agreement is patched up, or the debtor simply runs away or drops through, going out of trade altogether, and often disappearing from his creditors.²⁵

It should also be pointed out that changes to the Bankruptcy Laws interrupt the sequence of annual failure rates. Prior to 1884, the 1869 Bankruptcy Act was in force; this called for the recording of all compositions, liquidations and bankruptcies. However, the 1883 Bankruptcy Act did not require the gazetting of Deeds of Arrangement, that is, agreements for composition. This problem was only rectified by the 1887 Deeds of Arrangement Act. Consequently, between 1884 and 1887 there is no record of the total number of bankruptcies and arrangements.²⁶ Annual failure rates indicate trends in the economic condition of the shopkeeping world, rather than annual pictures of the exact financial state or turnover rate within each trade. Bankruptcy records are also important because the requirement that all debtors face public examinations, which were reported in the trade and local papers, gives us some idea of the problems which beset shopkeepers.

Figure 3:1 enumerates the number of failures and arrangements of shopkeepers recorded in Leicester between 1873 and 1913; it indicates that, after an apparently prosperous period in the mid-1870s, conditions worsened considerably in the late 1870s. Thereafter, despite some

Figure 3:1 Failures and Arrangements in Leicester, 1873-1913



Source: Kemp's Mercantile Gazette, 1873-1913.

fluctuations, the numbers remained fairly constant, from 35 to 45 per annum, occasionally increasing to as many as 50 in 1888, or decreasing briefly to 25 and 29 in 1896 and 1897. Finally, following 1905, there was a gradual improvement, until in 1911 there were only 12 failures and arrangements, the lowest number since 1876. However, it must also be remembered that during this period the number of shops in Leicester had grown quite dramatically. Consequently, the relative number of failures had decreased substantially.

Table 3:5 indicates that, whereas the number of failures for all shopkeepers remained fairly constant in the years 1881, 1891 and 1905, the ratio improved quite considerably, from 1 in 54 shops in 1881 to 1 in 84 in 1905. Given the problems associated with bankruptcy data, it would be dangerous to attach too much importance to these findings. Nevertheless, the material does suggest that, for those shopkeepers whose businesses were large enough to qualify for bankruptcy proceedings, there is little evidence to suggest that business conditions were deteriorating. Indeed, established shopkeepers may well have experienced better opportunities for business success. This is particularly apparent when the condition of grocers is examined. Whereas the ratio of failure for drapers, butchers and bakers, the three other most numerous trades before the bankruptcy court, remained either fairly constant or improved slightly, the improvement in the condition of grocers was more dramatic. This is particularly important because it lends credence to those who argued that 'the Passing of the Grocer' was not imminent, as had been suggested in a commentary which appeared in The Times in 1902. This article had concluded that the single-shop

grocer "is indeed between the upper and the nether millstone; and the process of attrition is proceeding at such a rate that in many districts he will soon have disappeared."²⁷ George Dodds, a London wholesale tea merchant, disagreed, arguing that "in most of our large towns A1 men still hold their own and increase their trade by offering high-class goods, which they have carefully studied."²⁸

Table 3:5 Ratio of Failures to Shops in Leicester, 1881, 1891, 1905

	1881 ¹			1891 ¹			1905 ¹		
	Shops No.	Failures No.	Ratio	Shops No.	Failures No.	Ratio	Shops No.	Failures No.	Ratio
All Shops	2,318	42.6	1/54	2,605	40.3	1/65	3,305	39.3	1/84
Grocers	124	16	1/8	130	12.3	1/11	203	6	1/34
Drapers	106	5	1/21	107	4.3	1/25	207	10	1/21
Butchers	182	2.5	1/73	256	3	1/85	259	2.3	1/113
Bakers	146	2.7	1/54	168	2.7	1/62	140	2.3	1/61

¹Failures: Numbers represented are 3 year moving averages, (i.e.) 1881 equals average of 1880, 1881, 1882.

Sources: Kemp's Mercantile Gazette, 1880-82, 1890-92, 1904-06.

It has been stressed that an enumeration of gazetted failures and arrangements is not an indicator of the economic conditions within the entire shopkeeping community; the annual failure rates chiefly reflect upon the principal traders within the hierarchy. The data has suggested that within this group, and despite annual fluctuations, the chances of business failure decreased; the trade prospects of the principal shopkeepers appear not to have deteriorated. Furthermore, as Table 3:6 suggests, an examination of debtors' liabilities indicates that, if the value of the liabilities is considered as an indicator of the size of a business, then the likelihood that the proprietor was in a smaller way

of business increased; the proportion owing less than £500 grew slightly between the late 1880s and the early 1900s.

Table 3:6 Value of the Liabilities of Deeds of Arrangements, Leicester, 1888-91 and 1908-11

		Value of Liabilities			
		£	£	£	£
		<100	<200	<500	>501
1888-91					
	No.=67	3	16	21	27
	Cumulative %	4.5	28.4	59.7	100
1908-11					
	No.=54	4	9	22	19
	Cumulative %	7.4	24.1	64.8	100

Source: Kemp's Mercantile Gazette, 1888-91, 1908-11.

Unfortunately the original transcripts of the public examinations of debtors are not available; nevertheless, even the extracts in the newspapers and trade journals give some indication of the problems and pressures which could lead to failure amongst shopkeepers. One common cause which must not be overlooked was illness, which could lead to particular problems for those small traders who did not have family members who could take over behind the counter. George Gent, a baker and grocer in a poor neighbourhood, claimed that an illness which extended over 8 weeks was the final blow, the expense of hiring an assistant proving too "burdensome".²⁹ In the same month of 1900, another grocer and baker, James Lawrence, informed the court that he had been successful for 10 years until 1898 when he had to retire for some time to the country to regain his health, and that while he was away the shop was mismanaged by the temporary staff.³⁰ The most bizarre claim of misfortune came from J.H. Plant, a tea dealer, whose predicament caught the imagination of the trade press. He argued that, although he had no

capital and had borrowed £300 to buy and stock his shop, he had done well for the first few months. Then, however, he was struck down by tea rot, which necessitated the removal of his toenails, a 2 year absence from the shop and the disappearance of his customers who feared they might also succumb to the disease.³¹ Another shopkeeper blamed his failure on injuries which resulted from a horse and cart accident. He had suffered from memory lapses ever since and, because he kept no books, he had been unable to recall those to whom he owed money and, conversely, those who owed money to him.³²

Another cause of failure was attributed to personal shortcomings, or moral turpitude. One grocer admitted that he was in the habit of attending the various Midlands race meetings and that he had lost "a sum of money."³³ Alfred Panter, a fishmonger, admitted that over the years he had lost money on the turf, which had done little harm in the past, but, once his trade began to fall off, betting losses became harder to recoup in the shop.³⁴ Yet for all these personal problems, whether or not they were self-inflicted, they were in the minority; a majority of failures were attributed by the Court and by the debtors to the plain fact that the traders' takings were not sufficient to pay the necessary expenses. Henry Ireland, a grocer in Flax Road, in a poor neighbourhood, told the court in 1890: "My trade has been so small that the profit was insufficient to pay my expenses. My takings had fallen to £1 per week."³⁵ Another grocer noted in the following year that "the business paid for the first 12 months; since then I have lost money; I have not done trade enough to pay expenses."³⁶ Clearly, however, a trader's failure to maintain the requisite level of cash

takings was not entirely a consequence of internal competition and a superfluous number of shops.

The editor of The Grocer had no doubts as to the reasons for failure amongst shopkeepers: a lack of knowledge of the trade, insufficient capital, the granting of credit, disposing of goods on an insufficient profit in an attempt to defeat competition, and a propensity to live above their means, were the causes he stressed above all else.³⁷ When the potted biographies of Leicester's bankrupts are examined, it is surprising how frequently most, if not all, of these 'sins' are in evidence. Certainly a vicious circle which led ultimately to financial disaster could quickly emerge. A lack of capital necessitated a quick turnover in order to pay the wholesalers and re-order goods. If sales were not forthcoming, granting customers credit was often resorted to in the hope that it would attract more custom, some of which would be in cash. Cutting, for the same purpose, was also resorted to in a last attempt to turn over the stock. Throughout, a lack of knowledge of the trade precluded the possibility of making consistently sensible business decisions.

Some idea of the despair which could rapidly overwhelm a trader can be gathered from the autobiography of Frank Bullen. With a £200 legacy, his wife decided they must take a shop. Fitting up the shop used up all of the capital and, consequently, their stock of goods, art materials and fancy goods all had to be purchased on credit. On their first day not one sale was made. "I went to bed that night with a heavy heart," he recalled, "because now the fact that I was in debt without hope of repayment stared me in the face, nagged at me, would not let me shut it

out."³⁸ Later he moaned, "I often compared myself at this time to a man running in front of a train, between two high walls, allowing of no escape to either side, having no choice but to run or be run over."³⁹ Finally, "I had lost all hope of ever doing any good for myself and family...Despite all my efforts I got deeper and deeper into debt."⁴⁰ He considered his ultimate bankruptcy to be a "deliverance" following which a new life might finally begin.

An observation of bankruptcy statements lends substance to a feeling that many shopkeepers, such as Frank Bullen, were in fact doomed to failure almost before they had opened up for the first time. Certainly the multitude of 'How To' books, such as How To Make A Small Business Pay, which appeared in 1913, stressed the importance of choosing a shop which had some chance of success and was not incapable of showing a profit. The author went on to stress that the multitude of businesses which were to be seen in the 'for sale' columns of newspapers "represent in the majority of cases the failures of dreamers."⁴¹ Arthur Morrison was clearly aware of this tendency for, in To London Town, we are told that the shop leased by Nan May

had been a greengrocer's, a barber's, a fried fishmonger's and a tripe seller's. But chiefly it has been shut up,... Nobody had ever come into it with much money, it is true, but all had gone out of it with less than they brought.⁴²

The available evidence suggests that there were important differences in the business prospects of domestic and principal shopkeepers. Throughout the period, small shopkeepers experienced high turnover rates, fuelled by uncontrolled entry into many of their trades. Competition from the co-operatives, department stores and multiples

certainly existed, and the correspondence of columns of the trade journals provides evidence of the degree to which shopkeepers were concerned about their encroachment. The resignation of one despairing shopkeeper will suffice as an example: "Why should we," he wrote, "get up meetings to try to do away with co-operative stores? We might just as well try to turn the world upside down."⁴³

Yet, at the same time, the claim of one co-operative organizer was surely misplaced. "To put the matter concisely," he stated in the Leicester Co-Operative Record, "there is no room in the commercial world for the small shopkeeper. His day has gone, the sun of his usefulness and prosperity has set; he is out of date in a civilization like the present."⁴⁴ The author failed to recognize that domestic shopkeeping was not necessarily viewed as a business venture which was expected to gain a return on an investment. While setting up shop in a small way may not have been financially rewarding, there were plenty willing to take the chance in order to gain a respite from the rigours of the factory or workshop, or to enjoy a sense of independence.

The business prospects of principal shopkeepers, despite a few setbacks, did not markedly deteriorate in the half century after 1860. Ultimately, the conditions bore out the cautious optimism of the editor of The Grocers' Journal in 1903, mentioned at the outset of this chapter. The turnover rates of those trades containing a preponderance of principal shopkeepers were consistently better than those dominated by domestic shopkeepers; furthermore, the turnover rates of the former did not worsen significantly. Bankruptcy records indicate that in Leicester fewer principal shopkeepers failed, proportionately and

absolutely, after 1905. Consequently, the reconstruction of the financial world inhabited by principal shopkeepers suggests that, by the end of the period under consideration, writers who prophesied the 'prospective annihilation of private traders' were either harking back to the depressed state of trade in the late 1880s and early 1890s, or failing to distinguish between the problems which beset principal and domestic shopkeepers.

Notes, Chapter Three

¹Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, pp. 120ff.

²The Grocers' Journal, 1 January 1892.

³Ibid., 3 January 1903.

⁴The Grocers' Assistant, May 1907.

⁵Although it was necessary to span the entire period, these years were examined because, in each case, a new directory was published 2 years later.

⁶J.C. Drummond and Anne Wibrahan, The Englishman's Food (London, 1939), p. 309, p. 323; on the rise of fish and chip shops see Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 107.

⁷Leicester Pure Ice and Storage Company, Shareholders, 1894.

⁸Small Trader and Shopkeeper, 15 January 1915.

⁹The Outfitter, March 1887.

¹⁰The first decade when directories appeared every 2 years.

¹¹L.G. Chiozza Money, Riches to Poverty (London, 1905), p. 239.

¹²Leicester Journal, 1 September 1882.

¹³The 1882 Directory reports actuals and represents shopkeepers in business during the previous year.

¹⁴The population of Leicester more than tripled during the years under consideration.

1861 - 68,055

1871 - 95,220

1881 - 122,376

1891 - 174,624

1901 - 219,579

1911 - 227,222

Source: Census Reports.

¹⁵Francis, Ironmongery, p. 5.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷David Alexander, Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution (London, 1970), pp. 110ff.

- ¹⁸The Ironmongers' Chronicle and the Hardwareman, 22 June 1910.
- ¹⁹The Tobacco Trade Review, 1 March 1911.
- ²⁰The Grocers' Journal, 13 October 1906.
- ²¹Berry, The Grocer and his Trade, p. 65.
- ²²The Trader and Consumer, 23 August 1902.
- ²³The Grocers' Journal, 15 July 1905. The writer continued:
That it would be a good thing if a check could be brought to bear on it we make no doubt, as nearly every new packet that comes up for distribution renders the skill of the grocer less necessary and makes it easier for the company shop to prosper and the unskilled to take their place in the ranks of competition with those who have spent their lives in learning their business.
- ²⁴The Grocers' Guide to Window Dressing (London, 1911), p. 114.
- ²⁵Kemp's Mercantile Gazette, 2 January 1889.
- ²⁶See John William Smith, A Compendium of Mercantile Law, vol. II (London, 1890), pp. 709ff; Richard Ringwood, The Principles of Bankruptcy (London, 1905).
- ²⁷The Times, 18 August 1902.
- ²⁸Ibid., 21 August 1902.
- ²⁹The Grocers' Journal, 10 March 1900.
- ³⁰Ibid., 31 March 1900.
- ³¹The Grocer, 31 October 1896.
- ³²Ibid., 5 February 1910.
- ³³Ibid., 28 January 1893.
- ³⁴The Grocers' Journal, 31 October 1890.
- ³⁵The Grocer, 5 July 1900.
- ³⁶The Grocers' Journal, 21 March 1901.
- ³⁷The Grocer, 23 February 1895.
- ³⁸Bullen, Confessions of a Tradesman, p. 115.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 157.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 169.

⁴¹Anon., How to Make a Small Business Pay (London, 1913), p. 2.

⁴²Morrison, To London Town, p. 79.

⁴³The Grocers' Journal, 14 February 1879.

⁴⁴Leicester Co-operative Record, October 1913.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BATTLE JOINED: FROM INDIVIDUALISM TO COLLECTIVISM

Whether or not the business position of shopkeepers was undermined in the late nineteenth century, and the preceding chapter has suggested that this process may well have been exaggerated amongst certain sectors, there can be no doubt that many shopkeepers considered themselves to be in an increasingly precarious economic position. Shopkeepers began to show a greater interest in protecting themselves against real or perceived competition, and this led to a change in the methods they employed to maintain their standing. Specifically, shopkeepers increasingly adopted collective action, such as the formation of trade associations, to supplement earlier individual action, in their battle against what they considered to be 'unfair' competition. This does not mean that shopkeepers rejected those personal attributes previously considered indispensable if a trader was to be successful. Rather, there was a growing realization that individual pursuits, no matter how desirable, were inadequate. In 1879 The Grocers' Journal offered tradesmen advice on neutralizing the most pernicious of the competitors, the co-operative societies. "The great thing, so it appears to us, is to meet these associations on their own ground and vanquish them with their own weapons."¹ This could be achieved "by combining and forming associations among tradesmen that will secure to them like advantages to those enjoyed by co-operative companies."²

Individual application: the professionalization of shopkeeping

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, shopkeepers had yet to embrace the idea of collective action. They, and their supporters in the trade press, argued that the development of exemplary personal characteristics was the key to succeeding in business. One writer detailed the qualifications for a life in business, which included diligence, energy, good judgement and perseverance. Thus, "diligence and energy, directed by good sense, and persevered in, must command success."³ A knowledge of business was considered to be only of secondary importance, ranking with a knowledge of human nature and general information, a gentlemanly deportment, politeness, self-reliance, integrity, good habits and steadiness.⁴ "Truth and equity," the writer noted, "are the foundations of legitimate trade. Any business structure not based on these principles, totters to its fall."⁵ Houlston and Sons' Industrial Library included a volume on the drapery trade in which it was argued that the requirements for the drapery trade were courtesy, cleanliness, punctuality, honesty and a duty towards God.⁶ When opening a shop, the writer observed, the beginner must be ardent and earnest, but also cautious and judicious.⁷ All obstacles could be overcome by the individual, Samuel Budgett emphasized, if he was a "first-rate man of business."⁸

As early as 1853, Robert Philp questioned the causes of business failure, and concluded that the most common were personal shortcomings. In order to succeed, he argued, all businessmen, small and large, had to live within their means, and in order to achieve this goal they had to

display those personal attributes, such as industry, earnestness and integrity, which have already been noted.⁹ James Plett, writing in 1875, was even more specific. He observed that if businessmen wished to succeed they would require 12 specific qualities: health, education, observation, industry, perseverance, arrangement, punctuality, prudence, tact, truthfulness, integrity and calculation.¹⁰

It is not surprising, given the tradition of acclaiming individual qualities, that the initial response of shopkeepers to the challenge of competition was to stress, to an even greater degree, the importance of individualism. Practises were promoted which could be mastered, given effort, by committed individuals. Advertising, in particular, was considered the most effective method of improving sales. The editor of The Grocers' Journal discussed this point in 1878:

It is of no use for [the grocer] to depend entirely on the qualities of the article he sells, though that must ensure him a fair business in the long run;--no, he must launch his business with an effort, sustain it with an effort, and even when it is fairly afloat, must make an effort now and again to preserve it from decay...Advertising is the lever of the business, and a lever of the first order, too, when properly applied.¹¹

As Michael Winstanley has observed, the shopkeeper was exhorted to "ADVERTISE and keep alive".¹² The Retail Trader argued that "the trend of all trading today is to take the fullest advantage of the power of advertising in its modern application. Competition...is so keen, the numbers are so great and the varieties so many, that only those who are advertised can hope to become known."¹³ Shoe retailers were informed that a growing number of customers were shopping elsewhere. "There is a reason for this, Mr. Retailer, and there is nothing supernatural about

it either. The secret of the whole thing is advertising."¹⁴ The consequences of not advertising, according to some practitioners, were dire:

There was a man in our town,
And he was wondrous wise;
He swore by all the gods that be
He ne'er would advertise.

At last one day he advertised
And thereby hangs a tale--
The ad. was set nonpareil,
And headed "Sheriff's Sale".¹⁵

Some traders, it was argued, had to advertise more than others. A commentator on the ironmongery trade suggested that, unlike grocers, bakers and drapers, ironmongers, 'the knights of the black apron', did not deal in the necessities of life and they had to use advertising techniques in order to create a demand for many items.¹⁶

Shopkeepers increasingly turned to newspaper announcements, elaborate signs on their delivery carts and other special events to promote their shops. Newspaper advertisements had long been a part of the shopkeeper's tactical arsenal, particularly amongst those who catered to an exclusive clientele. In 1866, for example, James Hodges of the High Street advertised in the Leicester Journal to the effect that he:

respectfully informs the Nobility, Clergy, Gentry,
and Inhabitants of Leicester and its County that
he has opened a Saddler's Ironmongery
Establishment...where articles of a general and
superior description will always be kept in
stock.¹⁷

Similarly, Alfred Adderly, a Market Place draper, announced to Leicester's fashion conscious women that he had obtained "correct copies of the most expensive Paris Models at less than half the

original price."¹⁸ Over the following decades, however, shopkeepers attempted to increase their market by appealing to a wider sector of the community. One method of achieving this goal was by aggressive campaigns to popularize winter and summer sales; such sales, it was suggested, enabled humbler folk to purchase, at knockdown prices, 'High Class' goods normally set aside for the gentry. By 1886 virtually all of the leading drapers were holding such sales which, according to Alfred Adderly, "have been increasing in magnitude and importance, all owing to the large and unflinching reductions."¹⁹ Even small shopkeepers, who could not afford regular advertising campaigns, were exhorted by the trade press to circularize their neighbourhoods occasionally in order to bring their names before the public. If this was not possible, they were told not to let their shop windows work against them. According to another practitioner, the shop window was "the retailer's best advertisement."²⁰

The Grocer was driven to publish its own guide to window dressing. The editor was appalled at the dismal quality of many grocers' windows: "the majority of grocers fail to take full advantage of the facilities which up-to-date shop fronts and fittings...offer them for making their establishments attractive to the public."²¹ Similarly, greengrocers were advised to improve their selling techniques; one writer's enthusiasm could not be concealed: "...what might not be done with a tasteful display of English Blenheim orange apples, well rubbed with a clean cloth, until the deep red-coloured cheeks of these king of fruits attracted the attention of every passer-by, tastefully set off against a few specimens of the grand-coloured Doctor Harvey apples, the most

delicious cooking-apple grown?"²² Yet, this advertising devotee glumly concluded: "how dull and unattractive are the majority, especially of the suburban greengrocers' shops."²³ Given the lack of effort by some sectors of the shopkeeping community, creative window displays could attract a good deal of attention from shoppers. The Leicester Grocers' Association clearly recognized the value of window displays; it held annual window dressing competitions in order to promote its combination margarine purchasing scheme, and was well-pleased with the interest it aroused.²⁴ A bakery journal mentioned that in Granby Street, Leicester, Mr. Callard had placed a large chocolate lighthouse in his window which had become quite an attraction.²⁵

Attempts to exploit new advertising techniques were only a part of the wider endeavour to professionalize the art of shopkeeping in an effort to bolster its sagging 'penny in the slot machine' image. Janet Blackman has discussed the changes in the grocers' stock-in-trade during the nineteenth century, from high class goods such as tea, coffee, sugar, spices and dried fruits to a general store with a wide range of food products and household goods.²⁶ Clearly the extent to which such changes effected the grocery hierarchy varied according to a trader's position and clientele. It is true that prepackaged goods and proprietary articles made the acquisition of traditional food preparation skills unnecessary for many domestic, if not principal, shopkeepers. Nevertheless, even the latter were afraid that there had been a visible decline in the quality of recruits into the shopkeeping world. Furthermore, many shopkeepers, even those who had dealt successfully in quality merchandise for many years, had never had the

commercial skills, such as bookkeeping, which were increasingly being touted as one possible source of salvation for the independent shopkeeper. It was not uncommon to find established traders whose businesses had crumbled in times of trade depression because the proprietor had no knowledge of the financial standing of his shop, or the state and value of his stock. The Jaques family of Cank Street in Leicester had operated a chandler's shop for over 50 years when Edwin Jaques failed in 1903. He had been in the shop for 45 years and had carried it on alone since his father's death 20 years before. The official receiver observed:

The same business has been carried on upon the same premises for generations, and no doubt it paid well at one time, but for many years past it has not been carried on in accordance with the necessities of modern trade, and the debtor has not been able to sustain increased competition. The books are inadequate, and there has been no regular stock-taking for some time.²⁷

Oscar Berry emphasized throughout his examination of the grocery trade the importance of commercial education to a successful shopkeeping career. "When opening a new business, the proper books MUST ALWAYS BE OPENED. Cash book, sales and bought ledgers, duplicating counter books in lieu of day book, purchases day book, and private ledger should be obtained and FAITHFULLY used."²⁸ He concluded by arguing that in his opinion the lack of basic accounting skills was the main cause of business failure; it led traders "to begin in a muddle, to proceed in a muddle, to live in a muddle, and therefore to end in a muddle."²⁹

The growing interest in commercial education was evident in the emergence of a number of organizations which catered to the needs of

shopkeepers or their assistants. The Traders' Bookkeeping and Auditing Association, based in London, was formed in 1901 to meet the difficulties of those who could not keep proper accounts. "We think there is no reason," argued a representative of the Association, "why any but the most humble of shopkeepers should not be thoroughly acquainted with his own business affairs and, in such case, there is no fear of his drifting into financial disaster through sheer ignorance of his position."³⁰ It is apparent, however, that most critics of the poor skills prevalent in a number of shopkeeping trades believed that there was little hope of improving the standard amongst those already in business. An observer of the tobacco trade actually welcomed "the Passing of the Tobacconist."³¹ "The present day tobacconist is doomed,"³² the writer contended. In the future, however, the new recruits to the trade, those who were currently in the educational system or working as assistants in the trade, would stand a fighting chance. "Out of the ashes will grow a sturdier and more enterprising race trading upon an intelligent commercial basis."³³

In the period prior to 1914 the primary sources of commercial education for shopkeepers, shop assistants or prospective shopkeepers originated outside of the shopkeeping world. A framework which provided an education in bookkeeping and its attendant skills was already forming as a result of demands emanating from the growing white collar workforce of clerks, commercial travellers and managers requiring a commercial education in order to make progress in an increasingly competitive job market.³⁴

One of the first institutions to offer commercial education courses

in Leicester was the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Commercial classes were offered briefly in 1876,³⁵ but it was nearly a quarter of a century before the question of providing commercially-oriented evening classes was discussed again. In September of 1901 it was determined

that a course of educational classes consisting of French, German, Shorthand, Book-keeping, Commercial Arithmetic, Commercial Correspondence and Geography and Ambulance be adopted and that they be open to members and non-members...The fees for members to be 1s 6d per quarter, and those for non-members to be 2s 6d per quarter.³⁶

However, less than 2 years later, the Committee reported that the classes had not been well-received. Financially, the courses were running at a deficit of £12 3s and, although it was pointed out that a government grant would reduce the amount somewhat, it was decided that action would have to be taken. An amendment that classes should be abolished was not seconded, however, and, with the exception of geography, the courses were once again offered.³⁷ Yet, only a month later it was decided that because of poor attendance the educational classes were to be discontinued.³⁸ A decade later it was explained in the annual report that the "Committee had no desire to enter into competition with the excellent facilities provided at the Technical School and [other] agencies of such proved value."³⁹ It should be noted that occasionally lectures on associated subjects were delivered, such as that of 6 November 1911, entitled 'Merchandising as a Business Career', by Mr. H. Gordon Selfridge.⁴⁰ However, it is evident that the YMCA's attempt to provide commercial education in Leicester was a failure.

The idea of establishing a technical school in Leicester had first been broached by the members of the Chamber of Commerce, who were concerned about the lack of progress in the area of technical education.⁴¹ After sending a deputation to Yorkshire to examine the schools operating there, they consulted the educationalist Canon Vaughan about the possibility of building a technical school in conjunction with Wyggeston School. In the autumn of 1884 the 'Ellis Wing', which adjoined Wyggeston School, was opened to provide training in the principal trades of the town.⁴² It was not until 1892, however, that the Technical School Prospectus announced that commercial education would be offered.⁴³ Nine classes were to be taught: writing, correspondence and precis; bookkeeping; shorthand; commercial geography and the history of commerce; French; French conversation; German conversation; and economics. Each class was to be taught once a week, and the fees ranged from 3s 6d to 5s.⁴⁴

Commercial education was given a further boost when the Corporation began to take a greater interest in the Technical School. In 1889 the Technical Instruction Act had given the Town Council the power to aid in the supply of technical education, up to an amount not exceeding the rate of a penny in the pound.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in 1891 the Council agreed to provide the Technical School with funds on the condition that it be represented on the managing committee. However, when it was reported that the existing Technical School was inadequate, the Council decided to erect a new school under its own management, and a Technical and Art School Committee was created to oversee the administration. When the new school opened in 1897, commercial education still occupied a minor

position within the educational framework. Of the 37 teachers employed, the commercial section was represented by only 3. Whereas £732 10s was allocated for the salaries of teachers in the technical and science departments, £60 paid the salaries of the commercial teachers.⁴⁶

The Committee was concerned about this imbalance and, when they received a letter regarding commercial education from the London Chamber of Commerce, they agreed to send 2 delegates to a proposed conference.⁴⁷ In 1899 it was decided that full-time teachers should be found for the language and commerce classes.⁴⁸ Over the next decade the number of students taking commercial classes continued to rise, and in 1910 the Committee noted that these classes were full; by 1913 the Committee was forced to hire a second full-time assistant to cope with the demand.⁴⁹

The shopkeeping trades could rely on external sources to provide some keen prospective shopkeepers with at least a rudimentary knowledge of commercial principles, but they had to provide their own infrastructure to teach the technical aspects of their trades. They understood that as the apprentice system declined there would evolve a need for alternative educational institutions to provide the technical education necessary to maintain a steady stream of trained recruits for their trades.

Leicester's bakers were informed in 1904 that one of the benefits of affiliating with the National Association of Bakers would be that they would have an entrance into the bakery school which was operated by the Association. Mr. Curtis reminded the bakers that 3 or 4 attempts had been made to start a bakery class at the Technical School in

Leicester, but they had failed to draw enough interest to warrant public expenditure.⁵⁰ Starting in the summer of 1906, teachers from the National Association's bakery school were brought in to give bread-making classes in the bakehouses of members of the Leicester Master Bakers' Association.⁵¹

Leicester's chemists were also active in providing courses and lectures which would train young men in the art of their trade. Indeed, education was the most important reason for creating a Chemists' Association, according to Mr. Lloyds. The members were informed that the

Council were in a position now to place before the young men the means of studying the science of chemistry and pharmacy. The rooms had been fitted up as a chemical laboratory, apparatus would be purchased at once, and able teachers had come forward and volunteered their services.⁵²

The grocery trade, however, proved to be the most active in the attempt to provide technical education for new entrants into the trade. Oscar Berry, some of whose strictures have already been noted, observed:

Whilst every man thinks he can rule a wife, edit a newspaper, or preach a sermon--until he has tried--the man who under the stress of modern conditions essays to run a grocery shop without previous training will certainly find, before gaining much experience, that he has chosen one of the speediest roads to the Bankruptcy Court.⁵³

The most important development in the early history of technical education for grocers was in 1905 when Mr. W.P. Bowman, of Goodall, Backhouse and Co. of Leeds, offered £500 towards a completely equipped and fully stocked shop for the grocer's assistant who, through a series of examinations, proved himself the most efficient of the competitors. The examinations were conducted by the National Association of Grocers'

Assistants and the contestants were the regional winners of a series of lectures and classes held over a 3 year period. Eighteen assistants ultimately entered the examination hall for the final test in September 1908, where they were to answer questions such as: "In buying Salad Oil, how would you ensure obtaining an article free from adulteration?" or "Give the various growths of Ginger and the purposes for which they are generally used."⁵⁴ The winner was William Tupman, of Bristol, who was employed in a shop in Cardiff. He chose to open a shop in Chiswick High Road, London, and a plaque attesting to his victory was placed beside the entrance of his establishment. Tupman was also asked to share his knowledge with others and wrote a volume on the grocery trade in the Pitman's traders' handbook series, in which he observed that "ultimate effort is foredoomed to comparative failure unless grounded upon theoretical and practical information."⁵⁵

The success of the competition initiated by Mr. Bowman led to the formation of the Institute of Certified Grocers which held its inaugural dinner in London in February 1909, at which time it was attested that, although nothing could truly replace the old apprenticeship system, technical education was indeed the next best thing.⁵⁶ Assistants who successfully passed their exams would be certified and could become members of the Institute; ultimately, the grocery trade would comprise, it was anticipated by the movers of the organization, individuals who had served as assistants, taken the requisite courses and graduated to shops of their own.

Ironically, the question of technical education for grocers was hindered by the publicity which accompanied its initial successes. In

October 1910, The Ironmongers' Chronicle and the Hardwareman reported that W.F. Tupman, who had won the grocery competition and opened his shop in Chiswick to much public attention, had discovered that idealism in business did not pay: "we very much regret to say that after fifteen months' hard work and anxiety he has cut his loss, closed his shop and sold fixtures for one fifth of the value."⁵⁷ If effort and theoretical knowledge, both of which Mr. Tupman was acknowledged to enjoy, were not enough, then what chance had ordinary traders? It was a question such as this which undoubtedly prompted many shopkeepers to question the wisdom of relying solely on individual effort for business success.

Early forms of collectivism: shopkeepers and combination buying

There were some shopkeepers who began, in the late 1870s and 1880s, to advocate collective action in order to help solve some of their woes. They argued that, although personal endeavour counted for much, co-operation between fellow traders could also be of great benefit. Many shopkeepers gradually came to believe that collective action did not necessitate the rejection of a belief in the efficacy of individualism; the two, it was discovered, could compliment each other very well. Shopkeepers could also count on the support of The Grocer in their campaign to popularize the idea of collective action. In 1887 the editor observed that if the struggle to defeat the stores was to be successful then shopkeepers would have to help themselves rather than rely on aid from other quarters. He concluded glumly that many "traders prefer to meet the foe by individual action, and stand or fall by the result. This is plucky, if not prudent."⁵⁸

A number of the first associations formed by shopkeepers,

principally grocers, were in fact co-operative buying combines which attempted to provide the independent trader with the discounts usually gained only by the largest customers of wholesalers and manufacturers. Unlike the trade associations, which would follow later in the nineteenth century, these buying associations were purely business ventures. They provided the link between individual and collective action in that their purpose was to combine to help the individual rather than the collective; their aim was not to counter competition by opposing certain groups, but rather it was to improve the lot of individual traders by enhancing their purchasing power in the wholesale markets. The Grocers' Association, the Traders' Defence Association Ltd. and the National Grocers' Union, Mutual Aid and Self-Help Society, founded in 1879, 1880, and 1881, respectively, were all pioneers in this regard.

The idea for the creation of a buying combine was first mooted at a meeting of traders held in London in January 1879 to protest against co-operative trading by civil servants. At an earlier meeting it had been determined that petitioning Parliament to put down the stores would have little effect; consequently, action of a different nature was required. It was proposed that shopkeepers would look favourably upon any plan which would enable them to purchase large quantities of goods at cheap prices. The prospectus of the Grocers' Association was issued in March 1879, and it informed traders that by purchasing a £5 share in the Association they could benefit from the tactic of buying in bulk.⁵⁹ Later in 1879 the Grocers' Society was created, which operated on similar lines to the Grocers' Association. The Grocers' Journal,

commenting on these and similar ventures, emerged as a great supporter of combination purchasing ventures: "The great thing, so it appears to us, is to meet these associations on their own ground and vanquish them with their own weapons."⁶⁰ The writer was astonished to discover, however, that "there has been a surprising...apathy on the part of the retail trade to avail themselves of what is a decided boon."⁶¹ "Let the grocers bestir themselves," he concluded, "and see into these things, and reap the advantages of such golden opportunities."⁶²

These associations, however, appear to have met with little success outside of London. Provincial shopkeepers were wary of organizations which demanded subscription fees of £5 before any satisfaction was forthcoming. 'A Would Be Member' wrote in to complain that he had asked the Grocers' Society for a price list, so that he could compare them with those current elsewhere, but he had been informed that until he bought a share in the association he could not learn the prices.⁶³ A similar complaint was made the following week.⁶⁴ The National Grocers' Union, a buying combine formed in 1881, attempted to break down shopkeepers' concerns by opening a permanent exhibition of goods in London, where prospective members could view the Union's stock at any time, and discuss business terms with the manager.⁶⁵

The most adventurous of the combination buying organizations was the Traders' Defence Association Ltd. (TDA Ltd.) which was based upon La Société Co-operative International of Paris.⁶⁶ The TDA Ltd. sought to pass on the benefits of buying in bulk, as did the other groups; however, it also recognized that in order to gain the support of shopkeepers it would have to attempt to instill a sense of membership,

not present in other organizations which remained principally business organizations for the benefit of the individual rather than the whole. The TDA Ltd. sought to mobilize London's shopkeepers by launching a vehement attack on their competition. "Our objective is definite and specific. We shall defend the retail trader from the attacks now so freely and recklessly directed against him, and shall point out the way in which he may meet, on something like equal terms, the fierce and not unfrequently unfair competition of the co-operative stores."⁶⁷

The TDA Ltd. sought to create a network of shopkeepers and small businessmen who, by subscribing to the Association, became eligible to receive discounts on goods or services offered by other members. Consequently, the intention was to create an atmosphere of mutual self-help. Furthermore, shopkeepers could purchase a 5s ticket which would then enable them to obtain discounts at all of the shops listed in the weekly paper of the Association. Unlike the earlier combination buying groups, such as the Grocers' Association and the Grocers' Society, the TDA Ltd. created a superstructure of rhetoric to accompany its business ends and to instill a feeling, however rudimentary, of comradeship amongst traders. Shopkeepers were made to feel that they were not alone in the struggle to survive the onslaught of 'unfair competition'. "The question comes then can the stores be met at the counter and fought and beaten there? We answer with confidence, yes. But it must be by combination and co-operation. We must tame the shrew of the stores by their own tactics."⁶⁸ If shopkeepers could combine, the future was much brighter: "Traders will not give up their existence without a struggle, and that a hard one too...we must prepare

for the crisis."⁶⁹ However, it would seem that the TDA Ltd. was constructed on unstable business foundations, for it only last 31 weeks and made a limited impact beyond London.

The promoters of combination buying organizations suffered from a problem which later beset trade associations: shopkeepers could be cajoled into listening to rhetoric, and they would occasionally lend their time to help, but they could not be counted on to provide the necessary financial contributions which were essential for the maintenance of any organization. This created numerous problems for trade associations, but it proved disastrous for combination buying companies. A number of these companies did struggle on; the Grocers' Association survived for over a decade, although in 1892 the directors admitted that "the results of the trading [had] not quite realized their expectations" and this meant that shareholders would not be receiving a dividend.⁷⁰ By the 1890s, however, the position of combination buying organizations had been undermined by the emergence of the more orthodox trade associations at the local level which frequently incorporated bulk buying into their programs in order to attract members.

Although the various companies and organizations that were instigated to facilitate combination buying met with only limited support from shopkeepers, they represented, nevertheless, an important stage in the development of a new consciousness which was beginning to emerge amongst some sectors of the shopkeeping community. The shift from individualism to collectivism was gradual and remained far from complete. Indeed, it was never argued that the new practise of collectivism amongst shopkeepers should ever replace the old belief in

personal endeavour and success; rather, co-operation was intended to complement individual effort. Shopkeepers would pursue collective action to maintain a retailing environment in which the spirit of individualism would be able to flourish.

The emergence of shopkeeping trade associations

The first local associations actually appeared in Leicester during the 1860s, usually to fight a specific battle, after which time they lapsed until another problem surfaced. The Leicester Butchers' Association was formed in the early 1860s to protest the Corporation's decision to remove the Cattle Market from its central position to a new location to the south of the town, a confrontation which will be examined in a later chapter. Thereafter, apart from the annual dinners at the Bull's Head Inn, the Association performed few duties.

It was during and after the 1880s that trade associations in Leicester emerged as vibrant and active forces in the business world; by the early 1900s, virtually every trade in the town could claim to be organized in some fashion. Those trade associations which had operated during the middle decades of the nineteenth century had tended to be principally reactive: they responded to matters at hand as circumstances required. In 1881 Mr. Owston, of the Leicester Butchers' Association, informed the membership at the annual meeting that it

was something in those days of excitement to be able to say that the interests which they represented were not threatened with any attack from without. So far as he was aware, they were in a very quiet condition, and indeed they had never been a very aggressive body, but simply combined for protective purposes.⁷¹

Consequently, William Berry was in a position to tell the members that,

because the Association did not require funds, the subscription could be lowered from 2s 6d to 1s per quarter.⁷² By 1900, however, trade associations showed a far greater inclination to be aggressive and were prepared to initiate action. This transition necessitated the creation of well-organized and well-financed administrations which were supported by loyal and dedicated leaders. Unlike the older associations of the mid-nineteenth century, which would meet annually to discuss the state of the town's trade, the new associations frequently met weekly and had to be prepared to canvass their membership on important matters with little notice.

Trade associations, like the earlier combination buying associations, did not reject the centrality of individual initiative and action to retail trading. Shopkeepers argued that collective action would create a fair business environment in which individual skills would then be able to flourish. Not surprisingly, therefore, trade associations emphasized the importance of retail skills in improving and solidifying the foundations of a business. In particular, associations were anxious to impress upon their members, and other shopkeepers, the importance of improving customer service. This concern was not accidental; it was one aspect of associational attempts to reduce price competition amongst traders, a campaign examined in the following chapter, by teaching young shopkeepers to improve retailing skills which had no bearing on over-the-counter prices.

Trade journals began to emphasize the superiority of service over prices. In 1906 The Shoe Shop argued that it was attributes such as cheerfulness and a concern for the customer which could never go amiss

and which were the basis of any sound enterprise: "They provide a strong business pull for any retailer. It is the kind of advertising money cannot buy."⁷³ The writer concluded: "The good businessman-- the successful retailer is seldom found among the cut-price brigade."⁷⁴ This new retailing dictum was frequently publicized. In an article entitled 'How's Your Service?', the writer observed: "In these days of keen competition every little counts to winning trade; and there is a great advantage to be scored by the shoeman whose customers are never kept waiting."⁷⁵ The editor of the Retail Trader agreed:

There is one advantage which every trader with a small business has over the larger stores, and that is in his knowledge of his customers. Properly recognized, this advantage is worth a great deal, and it would be worthwhile...to pay more attention to this personal aspect of business.⁷⁶

Or again:

The smaller the business, the greater the opportunity for the display of personal cheerfulness and sincerity. For a long time a customer will remember his dealings at such a shop, and will return again and again, realizing that to be sure of courteous treatment is worth some personal inconvenience. Get your personality into your business!⁷⁷

In 1907 The Grocers' Assistant published a lengthy article directed at assistants contemplating the prospect of entering the retailing world. The usual procedures were discussed: choosing the right neighbourhood, fitting the shop properly, offering good products at reasonable prices. The writer concluded, however, with the most important event in the new shopkeeper's career--opening day:

The shop is nicely tidied, and is neat in its newness and orderliness; the scales are burnished and bright; the sugars are weighed and stacked; and the blinds are pulled up and the doors opened. The proprietor stands ready with a smiling face to welcome his

patrons with a word of cheer and kindly greeting, and sees to their necessities with all diligence and readiness.⁷⁸

Another function of trade associations which should not be underestimated was the opportunity for conviviality which they provided. The importance and role of their recreational activities will be examined in Chapter Eight; however, it must be recorded that a desire to foster a social bond between traders was an important impetus behind the move towards collectivism. When Leicester's chemists met at the behest of J.G.F. Richardson in 1886 to discuss the formation of an association, it was argued that combination was required to educate young men in the trade, to protect their trade and to organize social intercourse. Trade associations were soon organizing all manner of events, such as whist drives, dinners, smoking concerts, soirees, summer outings and picnics in order to raise money and bring together their members.

Pleasurable as they may have been, however, picnics were not the principal concern of trade associations. Picnics were only a tool employed to create a bond which would facilitate the implementation of a common front against forces which were considered to be potentially injurious to the trade. Such a program could hardly be successful if the members were not on talking terms. Unanimity in the trade was of paramount importance. The Secretary of the Leicester Grocers' Association commented in 1908 that "businessmen everywhere are beginning to recognize the utility and fruitfulness of combined effort to serve their interests."⁸⁰

It must be remembered that not all the problems which beset shopkeepers originated within the business world. One important

function of local trade associations was to act as a watchdog, ensuring that the activities of other groups or organizations, public or private, did not threaten the well-being of their trade. The Leicester Butchers' Association expended a great amount of energy in the 1890s when it became apparent that the Corporation was intent upon abolishing private slaughterhouses in the city. This decision by the Corporation was a consequence of a report submitted by the Inspector of Nuisances in 1890, which condemned the state of slaughterhouses in the town. He discovered that there were 67 slaughterhouses in constant use, some of which opened upon public causeways, and others which were located in yards common to several houses; indeed, in one case a yard was shared between a slaughterhouse and thirteen houses. Consequently, the Inspector suggested, it was "a question whether it is desirable to familiarize children with the sights to be witnessed in a slaughterhouse."⁸¹ He also noted that "in the summer months especially there is a certain amount of offensive smell in connection with every place of this description."⁸²

It soon became apparent that the butchers were not going to be able to rely on the public for support of their opposition to the relevant clause in the 1897 Omnibus Bill which would abolish private slaughterhouses. The editor of The Wyvern observed: "If [butchers] have the welfare of the town at heart, they will realize that on this question they have got to put themselves to inconvenience and possible expense for the sake of the health and comfort of the general public."⁸³ The Leicester Butchers' Association left The Meat Traders' Journal to fulminate against the Corporation's proposal: "The erection

of public abattoirs is simply another form of municipal trading.... This tendency on the part of corporate bodies to crush out the individual trader is quite as much to be dreaded as the 'elimination' doctrine of co-operators."⁸⁴

Sensing that outright opposition to the Corporation's plan might prove foolhardy, the Butchers' Association attempted to negotiate a settlement which would compensate their members for their losses. The Association was particularly concerned that the Corporation provide adequate public slaughterhouses throughout the city; there was some concern that, if abattoirs were centralized at the Welford Road cattle market, then the small butcher would be unable to prepare his own meat and would consequently be unable to compete with the large companies on prices. Concern was also expressed that the Corporation provide adequate refrigeration facilities in the town. The Corporation replied, however, that after an investigation on its behalf, it had been determined that most butchers "have very little meat requiring a refrigerator, being in most cases a hand to mouth existence."⁸⁵

The eventual agreement between the Butchers' Association and the town provided for the abolition of private slaughterhouses after a period of 7 years, following the erection of public abattoirs throughout the town, and allowing for compensation for butchers under the Land Clauses Act.⁸⁶ C.H. Ross, a prominent member of the Association for nearly 30 years, observed in 1912 that in his opinion the 1897 negotiations with the Corporation were the most important task performed by the Association since its battle with the Corporation over the removal of the Cattle Market from the centre of town in 1866.⁸⁷

Not all negotiations between trade associations and the municipal authorities caused such controversy. The Leicester Pawnbrokers' Association decided to inform the Corporation of its members' dissatisfaction with the state of Belgrave Gate, where many pawnbrokers did business. According to T. Ashwell, it "had been more neglected than any other thoroughfare in Leicester for the past twenty years."⁸⁸ In 1902, 36 shopkeepers on Belvoir Street formed a temporary association to protest to the Watch Committee the custom of driving cattle through the street. "The present practise," they argued, "is terrifying to ladies, an annoyance and danger to all, and is in consequence, a great deterrence to business."⁸⁹ The Leicester Grocers' Association was quick to attack the policy of the Educational Committee of the Town Council which, in 1905, agreed that members of the Leicester Co-operative Society should be allowed to attend geology lectures provided by the Council at half price.⁹⁰ The Association congratulated itself upon its success in ending this practise following its petition of the Town Council.⁹¹

Trade associations did not emerge solely to protect their members from activities which came under the jurisdiction of the municipal authorities. Shopkeepers also found it necessary to defend themselves against the campaigns of certain pressure groups which were active in nineteenth century Leicester. A case in point was the verbal and, indeed, physical exchange which emerged in 1885 between the general shopkeepers who held grocers' licences, that is those who were licenced to sell beer for consumption off the premises, and the Leicester Temperance Society, under the aggressive leadership of the Reverend Mr.

Meyer.⁹² For a number of years the Temperance Society had sent a deputation to appear before the magistrates at the annual Brewster Sessions to call for the rejection of any new application for a licence. In 1884, and more specifically in 1885, however, the deputation actually suggested to the magistrates that the number of such licences be reduced. Meyer pointed out that in some neighbourhoods there were as many as 16 licenced shops in one street, and there were many with at least 7 or 8. He specifically asked for 78 of the 275 licences to be discontinued.

Clearly even F.B. Meyer was taken aback at the howl of anger which was sent up by the small shopkeepers of the town. "The indignation excited in some quarters of the town is apparently so great," he wrote, "that I might be afraid to walk down the streets."⁹³ T. Watchorn was the first to publicly respond to Meyer's actions:

Can the Rev. Mr. Meyer and his colleagues, the temperance party, dream of the ruin and misery they are bringing to 78 respectable tradespeople by their action this week...? They should bear in mind that the aforesaid tradespeople have had to satisfy the magistrates by written testimonial that they are fit and proper persons to carry on the business, and that they have invested their little all in taking or establishing the same.⁹⁴

Not content with complaints in the local newspapers, the shopkeepers also initiated a campaign to sabotage the Temperance Society's financial position. The Society was in the habit of collecting firewood which was then bundled by recently discharged prisoners at Providence House and sold to shopkeepers, with ensuing monies going to support their philanthropic work. Within 4 days of Meyer's request to the magistrates, the shopkeepers were boycotting his firewood. "Shop after

shop of our regular customers has refused to look at us, and as we sell 23,000 out of 25,000 bundles per week to grocers, this threatens a temporary paralysis of our trade at Providence House."⁹⁵

Meyer was not, however, easily put off by such tactics. He agreed with Mr. Watchorn that the profits of some grocers might well decline if they lost their licences, but he argued that "those profits ought to be cut off which...are gained by the 'ruin and misery' of the homes of working men."⁹⁶ He then went on to utter a loosely veiled threat which concluded: "It might come to pass that the temperance public should refuse to buy of [sic] grocers with licences. I do not say I should advocate that course yet."⁹⁷ The aggrieved 78 then prepared a memorial, which was to be signed by all licenced shopkeepers, officially binding each to take no more firewood from Meyer.⁹⁸ The Temperance Society's organizers were soon rallying to Meyer's side. "Teetotalers of Leicester!" proclaimed Joseph Gamble. "Let us support Mr. Meyer. He is fighting a great battle for us, and let us support him by buying his firewood."⁹⁹

There, however, the whole matter was temporarily ended, with the shopkeepers presumably satisfied by the magistrates' decision not to withhold any licences, and Mr. Meyer preparing his campaign for the following year. This also led directly to the formation of the Leicester Off-Licence Holders' Association, which became one of the most active of such associations in England¹⁰⁰ and one of the most prominent trade groups in Leicester. Within 2 years the Association's solicitor, J.T. Hincks, noted that, despite the efforts of the Temperance Society, "the local magistrates had treated them most fairly

and honestly, and as long as the off-licence holders continued to conduct their business as at present, they would have nothing to fear."¹⁰¹ Such were the expectations of the President, W. Pool, that, despite the fact that 156 of the 275 off-licence holders belonged to the Association, he regretted to observe the apathy shown by members of his trade.¹⁰² Over the following years membership rose steadily until, by 1890, 222 of 233 off-licence holders belonged.¹⁰³

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, a growing number of shopkeepers recognized collective action as a legitimate tool to help solve trade problems. Initially shopkeepers relied on a form of business co-operation to improve their position; collective buying ventures, however, proved inadequate. Consequently, trade associations began to attract support. These associations were originally formed in response to specific disputes. By the end of the century they had developed into well-organized associations staffed by committed members. In this chapter it was indicated that these associations dealt with public and private bodies whose actions were seen to threaten the traders of the town. The principal concern of the associations, however, was with trade problems created by others within, or associated with, the retail community. It is this aspect of associational activity which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Notes, Chapter Four

- ¹The Grocers' Journal, 26 September 1879.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Anon., How to do Business: A Pocket Manual of Practical Affairs and Guide to Success in Life (Glasgow, 1883), p. 17.
- ⁴Ibid., pp. 17ff.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 10.
- ⁶Anon., The Draper and Haberdasher (London, 1878), pp. 11ff.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 49.
- ⁸Arthur, The Successful Merchant, p. 140.
- ⁹Robert Kemp Philp, The Shopkeeper's Guide: Designed to Give Stability to the interest of the Shopkeeper (London, 1853), pp. 33ff.
- ¹⁰James Plett, Business (London, 1875), p. 14.
- ¹¹The Grocers' Journal, 19 July 1878.
- ¹²Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, pp. 58-9.
- ¹³Retail Trader, 27 September 1910.
- ¹⁴The Shoe Shop, January 1906.
- ¹⁵Retail Trader, 25 October 1910.
- ¹⁶Francis, Ironmongery, p. 111.
- ¹⁷Leicester Journal, 4 May 1866.
- ¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹⁹Ibid., 2 July 1886.
- ²⁰Ritenburg, Selling Schemes for Retailers, p. 33.
- ²¹Anon., The Grocer's Guide to Window Dressing (London, 1911), p.3.
- ²²The Greengrocer, Fruiterer and Market Gardener, 4 December 1895.
"How shall the retail trader--that is, the greengrocer and fruiterer, stimulate the public taste? That is the all important question."

- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ The Grocer, 16 December 1911.
- ²⁵ National Association Review, 23 October 1908.
- ²⁶ Janet Blackman, "The Development of the Retail Grocery Trade in the Nineteenth Century", Business History IX (1967), p. 116.
- ²⁷ The Grocers' Journal, 8 August 1903.
- ²⁸ Berry, The Grocer and his Trade, p. 80.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 116.
- ³⁰ The Grocers' Journal, 27 April 1901.
- ³¹ Tobacco Trade Review, 1 October 1911.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ See G.L. Anderson, Victorian Clerks (Manchester, 1976), pp. 89ff.
- ³⁵ Leicester YMCA, Minute Book, 26 September 1876.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 3 September 1901.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 7 September 1903.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 2 November 1903.
- ³⁹ Leicester YMCA, Annual Report, 1912-13.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Minute Book, November 1881.
- ⁴² Ibid., June 1882.
- ⁴³ See Gerald T. Rimmington, Education, Politics and Society in Leicester 1883-1903 (Hantsport, 1978), pp. 159ff; Malcolm Seabourne, "Committees", in Education in Leicestershire, 1540-1940, ed. B. Simon (Leicester, 1968), pp. 180ff.
- ⁴⁴ Leicester Technical School, Prospectus, 1892-93.
- ⁴⁵ Malcolm Seabourne, "Education in the Nineties", p. 180.
- ⁴⁶ Technical and Art School Committee, Minute Book, 27 May 1897.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 24 May 1898.

⁴⁸Ibid., 25 May 1899; 22 June 1899.

⁴⁹Ibid., 8 May 1913.

⁵⁰National Association Review, 10 February 1904.

⁵¹Leicester Master Bakers' Association, Minute Book, 30 May 1907.

⁵²The Leicester Daily Mercury, 24 September 1886.

⁵³Berry, The Grocer and his Trade, p. 14.

⁵⁴The Grocers' Journal, 26 September 1908.

⁵⁵William Tupman, Grocery (London, 1909), p. 1.

⁵⁶The Grocers' Journal, 20 February 1909.

⁵⁷The Ironmongers' Chronicle and the Hardwareman, 12 October 1910.

⁵⁸The Grocer, 1 January 1887.

⁵⁹The Grocers' Journal, 14 March 1879.

⁶⁰Ibid., 26 September 1879.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., 7 November 1879.

⁶⁴Ibid., 14 November 1879.

⁶⁵The Grocers' Daily Review, 24 October 1881.

⁶⁶This association should not be confused with the many Traders' Defence Associations which sprang up during the battle against co-operative societies in the early 1900s.

⁶⁷The Traders' Herald, 19 July 1879.

⁶⁸Ibid., 23 August 1879.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰The Grocers' Journal, 11 March 1892.

⁷¹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 29 January 1881.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³The Shoe Shop, January 1906.

⁷⁴Ibid., February 1906.

⁷⁵Ibid., January 1906.

⁷⁶Retail Trader, 25 October 1901.

⁷⁷Ibid., 22 November 1910.

⁷⁸The Grocers' Assistant, May 1907.

⁷⁹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 24 February 1886.

⁸⁰The Grocer, 25 July 1908. See Gerry Rubin, "From Packmen, Tallymen and 'Perambulating Scotchmen' to Credit Drapers' Associations", Business History XXVII (1986), pp. 206-25.

⁸¹Toll Committee, Minute Book, 21 January 1890.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³The Wyvern, 8 January 1897.

⁸⁴The Meat Traders' Journal, 26 January 1897.

⁸⁵Toll Committee, Minute Book, 16 September 1890.

⁸⁶The Meat Traders' Journal, 2 March 1899.

⁸⁷The Leicester Daily Mercury, 12 November 1912.

⁸⁸Leicester Journal, 8 April 1898.

⁸⁹Watch Committee, Minute Book, 21 January 1902.

⁹⁰The Grocer, 8 April 1905.

⁹¹Ibid., 10 June 1905.

⁹²"More persistent and determined enemies than the teetotal party no trade could possibly have; and if there is not eternal watchfulness on the part of Licence-Holders, the day must come when a deadly blow will be dealt them." The Off-Licence Holder: and Beer and Wine Seller, 29 June 1900.

⁹³The Leicester Daily Mercury, 31 August 1885.

⁹⁴Ibid., 29 August 1885.

⁹⁵Ibid., 31 August 1885.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., 5 September 1885.

⁹⁹Ibid., 8 September 1885.

¹⁰⁰This point was made by the editor of The Off-Licence Holder in 1900. J.J. Curtis of the Leicester Association, arranged, at his own expense, for every member of his Association to receive a copy of The Off-Licence Holder, thereby endearing himself to the paper's staff. The Off-Licence Holder, 6 July 1900.

¹⁰¹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 18 August 1887.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid., 21 August 1890.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONFRONTATION: CUSTOMERS AND PRICES

The efforts of trade associations to counter the activities of organizations which were not connected with the retail trade represented only part of associational activity. An examination of the minutes and reports of a number of trade associations indicates that their daily and weekly transactions were principally concerned with attempts to counter the various forms of business competition which were troubling traders at the time. Shopkeepers had no power to control entry into their trades. Consequently their efforts were aimed at limiting competition within the retailing world. The cast of challengers for the independent shopkeeper's trade was enumerated in Chapter Two. The battle which then commenced for the public's patronage was one which centred on the attempts of each group to gain control of certain competitive aspects of retailing: the allegiance of customers, prices and business hours. An examination of each of these fields of confrontation indicates that shopkeepers were prepared to use virtually any tool at their disposal in order to provide themselves with an opportunity to meet their competitors on an equal footing.

The most important goal of local trade associations was to defeat the evil of competition, in all of its forms. The Drapers' Record succinctly captured the attitude of shopkeepers: "The fear of the effect of competition is constantly before their minds."¹ The real and imagined horrors attendant upon bankruptcy procedures were difficult for any trader to escape. The Baker and Confectioner argued that

competition could be considered a good business stimulant on occasion, but agreed that it could too easily be carried to excess. Indeed, it went so far as to refer to reckless competition as the bane of the baking trade.²

Customer allegiance--the 'co-op' and the 'divi'

The least effective, although perhaps the most famous, of shopkeepers' attempts to counter competition involved their attempt to battle the co-operative societies. The principal concern of the shopkeepers was to break the bonds which those societies had built up with their customers and to replace them with their own.

The allegiance of customers was a concept which, according to the editor of The Grocers' Journal, had previously caused shopkeepers little anxiety. He observed in 1878:

In the good old days customers went methodically round to the same shop day after day, year after year. Now times are changed altogether. The great difficulty of the grocer in the present day is not merely to get new customers but to keep them.³

The problem, shopkeepers realized, was that the co-operative societies in particular were not only stealing their customers, but they were building up bonds of allegiance which entrenched the 'co-op' as the retailing outlet of the working, and often white collar, strata of society. The Leicester Grocers' Association was well aware that by the early 1900s one-third of the households in Leicester shopped regularly at the co-operative society's stores.⁴ Trade associations believed that it was their task to educate the public about what they considered to be the disadvantages of trading with a co-operative society. The actual task of recreating or reinforcing a bond of trust between shopkeepers

and their customers was left to the individual traders.

A leading co-operator, G.J. Holyoake, in a short series of open letters to private traders which appeared in The Co-operative News in 1905, accused shopkeepers of outright incivility to the public. They had no concern, he argued, for the public; they cared only for themselves. Holyoake divided commercial enterprise into two camps: public traders and private traders. "Co-operators are public traders, who take their customers into partnership. The private traders are they who conduct their business for their private interest alone."⁵ Soon after, in 1907, Clementina Black, the social investigator and novelist, also argued that many shopkeepers were no longer serving the best interests of their customers.

Shopkeeper: 'Why did not that lady buy anything?'
 'We hadn't what she wanted, sir.' 'Anybody can sell people what they want. Remember that I keep you to sell people what they don't want.' That in a nutshell is the present condition of retail shopkeeping--especially, perhaps, in the department of drapery; and that condition is one reason why some customers find it preferable to deal at co-operative stores.⁶

The co-operative societies skillfully employed the dividend, popularly known as the 'divi', which was a percentage return on money spent, to incorporate the customer into the co-operative family, thereby establishing bonds of allegiance which reinforced members' loyalty to the society. It was this aspect of co-operation, the divi, which most infuriated the shopkeepers; the divi was the key to co-operative societies' campaigns to attract custom away from private shopkeepers. G. Streeter of Reading presented a paper at the 1908 Anglo-French Grocers' Congress which highlighted the restraints imposed upon private

shopkeepers by this aspect of co-operative trading:

I unhesitatingly state that the present-day co-operative trading is the most insidious form of competition that we as traders have to contend with...We all know how everlasting this 'divi.' is being dangled before the eyes of the public at their social functions, tea-fights, sham educational and propagandist meetings. It is here, behind shop, instead of stating an actual fact--that the 'divi.' is held up as the profits made out of them by the trader, which will be theirs if they loyally support their "own shop", instead of stating an actual fact--that the 'divi.' is a semi-division of overcharges made to members.⁷

But, as the editor of The Grocers' Journal observed in 1902, "how to tell the public of the fallacy of the 'divi'?"⁸

A common practise organized by trade associations was to prominently display, in the shop windows of members, parcels of goods purchased from the local co-operative society, alongside similar parcels obtained from private traders. In this way, shopkeepers postulated, the higher prices and the inferior quality of the co-operative society's goods would be self-evident.⁹ However, as one commentator pointed out, such a program would have little effect on the co-operator because it did not attack the root of the problem--the divi.

What trader is there...who does not daily hear of instances where customers of the co-operative society are perfectly alive to the fact that they have to pay much more for their goods than is necessary in order to be made to save money. One says: "My husband believes in it; I don't!" Another says: "If I want a good thing I have to go to the trader..." These are expressions from the rank and file of co-operators, and yet, in the face of this, and the moral principle involved, they submit to this system of being overcharged. So enamoured do they become of the everlasting 'divi' that they lose all sense of judgement as to the purchasing power of their money.¹⁰

One plan, which was proposed by a member of the Coventry Grocers'

Association in 1908, involved fighting the co-operative societies with their own weapons. Grocers, it was suggested, should unite to give dividends on cash purchases equal to the dividend paid by the local co-operative society. The editor of The Grocers' Journal agreed that the plan had the charm of novelty, was courageous and took the battle into the enemy's camp, but concluded that even if it worked it was not to be desired. The plan was "rather startling to the old fashioned grocer."¹¹ Furthermore, he concluded, "have grocers...any right to copy such methods--methods which have been denounced by the organized trade for years?"¹² He might also have added that, given the limited success of previous associations which had required the pooling of money, such as combination buying associations, and the logistical problems which would need to be solved, the plan was almost utopian.

Ultimately, the inability of trade associations to counter the activities of co-operative societies led some shopkeepers to reject the educative campaigns favoured by the Leicester Grocers' Association and to seek solutions which favoured direct confrontation. The 'Battle of St. Helens', which in 1902 pitted the shopkeepers' society, known as the Traders' Defence Association, against the local St. Helens Co-operative Society, was the most famous event in a shopkeeping campaign to beat back the advances of co-operation. The events of 1902 in St. Helens have been well-documented by both Geoffrey Crossick and Michael Winstanley.¹³ The local shopkeepers, aggrieved at the rapid growth of the Co-operative Society in their town, threw down the gauntlet by initiating a boycott of the Society. This, they argued, represented the final attempt to scotch "the giant fiend which is withering the

individual trader...and whose progress we are desirous of stopping.¹⁴

The members of the St. Helens Traders' Defence Association argued that they were not actually boycotting the Co-operative Society; rather, the shopkeepers pointed out, it was their intent to support no one in any way connected with co-operation. The traders of St. Helens

...will not listen to the clergymen, nor send for the doctor, nor leave their balances with the banker, nor engage the builder, the plumber, the wheelwright, the painter, the printer, and so forth, who pass their shops to deal with the stores.¹⁵

The Co-operative News scornfully rejected the pretensions of the Traders' Defence Association: "The traders may rail as they like; they are as powerless to prevent the progress of an economic movement such as co-operation, as if they were 'dogs baying the moon'."¹⁶

After initial hesitation, shopkeepers' trade journals applauded the stand made by traders in St. Helens. Indeed, The Grocers' Journal was soon congratulating grocers for their activities, even though the movement constituted shopkeepers of all trades: "Evidently the movement is in train for big events, and expectation runs high as to the outcome."¹⁷ Two weeks later, however, a letter appeared which questioned the tactics of shopkeepers.

Wherever [the Co-operative Society] has been attacked, not only has it survived, but actually has been strengthened as the result. If it suits the Traders' Defence Association to attack the co-operative movement, and thus give it a good advertisement and its trade a fillip, well and good.¹⁸

The warning offered above was well-placed; the St. Helens Co-operative Society announced that during the third quarter of 1902, when it was facing the boycott, sales had risen by £5,000 over the past year, and

membership had risen by 143 over the previous quarter. This, it was observed, would prove a "bitter pill for the traders to swallow."¹⁹

Despite this setback, The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, a journal established to popularize the actions of the boycotting shopkeepers, continued the campaign it had set out in its first number. St.

Helens

...has taken off her coat with tremendous earnestness and gallantry, and has engaged herself single-handed in what I venture to predict will, within a measurable distance of time, become a great social struggle--a struggle, the magnitude of which was never before dreamed of in political or party conflicts of the past, great as many of them have been. The struggle is certain to extend to the whole of the United Kingdom, if it does not embrace the entire Empire.²⁰

Not surprisingly, no campaign could hope to live up to such expectations. Traders' Defence Associations did spring up in many of the strongholds of co-operation, particularly in the north of England, but after the initial excitement caused by the novelty of the shopkeepers' plan, interest and support waned. The National Traders' Defence Association, which had been formed during the initial flurry of activity, survived to condemn co-operation by placing advertisements and letters in the trade press, but the movement had lost its impetus by 1906.

It appears that in Leicester followers of the National Traders' Defence Association were only fleetingly active. By 1905 the principal weapon in the movement's arsenal was the vilification of co-operative societies in the columns of The Tradesman and Shopkeeper and local newspapers. In September of 1905 a sensational headline appeared in The Tradesman and Shopkeeper: 'Leicester Society Falling--Large Decrease

in Sales: is it Going to Smash?!'²¹ Acting on this leader, some shopkeepers then distributed handbills around the town suggesting that the sum of £11,000 was unaccounted for, and that the Leicester Co-operative Society would not be able to declare a dividend. The Executive of the Society dismissed the fanciful charges made by The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, refusing to be provoked into a confrontation. The Society admitted that sales were suffering due to the slackness of local trade, and that the dividend would be less than in previous quarters.²² However, the yearly figures indicated that, although the annual profits for 1905 had decreased by £2,000, both sales and membership were up.²³ Unable to bait the Leicester Co-operative Society, The Tradesman and Shopkeeper abandoned its attack.

The abortive campaign against co-operation in Leicester is instructive, however, because it illustrates the position held by shopkeepers: the dividend was their principal target in these skirmishes. Shopkeepers believed that it was only the lure of the divi which gained customers for the the co-operatives. The St. Helens boycott was the most sensational of the attempts to counter its hold on the population. Indeed, even during the early days of the St. Helens confrontation, a realization that the divi was the shopkeepers' true enemy lay just beneath the surface. In the first edition of The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, the editor raged against the co-operative movement, calling it "a subtle scheme of unfair trading, specially organised for the benefit of the rapacious few."²⁴ Yet in the same edition, John Green, the wholesale and retail grocer who led the St. Helens Traders' Defence Association was quoted: "If the stores would

discontinue the dividend and let value be the true test, they as traders would disband their association at once."²⁵ Some months later The Grocers' Journal reiterated this point: "If the stores would only abolish the divi grocers would not fear them."²⁶ However, there was no chance that co-operative societies would voluntarily abandon the divi, and the government showed no sign of adopting a plan put forward by the National Traders' Defence Association to tax the profits of co-operative societies before they had been distributed to the members as dividends.²⁷ By April 1903 the National Traders' Defence Association had reverted to popularizing old schemes for countering the divi; it recommended that shopkeepers exhibit goods from their own shop and the co-operative store so that customers could compare prices for themselves.²⁸

In Leicester, shopkeepers made only desultory attempts to combat the growth of the Leicester Co-operative Society. The Tradesman and Shopkeeper chided Leicester's grocers for their inactivity, and hoped that the Leicester Grocers' Association, formed in 1903, might brush off the lethargy of the past. However, the Grocers' Association, as with most local associations, directed much of its energy towards areas which would, in the members' opinion, yield more substantial rewards. Leicester's grocers acknowledged the harm inflicted upon their businesses by the co-operative movement, but made little attempt to counter it, beyond keeping a watchful eye on any excesses. For example, it has already been noted that the Association protested to the Corporation that the Leicester Education Department had been allowing members of the Co-operative Society into lectures at half the regular

price. The Association felt it wrong to use "public money in the form of rates by benefiting one section of the trading community to the disadvantage of another."²⁹ In the main, however, the Leicester Grocers' Association was less concerned with the Co-operative Society, and the attempt to break down the bonds of allegiance which linked the memberships, than with the campaign to restrict price competition in the town.

Price fixing in Leicester

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, established shopkeepers attempted to limit or eliminate price competition. It was usually the newcomer to a trade, intent on making an impression with the local populace, who attempted to revive the competitive spirit and persisted, as one weary commentator put it, in pursuing the "suicidal policy of selling an article at a loss in order to gain additional patronage."³⁰ More experienced hands did not consider competition to be the catalyst which motivated and reinvigorated the entrepreneurial spirit and lubricated the machinery which powered financial dealings. It is evident that amongst the representatives of the various trade associations there was a widespread conviction that rampant competition was inimical to successful trading. 'Legitimate' competition, the shopkeepers argued, was desirable; however, it will be indicated that the shopkeepers' perception of such allowable competition was extremely limited.

Many trade associations were initially formed to combat a pressing local evil, such as the off-licence holders' campaign to repel the activities of the Leicester advocates of teetotalism. However, by the

early years of the twentieth century, it is apparent that the principal purpose of many trade associations was to instigate a number of campaigns either to suppress or to control price competition at the local level. Foremost amongst these organizations was the Leicester Grocers' Association which, through its Emergency Committee, was particularly active in this regard and, despite several outbreaks of price cutting, managed to uphold, in the central shopping district, what the members considered to be a living profit.

Leicester's grocers first met to discuss the formation of an association in 1903, at which time Alderman Patey argued that it was necessary "to combine to protect themselves against unreasonable cutting and unjust attacks upon them from various quarters."³¹ The following year, at the first annual dinner, Charles Whitmore, a wholesale grocer in business for over 50 years, reiterated the comments of Alderman Patey. In his youth, Whitmore observed, it had been the practise to sell one article at a loss and attempt to put the profit on another; "he was pleased to say that to-day the trade locally went on the principle of getting a profit all round."³² Within 2 years the Association felt itself in a position to claim that in this matter they had achieved considerable success. In 1905 the Secretary reported to the membership at the annual meeting:

The year has proved an unusually trying one through the continued commercial depression, and the committee were of opinion that, had there been no association in Leicester, consequently no unity of action, and trade being so much below its ordinary level, it would have caused increased competition, with less profits, and the result would have been detrimental to the financial interests of the large traders and disastrous to the smaller ones.³³

An examination of the reports of the Leicester Grocers' Association indicates that, although the Executive dealt with many matters which were of a distinctly parochial concern, the job which occupied most of its time was the maintenance of a uniform scale of prices throughout the trade. The Association's success in this venture was varied: within its own ranks it managed to maintain prices fairly consistently; however, it met with less success when it attempted to extend the procedure beyond its own boundaries to other groups within the retailing hierarchy.

The Leicester Grocers' Association initially comprised approximately 40 or 50 of the principal independent grocers of the town; although it occasionally announced that it also had the best interests of the smaller shopkeepers at heart, there is little doubt that its principal object was to further the interests of those grocers who occupied premises in the central shopping districts of the town or on the main roads leading to the suburbs. These were the traders who, as was argued earlier, eventually came to see success as the maintenance of a living profit; the reduction of competition on prices was the central plank in their effort to achieve this end. The Association appointed an Emergency Committee to keep a close watch on prices in the town and to report any fluctuations or attempts at price cutting to the Executive.³⁴

In the first instance, the Emergency Committee contented itself with an attempt to maintain the price of sugar, which was one of the staples of the grocery trade. It was soon apparent, however, that no matter how closely the price of sugar was monitored, months of work maintaining an acceptable price could be destroyed in a day. The

Association had little in its arsenal, aside from the ability to stigmatize an offender, forcing a recalcitrant price cutter back into the ranks of those upholding the set prices. In February 1904 the Secretary ruefully noted that for 6 months the price of granulated sugar had been held at 2d per lb., and then one grocer reduced the price ¼d per lb. and, when he refused to listen to reason and raise his price, the other grocers of the town felt it necessary to follow suit.³⁵ The usual tactic employed by the Association if a member reduced prices was for a number of the members of the Emergency Committee to meet with the offender and explain to him the consequences of his actions, which he well knew. If this failed, and it should be said that the Emergency Committee could be very persuasive, the Association would occasionally resort to more drastic action. In 1910 the Secretary reported that:

A humorous incident occurred quite recently. A firm cutting a certain article below what it could be purchased for was surprised to find an unprecedented run upon it, only to discover, when too late, that the purchases had been made by other traders, who were re-selling at a fair profit. The price of the 'cutter' was at once advanced.³⁶

Following their periodic successes with sugar, the Grocers' Association soon began to fix prices on other articles: cheese in 1905, soap in 1906 and provisions in 1908. By 1912 the Emergency Committee was recommending that prices be set for such diverse articles as smoked salmon, tinned tomatoes and lard.³⁷

It is evident, however, that much of the success of the Grocers' Association in fixing the prices of certain articles was illusory. The editor of The Grocers' Journal once observed: "Like the poor, cutting is always with us. In many forms and diverse shapes it turns up in odd

corners after it had been deemed extinct."³⁸ It is true that grocers managed to maintain fairly consistent agreement regarding prices. In 1905 the President of the Leicester Grocers' Association noted that in "the old times they would, to use a figure of speech, have been cutting one another's throats in a desperate manner, but their Association had been able to regulate prices, and there had been no unpleasantness."³⁹ However, such success was ultimately dependent on the agreement of the various multiple or chain stores in the town. Without their co-operation the Association's attempts to set prices would have been ineffectual. In January 1905 the Association went ahead with its plan to raise the prices of demerara, lump, castor, crystal and granulated sugar only if the company shops agreed to the move.⁴⁰ Later that same year the company shops informed the Association that if the grocers could not agree on a price amongst themselves, then they would be forced to lower their prices.⁴¹ Similarly, when the topic of raising the price of cheese $\frac{1}{2}$ d per lb. was raised, it was only on the basis that the Home and Colonial Stores would fall into line.⁴²

In 1907 the President of the Grocers' Association was forced to admit that they could do little to influence the company shops if the latter were insistent on reducing prices. He noted that there "was keen rivalry between them [company shops] on the price of cheese, and the Association could hardly expect them to be guided by any step they might take or resolutions they might adopt."⁴³ It therefore became commonplace for the Association to advocate price rises, conditional upon agreement from the company shops. Furthermore, whereas the Association was usually successful in persuading any of its wayward

price cutting members to return to the fold, the effect of a company shop cutting prices was to precipitate a reduction of prices for that article throughout the town.⁴⁴ The problems associated with the Leicester grocers' attempts at price fixing had been foreseen by The Grocers' Journal. Although the editor considered unanimity on prices in a district to be a state of semi-perfection, he was not always sure it was worth the effort which had to be expended by associations to fix prices: "...over and over again Associations have been wrecked by the attempt to enforce the decisions of the majority."⁴⁵ One trader could destroy months of effort in an instant; this led only to internal squabbling.

Grocers were not the only traders who sought to implement a uniform scale of prices in Leicester; bakers were also active in this regard. John Burnett has indicated that throughout the nineteenth century price competition was rife in the bakery trade due to the emergence of the small bakers or undersellers who, true to their name, cut the price and quality of their bread in order to scratch a living.⁴⁶ Surveying the business in 1886, John Blandy, novelist and baker, also considered the undersellers a principal cause of the problem. However, he identified two other culprits: the greedy who wanted too much, and the young who desired to increase their new business at all costs.⁴⁷ In Leicester the bakers also complained of external competition from the local co-operative society, who, it was argued, refused to raise bread prices despite increases in the price of flour.⁴⁸ The Secretary of the Leicester Master Bakers' Association noted that because the bakery was only one part of a big concern, "the Stores could afford to charge a

price which, to a man relying on baking alone, [meant] but little beyond a continual struggle for existence."⁴⁹

It would appear that some members of the Leicester Master Bakers' Association felt that many of the problems caused by cutthroat competition were in fact a consequence of the inability of the Association's local Executive to act in a crisis; they were particularly upset that the Association was failing to deal with the price question, and one observer commented that "while the Association continues its present policy there can be no hope of unity."⁵⁰ It was this baker's opinion that the Leicester Association wanted waking up: "...the Association is never heard of outside its own immediate circle. It would be well, then, for some small amount of life to be breathed into it."⁵¹ Complaints regarding the Association's activities continued on into 1906 until, during the annual meeting of that year, there was something of a palace coup, and a new Executive was elected. The new leaders immediately reorganized the structure and membership of the Association's Committees and implemented a policy to create a uniform price for standard-sized loaves in the town.⁵²

In May of 1907 the rejuvenated Association met to discuss the possibility of raising the price of bread, and it was agreed that an emissary, Mr. Evans, would approach the Leicester Co-operative Society to discover if their managers were amenable to such a proposal. If the Society's support could be gained, then a circular announcing a price increase would be sent out to the town's bakers.⁵³ At a special meeting 6 days later, the Association was informed by Mr. Evans that the Co-operative Society would not agree to a raise in their prices. One

furious member argued: "We might wait for the stores till Doomsday, people say that they will laugh at us if we dare to go without them that however was not his opinion. [sic] His opinion was that if we don't go we are our own worst enemies, and are working to absolutely wreck the society."⁵⁴ The members then voted to raise their prices, in spite of the Co-operative Society's refusal, and they were able to report, one month later, that they could congratulate themselves "on the successful issue of their decision to advance the price of bread."⁵⁵

The new President of the Association, James Littlechild, was soon in a position to state that, although competition in the town was still very keen, the price question was "not such a burning issue,"⁵⁶ as it had been in the previous years. In 1909 the Association was able to claim that the age-old difficulty of price cutting had finally been solved. The Association had raised the price of a 4 lb. loaf and the members had loyally observed this resolution. Unfortunately, a baker outside of the Association then refused to follow suit, an action which could lead to other bakers reducing their prices to a "pitch barely remunerative."⁵⁷ However, the President and Vice-President visited the offender and persuaded him to bring his prices into line, thereby saving the town's bakers from a price war and proving the value of the Association.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the Chairman of the Association was still complaining in 1910 that there was no "fear of an undue profit being made in Leicester as the Co-operative Society would see to this."⁵⁹

By 1911 a spokesman for the ironmongery trade was congratulating its members for their success in minimizing competition between rival ironmongers; "price-cutting and unfair trading tactics have practically

ceased,"⁶⁰ he argued, as a consequence of the work of local associations. The last word on this matter must surely go, however, to J.G. Moody, President of the Leicester branch of the United Kingdom Tobacconists' Alliance. At the 1904 annual meeting he observed with some relish that during the past year there had been only two cases of cutting in Leicester, and those had been terminated satisfactorily. He concluded:

Some people were dubious as to what their Association had done, but he thought they had done a great deal. If a man went into one of their shops to-day for an ounce of tobacco he did not say, "You have charged me a halfpenny too much. I can get it at so-and-so's for a halfpenny less." Now THEY HAD ALL ONE PRICE and that made it very much pleasanter for them, and caused no dissatisfaction among their customers.⁶¹

Price fixing on proprietary articles

In the 1880s shopkeepers began to call for resale price maintenance in an attempt not only to increase profit margins but also to rob the custom of those shopkeepers who were guilty of cutting proprietary articles. Shopkeepers attempted to reduce the level of price competition on goods and produce obtained from wholesalers, but they also attempted to convince manufacturers to regulate the prices of manufactured or proprietary articles. It has already been seen that traders were concerned about the implications of proprietary goods on the state of shopkeeping. Shopkeepers believed that proprietary goods reduced the craft skills necessary for successful independent retailing and reduced the profit margins obtainable on their stock-in-trade.

The relationship between price fixing and proprietary articles was well understood in the trade.

The danger of weakening an Association by the adoption of price-fixing grows with the development of the sale of proprietary articles, the disposition of which makes grocers more and more mere machines for the handing over the counter of packet goods, and renders it more easy for young men without any knowledge of the grocery trade to enter into competition with the veterans of the trade who have passed through the business in the old-fashioned way and know it from A - Z.⁶²

A fixed price set by the manufacturer would, shopkeepers argued, solve many of their problems. It could even, if properly managed, solve another ill: the co-operative's divi. Why couldn't manufacturers add the dividend paid by co-operatives to the selling price, argued some traders, thereby negating the benefit?

The movement gained impetus in 1895 with the formation in the chemists' trade of the Proprietary Articles Trade Association (PATA) by William Glyn-Jones.⁶³ The grocery trade journals saw the PATA as the solution to the age-old problem of cutting. The Grocers' Journal noted:

...the expression of opinion being again and again offered that no satisfactory solution of the difficulty can be found save in the fixing of a minimum price by the manufacturers, and, after a full and impartial examination of the question, we are bound to admit that we can see no way of stopping the fatuous policy of cutting in certain articles which at present prevails except by adopting some such plan.⁶⁴

A grocers' committee of the PATA was formed at a meeting of London grocers held at the Holborn Town Hall in February 1900. The mood of the shopkeepers was exemplified by one grocer, in business for 18 years, who could not help but compare the past with the present: "Then they sold most loose goods, out of which they got a proper profit; but now, to take the cocoa trade as an example, nine-tenths of that trade was packet, on which they could only get the rate of profit which the

manufacturers chose."⁶⁵ However, it is apparent that certain sectors of the grocery trade were ambivalent towards the resale price maintenance movement, either because they considered it futile, as the co-operatives and multiples and other cutters would never allow it, or because they disagreed with the principle. One grocer wrote to The Grocers' Journal, "I am a firm believer in the 'help-yourself doctrine', and sometimes I think there is a grave danger in the habit which seems to be growing of looking to Associations to do for them that which, if they are worthy of the name of businessmen, they ought to be able to do for themselves."⁶⁶ The majority, including The Grocers' Journal disagreed; they argued that the "manufacturers are only waiting for a lead, and will follow as soon as they see the way clear."⁶⁷

The findings of the Proprietary Articles Committee of the National Federation of Grocers' Association, which had been formed in 1900, were divulged the following week. The Committee was not sanguine about the prospects of price fixing. The Proprietary Articles Committee had been formed to ask the most prominent manufacturers of cocoas, starch, blue, mustard, soaps, meat extracts, condensed milk, baking powder, corn flour and sauces, and any other firms, to co-operate with the Grocers' Federation to devise a means whereby retailers could be assured a minimum profit of 15 per cent, calculated on sales; co-operative societies would be required to add the amount of any dividend paid to the fixed price of an article. Manufacturers contacted by the Committee were often sympathetic to the shopkeepers' ideas. However, the majority, it was reported, "state most emphatically that they are unable to refuse to supply firms who cut the retail prices of their goods, and

that they cannot undertake to stop supplies to dividend or bonus paying concerns."⁶⁸

By 1905, The Grocers' Journal was advocating more direct action on the part of grocers if they were to achieve a living profit on proprietary articles. "There is one sure and certain method of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion, and that is to refuse to stock the goods of those proprietors who will not fall in with the views of the majority of the trade."⁶⁹ This view echoed that of a small grocer who suggested in 1902 that

...many retailers might do a great deal to help themselves if they would take the opportunity to press the sale of such lines as will yield them a reasonable profit. We all know there are such goods, and they should be brought to the front, their value impressed on customers, and care taken that they are well-stocked, whilst non-profit paying proprietaries are relegated to the stock-room.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, however, it was increasingly apparent that, by the early years of the twentieth century, proprietary articles had become a permanent feature of shopkeepers' stock-in-trade and, moreover, customers expected to be able to find them when they entered a shop. Furthermore, while the Executive of the National Federation of Grocers' Associations laboured, with only limited success, to negotiate minimum price settlements with reluctant manufacturers, it was often up to local associations to act as watchdogs to ensure that retailers adhered to those minimum prices which were established. It would appear that in Leicester the Grocers' Association was frustrated on a number of occasions when it attempted to maintain the stipulated schedule. In 1908, W.H. Lake informed the Association that, despite the decision that shopkeepers should not sell Cadbury's Cocoa for less than 5½d per tin,

the Leicester Co-operative Society had reduced the price to 5d.⁷¹ However, when the Association complained to the manufacturer about this injustice, Cadbury's replied that they would not be taking any action in the matter.⁷² It was this apparent lack of concern which led the grocers of Leicester to develop their own campaign. Their first act was to include proprietary articles within their own framework for price fixing. Consequently, the Emergency Committee began to set local prices for Nestle's milk as well as staple products such as sugar and lard.⁷³

The principal method employed by the Leicester Grocers' Association to counter price cutting in proprietary articles was to arrange for the provision of their own brand of articles to rival those of the manufacturers. Grocers were not alone in this activity; the Leicester Off-Licence Holders' Association was congratulating itself by 1900 on the successful introduction of a scheme to supply all of its members with their own brand of mineral water.⁷⁴ However, it was the grocery trade, one of the best organized trades and also one of the trades most affected by proprietary articles, which made the greatest strides in supporting its own brands of goods. The Leicester Grocers' Association also successfully implemented a combination buying department, to further counter the activities of the cutter.

The Leicester Grocers' Association created a buying combine in October 1906, and the first purchases were made the following month.⁷⁵ This plan, which allowed for collective bulk purchases on selected goods on the best possible terms, was considered a marked success after only three months.⁷⁶ By 1909 the Secretary reported that the 'buying combine' was the key to the current success of the Association: it

broke down the jealousies which had plagued the trade in years past, and it succeeded in bringing like-minded businessmen together for the common good.⁷⁷ In September 1909, the scope of the combine was extended when it was decided to initiate a 'margarine scheme' in order to regain the trade in an article which had become monopolized by multiples and stores.⁷⁸ Consequently, the Association began to purchase high quality margarine in bulk, margarine which was made available only to grocers belonging to the Association. By November it was reported that members were already receiving a direct benefit from the new plan.⁷⁹ In 1910, following the success of the margarine scheme, the Association introduced its own brand of cocoa, which was soon considered a great success⁸⁰ and, in May 1911, a plan to set up an 'oats scheme' was implemented.⁸¹ Consequently, by January of 1912 the Combine Buying Committee was able to report "a highly satisfactory state of things, the purchases of the members being much heavier than in previous years."⁸²

The success of the combination buying schemes also forced the members of the Leicester Grocers' Association to assess the structure of their trade. It soon became apparent that the number of shopkeepers applying for membership in the Association was increasing as the benefits of combination buying became known. By the summer of 1912 it was felt necessary to hold a discussion on the qualifications for admission into the Association. The Secretary felt that it "was generally understood that unless a man was a bona-fide grocer his name for membership was not entertained."⁸³ Another member, Mr. George, argued that a limit of some sort should be set to stop persons from

getting an opportunity to buy at prices they could not otherwise secure. It was his feeling, and indeed that of those present at the meeting, that only grocers who got their living by the trade should be elected.⁸⁴ However, the Committee clearly felt that a more stringent safeguard was required in order to protect the interests of the bona fide grocer, and it was decided that any person who wished to take part in the combination buying schemes would be required to provide a minimum deposit of £5.⁸⁵ It was felt that such a sum would preclude the small trader from even thinking of membership and would therefore solve the problem of inadvertently aiding traders who would benefit from combination buying and then cut the price of other products.

Local trade associations knew that they had little chance of controlling the prices offered by small shopkeepers in poor neighbourhoods. Unless agreements could be made between their national executives and the manufacturers of proprietary articles, no inducement would stop the small trader, on the verge of failure, from cutting prices in a last effort to remain in business. It was this realization which led organized shopkeepers to adopt a different tactic in their struggle to limit the competition offered by the small shopkeeper. Established shopkeepers gained control of a voluntary movement to gain a weekly half-holiday for shop assistants and transformed it into a movement which sought compulsory early closing. Small shopkeepers could offer little threat if they were not open for business.

Notes, Chapter Five

- ¹The Drapers' Record, 30 May 1896.
- ²The Baker and Confectioner, 19 July 1895.
- ³The Grocers' Journal, 19 July 1878.
- ⁴The Grocer, 3 December 1904.
- ⁵The Co-operative News, 8 April 1905.
- ⁶Clementina Black, Sweated Industry and the Minimum Wage (London, 1907), p. 64.
- ⁷The Grocers' Journal, 30 May 1908.
- ⁸Ibid., 24 January 1903.
- ⁹Ibid., 25 April 1903.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 30 May 1908.
- ¹¹Ibid., 31 October 1908.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, pp. 83-88; Crossick, "Shopkeepers and the state in Britain", pp. 248-9.
- ¹⁴The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, 16 August 1902.
- ¹⁵The Trader and Consumer, 23 August 1902.
- ¹⁶The Co-operative News, 26 July 1902.
- ¹⁷The Grocers' Journal, 13 September 1902.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 27 September 1902.
- ¹⁹The Co-operative News, 13 September 1902.
- ²⁰The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, 16 August 1902.
- ²¹Ibid., 9 September 1905.
- ²²The Co-operative News, 23 September 1905.
- ²³Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for the year ending 31 December 1905, P.P. 1906, 62, p. 319.

²⁴The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, 16 August 1902.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶The Grocers' Journal, 3 January 1903.

²⁷The Tradesman and Shopkeeper, 16 August 1902.

²⁸The Grocers' Journal, 25 April 1903.

²⁹Ibid., 11 February 1905.

³⁰The Grocer, 25 July 1908.

³¹Ibid., 4 July 1903.

³²Ibid., 6 February 1904.

³³Ibid., 13 July 1905.

³⁴The Emergency Committee was composed of members of the Executive. These men had the respect of the general body of the Association; this respect was the Committee's only real tool in maintaining prices.

³⁵The Grocer, 27 February 1904.

³⁶Ibid., 26 November 1910.

³⁷Ibid., 21 October 1905; 8 September 1906; 4 July 1908; 8 June 1912.

³⁸The Grocers' Journal, 6 January 1900.

³⁹Ibid., 4 March 1905.

⁴⁰The Grocer, 21 January 1905.

⁴¹Ibid., 9 September 1905.

⁴²Ibid., 13 October 1906.

⁴³Ibid., 4 May 1907.

⁴⁴See for example The Grocer, 27 June 1908.

⁴⁵The Grocers' Journal, 20 June 1903.

⁴⁶John Burnett, "The Baking Industry in the Nineteenth Century", Business History V (1962-3), pp. 100ff.

⁴⁷John Blandy, The Bakers' Guide and Cooks' Assistant (London, 1886), p. 78.

- ⁴⁸National Association Review, 6 January 1905.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., 9 June 1905.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., 9 February 1905.
- ⁵¹Ibid.
- ⁵²Ibid., 26 October 1907; 21 February 1908.
- ⁵³Leicester Master Bakers' Association, Minute Book, 24 May 1907.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., 30 May 1907.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., 26 June 1907.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., 9 October 1908.
- ⁵⁷Ibid., 14 May 1909.
- ⁵⁸Ibid.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., 16 November 1910.
- ⁶⁰Francis, Ironmongery, p. 183.
- ⁶¹The Tobacco Trade Review, 1 March 1904.
- ⁶²The Grocers' Journal, 20 June 1903.
- ⁶³B.S. Yamey, "The origins of resale price maintenance: a study of three branches of the retail trade", Economic Journal LXII (1951), p. 530.
- ⁶⁴The Grocers' Journal, 27 January 1900.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., 10 February 1900.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., 5 April 1902.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., 18 January 1902.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., 15 February 1902. The greatest success of the PATA occurred in the chemical industry. By 1906, 240 manufacturers, mostly of chemical goods, had agreed not to supply co-operative societies giving dividends on minimum priced articles. The Grocers' Journal, 21 April 1906.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., 29 July 1905.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 5 April 1902.
- ⁷¹The Grocer, 5 September 1908.

- ⁷² Ibid., 31 October 1908.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 11 November 1911.
- ⁷⁴ The Off-Licence Holder, 6 July 1900.
- ⁷⁵ The Grocer, 27 October 1906; 3 November 1906; 17 November 1906.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 26 January 1907.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 20 February 1909.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 11 September 1909.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 13 November 1909.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 25 March 1911.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 6 May 1911.
- ⁸² Ibid., 6 January 1912.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 3 August 1912.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 26 October 1912.

CHAPTER SIX

CONFRONTATION: EARLY CLOSING

The battle to determine the hours when shopkeepers could sell their stock is the final field of confrontation which will be considered. It was undoubtedly the most controversial, the most complicated and the most time-consuming issue to cloud the retailing horizon. Yet the implications of the struggle for early closing are more important to the observer than the outcome of the struggle itself, which, prior to 1914, was inconclusive. An investigation of this issue suggests the extent to which the aims of shopkeepers' trade associations had become disjointed and the divisions within their ranks had multiplied by the proposals and counter-proposals which emerged. The early closing debate reinforced the fragmentation of the shopkeeping community both by stimulating the conflict between the associations representing principal and domestic traders and by strengthening the ties between local associations and their national executives.

Voluntarism and the early closing movement

The topic of early closing was, in fact, the first to unite certain of the shopkeepers of Leicester in a common cause. Furthermore, it should be stressed that this first foray into collective action in the 1850s and 1860s was not organized along trade divisions, but incorporated shopkeepers from all trades: drapers, haberdashers, grocers, hatters, booksellers, clothiers, hosiers, outfitters and shoe dealers. All of these shopkeepers were involved in a program which

attempted to institute a voluntary Thursday half-holiday for their assistants.¹ Unfortunately, the earliest of the attempts to solve systematically the half-holiday problem in Leicester experienced the problems which beset such attempts throughout Britain; foremost amongst these was that shopkeepers were usually willing to close as long as all of their competitors were also closed, yet unanimity was virtually impossible to maintain. As it was with the efforts to solve the price cutting question, so it was with early closing: it only took one trader to destroy months of work by concerned shopkeepers.

The two strands of the early closing movement in Leicester gained their associational trappings in the 1860s: the Leicester Early Closing Association aimed to close shops at an earlier hour in the evening, and the Thursday Half-Holiday Association worked to provide shopkeepers and their assistants with a half-day holiday once a week. The two Associations shared virtually the same membership, and during their early years it is difficult to distinguish between the two. One attempt to promote the half-holiday movement occurred in June 1868, when a draper's assistant wrote in to a local paper to thank the employers of the town for attempting to implement the Thursday half-holiday. "I think this voluntary movement on the part of the employers far preferable to the system of trades unions, which has now become so general in every other class of employed labour."² A further letter, the following week, from another draper's assistant, also applauded the trade's efforts. However, this writer also observed that the stand of 5 or 6 employers who were refusing to comply with the wishes of their fellow shopkeepers was standing in the way of the movement's success.³

Alfred Adderly, owner of one of the largest drapery shops in Leicester, and an early leader of the half-holiday movement, wrote to the local press in an attempt to convince the few recalcitrant traders to support the movement's cause. Adderly also included a letter from the London concern of Marshall and Snelgrove which stated, unequivocally, that their Saturday half-holiday did "not interfere or cause business to decrease."⁴

By July 1868, the half-holiday movement had built up enough momentum to warrant a public meeting at the Temperance Hall which was attended by many of the most influential traders of the town, and a motion in support of the half-holiday was passed. The consequence of this meeting was a statement in the local newspaper, by 55 of the leading traders in Leicester, announcing: "We, the undersigned, will continue to close at 2 p.m. on Thursday."⁵ It soon became a feature of advertisements for traders to state that they would be closed for business on Thursday afternoons. Henry Gee, a draper, announced that "he hopes that those of his customers who may inadvertently forget to make their purchases on Thursday before two o'clock, will postpone doing so until the following day."⁶

Meanwhile, there were also a number of calls for the implementation of early closing on a widespread basis. John Barrs, one of the principal grocers in the town, suggested that all shops should volunteer to close at 7 p.m. every day except Saturday, and he pointed out that he and a number of other grocers, including John Sarson, Samuel Patey, Samuel Baines, and Simpkin and Son, had done this for the past years to the great satisfaction of the public, the employed and the employer.⁷

However, the simultaneous call for a half-holiday and early closing served only to divide the shopkeeping community. John Orton, a draper, positively refused either to close early or to give his assistants Thursday afternoon off because he believed this would only serve to engender immorality amongst his assistants.⁸ This belief was firmly repudiated by George Brown, a fellow draper, who informed the public that it was the opinion of the half-holiday and early closing movements' supporters that the opposite was in fact the case: an afternoon or a few evenings of time to themselves would enable assistants to gain access to institutions which would only have beneficial effects.⁹ The prize-winning essay of a contest sponsored by the Leicester Early Closing Association was titled, 'The Necessity of Early Closing to Self-Culture'; the writer concluded that shop assistants were considered to be respectable members of the the community and yet, once they were behind the counter, a few employers deluded themselves into believing that assistants "must now be distrusted and kept in the shop to keep them moral."¹⁰

However, no matter how heartfelt the feelings of the majority of shopkeepers for their assistants, it soon became apparent that a few disagreed and were not prepared to fall into line with the other shopkeepers. Given this division within their ranks, many felt, for business reasons, that they also could not close. The agreement to close on Thursday afternoons, which was advertised on 6 November 1868, lasted only 17 days. The rejection of the plan was initiated by the retail hosiers who, while agreeing in principle to the practise, believed that until a more general feeling in favour of the holiday

permeated the trade they would be unable to continue with their part of the agreement.¹¹ This precipitated the collapse of the most widespread effort to improve the working conditions of shop assistants thus far attempted in the town, and, indeed, assistants had to wait over 2 decades for the movement to generate enough strength for a further effort.

Although the attempt to create a working agreement between trades failed in 1868, the spirit of voluntarism lingered on amongst a number of shopkeepers who continued to close their shops on Thursday afternoons and, to a lesser extent, at 7 p.m. in the evenings, despite the fact that a number of their competitors remained open. The President of the Leicester Early Closing Association observed in 1874 that their efforts had not been very successful and that only pawnbrokers were closing as a complete trade on Thursday afternoons.¹² Except for a few committed supporters, such as Adderly and Gee, the half-holiday movement appears to have lost most of its support. In 1878 a shopkeeper suggested in the Leicester Journal that 2 or 3 shopkeepers should canvass the town; there would be, in his opinion, "a large majority in favour of closing."¹³ Nothing appears to have developed out of this suggestion, however, and it was left to a few to maintain the holiday for their assistants and to thank the public "for putting up with the few consequent inconveniences."¹⁴

The Thursday Half-Holiday Association (THHA), like the Leicester Early Closing Association, struggled on; it remained an organization comprising shopkeepers from a cross-section of the trading community who were dedicated to voluntary action. At no time did it attempt to pursue

any action to limit the opening hours of any shop which did not employ assistants. This point was made manifestly clear in 1891, when the voluntary movement to secure the lessening of shop assistants' hours made its last determined attempt to gain widespread acceptance of its plans in Leicester. The voluntarists' ultimate failure served to break any influence the THHA held in the town, sever the relationship which had grown between the employers and their assistants, and leave the way open for the emerging trade associations to usurp the THHA's concern over the early closing question.

In the THHA's 1890 annual report, the Secretary admitted that it had as yet accomplished little.¹⁵ However, within a year the early closing question had been brought to the forefront of public concern in the town, and a lively debate which lasted for nearly 2 months occupied the columns of the local newspapers. The difference between the agitations of 1891 and those of previous years was the role of the shop assistants who, for the first time, became active in the THHA itself, rather than giving vocal support from the sidelines. Indeed, the agitation of 1891 was precipitated by the shop assistants, who succeeded in their attempt to change the THHA's principal aim of gaining Thursday afternoon off to that of securing the early closing of shops at 7 p.m. throughout the year. The debate was initiated by 'Hopeful' who, in mid-February, asked that 7 p.m. closing, which was prevalent in many drapery establishments during the winter months, be extended to include the summer months as well. At present, "we assistants are entirely shut out from the enjoyment of the extra hours of daylight which the summer brings."¹⁶

Shop assistants who supported 7 p.m. closing were well-represented at the annual meeting of the THHA, which was held only 4 days after 'Hopeful''s letter appeared. The Chairman of the meeting, Mr. Knapp, clearly surprised at the attendance, was nevertheless "pleased to see by the numbers present that the shop assistants were desirous of co-operating to secure time for recreation and culture."¹⁷

Unfortunately for the assistants, however, it appears that the THHA did not discuss the early closing question and merely reminded the public that a number of shops chose to close on Thursday afternoons.¹⁸ 'Nil Desperandum', who had attended the THHA meeting and was clearly disappointed in its members' performance, was quick to call for an extraordinary meeting of the Leicester Early Closing Association to discuss the 7 p.m. closing question and to organize deputations to wait upon the employers.¹⁹ The following day a letter from 'Educator' appeared which applauded 'Nil Desperandum''s concerns, but pointed out: "...where is the Early Closing Association in Leicester? It would be news to me that there was such an Association."²⁰

During the following days numerous letters appeared from assistants desirous of obtaining the 7 p.m. closing, and their persistence was rewarded when the Secretary of the THHA announced that his organization would sponsor a public meeting to discuss the question of early closing. The meeting was held on 10 March 1891 in the Old Town Hall, where the packed audience was addressed by Mr. Edwin Lester. He pointed out to the assistants that the primary purpose of the THHA was to obtain a half-holiday, and this they had not yet accomplished; he agreed, however, that the time had arrived when 7 p.m. closing, particularly in

the summer months, should be implemented, but also warned them that they should not expect all employers to share his opinion, as most would close only if others did the same.²¹

The THHA carried out its proposal to meet with the shopkeepers and, under its new title, the THHA and Early Closing Association canvassed the town. Some traders were found to be amenable to the plan, but "others objected on the grounds that a brisk and popular business was done between six and eight o'clock in the evening."²² At the annual meeting of the Association the following year it was reported that the opposition to 7 p.m. closing had been so strong "that it was found useless to proceed with the canvass."²³ The Chairman concluded that before assistants could expect 7 p.m. closing throughout the retail community they would also have to educate the working class to shop earlier.²⁴

The failure to resolve the early closing question in Leicester in 1891 signalled the end of the alliance between shopkeepers and their assistants and the virtual disappearance of the THHA and Early Closing Association. A number of leading traders continued to close early and give their employees the half-holiday, but there was no consensus between either specific trades or shopkeepers. Concern for the problem of opening hours passed from associations comprising traders from all sectors of the retail community to local trade associations and, soon after, to national trade associations, which were little influenced by the parochial concerns of their local affiliates. One consequence of this process was that the retail community was further fragmented into trades served by their local associations. More importantly, the

perversion of the early closing movement by these trade associations, often directed by their national executives, later increased the degree of vertical fragmentation within the shopkeeping hierarchy.

Trade associations: the campaign for compulsory closing

Initially local trade associations remained loyal to the tradition of voluntarism which persisted in the early closing movement. The Leicester Grocers' Association, formed in 1903, decided to join the local Early Closing Association the following year.²⁵ However, it soon became apparent that such efforts were only token gestures and that the Leicester Grocers' Association, like its National Executive, was committed to proposals which called for legislation to stipulate the opening hours of shops. It was also readily apparent that the calls for legislative intervention were not precipitated entirely by a concern for the welfare of shop assistants, although this aspect was not entirely absent from the shopkeepers' minds. Rather, the purpose of legislation was to limit the opening hours of the small shopkeepers, who remained open until the late hours of the evening in order to scratch a living.

The Leicester Grocers' Association made no attempt to hide the fact that its concern for early closing was not only a consequence of its concern for the welfare of assistants, but was also motivated by its fear of losing trade to the small trader. In February 1906 the manager of Joseph Burton and Sons, a multiple shop in the town, suggested to the Association that some attempt should be made to shorten the working day; this would be a move, he concluded, which would benefit both the assistants and the employers. He suggested that shops close at 7 p.m. instead of 8 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays. Mr. F. Lake, who replied on

behalf of the Committee, said that such a move would be impossible for him and for others whose shops were on the outskirts of town. He argued that he did a good trade after 7 p.m. and that if he closed he would be playing into the hands of the small off-licence holder.²⁶ Two weeks later the Association decided that if the grocers in the centre of town wanted to close earlier they could; however, the suburban grocer could not close while others remained open. The Committee concluded that only compulsory legislation would end this state of affairs.²⁷ Thus, the early closing campaign underwent a shift in Leicester which paralleled action throughout the country: the heirs to a movement which had at its core a concern for the assistant proceeded to manipulate the movement so that, while its purpose remained the same, the motives of its shopkeeping supporters changed.

Although the voluntary early closing movement in Leicester lingered on into the 1890s and 1900s, in London it was pronounced dead in 1886 following a meeting at Mansion House. James Stacey, Secretary of the Early Closing Association, observed that this meeting was "a landmark...in the history of early closing in respect to the demand for legislation."²⁸ It was at this time that the Early Closing Association recognized the extent of the support for legislative controls amongst principal traders and determined to abandon its practise of voluntarism.²⁹

The call for legislation to determine early closing also sparked demands for the creation of national federations of trade associations. The National Federation of Grocers' Association was formed in March 1891 at the instigation of W.H. Lever, the soap manufacturer and former

grocer. Lever argued at the first meeting of the new Federation that it would not be their purpose to attempt to stop competition or cutting as these were matters to be dealt with at the local level; rather, the Federation would bring to Parliament's attention any problems, such as early closing, which needed discussion.³⁰ The first annual meeting of the Grocers' Federation was held in Birmingham in November 1891, at which time 28 of the 38 delegates voted in support of legislative action. The Federation was supported in this matter by The Grocers' Journal, which was one of the first journals to come out in support of legislation.³¹ The grocers soon had the support of The Grocer, whose editor lamented the need for compulsory legislation, but observed that voluntarism clearly had proved a failure.³²

Over the following 2 decades, small shopkeepers spent much of their time attempting to impress upon legislators that they were not, as supporters of the various Shops Bills suggested, in favour of legislation. In 1895, John Parker appeared before the Select Committee on the Shops (Early Closing) Bill as a representative of the Off-Licence Holders' Association, which in turn represented the interests of many small shopkeepers. He asked that shops which employed no assistants be exempted from the provisions of the Bill. "We think that if there is legislation needed for assistants, that can be accomplished without interfering with those shops where there are no assistants employed."³³ Sir Blundell Maple, a ferocious opponent of early closing legislation asked Parker if he had heard a previous witness argue that small shopkeepers would welcome the Bill. "Yes", replied Parker, "but I do not believe it."³⁴ Further witnesses, such as Robert Dunwoody,

President of the Grocers' Federation, and Thomas Stubbs, Secretary of the Bolton Drapers' Association, were brought forward to argue that small shopkeepers did favour legislation. The latter intimated that "the smaller shopkeepers of our association speak very strongly in favour of the Bill."³⁵ This prompted the return of John Parker, who reiterated his contention that legislation could be designed which improved the working conditions of assistants without closing small traders' shops.³⁶

This debate continued to occupy the proceedings of the early closing question. In 1901 the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords concluded: "The evidence has convinced us that earlier closing would be an immense boon to the shopkeeping community, to shopkeepers and shop-assistants alike."³⁷ As in 1895, a number of influential witnesses argued that small shopkeepers were in favour of early closing legislation. James Stacey, Secretary of the Early Closing Association, agreed that "the smaller shopkeepers themselves are very anxious for some limitation of hours."³⁸ John Beaumont, a Birmingham draper, observed: "I have come in contact with the small shopkeepers particularly; and in my opinion it is the small shopkeeper who, perhaps more than the large shopkeeper, is desirous that he shall be protected from the slovenly habits of the consumers...; and it is precisely the small shopkeeper who seeks the relief by legislative influence."³⁹ John Williams, President of the Manchester, Salford and District Grocers' Association, agreed that the small shopkeeper who had no assistants was desirous for some legislation. He noted that it "was remarkable to find that those most anxious for some arrangement of the kind were the small

shopkeepers who had no assistants, but they were mostly too suspicious of each other to come to a firm agreement amongst themselves."⁴⁰

When those few small shopkeepers who came before the Select Committee were examined, however, it soon became clear that the consensus in favour of legislation was not as overwhelming as supporters of the Bill had intimated. Frederick Harris waited upon the Committee as a representative of the Islington Traders' Defence Association; this organization had been in existence for only one month, and its express purpose was to oppose legislation concerning early closing. Harris, after offering his opinion to this effect, then continued: "I am also of the opinion, and in this I am supported by a very large number of traders, that the agitation is being carried on for law largely in the interests of those who have large shops, and who apparently desire to close up the shops of poor widow women, and other places where no assistants, or very few assistants are employed, and who are struggling to get a living which might be said to be the crumbs left from the great stores' business."⁴¹ Alfred Turley, of the West Bromwich Early Closing Association openly intimated that Frederick Harris' fears were legitimate. Turley complained that the small shopkeepers seemed to open whenever it suited them: "...that is the trouble we have to contend with. They are certainly small, but they are in the same line of business as the larger shops and the middle people of the trade, and then when they are open two hours later than the ordinary shops they certainly do pick up stray money which they really ought not to."⁴²

Lord Avebury, formerly Sir John Lubbock, who was responsible for the Shops (Early Closing) Bill, made a tremendous effort to dispel the

fears of small shopkeepers, and to disarm critics of his Bill. He persistently pointed out to small traders that they need not fear the Bill, as the key to its usage would be in their hands: before any trade adopted an early closing plan in its town, two-thirds of that trade had to vote in favour of the action. In 1895 he questioned John Parker, who, as previously indicated, was an opponent of legislative action.

Q3614 Do I understand you to say that, in your opinion, there are a great many more large shops than small ones? - Than small ones? Oh no, I did not say so; I think the smaller shops predominate...

Q3617 ...do you not see that if the small shopkeepers are, as you very justly say, a large majority, and they think they are going to be injured, they will not put the Bill into operation; the Bill cannot come into operation unless a majority of two-thirds wish it? - I quite see that.⁴³

In 1901 he had a similar exchange with Alfred Turley, who had suggested that it was fair for the larger shopkeepers to be in a position to coerce the smaller shopkeepers to close early.

Q837 But the smaller shops are the large majority, are they not as compared with the very large ones? There are a great number of small shops? - Yes, but not all keeping open late.

Q838 But my point was that unless the small shops agreed you could not get the two-thirds majority? - We should have to abide by that.

Q839 But there could not be an injustice to the small shops, because if the small shops did not wish to close you could not get the majority without them? - That is so.

Q840 So that there could be no injustice to the small shops? - Not at all.⁴⁴

The Early Closing of Shops Act was ultimately passed in 1904; it soon became apparent that it would have little effect on shop opening hours. In January 1907 the Home Office informed the editor of The Grocers' Assistants' Year Book that as yet only 91 closing orders were in force throughout the country.⁴⁵ In Leicester the only traders who

successfully gained a closing order were the hairdressers, who set their closing hours at 9 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, 2 p.m. on Thursday, and 11 p.m. on Saturday.⁴⁶ Of the 192 hairdressers in the town, 157 supported the petition for a closing order. Such unanimity was not present in other trades, and the witnesses who had argued that small shopkeepers were not in favour of legislative controls were vindicated. Attempts by trade associations to have closing orders introduced were defeated because they could not gain a two-thirds majority when voting was held. The Grocers' Journal had predicted that the task of getting this majority would be the stumbling-block which would stand in the way of the reformers.⁴⁷

The failure of the 1904 Shops Act had in fact been prophesied in many quarters prior to its implementation. The Manchester, Salford and District Grocers' Association felt that the Bill was "hardly strong enough. It hardly goes far enough."⁴⁸ The Secretary of the West Yorkshire Federated Chamber of Trade, representing 25 trade associations, felt that his members would like the Bill to go further: "they are afraid that it is a very large majority to get, is two-thirds."⁴⁹ The Liverpool Grocers' Association favoured the Bill, but "would prefer a stronger measure."⁵⁰ Charles Abraham, of the Hull and District Chamber of Trade, informed the 1901 Select Committee of the House of Lords that his Association and the National Chamber of Trade, to which it was associated, favoured the Shops (Early Closing) Bill of Lord Avebury, but would prefer it to be more drastic.⁵¹

The failure of the 1904 Shops Act enabled this groundswell of support for more extensive legislation concerning shop hours to gain

momentum. The editor of the Grocers' Journal observed:

Instead of producing harmony in the trade it has created dissension, and the hucksters and highers, the chandlers, shopkeepers, and the little places where a 'multum in parva' business is done have had placed in their hands a power for annoying their neighbours greater than they ever had before.⁵²

Complete and general compulsion, it was later argued, was the only solution to the early closing question.⁵³ All shops should be compelled to close at specified times. "If there is to be an exception made in the case of little shops which keep open at present at all hours of the day and night," argued one grocer, "and take the tradesman's trade from him because he closes at a reasonable hour an evil which bears hard upon voluntary closing will be perpetuated and made legal."⁵⁴

A novel solution to the Shops Bill muddle appeared in 1908 with the introduction of Sir Charles Dilke's Bill. Domestic shopkeepers were initially relieved that the proposed legislation tackled the problem head-on by stipulating that no shop assistant could work more than 60 hours in the week, exclusive of meal times. However, Dilke also wanted to appease principal shopkeepers who employed assistants, so he included provisions for the compulsory closing of shops.⁵⁵

In 1909, the Liberal Government adopted Sir Charles' Bill, although the compulsory closing provisions were soon excluded. Principal traders, who had previously given half-hearted support, were aghast at this action. As Winstanley, echoing the shop assistants, has observed, principal shopkeepers did not appear to be in a position to complain about legislation which was intended to remedy ills which they had been ostensibly fighting for years.⁵⁶ Yet complain they did for, they argued, the definition of shop assistant did not include family members

of the occupier of a shop. Consequently, a shopkeeper who employed assistants was forced to limit their employment to 60 hours, while the members of a shopkeeper's family could work as long as they wished. A deputation from the National Chamber of Trade appeared before the Home Secretary in July 1910 to suggest that "all members of the family should be treated as assistants. In that we have the heartiest support of all the smallest shops in the country."⁵⁷ A clearly incredulous Mr. Develingne of the Home Office replied: "It is very important, I think, that you should show whatever evidence you have that small shops are in favour of this,...It is quite easy to understand that the traders who employ shop assistants should be anxious to have those words eliminated."⁵⁸ The Grocers' Federation also appeared before the Home Office to complain about the provisions regarding the treatment of shops that were managed by families. "I am afraid there will be extraordinary extensions of the family circle if the Bill becomes law,"⁵⁹ argued the leader of the deputation. "Why should a member of one's own family be allowed to work longer than an assistant?"⁶⁰ asked Mr. Goodrich of the Metropolitan Grocers' Association.

It soon became apparent that there was some confusion about the interpretation of the Bill. The Trade Protection Society appeared before the Home Office in October 1910 to argue that, although it was distinctly in favour of the Bill, it felt that the entire shopkeeping community would turn against the provisions if they did not apply to all shops. Mr. Masterman, speaking for the Home Office, was puzzled by this statement:

Mr. Masterman: What do you mean?

Mr. Dixon: Every shop must close under the Bill.

There is an exception made. That is to say, that small shops carried on by the father or mother, or by the daughter or son, are exempt from the Bill...

Mr. Masterman: I do not think that is in the Bill, is it?

Mr. Kindred (of the Trade Protection Society):
It is the definition of a shop assistant...

Mr. Masterman: But there is no regulation in the Bill, if you mean Part I (One) of the Bill, which says that shops are to shut at any hour. Part I merely says that shop assistants are only to work 60 hours.⁶¹

Masterman concluded: "There is no advantage given to the small shop over the big shop."⁶²

If shopkeepers who employed assistants were upset that legislation limited the hours which they could work, then small shopkeepers resented any legislation which stipulated that they must recognize the weekly half-holiday and close on Sunday, supposing that they were not included in the Schedule of Exemptions.⁶³ Mr. Pearson, a wholesale grocer who appeared to represent the interests of the small shopkeeper, argued: "We feel rather strongly that if those small shops are made to close compulsorily the effect will be to squeeze them out of the trade."⁶⁴ The Shopkeeper, supportive of the small trader, suggested that "there is no evil in a man opening and attending to his own business, either during the week or on Sundays. The evil is compelling others to work for him for a long number of hours."⁶⁵

Irrespective of the effect on the condition of employment of shop assistants, which was minimal, the agitation for early closing legislation had a twofold effect on the members of the shopkeeping community: firstly, it provided the national federations of the various trade associations with an issue which enabled them to impress upon the

local associations their importance to their respective trades; and, secondly, it gave psychological substance to the structural divisions which existed within the shopkeeping hierarchy.

Local associations and national federations

It has been seen that, when the National Federation of Grocers' Associations was created in 1891, its promoters announced that they would work to convince Parliament of the need for legislative action to solve the problem of early closing. At the time, the editor of The Grocers' Journal, who had been calling for federation amongst local groups, was delighted. Only the week prior to the inaugural meeting of the Federation, he had written: "Essentially the one thing wanting for grocers of today, as indeed it has been for years past, federation--or combination--seems likely at last to 'catch-up' with the trade."⁶⁶

Yet, after only a decade, the Federation and the local Associations were openly hostile towards each other. In 1901, The Grocers' Journal called upon the Federation's Executive to justify "its action or non-action with respect to divers matters which are believed to be of vital concern to the well-being and progress of the trade it represents....We must confess to a fear lest Federation meetings should lapse into mutual admiration gatherings."⁶⁷ The joy which had accompanied the creation of a Federation had soured even further by 1903, when a groundswell of opposition to the inactivity of the National Executive threatened to destroy it. A letter from a grocer who considered himself to be "an every day sort of trader who finds it takes all he knows to make ends meet,"⁶⁸ pointed out that, at first sight, the Federation appeared to accomplish a great deal.

I read of rules and regulations, committees for this, that and the other, conferences and deputations, but with the exception of the Benevolent Fund for broken-down traders I cannot for the life of me see the good that the Federation is doing to make it easier and better for the average grocer.⁶⁹

The Federation could ignore criticisms from individual grocers; however, it was rocked by the decision of the Manchester, Salford and District Grocers' Association to secede from the Federation in May 1903. Manchester, one of the most prominent associations in the country, complained that the Federation had mismanaged the early closing question, and that it had thwarted the wishes of a number of leading associations on the Margarine Act and Food and Drug Act issues. Furthermore, it was argued, the Federation's inactivity regarding the question of proprietary articles was inexcusable.⁷⁰ In the grocery trade, as in other trades, members of the provincial associations complained that their National Executives were remote and insensitive to local needs, bureaucratic yet inefficient, and overbearing.

As the Manchester Association was preparing to secede, the newly formed Leicester Grocers' Association was preparing to affiliate with the Federation. Its members soon discovered that working with the Federation could prove to be a frustrating experience. The Leicester Association's first impression of the Federation was favourable; Mr. Foster, the President, paid a visit to the quarterly General Purposes Committee meeting in March 1904 in London and returned to report that he was "greatly impressed ... he had no idea that the work of the Federation was so extensive and complete."⁷¹ By November of the following year, however, the first signs of discord between the

Leicester Association and the Federation had appeared. Mr. Worthington, the Vice-President, was particularly upset that a resolution from their branch which had been forwarded to Mr. Giles at the Federation's London office had been lost. According to Mr. Worthington there was "a little too much junketing introduced into its operations. He thought it would be very much better...if they were to get their work done instead of devoting so much time to social functions."⁷² Throughout 1906 it would appear that complaints about the Federation's work continued; Mr. Foster, a staunch supporter of the Federation's work, felt it necessary to speak in favour of the Federation at the annual meeting, and later in the year at a committee meeting. He argued that while the Association could deal with local matters, only the Federation could tackle matters that pertained to the whole of the country.⁷³

Mr. Foster retired from business and from the Association in late 1906, and in the following year the question of seceding from the Federation was raised. The Association was particularly upset that the Federation had no intention of implementing an insurance scheme under the provisions of the Workmen's Compensation Act.⁷⁴ In 1909 further complaints were levelled at the Federation, this time regarding the demand for an increase in their annual contribution to the Federation. "What do we get for the money?" asked one member. "I cannot say," replied the Secretary. "I should like to know. We get a large number of circulars time after time, and the General Purposes Committee talk a great deal about resolutions at the general meeting, but after the general meeting we seldom hear anything further."⁷⁵

Discontent between local associations and their national

federations was not confined to the grocery trade. The Leicester Master Bakers' Association complained that the National Association was too remote; members of the National Association did not even belong to the local Bakers' Association. The Secretary of the latter organization observed ruefully in 1906 that he felt somewhat disheartened that so few attended the meetings, and he wished that the members of the National Association would do more work at the local level.⁷⁶ In 1909, W.T. Callard, one of the leading bakers of the town, was Vice-President of the National Association, yet he had absolutely no duties or involvement with the branch in his own town.

The relationship between the Leicester Association and the National Association deteriorated even further in 1908 when the local branch attempted to initiate an end to price competition and cutting. The Secretary wrote to Mr. Callard and Mr. Frears, another of the leading bakers and a member of the National Association, asking them to work with the Leicester branch to solve the problem. However, far from offering to exert considerable influence over the matter, they replied to the effect that, until the local bakers provided a united front, they could not find the time to work with them.⁷⁷ Similarly, the local associations of ironmongers would also appear to have had little faith in their Federation in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1909 it was reported that, despite increased effort on the part of the Executive, the Federation was steadily losing members, and the observer had little confidence in its future: "You cannot put living blood into a dying thing by any amount of whipping."⁷⁸

The introduction of the Government Shops Bill in 1909 provided the

national executives of the various trade federations with a perfect opportunity to indicate their true worth to their affiliated associations. In Leicester the Grocers' Association, which only 2 years before had voted on the question of secession from the Federation, immediately offered its wholehearted support to the ventures of the Federation in its attempts to 'Scotch the Bill'.⁷⁹ The grocers in Leicester began to show more interest in Federation business, and sent delegates to the quarterly meetings of the Federation. The Grocers' Journal, which in 1909 was criticizing the Federation's leaders for failing to arouse enthusiasm amongst grocers, observed early in 1911:

The Grocers' Federation has come out of a trying year with great success. Never has it stood higher with the trade, and never has the official world recognized it more than it has done in 1910...It has worked in many ways to promote the interests of the trade and its ranks are closing up once more in a manner which clearly indicates that trades know what they owe to it.⁸⁰

The bonds between local associations and the national executives were further tightened when it appeared that the Home Secretary was initially indifferent to their concerns. In April 1911, the Grocers' Federation's suggestion that the Bill be referred to a Select Committee was rebuffed.⁸¹ This was the last in a series of government actions which, according to the editor of The Grocers' Journal, created a "complete unity of opinion among the federated Association."⁸²

Throughout the rest of 1911, shopkeepers and their associations bombarded the Home Secretary with their complaints. When the government eventually dropped the vast majority of contentious clauses in the Shops Bill in 1911, the Secretary of the National Federation of Meat Traders, Mr. Payne, was quick to accept congratulations for the result.

Without fear of contradiction, I assert, the abandonment of the major position of the Bill, and the final drafting of its remaining clauses, is directly due to the determined and persistent opposition of the Federation.⁸³

The National Federation of Grocers' Associations was more generous, observing that the decision of the government not to proceed with the Bill was a consequence of the keen objection to the Bill amongst all classes of shopkeeping.⁸⁴ Drapers also congratulated all shopkeepers for their perserverance: "organised traders have at last succeeded in convincing the Government of the unwisdom of proceeding with their...Bill."⁸⁵ The Draper concluded that tradesmen's sabotage operations had succeeded: Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary, like others before him, "found the currents too strong."⁸⁶

Early closing: principal and domestic shopkeepers

During the years immediately prior to and following the 1912 Shops Act, the conflict between principal and domestic shopkeepers was institutionalized. Domestic shopkeepers, threatened by legislation in 1908 which would regulate their hours of business and dull their competitive edge, ultimately responded by creating their own trade association. The Leicester branch of the Shopkeepers' and Small Traders' Protection Association (SSTPA) first appeared in 1908; it soon became one of the most vocal and active branches in the country. Its primary purpose was to oppose the Sunday Closing (Shops) Bill and Sir Charles Dilke's Shops Bill which, it has been observed, originally included provisions for compulsory closing. The SSTPA's secondary aim was to campaign in Leicester against any attempts by trade associations

to get early closing orders passed under the 1904 Shops Act.

The Shopkeeper, the organ of the SSTPA, announced in its first edition that, in its opinion, it would be "impossible without inflicting very great hardship upon a small trader to enforce an uniform closing hour."⁸⁷ The editor argued that Sir Charles' Bill would spell ruin to thousands of small shopkeepers, an event which would please the 'big-traders' associations' which backed the Bill, and others like it.⁸⁸ William Leavis, editor of the Small Trader and Shopkeeper, heir to The Shopkeeper, observed in 1915: "There has been too much legislation of the 'closing' kind openly supported by the large shopkeepers, whose aim it is to crush their smaller brethren out of existence altogether."⁸⁹ A correspondent from Harrogate agreed; Harold Shaftoe suggested that the 1904 Shops Act was "a pretence of doing good to one class in order to strike a more direct blow at another."⁹⁰ The SSTPA argued that legislators would have to realize that what would suit one trade would not suit another, that what would suit one town would not suit another, and that conditions also differed within one trade in the same town. Unless these points were recognized and acted upon, the SSTPA would oppose all attempts by Parliament or municipal authorities to interfere with the interests of small traders.⁹¹

After the government dropped the compulsory closing provisions of the Shops Bill, domestic shopkeepers and the SSTPA, temporarily mollified, awaited the next move by their rivals, the principal shopkeepers. This came, following the implementation of the 1912 Shops Act, when the early closing question shifted from the lobbyists in

Whitehall back to the traders in the local arenas throughout the country. The Act stipulated that all shop assistants must be given a half-holiday once a week; more contentiously, it also stipulated that all shops must close by 1 p.m. on one weekday a week. The half-holiday would be determined either by the local authority or, if no closing order was made, by the shopkeeper. Local authorities could also fix different closing days for different trades. Furthermore, certain classes of shops were exempted from the half-holiday, including those which sold intoxicating liquors, newspapers, meat, fish, bread, milk, fruit, vegetables and other articles of a perishable nature, tobacco and medicine.⁹² Finally, and significantly, if the shopkeepers of a particular trade or district could satisfy the local authority that a majority desired to be exempted from the half-holiday, then the authority could make an order to that effect, although assistants would still have to be given the holiday.⁹³ The effect of this legislation was to pit the small traders against the large traders in their attempts to have the Leicester Corporation either impose a closing order or exempt a trade from the necessity of having a half-holiday. The Watch Committee, which was responsible for implementing the 1912 Shops Act, was inundated with depositions who presented petitions and counter-petitions, each arguing their side of the issue.

In April 1912, the Secretary of the Leicester Grocers' Association wrote to the Town Clerk to ask for a closing order for Thursday afternoons.⁹⁴ However, the Association soon discovered that it was going to face stiff opposition. It was rumoured that the off-licence holders, who were exempt from the Act insofar as their right to retail

liquor was concerned, were to petition the local authority for an exemption to sell other goods as well. The Chairman of the Grocers' Association felt bound to say, however, that he felt positive that the Watch Committee would not allow such a "gross injustice to the legitimate grocer and provision dealer."⁹⁵ The following month it was reported that the small shopkeepers, who were up in arms against the Act, were also to petition for an exemption.⁹⁶

The Watch Committee formed a Shops Act Sub-Committee which invited the combatants to state their claims at a meeting held in June 1912. At this time the Associations representing fruiterers, greengrocers, grocers, tea dealers, provision merchants, tobacconists and chemists all asked that a half-holiday be set for Thursday afternoons. The tobacconists and the SSTPA stressed the importance, however, of an exemption for small shopkeepers.⁹⁷ The Secretary of the Leicester Grocers' Association reported to his members that he foresaw some problem in attaining a closing order for the trade. There was no doubt that the 'legitimate' grocers were in favour of the Thursday half-holiday, but he observed that there were a large number of traders who called themselves grocers but were really nothing of the kind. It was to be hoped that the Watch Committee would not "allow themselves to be over-ridden by the small traders."⁹⁸ It was noted by the Secretary that nearly 80 of the principal grocers had signed the petition for the half-holiday, which represented most of their kind in the town. The Association was, therefore, mortified when the Watch Committee informed it that their application for a closing order could not be entertained because 74 signatures did not constitute a majority of grocers in the town. The

grocers were only slightly mollified by the news that the off-licence holders' petition for exemption, excluding the sale of liquor, was rejected.⁹⁹

Small and large shopkeepers were also opposed to each other on the issue of Sunday closing. When the provision for compulsory Sunday closing was dropped from the Shops Bill, the Leicester Grocers', Bakers', Butchers' and Fruiterers' Associations appeared before the Watch Committee to ask that the old Sunday Closing Act, which had recently been revived in Hull and Liverpool, be enforced in the town.¹⁰⁰ The shopkeepers were apparently unaware that such a ploy had been attempted over 30 years earlier when, in 1878, the local authorities charged 10 small traders with selling goods on a Sunday. John Bowles, an ex-police sergeant, visited a fishmonger, 2 greengrocers, 4 tobacconists, 2 grocers and a confectioner, purchasing an item from each. All of the men appeared before the magistrate and were ordered to pay costs of 3s each.¹⁰¹ Small shopkeepers were outraged at this "interference with their right to trade..."¹⁰² and they formed a temporary association to collect money to pay any subsequent fines imposed by the magistrates. Mr. D. Day argued that all of his capital was invested in his shop, and if he could not sell his stock on Sundays then he might as well close up his shop at once. The Corporation policy, he warned, would soon fill the workhouse and "there would not be so many to pay the rates."¹⁰³ The Leicester Journal was also critical of the Corporation's action, suggesting it was at best injudicious.¹⁰⁴ Despite the fears of the small shopkeeper and the newspaper, the authorities decided against continuing their practise,

and no charges were laid the following week.¹⁰⁵

In 1912 the Corporation was more cautious and it decided to canvass the town before initiating any course of action. The Chief Constable presented a report to the Watch Committee in 1913 which summarized the number of shops open in certain districts of the town on Sunday, 12 October 1913. Unfortunately the number of shops which were closed was not noted; however, the number found to be open--1780--represented roughly 50 per cent of the shops in the town.¹⁰⁶ Faced with such a large number of shops which were open on Sunday, and opposition from the SSTPA, the Corporation felt it could not act upon the request of those Associations which represented the principal shopkeepers.¹⁰⁷

In this chapter it has been indicated that the voluntary early closing movement, which united shopkeepers from many trades in Leicester, failed to achieve its objectives. When trade associations emerged in the late nineteenth century, they superseded the Early Closing Association and the Thursday Half-Holiday Association and took control of the early closing movement. However, whereas the principal aim of the mid-Victorian associations had been to ameliorate the working conditions of shop assistants, the principal aim of the trade associations was to obtain legislation which would regulate the hours when shops could open.

The agitation for early closing caused by trade associations heightened the divisions between and within the trades comprising the shopkeeping community. Firstly, the campaign strengthened the bonds between local associations and their national executives, which then lessened the need for local associations to rely on other trade

associations in their city or town for support. This process furthered the disintegration of the practise of combination between different trades which had been prominent in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Secondly, the debate which raged over early closing served to polarize the contenders, reinforcing any belief in an 'us and them' mentality. The agitation gave psychological substance to the structural differentiation which characterized the shopkeeping hierarchy. Consequently, a process of vertical fragmentation was further superimposed upon a community already subjected to increased horizontal fragmentation.

Notes, Chapter Six

¹For a detailed examination of the struggle by shop assistants to secure early closing see W. Whitaker, Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers (Newton Abbot, 1973). Unfortunately the author does not stress that there were serious divisions within the shopkeeping world about the various proposals.

²Leicester Journal, 19 June 1868.

³Ibid., 26 June 1868.

⁴Ibid., 3 July 1868.

⁵Ibid., 6 November 1868.

⁶Ibid., 16 October 1868.

⁷Ibid., 31 July 1868.

⁸Ibid., 9 October 1868.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Leicester Early Closing Association, Prize Essays, 1855.

¹¹Leicester Journal, 27 November 1868.

¹²Ibid., 27 March 1874.

¹³Ibid., 11 January 1878.

¹⁴Ibid., 21 July 1882.

¹⁵The Leicester Daily Mercury, 15 May 1890.

¹⁶Ibid., 16 February 1891.

¹⁷Ibid., 20 February 1891.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 24 February 1891.

²⁰Ibid., 25 February 1891.

²¹Ibid., 12 March 1891; Leicester Journal, 13 March 1891.

²²Ibid., 25 March 1891.

- ²³Leicester Journal, 5 February 1892.
- ²⁴Ibid. See also The Leicester Daily Mercury, 13 March 1891.
- ²⁵The Grocers' Journal, 30 April 1904.
- ²⁶The Grocer, 10 February 1906.
- ²⁷Ibid., 24 February 1906.
- ²⁸Report from the Select Committee on Shops (Early Closing) Bill, 21 May 1895, P.P. 1895, XII, p. 1.
- ²⁹Ibid.
- ³⁰The Grocers' Journal, 20 March 1891.
- ³¹Ibid., 7 July 1900.
- ³²The Grocer, 6 April 1895.
- ³³S.C. on Shops (Early Closing) Bill, P.P. 1895, p. 142.
- ³⁴Ibid.
- ³⁵Ibid., Q4243.
- ³⁶Ibid., p. 142.
- ³⁷Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Early Closing of Shops, P.P. 1901, VI, p. VII.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 4.
- ³⁹Ibid., Q335.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 79.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 145.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 60.
- ⁴³S.C. on Shops (Early Closing) Bill, P.P. 1895, p. 142.
- ⁴⁴S.C. on Early Closing of Shops, P.P. 1901, Q337-340.
Lord Avebury wrote in his diary on 28 April 1903: "Got my Early Closing Bill through the House of Lords after 30 years work. Very thankful."
Horace Hutchinson, Life of Sir John Lubbock, Lord Avebury, vol. II (London, 1914), p. 179.
- ⁴⁵Public Records Office H0171/1/p.910.

- ⁴⁶PRO HO171/1/p.313.
- ⁴⁷The Grocers' Journal, 10 September 1904. See also Cecil V. Barrington, The Shop Hours Act, 1892-1904 (London, 1905).
- ⁴⁸S.C. on Early Closing of Shops, P.P. 1901, p. 35.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 34.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 67.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 87.
- ⁵²The Grocers' Journal, 9 December 1905.
- ⁵³Ibid., 4 May 1907.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., 22 October 1910.
- ⁵⁵Whitaker, Shopworkers, pp. 148-9.
- ⁵⁶Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, p. 97.
- ⁵⁷Deputations Received at the Home Office Since the Introduction of the 1910 Bill (ie) Shops (No.2) Bill of July, 1910, P.P. 1911, 89, p. 16.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 17.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 38.
- ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 44.
- ⁶¹Ibid., p. 93.
- ⁶²Ibid., p. 94.
- ⁶³Including tobacco, bread, confectionary.
- ⁶⁴Deputations Received at the Home Office..., P.P. 1911, p. 46.
- ⁶⁵The Shopkeeper, November 1909.
- ⁶⁶The Grocers' Journal, 31 March 1891.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., 12 October 1901.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., 30 May 1903.
- ⁶⁹Ibid.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 7 March 1903.

- ⁷¹The Grocer, 12 March 1904.
- ⁷²Ibid., 11 November 1905.
- ⁷³Ibid., 8 September 1906.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., 8 June 1907.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., 19 June 1909.
- ⁷⁶National Association Review, 2 February 1906.
- ⁷⁷Leicester Master Bakers' Association, Minute Book, 31 January 1908.
- ⁷⁸Ironmongers' Chronicle, 23 May 1909.
- ⁷⁹The Grocer, 11 November 1911.
- ⁸⁰The Grocers' Journal, 7 January 1911.
- ⁸¹Ibid., 15 April 1911.
- ⁸²Ibid., 29 October 1910.
- ⁸³The Meat Traders' Journal, 21 December 1911.
- ⁸⁴The Grocers' Journal, 25 November 1911.
- ⁸⁵The Drapers' Record, 9 December 1911.
- ⁸⁶The Draper, 9 December 1911.
- ⁸⁷The Shopkeeper, September 1908.
- ⁸⁸Ibid.
- ⁸⁹Small Trader and Shopkeeper, 15 January 1915.
- ⁹⁰Ibid.
- ⁹¹The Shopkeeper, September 1908.
- ⁹²However, if shopkeepers also stocked articles which were not exempt, these could not be sold on the half-holiday.
- ⁹³The Retail Trader, "The New Shops Act Supplement", April 1912.
- ⁹⁴The Grocer, 27 April 1912.
- ⁹⁵Ibid.

- ⁹⁶Ibid., 25 May 1912.
- ⁹⁷Watch Committee, Minute Book, 12 June 1912.
- ⁹⁸The Grocer, 3 August 1912.
- ⁹⁹Watch Committee, Minute Book, 23 September 1912.
- ¹⁰⁰Ibid., 3 December 1912; The Grocer, 12 August 1912.
- ¹⁰¹Leicester Journal, 18 January 1878.
- ¹⁰²Ibid.
- ¹⁰³Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁵Ibid., 23 January 1878.
- ¹⁰⁶Watch Committee, Minute Book, appended to the proceedings of 26 November 1913.
- ¹⁰⁷The Retail Trader, June 1912.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SHOPKEEPERS AND THE WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY

The shopkeeping world in Leicester comprised individuals representing all but the lowest and highest strata of society. The majority, however, occupied positions in the over-crowded trades at the bottom of the retailing hierarchy. Mostly non-specialist shopkeepers, they served the needs of the town's working people in the poor central districts and the industrial suburbs.¹ Such shopkeepers, Robert Roberts has observed, were solidly working class; they had little chance of climbing up into the genuine middle class.² Nevertheless, as a contributor to the Small Trader and Shopkeeper noted in 1915, domestic shopkeepers had still not decided whether their allegiance lay with the workers or the 'higher classes'.³ Domestic shopkeepers may have found themselves in the working class, but they were not entirely of it.

By birth and marriage shopkeepers and their families were well-integrated into the working class. Shopkeepers performed a number of crucial economic functions in the working class community. Shopkeepers were also well-integrated into the informal domestic culture of working class women; however, they were noticeably absent from the formal, work-oriented, institutional culture of working class men. Ideologically, domestic shopkeepers cherished the dream of personal independence, but accepted the reality that to survive they had to play their part in a reciprocal relationship with their customers. An examination of the social and familial, economic, cultural, and ideological aspects of domestic shopkeeping indicates the ambiguity of its participants'

position within the working class community.

The social and familial ties of domestic shopkeepers

In his very personal, yet incisive, examination of working class society in early twentieth century Salford, Robert Roberts commented that by "entering into any business at all a man and his family grew at once in economic status, though social prestige accrued much more slowly."⁴ As the son of domestic shopkeepers, Roberts was uniquely positioned to determine the social position of small traders. Credence is added to his observation by evidence in earlier chapters which indicated that in Leicester the business prospects of small shopkeepers were so horrendous that few were in business long enough to establish themselves, let alone contemplate the prospect of social elevation within the working class.

Although it is extremely difficult to substantiate Roberts' thesis that the majority of shopkeepers in or from the working class remained firmly entrenched in their world, the evidence of marriage registers does suggest that few shopkeeping families could rely on relatives to raise them up the social ladder.⁵ Certainly, Table 7:1 indicates that very few shopkeepers had a middle class family background. Furthermore, of the sons of the middle class who did set themselves up as shopkeepers, most entered trades which were dominated by the large, successful retailers. For example, between 1879 and 1881, of the 155 shopkeepers who married in the 16 parishes which were investigated, only 22 (14 per cent) had fathers who were gentlemen, businessmen or professionals. These 22 shopkeeping grooms included 4 ironmongers, 3 wine merchants, 3 drapers, 3 grocers, 2 butchers and a chemist. On the

Table 7:1 The Occupations of Shopkeepers' Fathers: 1859-61, 1879-81, 1899-1901

	Unknown	Gent.	Business	Prof.	Shop	Publican	White Collar	Skilled Trades	Manual	Agric.	No.
1859-61 %	0.9	2.8	11.2	1.9	31.8	4.7	3.7	16.8	5.6	20.6	107
1879-81 %	2.6	1.9	7.1	5.2	31.6	2.6	4.5	18.1	14.8	11.6	155
1899-1901 %	2.6	2.6	8.6	2.0	38.4	1.3	4.0	22.5	7.9	9.9	151

Sources: Church of England, Marriage Registers:

1859-61 St. John the Divine, Christ Church, All Saints, Holy Trinity, St. George's, St. Mary de Castro, St. Margaret's, St. Nicholas, St. Martin's.

1879-81 St. John the Divine, Christ Church, St. Andrew's, All Saints, Holy Trinity, St. George's, St. Matthew's, St. Mary de Castro, St. Mark's, St. Margaret's, St. Luke's, St. Leonard's, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Nicholas, St. Martin's.

1899-1901 St. John the Divine, Christ Church, St. Andrew's, All Saints, Holy Trinity, St. John the Baptist, St. George's, St. Matthew's, St. Mary de Castro, Church of the Martyrs, St. Mark's, St. Luke's, St. Leonard's, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Martin's.

other hand, Table 7:1 suggests that throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century over 40 per cent of all shopkeepers had fathers who were either rural or urban working men. Although classification is difficult, it would appear that by the turn of the century the proportion of shopkeepers with rural ties declined, while the number emerging out of the ranks of the skilled workforce increased.

Table 7:2 is perhaps more interesting because it enumerates the occupations of shopkeepers' sons. The data appears to confirm the suggestion in Table 7:1 that shopkeepers were very likely to come from shopkeeping families, even if they did not necessarily take over the family business. Table 7:2 clearly indicates that very few shopkeepers' sons entered a profession or business, other than as a shopkeeper. In each of the 3 periods examined, less than 10 per cent could be classified as members of the established middle class. Shopkeepers' sons were in much greater evidence at the lower end of the social hierarchy, particularly amongst the world of small masters and skilled workers. The proportion of shopkeepers' sons entering skilled trades was also larger than the proportion of shopkeepers who had skilled workers as fathers. The effect of retailing on a family's position, in a number of instances, may well have been to elevate its rank within the working class, rather than to elevate it out of the working class. It is interesting to note that by the end of the nineteenth century a growing number of shopkeepers' sons were entering the burgeoning ranks of white collar, especially clerical, workers. However, as an investigation of the position of clerks in Leicester suggests, this does not mean that clerks from shopkeeping families had necessarily escaped

Table 7:2 The Occupations of Shopkeepers' Sons: 1859-61, 1879-81, 1899-1901

	Gent.	Business	Prof.	Shop	Publican	White Collar	Skilled Trades	Manual	Agric.	No.
1859-61 %	0	1.4	5.7	48.6	1.4	2.9	31.4	5.7	2.9	70
1879-81 %	0.9	3.4	5.1	41.0	0	8.5	33.3	7.7	0	117
1899-1901 %	0.7	0.7	2.9	40.6	0	16.7	24.6	14.5	0	138

Sources: See Table 7:1.

Table 7:3 The Occupations of the Fathers-in-Law of Shopkeepers' Daughters: 1859-61, 1879-81, 1899-1901

	Gent.	Business	Prof.	Shop	Farmer	White Collar	Skilled Trades	Manual	Agric.	No.
1859-61 %	1.0	15.3	2.0	16.3	13.3	2	38.8	10.2	1	98
1879-81 %	1.5	11.0	2.2	20.6	10.3	1.5	33.8	16.9	2.2	136
1899-1901 %	1.4	6.4	2.8	19.3	6.4	7.1	40.0	12.9	3.6	140

Sources: See Table 7:1.

their humble origins. The social aspirations of clerks may have been high, but the reality of their lives placed the majority firmly within the upper levels of the working class.⁶

Table 7:3 shifts the emphasis of this examination of marriage data slightly by concentrating on the social groups into which shopkeepers' daughters married. Once again the principal problem besetting the use of such data remains: the position of the shopkeeper within the retailing hierarchy cannot be determined; his trade is listed, but not his rank within it. Nevertheless, Table 7:3 appears to confirm that the families of skilled workers provided the greatest number of husbands for shopkeepers' daughters. This data also indicates that the number of shopkeepers' daughters marrying into the professional and business classes was decreasing throughout the half century investigated. It must be stressed that data generated from marriage registers is not sensitive enough to the many variables which determined an individual's social standing to provide precise pictures of shopkeepers' status. However, marriage data has suggested that an increasing majority of shopkeepers inhabited a social milieu which had little contact with the established middle class and much to do with the skilled working class.

Small shopkeeping families who remained firmly entrenched within the working class community did not, as Robert Roberts has perceptively noted, necessarily have to feel that they were an integral part of this world. Certainly, many shared the working class culture of their customers; unlike many of their customers, however, Roberts has concluded that shopkeepers had aspirations. Aspirations could either

bridge the widest gulf which may have separated the working class from the middle class, or create fundamental divisions between the families who shared a neighbourhood. Roberts, whose father was proud to be the proprietor of a small shop, was aware that, along with publicans and artisans who might be small masters, shopkeepers formed the social elite in the poorer regions of the community.⁷

One important feature regarding shopping and shopkeeping in working class communities is that it was often very much a business relationship conducted between women. An examination of Commercial Directories reveals that in those trades which generally included a larger number of small traders, such as general shopkeepers, greengrocers, newsagents, tobacconists and confectioners, women comprised a significant minority of the trade. Table 7:4 indicates that by 1906 women accounted for roughly 20 per cent of these traders. Women were also very active in clothing trades, especially in haberdashery where they controlled 40 per cent of the trade.⁸ However, it is likely that these are conservative figures and that the proportion was really much higher, particularly in 1861 and 1882, because it was the policy of the compilers of the directories to list wives, who were shopkeepers in their own right, under their husbands' names. Only widowed or unmarried women appear to have been listed under their own names. This custom is frequently evident in the reports of bankrupts. J.T. Green failed in 1909 after 7 years in business as a small grocer and general shopkeeper in a poor neighbourhood. He bought the business with £20 which he had saved and £10 which he had borrowed from his brother. His wife looked after the shop while he continued to work as a shoe finisher.⁹ Yet, although his

Table 7:4 Women Shopkeepers in Leicester: 1861, 1882 and 1906

Proportion of women in selected trades:

	1861 %	1882 %	1906 %
General			
Shopkeepers	17.7	15.9	21.8
Newsagents	7.1	14.9	19.1
Greengrocers & Fruiterers	9.7	12.6	15.9
Confectioners	17.1	-	28.3
Haberdashers	37.1	25.7	40.1
General Dealers	-	11.7	18.8
Tobacconists	5.9	-	16.3
Fishmongers	12.5	7.2	11.8
Grocers	5.4	6.5	10.8
Bakers	9.9	6.2	11.4
Butchers	3.4	4.4	4.6
Chemists	2.5	2.0	0
Ironmongers	6.7	0	3.1
Wine Merchants	0	-	3.4
Drapers	6.7	16.0	23.2

Sources: Drake's Directory of Leicester, 1861; Wright's Directory of Leicester, 1882, 1906.

wife was responsible for the shop, it was listed under his name in the directory. Similar circumstances are evident in the cases of Clifford Hodgson, a mechanic whose wife ran their grocery business;¹⁰ W. Wildbore, a hosiery hand whose wife took a shop because "she thought it would be a help" to them;¹¹ and A. Hodson, a shoe rivetter whose mother operated the business despite the fact that she had been losing money for years.¹² Clearly, there were a substantial number of small general grocery shops which were managed by female family members.

Many women ran shops while their husbands worked in order to supplement the family income, and there were a number of other women who had run a shop with their husbands who found themselves in control of a business following the death of their husband. However, there were also a proportion of unmarried or widowed women who chose to open a shop in order to provide themselves with a living. Some widowed women who benefited from an insurance policy or other investments chose shopkeeping as a means of keeping their family together or providing for their old age. A harassed mother of small children had the benefit of working at home if, as was usually the case, the shop was situated in the front parlour. Furthermore, women who opened a shop on the proceeds of a legacy at least had the good fortune to escape one of the most frequent causes of business failure: a virtual absence of capital. After her husband's death, Mrs. R. Holland used the £113 which had been invested in Corporation stock to buy a shop and to bring up her family, and, although she eventually came before the bankruptcy court, she managed to make a go of the shop for 14 years.¹³ Not all, however, were able to survive that long. Emma Willey opened a small shop after her

husband's death, but unfortunately within a year her sons were out of work and the business was not established enough to maintain the entire family.¹⁴

Elizabeth Roberts has recently shown that, regardless of the short-term reasons behind women's entry into the retailing world, small-scale trading was ultimately an important source of family income. The level of their trading ranged from the sale of home-baked goods in the front parlour or back kitchen, to the development of a 'house shop' in the front room in which a wide range of goods were sold.¹⁵ The stock of such shops, Robert Roberts recalled, primarily comprised small items which could be purchased inexpensively. Indeed, his mother's weekly trade, which was usually about £8 at the turn of the century, was mostly in pennies, halfpence and farthings.¹⁶

'Bankers of the poor': the economic role of domestic shopkeepers

In his study of early twentieth century London, Charles Booth observed that the poor treated the shop as their larder. "They go to the shop as an ordinary housewife to her canisters."¹⁷ Even a cursory examination of working class budgets, contained in studies by observers such as Maud Pember Reeves and Lady Bell, indicates that the finances of most families were so precarious that purchases had to be small. Buying in bulk, thereby saving money, required an ability to earn or save money which was quite beyond the slender resources of the majority. After discussing the expenditure of working class families in Middlesborough, Lady Bell concluded: "The difficulty of paying for anything for which more than a very small sum in ready-money is needed, explains the eagerness with which the housewives of this town embrace any system by

which they are enabled to buy in installments."¹⁸ If budgets are any indication, it is apparent that many customers of corner shops made small purchases which shopkeepers were well-prepared to accommodate. It is also clear that, small though they were, many items were purchased on credit.

Gareth Stedman Jones has argued that the families of seasonal and unskilled workers relied on credit from the shop, pub and landlord to survive the short-term fluctuations in their earnings.¹⁹ Conversely, the basis of shopkeepers' power and status within the working class community was the financial hold they were capable of exerting over its inhabitants by granting credit judiciously. In the highly parochial world which small shopkeepers inhabited, this power was a social weapon which could be cultivated, marshalled and employed to good advantage when the need arose. Many shopkeepers may have had other personal attributes which brought them respect and authority, but their influence over the purse-strings of the various local households was pervasive, and, what is more, shopkeepers were well-aware of this hold. Indeed, the poorer the neighbourhood, the greater the shopkeepers' hold, as long, as they did not have to worry about other traders competing for their customers.

In his memoirs, John Paton, who grew up in his grandmother's provision shop in Aberdeen, has acknowledged that her dominance over the local population rested not only on her own strength of character and will, but "on the surer basis of her power, as owner of the shop, to give or withhold 'tick'."²⁰ The granting of credit was a weighty weapon in a shopkeeper's arsenal; yet, it will also be seen that for many in

the shopkeeping world it became the rock upon which they were to founder. In the working class community, the ability to manage credit wisely was a crucial skill which both shopkeepers and customers had to master if they were to prosper.

A number of social investigators commented on the struggle which many working class wives faced each week to provide for their families from a limited budget. Lady Bell observed that in Middlesborough husbands kept back a certain amount from their wage packet for their own use, and gave the remainder to their wives for household expenses.²¹ Unfortunately, while the size of the weekly wage packet might waver, the amount of the husband's allowance did not. Hence wives had to become adept at juggling their budgets. Their skill in this matter, Lady Bell noted, often helped to determine the family's standing within the neighbourhood. Maud Pember Reeves' discussion of working class budgets reveals the adroitness of wives who were forced, week in and week out, to survive on inadequate finances.²³ Sidney Campion, who was brought up on Waring Street, which was considered a rough part of Leicester, recalled his mother's attempts to plan her budget for the week:

Every penny of her twenty shillings was placed on the table. With pencil and paper she reckoned where each halfpenny was going--and wondered how she could cater for us after having paid the fixed amounts like rent, insurance, clothing club and repayment of debts.²⁴

Evidence makes it clear, however, that in many instances no amount of skill in financial matters could stretch the wage packet far enough; unemployment, underemployment or illness could force even the most resourceful wife to resort to other stratagems in order to put food on the table. The use of pawnbrokers as a form of safety deposit box has

been well-documented. "I never remember the time that the pawnbroker was not the usual resort for cash..." wrote George Acorn. "All sorts and conditions of clothes would be gathered into a parcel and pawned."²⁵ In A.S. Jasper's family the pawnshop was resorted to so frequently that the patten between the pawnbroker and his mother had become routine.

One went into a cubicle where the gent behind the counter usually knew his customers. 'How much'? were his first words. 'Ten shillings' says Mum. 'Seven', says the gent behind the counter. 'Oh Christ', says Mum 'don't be like that, Sid'.²⁶

However, if frequent use of the pawnbrokers was a feature of the difficult life of the harried housewife with an inelastic budget and a hungry family, so too was a request for credit at the local shop. How to respond to such a request was a problem which shopkeepers frequently had to face and it sparked considerable debate amongst trade journals and books.

Journals such as The Grocery World advocated that all grocers should cease granting credit, arguing: "We do not believe that, as a rule, a grocer changing his business from credit to cash will lose any customers that are really worth retaining."²⁷ The Practical Confectioner told its readers that if they wanted to go bankrupt, they could do no better than to give credit to customers rather than accept cash.²⁸ The editor of The Butcher argued that, in order to defeat competition from co-operative stores, butchers should also co-operate. "We must see to our armour and find our weakest point. A terrible rent meets our gaze--the Credit System--a rent so deep that it is difficult where to commence the repairing.... Butchers, co-operate yourselves, and

reduce this absurd system."²⁹ The growing concern amongst commentators about the debilitating effects of granting credit was in part a consequence of the sorry reading to be found in the annual reports of the Inspector-General in Bankruptcy. The majority of bankrupts, it was argued, were guilty of granting credit indiscriminately. Grocers, argued one writer, may be classed as the traders who must "readily lend themselves to credit-giving, and it is safe to say that in some districts they suffer thereby to an extent which practically paralyses their business."³⁰ Examples of debtors who agreed that poor credit granting techniques had precipitated their downfall were commonplace. W.S. Knight, a grocer on the Narborough Road, Leicester, attributed his deficiency to bad debts and gradually diminishing takings.³¹ J.A. Townsend noted that he resorted to granting credit when his weekly takings dropped from £18 to £8. He had had no understanding of the grocery trade when he took the shop and his takings had not been enough to make the business pay.³² He fell into the trap which, according to the editor of The Grocer, claimed many bankrupts. Shopkeepers with little capital could neither compete for the cash trade nor command good enough prices, and they resorted to selling by credit to turn over their stock.³³

However, while many shopkeepers agreed that the credit system was an evil, many clearly believed it to be a necessary evil which, if managed properly, could be turned to their advantage. One butcher wrote to offer his support for the campaign to convince his fellow traders to dispense with the system. However, he was not sanguine, noting that it would prove "easier said than done."³⁴ The truth was that many small

shopkeepers were loathe to give up a system which, if handled properly, could greatly benefit both their business and their authority within the community. A correspondent to The British Baker warned shopkeepers that there was such a thing as credit-blindness; although cash-trading was preferable, there were certain advantages to the credit system, the foremost of which was that it could keep hold of, and consolidate, custom from the neighbourhood. Then, "by a judicious encouragement, they [credit customers] might be converted from flotsam and jetsam buyers into regular and safe customers."³⁵ W.F. Tupman agreed: "...if short accounts are sanctioned he [the grocer] gains to some extent a hold over his patrons. When their needs are properly met and the pass-book is sent regularly in accurate form they are in the main extremely averse to change."³⁶

Shopkeepers took on a particularly significant role within the working class community during times of economic hardship, whether induced by economic depression or industrial conflict. By extending credit to regular or well-known customers, shopkeepers offered a lifeline to many poor families with no other means of deriving an income. It is true that this state of affairs may not always have been to the shopkeeper's liking and may not have been prompted solely by humanitarian concerns--shopkeepers could well have feared that by refusing credit they would lose long-time customers once the hardship was over--and yet it is also apparent that the shopkeepers would go to considerable lengths to help their neighbours during times of distress. This was particularly so in 1895 during the infamous lock-out which affected Leicester's shoe industry and brought the town's trade to a

virtual standstill. The lock-out commenced on 9 March and, according to The Leicester Daily Mercury, about 23,000 shoehands were out of work by 18 March. "There are households in our midst to-day where not a single member of the family is at work," noted the paper's editor, "and where the weekly income is only a trivial ten shillings, coming after a hard winter, and probably a period of short-time."³⁷ He also reported that Mr. Inskip, the General Secretary of the Boot and Shoe Operatives Union, "is engaged endeavouring to make arrangements with trades people whereby the strikepay may go as far as possible in the purchase of necessities."³⁸

However, if workers were soon facing hardships, then so too were many shopkeepers who relied on working class custom. The following day, 19 March, the newspapers were reporting that some traders were already experiencing financial problems. "We have an authentic account of one shopkeeper in a prosperous [working class] district taking only a half a crown yesterday, after a very depressing Saturday, and his experience is that of many more. The result of the dispute to these classes will be most serious."³⁹ Indeed, at least one shopkeeper attributed his eventual failure to this dispute in the shoe trade. A.F. Palmer opened a shop in August 1894 in a respectable and relatively affluent working class neighbourhood near the Midland Railway Station. His business paid well until the unrest in the shoe trade, when his weekly trade fell from £20 to £11; it never recovered.⁴⁰ It was reported that by 23 March the dispute was already having a marked effect on the trade of the town, "and there is a general feeling among the shopkeepers that as yet they have only had a foretaste of the depression that must

inevitably accompany the struggle."⁴¹ Mr. Dolman, speaking at the annual dinner of the Leicester Off-Licence Holders' Association, made note of the current "momentous times for the trade and prosperity of Leicester. They are facing a difficulty such as they were seldom called upon to face. (Hear, Hear)"⁴²

To combat the distress affecting both shopkeepers and customers, the small grocers, greengrocers and milk dealers of the town formed a number of 'ways and means' committees, which had the power to confer upon out-of-work families the right to a special tariff of prices. It was calculated that, if the shoe operatives made proper use of their 10 shillings of strike pay, they would be able to purchase 14 shillings worth of provisions. This was aside from the many private arrangements which shopkeepers were striking with their customers.⁴³ The factories did not re-open until 25 April and the financial hardship from which shopkeepers suffered can only be speculated upon. However, it should be said that there is little indication that domestic shopkeepers attempted to help any side in the dispute other than that comprising their customers. They certainly appear to have followed the advice offered to the shopkeepers of Lancashire by The Grocer in 1862, rather than that given to the shopkeepers of Durham by The Grocers' Journal in 1892. In the former case, the journal's editor observed that no class of shopkeeper benefited more from the custom of operatives than grocers; consequently, he continued, "it is at least incumbent on them now to do their utmost to relieve the urgent distress of those who are, when in employment, their best and most constant customers."⁴⁴ The Grocer advocated aid to those suffering distress as a consequence of the cotton

slump, but The Grocers' Journal was not as compassionate towards the Durham miners who were on strike in 1892. Under the title 'A Serious Question for Grocers', the editorial argued:

...it would not be possible for such large bodies of men to abstain from work, and thereby forfeit the money necessary to keep their homes going, were it not for the leniency of the shopkeepers who provide them with the wherewithal to live, on deferred payment terms. It is a largely accepted opinion that were tradesmen absolutely to refuse any longer to give credit to the Durham miners they would be compelled to listen to reason, and once they brought themselves to do that a settlement of the dispute would not be too far distant.... It may be cruel, as one miner styles it, to endeavour 'to starve the men into submission', but it is sometimes necessary to be cruel to be kind.⁴⁵

The shopkeepers of Leicester, it would seem, decided that to refuse to help workers in need of economic aid would be tantamount to business suicide in a trade which, even in prosperous times, suffered from intense internal competition. Furthermore, it will be suggested that domestic shopkeepers' ideology incorporated a sense of social duty to their working class constituency.

The bakers of Leicester were particularly sensitive about their function and standing within the working class community. They reacted angrily to any charges that they were shirking their responsibilities in times of trouble. In her study of those working class budgets of around 20s a week, Maud Pember Reeves observed that bread was, without doubt, the chief article of diet. Furthermore, if for any reason the weekly income was reduced, bread was the one item of food which seldom varied, unlike meat or fish, which would be affected immediately.⁴⁶ Pember Reeves' findings for Lambeth confirm those compiled by the Board of Trade in 1905. These indicated that, whereas the amount spent on meat a

week by a family with an income of above 40s a week was 5s 10½d, the amount spent by a family with an income of under 25s a week was only 2s 8d, a difference of 3s 2½d. On the other hand the reduction in the amount spent on bread by similar families was only 1s 3¼d, from 4s 3¾d by the family with over 40s a week to 3s ½d by the family with an income of under 25s.⁴⁷ Bakers, therefore, can be said to have been the last of the shopkeeping trades in working class districts to have suffered in times of economic hardship. Certainly this was the belief of some observers in Leicester. One commentator observed in 1909,

I know that bakers are about the only tradesmen that seem to be doing well. What do I see on Friday and Saturday nights? Butchers propping their door posts up looking for customers. Go to your grocers, where a few years ago you often had to wait for a quarter of an hour before you could get served. What do you find now but assistants starving behind the counter for want of a job? Not so the bakers. Bread must be had, being the stuff of life. Bakers who used to run their bread to Aylestone Park in a hand-cart have now a good horse and covered cart. Where did they get them? Perhaps I shall be told some rich relative died and left them a fortune, but I have my doubts.⁴⁸

Bakers realized that in times of distress they had to tread a careful path, and they were clearly not impressed by one leader of the unemployed in Leicester who advocated to his followers that they sack local shops if they were hungry.⁴⁹ To counter such orators, some went out of their way to help the destitute. The Leicester correspondent to the trade press noted in 1905 that trade prospects were rather better than in the previous year, when conditions were so bad that a number of bakers took it upon themselves to distribute quantities of loaves among the unemployed.⁵⁰ Similarly, although a number of bakers complained about the evils of credit, they conceded that they had a duty to the

needy.

Nevertheless, bakers were determined to deal with those "customers who habitually misuse credit."⁵¹ One Leicester baker suggested that the local association start a private list of "those housekeepers who know they can dodge their bread bills because it does not pay the baker or anyone else to spend time and money in the County Court to sue them."⁵² Bakers in Leicester understood that the creation of such a Bakers' Protection Society, to collect outstanding debts in the town, would require very delicate handling. It would have to be stressed, argued the correspondent, that only persistent offenders of the credit system would be recorded because bakers were aware that they "very often have to act as unofficial guardians of the poor in the way of giving credit for bread."⁵³ It was pointed out that it was the habit in Leicester for bakers to grant credit to customers during the 2 or 3 weeks prior to the summer holidays, a custom bakers willingly supported if it helped the locals, even if, when the holiday-makers returned, relations were somewhat strained until the credit balance was restored.⁵⁴

Clearly, evidence suggests that shopkeepers acted as an important support service within the working class community, a role to which further significance was attached during times of economic hardship. Yet, it must be said that during this period the first signs of the undermining of this particular role emerged. In his pioneering study of voluntary organizations in Reading, Stephen Yeo has argued that, between 1906 and 1912, legislation, particularly in the areas of unemployment, National Insurance, and Old Age Pensions, transferred control of welfare

from the community to the state. He has warned that prior to 1914 the practical effects of such social reforms may have been limited or exaggerated; nevertheless, they represented "a massive qualitative change"⁵⁵ in the provision of welfare. Consequently, in the years immediately preceding the Great War, shopkeepers were less likely to act as 'unofficial guardians'. Moreover, the emergence of retailing outlets such as co-operative societies and multiple shops which eschewed the credit system began to erode the elaborate system of checks and balances which had previously mediated the business and social relationships of the shopkeeper and the customer in working class neighbourhoods.

A commentator on the drapery trade observed that the greatest difficulty in meeting the competition of the stores was the continued demand on the part of the customers for credit. "I could compete with the stores well enough," one draper informed him, "if I did a ready-money trade, but my customers deal with me on credit and carry their cash to the stores."⁵⁶ This was a problem which shopkeepers increasingly had to solve as the nineteenth century progressed and the stores increased their hold on the pocketbooks of working class customers. The co-operative store in particular broke down the parochial shopping habits of the working class, and in doing so it undermined the standing of the small shopkeeper. A Leicester trader who described himself as "a small shopkeeper of fair establishment in the grocery line, ... holding an off-beer licence,"⁵⁷ considered that he did a good credit trade: "my customers brought their money with very fair promptitude, and I complimented myself because I thought I was doing well."⁵⁸ However, like other shopkeepers he found that even his best

customers were starting to take their ready money elsewhere, and, despite his determination to give up credit trading, his fear of offending the customers and losing all of his trade was initially too strong.⁵⁹ Observers of the retail trade commented that the clear solution to this problem lay with the small shopkeepers: they had to stop granting credit. Indeed, the Leicester shopkeeper discussed above finally made a stand, and after a time, by perseverance, slowly worked up a good ready-money business. However, in doing so, the relationship of trust which had existed between shopkeeper and customer was diminished, and the influence of one small shopkeeper within the working class community, based as it was on a certain degree of financial leverage, was certainly undermined.

If shopkeepers may be said to have acted as the bankers of the poor by advancing credit, then they also fulfilled their social obligations by acting as treasurers of the poor. Food clubs were particularly important to the shopkeeper and the customer alike for they provided guaranteed sales for the former and guaranteed provisions for the latter, once the stipulated number of payments had been made. Rowntree observed that in York Christmas or 'Goose' clubs which had previously been organized in public houses were taken over, in some cases, by tobacconists.⁶⁰ Richard Johnson has observed that shopkeepers and publicans who acted as treasurers of the poor were viewed by some as providing a legitimate aid to household budgeting, and by others as self-seekers.⁶¹ Edith Deverell, writing in 1899, concluded that many clubs were "of obviously extortionate intention."⁶² Robert Roberts has recalled, however, that local women and shopkeepers occasionally

organized temporary clubs to help an honest neighbour who had fallen into debt.⁶³

The importance of such clubs to small shopkeepers can be gauged by the intensity of their complaints about organizations which established rival clubs which depreciated the value of their own. H.A. Lennox, a shopkeeper in Clarendon Park, Leicester, wrote to the local press to complain about the existence of purchasing clubs in workshops and factories; owners, he argued, should ban them immediately. "What chance have small shopkeepers to pay rent and expenses, whose landlords probably are shareholders in some such factory where this privilege is permitted?"⁶⁴ A tenant of a Leicester manufacturer heartily agreed: he was tired of hearing of men selling up to 3 or 4 boxes of cigarettes a day to workmates; it was ruining shopkeepers.⁶⁵ Another shopkeeper congratulated those manufacturers who had banned purchasing clubs, and urged others to follow suit.⁶⁶

Indeed, this issue was one of the few in which the domestic and the principal shopkeepers found themselves sharing common ground. Some established grocers discovered that they were also suffering from the encroachment of purchasing and Christmas clubs. They were particularly upset when it was brought to their attention in 1909 that there was a growing practise of holding Christmas clubs in connection with nonconformist places of worship, although the custom was in fact much older. Similarly confectioners argued that "as the religious bodies appear to be losing their hold upon the community, and free-will offerings are becoming less free, the organisations have to resort to commercial devices in order to derive an income."⁶⁷ Not surprisingly,

confectioners were particularly upset at the growing practise of establishing chocolate clubs in connection with Sunday Schools.

Unlike confectioners, who were not sure how to solve the problem, some grocers felt that they were. One grocer, Mr. Flewitt, believed, as did the small shopkeepers, that if such clubs were to exist they should at least order their goods from shopkeepers rather than wholesalers.⁶⁸ At the annual meeting of the Grocers' Association the following year, it was decided that representations should be made to the various religious organizations operating clubs, notifying them of the detrimental effects that their schemes had on local traders.⁶⁹ It was also suggested that each club member should have a ticket which listed the amount of money saved, which could then be exchanged for goods at the shopkeeper of their choice.⁷⁰ The Secretary pointed out to the organizers of clubs that "the danger to the small tradesman was that by getting his trade diverted for a week or fortnight through the operation of these clubs he would lose his customers altogether."⁷¹ Mr. Widdowson, Secretary of the St. Mary's Christmas Club, sympathized with the shopkeepers' problems: "...the farthest thing we wish to do is to inflict hardship upon struggling tradesmen."⁷² However, he pointed out that "by our getting the provisions direct from wholesalers and in bulk we are able to do good to some 150 poor people."⁷³

One correspondent, who chose not to run a club at his Congregational Church, suggested that shopkeepers ask wholesalers not to supply such clubs.⁷⁴ However, when one club secretary informed the Association that if he could not get his goods from local wholesalers he would go to London, the Association apparently gave up their campaign

and left individual shopkeepers to fare as best they could at Christmas time.⁷⁵ This was a serious blow to small traders, particularly as the growing popularity of such purchasing clubs could detract seriously from their business. Some idea of the custom lost by shopkeepers is evident in the stock of the Christ Church Christmas Club in 1885. Each member paid 9s into the club, for which he or she received a goose, 2 lbs. cake, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. tea, 2 lbs. sugar, 1 lb. currants, 1 lb. raisins, peel, etc. and 4 oranges. When it is considered that there were over 360 members, the total amount of goods supplied was considerable.⁷⁶ A large grocer such as Mr. Hirst, who dealt in a high-class trade, might consider such business as 'minor', but to the small shopkeeper, who usually dealt in infinitesimal amounts of produce during the greater part of the year, the loss of such a trade could have devastating effects.⁷⁷

Aside from their unofficial economic role as bankers and treasurers to the poor, shopkeepers served one further important function in the working class community: they employed adolescent youths to perform the multitude of menial tasks which abounded in daily shop routine. Lord Morrison of Lambeth was brought up in Brixton where he first gained employment, when a lad of 14, as an errand boy with a grocer and oil merchant. He recalled that the "bugbear of my life was the almost daily cleaning of the enormous plate glass windows with whiting."⁷⁸ George Meek grew up in Eastbourne where he was employed first by a baker when he was 12: "our duties consisted in selling hot rolls in the early morning, buns and tarts on the beach later in the day, and we filled up our time by delivering bread, running errands and washing up and cleaning tins and other utensils used in the bakehouse."⁷⁹ John

McGovern performed similar duties when only 11 for a Shettleston baker: "from half-past four to a quarter-past eight each morning for six days a week [I] delivered and sold rolls around the tenements in the area for the weekly sum of two shillings."⁸⁰ John Birch Thomas gained a live-in job in an oil and colour shop in Hornsey where one of his principal duties was to guard the pails, zinc baths, brooms, brushes and kettles which were displayed on the pavement.⁸¹

The experience linking the majority of the individuals examined above was the brevity of their employment in any one shop. Sidney Campion, a Leicester lad, quickly went from a newsagent to a butcher to a hardwareman.⁸² John McGovern left the baker to work for a newsagent and then a grocer.⁸³ George Meek lasted only 4 days with the first baker to employ him. After his time with a second baker, there followed stints with a chemist, a grocer, a draper and a bookseller.⁸⁴ Yet, despite this, the money obtained for such casual employment could be crucial to poor families, supplementing their meagre weekly budgets, and it was not unwelcome in households which were not destitute. John McGovern recalled: "I often heard my mother say that my half-crown on a Saturday was the means of providing a splendid meal at lunch-time for the entire household."⁸⁵

Studies of working class budgets have increasingly concluded that the crucial determinant of a family's financial well-being was the ability of all family members to contribute. The wages of the husband and father may have been the highest, but it was the supplementary income provided by others which could often make the difference.⁸⁶ Furthermore, as employment opportunities for children under the age of

14 in factories or workshops decreased in the latter decades of the century, so the opportunities for part-time employment in shops assumed greater significance. For many boys between the ages of 12 and 14, the money they earned as a shop boy, even if it was only 2s, contributed to the family's income and, therefore, to the family's position and status with the neighbourhood.

Shopkeepers and working class culture

Shopkeepers occupied an ambiguous position in working class culture. Their shops were important public territory, serving as meeting places in women's informal domestic culture. Shopkeepers, therefore, were intimate with the network of gossip which played such a central role in the life of the community. However, shopkeepers were noticeably absent from the formal, work-oriented, male cultural world of friendly societies, which often met in pubs, and working men's clubs. Shopkeepers' rejection of institutional life was partly a consequence of the demands of their business, and partly a consequence of their identification with women's cultural world.

In her examination of women's neighbourhood sharing in London prior to World War One, Ellen Ross has identified the pivotal place of women in structuring working class culture at the domestic and neighbourhood levels. Indeed, she argues, working class culture was a compound of quite separate male and female worlds.⁸⁷ Within the latter, it will be argued, shops occupied a prominent position. To borrow E.P. Thompson's description of the eighteenth century market, the local working class shop was "a social as well as economic nexus."⁸⁸

Lady Bell observed that, if there was little provision of

recreational facilities for working class men, then there was even less for women, who had to fall back entirely on their own initiative to pass their few moments of leisure time.⁸⁹ Whereas male leisure activities, although oriented around the workplace, were physically divorced from the factory or workshop, female leisure was integrated into their workplace--the domestic world. Women's leisure took place in communal territory, such as backyards or the street, or easily accessible indoor public territory, such as pubs and shops. It is not surprising that in women's cultural world, in which work and leisure had to complement each other, the central social activity was talk or, more specifically, gossip.⁹⁰ Gossip could accompany almost any public domestic chore.

Ross has paid particular attention to the existence of a vibrant women's pub culture in London.⁹¹ Shops were equally important, however; indeed, their role as women's territory may have been superior to that of the pub. Both were cheaply accessible, requiring minimal cash outlay to gain entry. The shop, however, was a part of the domestic culture, whereas the pub could only occasionally be incorporated into the day's routine, and its use could severely compromise a woman's--and her family's--claim to respectability. Shops were suited to the domestic leisure world because women visited shops so frequently: they were their larder; they were always close by; and they were almost always open. The corner shop, Richard Hoggart has observed, acted as the "housewives' club."⁹²

John Paton has recalled that the living-room at the back of the shop, where the family spent most of its working hours, also saw service as the meeting place for the local gossips, where his

grandmother would occupy her "throne" and pass judgement on local affairs. The room "was never without one visitor and not seldom resounded with the noisy talk and loud laughter of a gathering of wives. There the mysteries of life as it was lived in Gordon Street were laid bare: as the fire of rapid conversation waxed hotly reticence was discarded."⁹³ Within this coterie of matriarchs the female shopkeeper, if she so wished, could often exert particular power, especially at these social gatherings. John Paton's grandmother "was self-appointed censor of morals and licenced critic of manners. Even the boldest of local viragoes quailed under the lash of her tongue. She had established herself as unchallenged 'boss' of the street and held herself free to speak what she called ... 'the god's truth' about anything and anybody."⁹⁴ In Salford, shopping was "a high social occassion."⁹⁵

It must not be imagined that such gossip was idle talk. Robert Roberts recalled that although gossip was a prime leisure activity, it was also a vital ingredient in the street culture of a society in which many still relied entirely on the spoken word for news of any kind.⁹⁶ Furthermore, gossip enabled the inner circle of matriarchs from the street or neighbourhood to exert their control over the group conscience. From his vantage point behind the shop counter, Roberts observed these matriarchs trailing in and out, trading news. "Over a period the health, honesty, conduct, history and connections of everyone in the neighbourhood would be examined. Each would be criticized, praised, censured openly or by hint and finally allotted by tacit consent a position on the social scale."⁹⁷

Shopkeepers were not passive observers of this domestic culture. The daughter of a greengrocer in Chatham has remembered that her family never tired of running the shop. "We enjoyed the company. We enjoyed seeing people, and we learned to mix with everybody.... And you were never lonely, not when you could talk to anybody."⁹⁸ Traders who made deliveries, such as bakers, butchers, milk dealers and grocers, also acted as a conduit for gossip, informing customers of local news.⁹⁹ Furthermore, there can be little doubt that shopkeepers also encouraged gossip. Knowledge of the private lives of customers not only allowed shopkeepers to place families in the local hierarchy, it also enabled them to determine a customer's credit worthiness. Roberts has noted that gossips--shopkeeper and customer--were "both storing and redistributing information that could be important economically to themselves and their neighbours."¹⁰⁰ Shopkeepers were unlikely to give credit, except in periods of general distress, unless they had gleaned some information which suggested that a family member would soon be earning money.

It is evident that, whereas shopkeepers were an integral part of women's informal domestic culture, they were seldom active in male institutions, such as the working men's club and the friendly society, which comprised the formal working class culture. Working men's clubs were originally established by the middle class in the 1860s to provide rational recreation for working men. Yet, by the 1880s, as Peter Bailey has observed, the clubs had evolved into working class preserves, and the founders' designs had been frustrated.¹⁰¹ In the same vein, T.G. Ashplant has recently examined the shift to a concern for entertainment,

rather than politics or education, in the clubs after about 1890.¹⁰²

Richard Hoggart has confirmed that, although the educational side of the clubs was still formally alive, it was little more than that. The men went there to drink, to talk, and to play a game of darts, billiards, cards or dominoes.¹⁰³ Tom Barclay, working man, secularist, socialist and writer, was less generous: he considered the clubs in Leicester, at which he unsuccessfully attempted to teach, as little more than glorified public houses.¹⁰⁴

Barclay, a keen supporter of self-help and mutual-improvement societies who, along with F.J. Gould, successfully terminated the practises of selling alcohol at the Secular Society,¹⁰⁵ may well have exaggerated the debasement of the working men's clubs in Leicester. Nevertheless, Joseph Dare, Director of the Leicester Domestic Mission Society, reported as early as 1866 that in the first working men's club in the town the "rooms best filled are those for general conversation and popular games."¹⁰⁶

Regardless of their curriculum, clubs remained integral components of a work-oriented culture, from which shopkeepers appear to have been absent. When the formation of the Leicester Working Men's Club was announced in 1881, potential members were informed that "the promoters are all working men, and they intend to maintain it exclusively for the labouring class, respectfully declining patronage from those higher in the social scale."¹⁰⁷ The Executive of the Club was drawn from a number of trades, including hosiery and building, but the majority, including the President, Vice-President and 2 of the Trustees were also officials in the Shoe Riveters' Union.¹⁰⁸

Unfortunately, evidence relating to the general membership of working men's clubs is incomplete. The membership register of only one club, the Leicester branch of the Nottingham Ancient Independent United Order of Oddfellows Club and Institute, founded in 1888, is extant. This document lists the names and addresses of paid-up members for 1909; however, it does not record the members' occupations. Attempts to locate these men in the directories have proved unsuccessful. Indeed, a sample of one-third of the 787 members provided references to the occupations of only 25 individuals, and of those only one was a shopkeeper.¹⁰⁹ An examination of the members' addresses indicates that most resided in solidly working class districts, such as north Westcotes near the West Bridge, north Spinney Hills, and the old low-lying areas bordering the River Soar. The expansion of the club network into the growing working class suburbs of Newfoundpool, North Evington and Belgrave during the late 1890s and early 1900s would also seem to confirm that the club membership was dependent principally on the mass of the wage earning working class.

It is interesting to note that in those few instances where shopkeepers do appear to have become involved in working class institutions, it was often to perform certain business duties which were concomitant to any organization with financial obligations. This was particularly so in the case of a number of Leicester's friendly societies, particularly the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity and the Ancient Order of Foresters, whose executive positions were filled by a combination of businessmen, shopkeepers, white collar employees and artisans. Geoffrey Crossick has concluded that in Kentish

London artisans dominated the leadership of such societies, certainly during the mid-Victorian years,¹¹⁰ perhaps an indication that a number of the untraced trustees and officers listed in Table 7:5 were skilled workers. By 1903 the Foresters were certainly controlled by a mixture of white collar staff and skilled artisans, whereas the leaders of the Oddfellows were recruited from a broader element of the community.

However, although some shopkeepers were active in the leadership of the friendly societies it does not appear that many were present amongst the general membership. Friendly societies were extremely popular in Leicester;¹¹¹ they were havens for the respectable working class.¹¹² Unfortunately we know little about their social role beyond their function as insurance institutions. One extant rule book belonging to the Briton's Pride Lodge does, however, give a glimpse of one society's proceedings. Any person of good character and sound health, who was over 18 and under 45 years of age, could become a member. In writing the rule book, the trustees stressed the respectability of their society. Those who are incapable of employment due to "immoral or disorderly conduct,"¹¹³ would not be eligible for any sick benefit. Friendly societies were more than insurance institutions, however; they were a vital part of their subscribers' social lives.¹¹⁴ On club night, held every month or fortnight, the various forms of lodge ritual reinforced the feeling of brotherhood between members.¹¹⁵

Despite the size and popularity of friendly societies, reliable membership records are difficult to obtain. Fortunately, the survival of the membership records of the Leicester Bond Street Friendly Society enable a precise reconstruction of the supporters registered between

Table 7:5 Leadership of the Leicester Friendly Societies, 1887-1914

	Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity: Trustees and Officers, 1893-1914	Ancient Order of Foresters: Court Secretaries, Trustees and Officers,	
		1887	1903
Gentlemen	2	2	
Business	3	2	1
Prof.	1		
Shopkeepers	6	5	3
White Collar	9	7	14
Skilled Trades	5	6	9
Unknown	8	11	12
	34	33	39

Sources: Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity, Annual Report, 1893-1914; Ancient Order of Foresters, Annual Report, 1887 and 1903; Wright's Directory of Leicester, 1886-1914.

Table 7:6 Membership of the Leicester Bond Street Friendly Society, 1893-1903¹

	<u>Members</u>
Shopkeepers	5
White Collar	21
Skilled Trades	
Hosiery	22
Boot and Shoes	59
Mechanic	4
Tailor	3
Framesmith	2
Printer	5
Carpenter	8
Cooper	3
Painter	5
Bricklayer	2
Cigarmaker	5
Bookbinder	2
Misc. Trades ²	33
Labourer	<u>14</u>
	193

¹One-third sample of members registered from 1893-1903.

²Misc. includes those trades with only one representative.

Source: Leicester Bond Street Friendly Society, Membership Register, 1893-1903.

1893 and 1903. The majority of the members, listed in Table 7:6, were recruited from the two principal industries in the town: shoe and hosiery manufacture, and the skilled trades. Shopkeepers were represented by only 5 members: 3 grocers, a Chandler and a butcher. One of the grocers, Thomas Forknall, was, however, a longtime member of the Society's Finance Committee. He joined the Society in 1845 and was still attending meetings in 1903.¹¹⁶

It is unfortunate that the membership of so few of the institutions supported and controlled by the working class can be examined. Middle class clubs and societies could afford the proper associational plant, and could rely on members with adequate leisure time to devote to club matters. Working class societies were usually not as fortunate and, consequently, documentation is scarce. Nevertheless, the evidence which has survived indicates that shopkeepers played little part in the 2 institutions central to the formal working class culture: working men's clubs and friendly societies.

The reasons for this absence were twofold. Firstly, a problem which beset all small shopkeepers, even if they did hanker after the sociability provided by the pub or club, was that the bulk of their customers usually arrived in the evening, particularly if they held an off-licence. Although determined shopkeepers could no doubt leave their shop in other hands, the unusual business hours did act as an obstacle which hindered their participation in formal institutional activities. Moreover, as competition increased, shopkeepers were even less likely to forfeit opening hours.

In his study of York, Rowntree had an assistant take up a position

on the street from where he could see directly into a shop with an 'off' beer, wine and spirit licence. An enumeration of the customers indicated that the majority purchased beer and spirits either in the morning or after 7 p.m., while the afternoon was relatively slow.¹¹⁷ In 1895 John Parker informed a Select Committee that, although he opened his shop between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m., the work was not continuous: "We find that either the husband or the wife in the morning or afternoon can go out alternately, just as they think well to arrange it."¹¹⁸ He agreed that most of the trade was done at night. Six years later, Parker provided more specific evidence to the Select Committee of the House of Lords: 25 per cent of his business, he observed, was done between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m., 15 per cent was completed between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. and 60 per cent of his trade was done between 6 p.m. and 11 p.m.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, as the multiples and co-operative stores stole more of their regular trade, one shopkeeper contended, he was more determined than ever to pick up any remaining "crumbs" of business which might be around in the evening.¹²⁰

Secondly, many small shopkeepers were also excluded from male working class leisure because they were divorced from the culture of the workplace. Patrick Joyce has convincingly argued that the workshop or factory was not only an integral but a dominant influence on the social lives of workers;¹²¹ yet the factory was foreign to numerous shopkeepers. It has been seen that some shopkeepers also pursued wage-work during the day, and they were consequently influenced by the social atmosphere of the workplace. Yet it is also true that these men, absent from the shop during the day, were expected to put in their shift

behind the counter in the evening. This is not to say that some shopkeepers did not escape with their working friends, as some autobiographies indicate. Robert Roberts' father, who called himself a "master grocer", also pursued, fitfully, daytime occupation, and he was locally renowned as a great drinker.¹²² Nevertheless, by setting up as small retailers, shopkeepers were consciously pursuing a path which led away from the workplace culture and trade union world of Leicester's factories.

Moreover, not only were shopkeepers absent from the male work culture, but they were clearly incorporated within the domestic culture of women. Because of their intimacy and identification with women's domestic culture, shopkeepers may well have been excluded from men's work culture. Although the environment of some traders, such as butchers, was undisputably coarse and violent, the masculinity of domestic shopkeepers may well have been compromised. Habitual social engagement with women undoubtedly left its mark on their manner and general style of address. Ross, it has been observed, emphasized the existence of separate male and female cultural worlds; shopkeepers were privy to the activities which defined this division, and it is this which partly explains their ambiguous position within the working class community.

The ideology of domestic shopkeeping

The ambiguity which characterized shopkeepers' position within working class culture can also be identified in their entrepreneurial and social ideology. While they coveted the independence which retailing promised, domestic shopkeepers' ideology incorporated a sense

of social and economic service to the community. Domestic shopkeeping did provide an alternative lifestyle; however, it was a lifestyle which was clearly within the boundaries of the working class world.

It has been observed that by the end of the nineteenth century the turnover rates of small traders were quite phenomenal. Some shops traded hands a number of times in one year. Yet, when one shopkeeper failed, another was waiting to move in. No matter how bad the economic situation of shopkeeping, no matter how marginal the position of the shopkeeper, the ideal of independent trading persisted. In his study of penny capitalists, John Benson has concluded that, because retailing was a relatively easy business to enter, it "provided a dream, a possible escape route from poverty and drudgery."¹²³ Shopkeeping appeared to promise comfort, security, status and, above all, independence.¹²⁴ Arthur Morrison was certainly aware of these points. In a short story in Tales of Mean Streets, Ted Munsey, a moulder, was left £100: "The obvious use of a hundred pounds was to put its possessors into business; to elevate them socially at a single bound beyond the many grades lying between the moulder and the small tradesman."¹²⁵ H.G. Wells' inefficient shopkeeper hero, Mr. Polly, observed: "In a shop there's this drawback and that, but one is one's own master."¹²⁶

Crossick has argued that the independence provided by retailing was often illusory.¹²⁷ Yet, in one sense it does not matter that the dream of personal freedom proved to be a chimera; the significance and influence of the shopkeeping ideal lay in its ability to attract new recruits to the retailing world, rather than keep them, thereby perpetuating itself. Therefore, despite the indisputable fact that the

business prospects of domestic shopkeepers were not promising, shopkeeping remained a form of freedom sought after by many families.

While domestic shopkeepers may have dreamed of personal independence, they were well-aware that their business was locked into a reciprocal dependence on their working class constituency. Although much of this relationship was calculative, shopkeepers dignified their dealings with regular customers as transcending the cash nexus; dependence was represented as an exchange of loyalties, and shopkeepers translated their public role into an ideal of service to the community. During the early closing debate, domestic shopkeepers opposed legislation for business reasons; however, their argument also included a defence of the specific requirements of customers in working class neighbourhoods. One shopkeeper could not conceive how legislation could compel small traders to close because there "are absolute articles of food which we contend the public ought to be able to purchase at the hour most convenient to themselves, that is, when many of the poorer class have the money to expend."¹²⁸ In 1900, a number of small shopkeepers in Leicester sprang to the defence of working men who had been villified by assistants for going straight to the pub with their pay, thereby delaying their family's shopping and causing shop assistants unnecessary hardships. One correspondent blamed "working people who do their shopping after 9 p.m. to midnight on Saturday. These do not seem to care about the assistants."¹²⁹ However, opponents of early closing quickly attacked the position adopted by shop assistants. People must realize, one writer noted, that in working class regions late shopping was a habit, and would probably remain

so.¹³⁰ The son of a Ramsgate butcher recalled that the shop was always open late on a Saturday night. "We used to do more trade after eleven o'clock than we done all the afternoon because the pubs used to shut then and the old girls came out for their shopping."¹³¹ Domestic shopkeepers, who were aware of local convention, were prepared to accommodate the needs of their neighbours.

Shopkeepers' concept of community service went beyond an identification with the requirements of their customers; on occasion shopkeepers actively defended the lifestyle of the working class. Evidence of their role as public defender surfaced during the debate which followed the confrontation between small shopkeepers and the Leicester Temperance Society in 1885, a battle which was examined in Chapter Four. The controversy, which was initiated when aggressive temperance campaigners, led by the Reverend Mr. Meyer, attempted to persuade the local magistrates sitting on the Brewster Sessions to limit the number of off-licences granted to shopkeepers, should not be viewed as a minor skirmish between temperance advocates and small shopkeepers who were sensitive about the financial value of their off-licences. Certainly, there is no doubt that an off-licence was often a necessity for business success, and the threat of losing it was enough to enrage any small trader. Nevertheless, the rhetoric which accompanied the debate indicates that shopkeepers also saw themselves as defenders of working class lifestyles, and businessmen whose services were an integral part of working class culture.

Domestic shopkeepers who held an off-licence conceded that beer sales formed the staple of their trade. A small shopkeeper in Leicester

whose licence was not threatened by F.B. Meyer replied to the temperance supporters' taunt that he was responsible for the 'ruin and misery' of the poor: "'Why don't we make an honest living out of other things we sell?' To this I reply, simply because the small shopkeepers cannot keep pace with the competition of the larger shops, and he will find in many instances that where there is no licence to a shop, that shop is no use whatsoever."¹³² Data extracted from the commercial directories would appear to reinforce such an argument. If all the general shopkeepers listed in 1906 are examined it can be seen in Table 7:7 that, whereas 70 per cent of those with an off-licence remained in business 2 years later, less than 50 per cent of those shopkeepers without a licence continued in business.

Table 7:7 Off-Licences in Leicester, 1906-08

	In Business in 1906	Remaining in Business in 1908	
	No.	No.	%
General Shopkeepers with an Off--Licence	240	169	70.4
General Shopkeepers without an Off-Licence	917	439	47.9

Source: Wright's Directory of Leicester, 1906, 1908.

Clearly an off-licence was financially important to a small shopkeeper. Yet it is also apparent that shopkeepers believed that their support of off-licences was not wholly out of self-interest. The crux of the shopkeepers' argument concerning their duty to the public was articulated in a letter by S.W.H.: "...is not the moral atmosphere

of the grocery store better than that of the public-house? And does not the granting of beer licences to grocers minimise the evils that result from young children being sent to the public-house for drink?"¹³³ The writer contended that, regardless of changes in the licencing laws, families would continue to demand beer with their evening meals, and, therefore, it was in the best interests of the public that this beer was purchased in respectable shops rather than in smoke-filled public houses. John Parker, a spokesman for the Off-Licence Holders' Association, informed the 1895 Select Committee on the Shops (Early Closing) Bill that in his opinion early closing would ruin the off-licence holders' trade, and drive it into another channel, that is the public house. "I contend that the intention of the legislature when these off-licences were granted was that the public should be able to obtain their draught beer for home consumption without being compelled to go to the public-house to obtain it."¹³⁴

By defending the drinking habits of their customers, shopkeepers assumed a role as stewards of working class respectability. Drinking had long been a feature of workers' lifestyle;¹³⁵ beer was an important component of a family's diet. Shopkeepers felt no compunction in arguing that by selling beer, to children if necessary, they were providing an important service because they enabled families to bypass the pub; shopkeepers were outraged by one temperance advocate who accused them of mischievous speculation.¹³⁶ One shopkeeper did not hesitate to remind the middle class inhabitants of Leicester that, irrespective of the public's feelings about teetotalism, off-licence holders were respectable tradespeople who had satisfied the magistrates that they were "fit and proper persons to carry on the business."¹³⁷

Shopkeepers believed that the very act of defending the conventions of their constituency fulfilled their charge as 'fit and proper persons' to hold a licence. Gareth Stedman Jones has illustrated the process by which the working class moulded middle class views of respectability to suit their own needs.¹³⁸ Therefore, as Bailey has summarized, respectability "could be subtly, even abruptly differentiated in terms of class."¹³⁹ When middle class and working class interpretations of respectability conflicted, domestic shopkeepers could be important figures, articulating the value system of their customers and neighbours.

In conclusion, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marriage patterns suggest that domestic shopkeepers remained firmly entrenched within the working class community. Shopkeeping seldom enabled individuals to escape the world into which they were born. Nevertheless, it has also been suggested that shopkeeping did enhance a trader's status within the neighbourhood. Shopkeepers were intimate with the domestic economies of their customers; their ability to advance credit enabled them to exert much influence over the purse-strings of working class families. The shop also acted as a clearinghouse for gossip, a central feature of women's cultural network. Shopkeepers' absence from formal working class institutional life is indicative of both the long hours which they spent behind the counter and their association with the neighbourhood's informal domestic culture.

Shopkeeping should not, as John Benson has argued, be considered a divisive force in the working class because it engendered a spirit of individualism.¹⁴⁰ It is true that shopkeepers occupied an ambiguous

position in the working class community. Shopkeeping allowed individuals to escape the discipline of the factory or the workshop, even if only for a brief period; some frustrations may have been dispelled and some dreams attained. Furthermore, Crossick's study of an artisan elite in Kentish London has indicated that working class mutualism was frequently tempered by a strong desire for independence.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, shopkeepers also recognized that they were dependent on the custom of the community in which they traded and, consequently, they were well-integrated into the working class neighbourhood. Domestic shopkeepers identified with, and defended, working class values. Ultimately, it was the reciprocal nature of the relationship between trader and customer which drew together the contradictory strands of domestic shopkeepers' social and entrepreneurial ideology.

Notes, Chapter Seven

¹Pritchard, Housing and the Spatial Structure of the City, pp. 84-6.

²Roberts, The Classic Slum, p. 18.

³Small Trader and Shopkeeper, 15 April 1915.

⁴Roberts, The Classic Slum, p. 19.

⁵The difficulties associated with an attempt to classify social groups by occupational data alone cannot entirely be avoided. It has been indicated that there was a tremendous variation within the ranks of specific shopkeeping trades. Such differentiation cannot, however, be gauged in the marriage registers; the occupational information provided offers no clue to variables such as the size, rank or financial condition of a trader's business.

⁶See Hugh McLeod, "White Collar Values and the Role of Religion", in Crossick (ed.), The Lower Middle Class in Britain, p. 84. The social and economic marginality of clerks is discussed in G.L. Anderson, Victorian Clerks (Manchester, 1976). See also Shan F. Bullock, Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk (London, 1907).

⁷Roberts, The Classic Slum, pp. 17-18.

⁸It is remarkable that despite the number of women in the retail trade, journals, including those catering to small shopkeepers, virtually ignored their presence.

⁹The Grocer, 27 February 1909.

¹⁰The Grocers' Journal, 9 September 1905.

¹¹The Grocer, 22 August 1903.

¹²Ibid., 2 June 1900; 9 June 1900.

¹³The Grocers' Journal, 31 May 1902.

¹⁴Leicester Charity Organisation Society, Case Report 712, 16 February 1905.

¹⁵Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place: an oral history of working-class women, 1890-1940 (Oxford, 1984), p. 141.

- ¹⁶Robert Roberts, A Ragged Schooling: Growing up in the Classic Slum (Manchester, 1976), p. 9.
- ¹⁷Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People of London, First Series, vol. 1 (London, 1902), p. 131.
- ¹⁸Lady Bell, At The Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town (London, 1907), p. 70.
- ¹⁹Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 87.
- ²⁰John Paton, Proletarian Pilgrimage (London, 1945), p. 4.
- ²¹Lady Bell, At The Works, pp. 78-9.
- ²²Maud Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week (London, 1913), p.75.
- ²³Lady Bell, At The Works, p. 171ff; Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week, pp. 22-23.
- ²⁴Sidney Campion, Sunlight on the Foothills (London, 1941), p. 12.
- ²⁵George Acorn, One of the Multitude (London, 1911), p. 5.
- ²⁶A.S. Jasper, A Hoxton Childhood (London, 1969), p. 23.
- ²⁷The Grocery World, 1 January 1910.
- ²⁸The Practical Confectioner, July 1890.
- ²⁹The Butcher, 28 September 1888.
- ³⁰The Grocers' Journal, 30 January 1904.
- ³¹The Grocer, 18 June 1910.
- ³²Ibid., 22 February 1908.
- ³³Ibid., 23 February 1895.
- ³⁴The Butcher, 5 October 1888.
- ³⁵Quoted in The Grocers' Journal, 28 September 1901.
- ³⁶Tupman, Grocery, p. 80.
- ³⁷The Leicester Daily Mercury, 18 March 1895.
- ³⁸Ibid.

- ³⁹Ibid., 19 March 1895.
- ⁴⁰The Grocer, 24 October 1896.
- ⁴¹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 23 March 1895.
- ⁴²Ibid., 15 March 1895.
- ⁴³Ibid., 19 March 1895. This confirms the findings of Ellen Ross, "Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before W.W.I", History Workshop 15 (1983), p. 8.
- ⁴⁴The Grocer, 22 November 1862.
- ⁴⁵The Grocers' Journal, 8 April 1892.
- ⁴⁶Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week, pp. 94-5.
- ⁴⁷British and Foreign Trade and Industry: Second Series of Memoranda, Statistical Tables, and Charts, prepared in the Board of Trade with reference to various matters bearing on British and Foreign Trade and Industrial Conditions, P.P. 1905, 84, p. 5.
- ⁴⁸The Leicester Daily Mercury, 18 November 1909.
- ⁴⁹The National Association Review, 26 November 1909.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., 30 October 1905.
- ⁵¹Ibid.
- ⁵²Ibid., 20 October 1905.
- ⁵³Ibid., 28 September 1906.
- ⁵⁴Ibid.
- ⁵⁵Yeo, Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis, p. 229.
- ⁵⁶Warehouseman and Draper's Trade Journal, 25 September 1880.
- ⁵⁷The Wyvern, 26 November 1897.
- ⁵⁸Ibid.
- ⁵⁹Ibid.
- ⁶⁰Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty: a study of town life (London, 1901), p. 312; see also George Gissing, Workers in the Dawn, vol. II (London, 1880), p. 290.

- ⁶¹Richard Johnson, Saving and Spending: The Working-Class Economy in Britain, 1870-1939 (Oxford, 1985), pp. 149-150.
- ⁶²Edith Deverell, "Slate Clubs", Economic Journal 9 (1899), p. 269.
- ⁶³Roberts, The Classic Slum, p. 33.
- ⁶⁴Leicester Journal, 2 September 1911.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., 6 September 1911.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., 16 September 1911.
- ⁶⁷Confectionary, 13 February 1911.
- ⁶⁸The Grocer, 30 October 1909.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., 30 July 1910.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 10 September 1910.
- ⁷¹Ibid., 22 October 1910.
- ⁷²Ibid.
- ⁷³Ibid.
- ⁷⁴Ibid.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., 25 March 1911.
- ⁷⁶The Leicester Daily Mercury, 26 December 1885.
- ⁷⁷The Grocer, 22 October 1910.
- ⁷⁸Lord Morrison of Lambeth, Herbert Morrison: An Autobiography (London, 1910), pp.22-23.
- ⁷⁹George Meek, George Meek: Bath Chairman (London, 1910), p. 43.
- ⁸⁰John McGovern, Neither Fear Nor Favour (London, 1960), p. 22.
- ⁸¹John Birch Thomas, Shop Boy: An Autobiography (London, 1983), p. 72.
- ⁸²Campion, Sunlight on the Foothills, pp. 21ff.
- ⁸³McGovern, Neither Fear Nor Favour, p. 23.
- ⁸⁴Meek, George Meek: Bath Chairman, pp. 43ff.

- ⁸⁵McGovern, Neither Fear Nor Favour, p. 22.
- ⁸⁶See Henry Pelling, "The concept of the labour aristocracy", in Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (London, 1968), pp. 37-61.
- ⁸⁷Ross, "Survival Networks", p. 7.
- ⁸⁸E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", Past and Present 50 (1971), p. 135.
- ⁸⁹Lady Bell, At the Works, p. 131.
- ⁹⁰Ross, "Survival Networks", p. 10.
- ⁹¹Ibid., pp.10-11.
- ⁹²Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth, 1958), p. 61.
- ⁹³Paton, Proletarian Pilgrimage, p. 7.
- ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 3.
- ⁹⁵Roberts, A Ragged Schooling, p. 9.
- ⁹⁶Roberts, The Classic Slum, p. 121; Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, pp. 64-68; Kathleen Woodward, Jipping Street (New York, 1928), p. 30.
- ⁹⁷Roberts, The Classic Slum, p. 42.
- ⁹⁸Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, p. 165.
- ⁹⁹Ross, "Survival Networks", p.10.
- ¹⁰⁰Roberts, The Classic Slum, p. 43.
- ¹⁰¹Peter Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885 (London, 1978), p. 106.
- ¹⁰²T.G. Ashplant, "London Working Men's Clubs", in Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo (eds.), Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590-1914 (Brighton, 1981), pp. 241ff.
- ¹⁰³Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, pp. 151-2.
- ¹⁰⁴Tom Barclay, Memoirs and Medleys: The Autobiography of a Bottle-Washer (Leicester, 1934), p. 64.
- ¹⁰⁵F.J. Gould, The Life Story of a Humanist (London, 1923), p. 88.

¹⁰⁶Leicester Domestic Mission Society, Annual Report, 1866. Advertisements in the Leicester newspapers in 1866 appear to confirm Dare's conclusions. Although attempts were made to organize discussions on such topics as "Trades Unions and Strikes" and "News of the Week", pride of place went to announcements indicating that Monday and Saturday were music and singing nights. The Chronicle and Mercury, 5 May 1860.

¹⁰⁷The Leicester Daily Mercury, 16 April 1881.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. By 1906 it was the largest of Leicester's 16 clubs, with a membership of 3,857. Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for the year ending 31 December 1906, Part A - Appendix (N) Section III, P.P. 1907, LXXVIII, p. 199, pp. 518-535.

¹⁰⁹Nottingham Ancient Independent United Order of Oddfellows Club and Institute, Leicester branch, Register of Members, 1909.

¹¹⁰Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society, p. 185.

¹¹¹Membership of the Leicester friendly societies in 1906

	Number of Societies	Branches	Members	Funds £
Ordinary Societies ¹	12	-	1,976	13,627
Affiliated Societies ²	10	110	14,208	132,957

¹No branches; strictly benefit societies.

²National bodies with local branches; convivial as well as benefit societies.

¹¹²Johnson, Saving and Spending, p. 58.

¹¹³Briton's Pride Lodge, Rule Book, 1888.

¹¹⁴Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society, p. 177.

¹¹⁵Johnson, Saving and Spending, p. 65.

¹¹⁶Leicester Bond Street Friendly Society, Finance Committee Minute Book, 1893-1903.

¹¹⁷Rowntree, Poverty, p. 332.

¹¹⁸S.C. on Shops (Early Closing) Bill, P.P. 1895, p. 144.

¹¹⁹S.C. on Early Closing of Shops, P.P. 1901, p. 99.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 145.

¹²¹Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics: The culture of the factory in later Victorian England (London, 1980), pp. 158ff.

¹²²Indeed, Robert Roberts' father was 'in his cups' when he went into the retailing world.

With forty pounds in cash, borrowed from a sister, he came home tipsy one Sunday evening, my mother said, to announce the purchase of a 'lil' gold mine!' He then began to sing 'Queen of the Earth!' In between verses she learned that the prize consisted of a 'lovely lil' dairy and "mished" business' combined-- 'all ready for you to step into, my love!'

Roberts, A Ragged Schooling, pp. 2-3.

¹²³Benson, The Penny Capitalists, p. 127.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 117.

¹²⁵Arthur Morrison, Tales of Mean Streets (London, 1894), p. 157.

¹²⁶Wells, The History of Mr. Polly, p. 99.

¹²⁷Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society, p. 114. More recently, he has argued that shopkeeping also bred "a narrow moral individualism." Crossick, "The petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain", p. 78.

¹²⁸S.C. on Shops (Early Closing) Bill, P.P. 1895, p. 143.

¹²⁹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 22 January 1900.

¹³⁰Ibid., 24 January 1900.

¹³¹Cited in Winstanley, The Shopkeeper's World, p. 147.

¹³²The Leicester Daily Mercury, 3 September 1885.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴S.C. on Shops (Early Closing) Bill, P.P. 1895, p. 142.

¹³⁵Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872 (London, 1971), pp. 37ff.

¹³⁶The Leicester Daily Mercury, 11 September 1885.

¹³⁷Ibid., 29 August 1885.

¹³⁸Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870-1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class", Journal of Social History VII (1974), pp. 471ff.

¹³⁹Peter Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?' Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Respectability", Journal of Social History XII (1979), p. 336.

¹⁴⁰Benson, The Penny Capitalists, p. 132.

¹⁴¹Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society, pp. 137-144.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MIDDLE CLASS SOCIETY IN LEICESTER: SHOPKEEPERS AND THE COMMERCIAL ELITE

The forces which were restructuring the various shopkeeping trades prior to 1914 were also at work redefining the boundaries of principal shopkeepers' social world. Although the effects of this process must not be overemphasized, it is apparent that in the late nineteenth century there was a realignment of the ideological and cultural ties which had in the past bound the middle class together. This realignment had a definite impact on the social role of shopkeepers in late Victorian Leicester. This chapter will examine the changing relationship between shopkeepers and the dominant commercial elite. Then, in the final chapter, the effect of these changes on Leicester's political structure can be discussed.

In recent years historians such as Robert Gray, attempting to explain the emergence of a stable society in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, have turned to Antonio Gramsci's writings on hegemony. A dominant industrial bourgeoisie, Gray argues, exercised cultural and political power through ideological control.¹ Critics have suggested that such a reliance on the concept of hegemonic power to explain the quiescence of the working class after 1848 is too dramatic a retreat from earlier explanations based on the principle of coercion.² However, the theoretical framework proposed by Gray to explain the stability of middle class rule does provide a starting point for an understanding of the relationship between the groups which comprised the middle class.

Gray has divided the middle class into 2 groups - a dominant bourgeoisie and a middle stratum of shopkeepers, tradesmen, some professionals, and white collar employees. Whereas Gray argues that the dominant bourgeoisie was composed principally of industrialists, it will be suggested that in Leicester the elite encompassed a broader group, including bankers and merchants, and is more aptly referred to as a commercial elite. Shopkeepers, meanwhile, were one of the most influential groups within the middle stratum. Principal shopkeepers had the opportunity to participate in public affairs because they were in a position to leave their shops in the hands of their assistants. While there can be little doubt that shopkeepers realized it was good business practise to be seen and heard in the community, many also subscribed to the view of one writer that every shopkeeper "should do his part in the work of the community."³

In the mid-Victorian years, shopkeepers were co-opted into a putative business community in which a fictional sense of equality and opportunity encouraged public service in return for association with the commercial elite. The evidence for Leicester suggests that Gray is correct to argue that the prevalence of the notion that the commercial elite and the middle stratum formed one class is a measure of the success to which the latter "were subordinated to bourgeois hegemony."⁴ However, in the late nineteenth century principal shopkeepers began to withdraw into a shopkeeping sub-culture which revolved around trade associations. They began to neglect their part in the reciprocal relationship with the elite, thereby loosening the ideological bond uniting them. This led to shopkeepers' displacement

within the business community as the elite began to recruit new groups from the middle stratum.

Shopkeepers and the familial world of the commercial elite

If the commercial elite in Leicester perpetuated its dominance by successfully stage-managing its participation in the public world, then it maintained the exclusivity of its private world. The familial world of the elite was isolated from the public's gaze, for they could afford the 'paraphernalia of gentility' which enabled them to retreat from life in the centre of town. As Dinah Freer has suggested in her reconstruction of Leicester's middle class, the family was sacred to the elite because it was at the heart of the business dynasties which they were attempting to create and maintain.⁵

Despite the fact that the evidence in Chapter One suggested that principal shopkeepers represented a varied group in the retailing hierarchy, even the most established of them failed to penetrate the private familial world of the elite. Certainly, in Chapter Seven, Table 7:3 indicated that there was minimal intermarriage between shopkeepers' families and members of manufacturers' and merchants' families. The dynasty builders in Leicester were too concerned about consolidating their social position or branching out into the county gentry to consider marrying into the retailing world.

Marriage data indicates that only a small proportion of Leicester's principal shopkeepers could expect to marry into the fringes of the middle class commercial elite. This point is emphasized when the data provided in Table 7:3 is broken down to indicate the marriage pattern of each trade. The information provided in Tables 8:1, 8:2 and 8:3

Table 8:1 Occupations of the Fathers-in-Law of Shopkeepers' Daughters: 1869-71

Fathers of the Groom - Occupations

Shopkeepers	Gent.	Bus.	Prof.	Farmer	Shop.	White Collar	Skilled Trades	Lab.	Agric. Lab.
Butchers		5		5	5		7	2	1
Drapers	1	1	1	1	4	1	3		
Bakers		1	1		2	1	13	4	
Grocers		4		2	2		8	1	
Chemists		1					1	1	
Booksellers		1			1		1		
Pawnbrokers		1							
Confectioners				3	1			1	
China Dealers					1				
Ironmongers				1			1		
General Dealers							2	1	
Greengrocers							2		
Shopkeepers (Gen.)		1							
Wine Merchants				1					
No. = 98	1	15	2	13	16	2	38	10	1
%	1	15.3	2	13.3	16.3	2	38.8	10.2	1

Sources: Church of England Marriage Registers: St. John the Divine, Christchurch, All Saints, Holy Trinity, St. George's, St. Mary de Castro, St. Margaret's, St. Nicholas, St. Martin's.

Table 8:2 Occupations of the Fathers-in-Law of Shopkeepers' Daughters: 1879-81

Fathers of the Groom - Occupations

Shopkeepers	Gent.	Bus.	Prof.	Farmer	Shop.	White Collar	Skilled Trades	Lab.	Agric. Lab.
Butchers		4		3	3		18	5	2
Drapers		3	1	5	2		2		
Bakers				2	3	2	7	8	1
Grocers	1	2		1	9		8	4	
Chemists		1					2		
Booksellers							2		
Pawnbrokers					1				
Confectioners		1					5	3	
Ironmongers		1	2	2	1			2	
Greengrocers		1		1	1		2		
Shopkeepers (Gen.)					1				
Wine Merchants					3				
Hatters							1		
Tobacconists		1					1		
Fishmongers	1	1			1			1	
Hosiers					2		1		
Cheesemongers					1				
No. = 139	2	15	3	14	28	2	49	23	3
%	1.4	10.8	2.2	10.1	20.1	1.4	35.3	16.6	2.2

Sources: Church of England Marriage Registers: St. John the Divine, Christchurch, St. Andrew's, All Saints, Holy Trinity, St. George's; St. Matthew's, St. Mary de Castro, St. Mark's, St. Margaret's, St. Luke's, St. Leonard's, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Nicholas, St. Martin's.

Table 8:3 Occupations of the Fathers-in-Law of Shopkeepers' Daughters: 1899-1901.

Fathers of the Groom - Occupations

Shopkeepers	Gent.	Bus.	Prof.	Farmer	Shop.	White Collar	Skilled Trades	Lab.	Agric. Lab.
Butchers	1	1	1	5	6		15	5	1
Drapers	1	3	3	1	5	1	4		
Bakers		1			3		20	4	
Grocers				1	4	3	9	2	1
Chemists		2		1		2			
Pawnbrokers					3		1		
Confectioners					2	1	2	1	
Greengrocers					1			1	2
Wine Merchants		1							
Tobacconists				1		1			
Fishmongers		1			3		3	2	1
General Dealers								1	
Music Dealers						1	1		
Poulterers						1		1	
Newsagents							1	1	
No. = 142	2	9	4	9	27	10	56	18	5
%	1.4	6.4	2.9	6.4	19.3	7.1	40	12.9	3.6

Sources: Church of England Marriage Registers: St. John the Divine, Christchurch, St. Andrew's, All Saints, Holy Trinity, St. John the Baptist, St. George's, St. Matthew's, St. Mary de Castro, Church of the Martyr's, St. Mark's, St. Luke's, St. Leonard's, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Martin's.

suggests that those shopkeepers' daughters who did marry the sons of middle class families came from trades which were dominated by established shopkeepers', although, as Table 7:3 indicated, this proportion was declining. Thus, in the period 1899-1901, the 15 (10.6 per cent) recorded shopkeepers' daughters who married the sons of gentlemen, businessmen and professionals were daughters of drapers (7), butchers (3), chemists (2), a wine merchant, a baker and a fishmonger. Furthermore, none of these marriages involved the sons of the business dynasties which comprised a large part of Leicester's commercial elite.

The private familial world occasionally overlapped with the public world of the town, particularly in the field of women's philanthropic work.⁶ The matriarchs who supervised the elite's family life also controlled and organized many of Leicester's charitable institutions. Campaigns were often hatched in the homes of public benefactors and philanthropists, before they were put to the general public. The executives of charities were frequently composed almost exclusively of women belonging to the town's elite. Yet only occasionally did the wife or daughter of a successful shopkeeper take part in the public work which emerged out of the private world of the middle class elite.

The elite dominated the membership of prominent charitable institutions such as the Leicester Kyrle Society, which attempted "to bring the refining and cheering influences of natural and artistic beauty into the homes and resorts of the poor of Leicester."⁷ The members were all representatives of the leading families in town; the names Gimson, Paget, Fielding, Johnson, Vaughan and Clephan are constantly featured in the Society's minutes. The closest

representative of the retail community was Mrs. J.D. Paul, whose husband was one of the leading manufacturers of ironmongery in the Midlands, and who maintained, it is true, a shop in the Market Place.⁸

'The business community' in mid-Victorian Leicester

While shopkeepers were excluded from the private world of the elite, their membership in the public world of the elite was actively encouraged. The commercial elite exerted its hegemony over the middle stratum by successfully co-opting them into its public economic and cultural worlds. The elite constructed what may be referred to as a business community which united otherwise disparate middle class groups ideologically and institutionally.

Within this business community the elite fostered a sense of equality and opportunity which, although manifest, was fictional because the elite designated its terms. Entry into the business community was controlled, and subsequent performance was monitored by the elite. Nevertheless, membership was mutually advantageous to both the elite and the middle stratum. The latter served the elite as auxiliaries; they participated in, and helped to organize, the associations which comprised the formal middle class culture. In return, they were introduced into the more selective circles of the elite's public world.

Although there are many examples in the literature that shopkeepers generally subscribed to the Smilesian model of the self-made man,⁹ the crucial ideological bond between the elite and shopkeepers lay less in shared interpretations of success than in the flattering assumption that members of the putative business community were already successful. The elite exercised ideological control through the shared experiences of

the institutional and associational life that confirmed this select status rather than through rhetoric. It will be seen that through its control of schemes such as the Leicester General Charities the elite conferred tangible rewards on selected individuals.

Where their own economic interests, or the larger interests of the town, were most directly involved, the commercial elite maintained virtually exclusive control. The idea of forming a Chamber of Commerce was first mooted in 1847,¹⁰ but it was not until 1860 that it was successfully established. The Chamber's primary purpose was to watch over and safeguard the interests of the town's trade, and represent the business community in any matters which might effect it, directly or indirectly. In particular, the Chamber was responsible for promoting Leicester nationally and internationally. This included a concern for such matters as obtaining improvements in the delivery of letters, so that replies to midday mail could be received more rapidly from London, improving railway service to London,¹¹ promoting technical education, and representing Leicester at national and imperial Chamber of Commerce conferences.¹² Five delegates were sent to appear before the hearings of the 1892 Royal Commission on Labour, including the President of the Chamber, Benjamin Wates, a worsted spinner, and Osmond Tabberer, a hosiery manufacturer, two of the most influential industrialists in Leicester. Another of the Chamber's principal concerns over the decades proved to be the bankruptcy laws which, the Directors observed in 1865, had tended lately "to punish the creditor and let the debtor go free."¹³ Not surprisingly, the Chamber was delighted with the 1883 Bankruptcy Act, which it considered a great improvement on its

predecessor.¹⁴

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century the Chamber remained the preserve of the commercial elite, particularly manufacturers. Table 8:4 indicates that in the mid-Victorian era hosiery manufacturers dominated the proceedings of the Chamber of Commerce. Eminent spinners such as Joseph Whetstone and George Baines, and hosiery manufacturers such as John Dove Harris, M.P., Richard Angrave and John Baines, actively participated in the weekly meetings.¹⁵ In subsequent years, when Leicester's economy began to diversify, shoe manufacturers increased their representation; however, the elite maintained its control over the Chamber. The only long-time member whose trade was exclusively retail was Samuel Squire, proprietor of one of the largest and most select drapery shops in the town.¹⁶

The Chamber of Commerce represents the elite's ability to maintain its control over the small business interests which comprised much of the middle stratum. At a lower level of commercial priority, however, the elite were clearly prepared to register a community of interest with other business groups. The Trade Protection Society, founded in 1849, served the needs of the entire business constituency: by 1885 over 1000 manufacturers, merchants and shopkeepers were members.¹⁷ However, during the mid-Victorian years, although a number of prominent manufacturers, such as George Baines and H.S. Gee, sat on the Executive Committee, the elite were content to allow principal shopkeepers to manage the Society's affairs.

The parochial concerns of shopkeepers were reflected in the Society's activities. The Committee vigorously pursued 'Towzery Gangs',

Table 8:4: Leadership of mid-Victorian Financial Institutions in Leicester

	Chamber of Commerce, Directors, 1865		Trade Protection Society, Committee 1865	
	No.	%	No.	%
Manufacturers	19	65.5	2	11.1
Hosiery	16			
Shoes	2			
Elastic Web	1			
Merchants	6	20.7	4	22.2
Professionals	3	10.3	2	11.1
Shopkeepers	<u>1</u>	3.4	<u>10</u>	55.6
	29		18	

Sources: Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Fifth Annual Report, 1865; Leicester Trade Protection Society, Leicester Journal, 10 February 1865.

swindlers who took local premises to sell supposedly 'Bankrupt Stock', and then left town without paying their bills.¹⁸ At the quarterly and, particularly, at the annual meetings, the elite and shopkeepers would discuss the past year's events before retiring to a nearby inn for a dinner, to be followed by numerous loyal, and self-congratulatory, toasts.¹⁹ Week in and week out, however, the Committee, dominated by shopkeepers, circulated the local Gazette and traced delinquent debtors. Periodic moments of intimacy with the elite were the rewards for a year of committee work.

Shopkeepers' admission into the business community had to be based on merit, otherwise the sense of equality it promoted would have been transparently fictional. The precise mechanics of the transactions which moulded the ideology uniting the commercial elite and the middle stratum are hard to salvage, but the essential reciprocal nature of the exchange is conveyed in the dealings of the Trustees of the Leicester General Charities. The Trustees were recruited from amongst the leading manufacturers and merchants of the town; representatives of a number of the most prominent families in Leicester were members, including the Ellises, the Everards, the Pagets, the Gimsons and the Rollestons.²⁰ They administered the funds of a number of charities which had become the responsibility of the Leicester Corporation; foremost amongst these was Sir Thomas White's Charity, which provided loans of £50 or £100 to be used for business purposes by 'respectable' men between the ages of 20 and 34 who could provide two gentlemen to act as sureties.²¹

The Trustees' deliberations over which applicants could be designated respectable young businessmen is the clearest example of

the terms upon which entry into the business community was negotiated. By repaying their loans, young men indicated to the elite that they were responsible individuals who had earned the right to have membership conferred upon them. This reciprocity reinforced the fictional sense of equality and the hegemony exercised by the elite. Consequently, shopkeepers' position as the group which most successfully attracted the confidence of the Trustees, is particularly instructive. Table 8:5 indicates that in 1870 virtually 50 per cent of all beneficiaries were shopkeepers, although the proportion had decreased somewhat, down to 41 per cent, by 1875.

It is true that, as businessmen, shopkeepers may well have been more likely than working men or white collar employees to know guarantors who could help to convince the Trustees of their respectability. Nevertheless, it is evident that the Trustees manipulated the selection process to favour the applications of those, such as shopkeepers, whom they considered suitable. In 1876 a letter appeared in the Leicester Chronicle reminding the Trustees that they were renegeing on their responsibility to provide funds for young men to commence in business. Shopkeepers, the writer observed, were clearly already in business.²² However, this and other complaints had no immediate impact on the policy of the Trustees, who acknowledged the contradiction but continued to select shopkeepers.²³

Voluntary associations in mid-Victorian Leicester

Shopkeepers' co-option into a business community controlled by the commercial elite was reflected in their active participation in the voluntary associations which comprised its formal culture. As

Table 8:5 Leicester General Charities - Loan Recipients 1870, 1875

	1870		1875	
	No.	%	No.	%
Manufacturers	3	8.6	1	3.7
Merchants			1	3.7
Professionals	2	5.7	1	3.7
Shopkeepers	17	48.6	11	40.7
White Collar	7	20.0	7	25.9
Skilled Trades	6	17.1	6	22.2
	35		27	

Sources: Leicester Journal and Midland Counties Advertiser, 18 March 1870; Leicester Journal, 15 October 1875.

auxiliaries of the elite, shopkeepers manned the committees which tended to the routine, tiresome details concomitant to religious, charitable and fraternal life. In return for relieving them of these responsibilities, the elite accorded shopkeepers a greater measure of association with its world.

In Victorian Leicester, religion operated as the primary focus of associational life. Indeed, as the century progressed, Stephen Yeo has suggested, the penumbra of sub-organizations could become the master and displace the spiritual goals of churches and chapels.²⁴ Religious life, therefore, also mediated political, cultural and convivial relationships. A place of worship, as James Kenwood has recollected in his homage to suburbia, was sports club, social club and church combined.²⁵ Religious activity could introduce individuals into a number of associational circles in which disparate members of society were active. Shopkeepers' participation in this world may have been partly calculative. Michael Rolf, the grocer hero of An Englishman, admitted: "I'm willing to own I go to Chapel partly because its good for trade and I've been brought up to consider it a duty."²⁶ Certainly, in mid-Victorian Leicester, shopkeepers were prominent in the religious environment.

Perhaps the best example of the way in which religion could, on one day of the week at least, bring together diverse sections of society was the Leicester Great Meeting. The Great Meeting was initially founded by the Presbyterians and Independents, and it later became a Unitarian chapel under Dr. Joseph Priestly. In the years following 1835, when the Liberals removed the Tories from municipal power, the

Great Meeting became known as the 'Mayor's Nest' because 12 of the first Liberal Town Council and the first 7 mayors of the reformed Corporation were members of its congregation.²⁷ The influence of the Great Meeting lay, therefore, in the stature of its members rather than in its numerical strength. Although the significance of the Great Meeting declined somewhat during the nineteenth century, it remained the hub of nonconformity in the town and retained the allegiance of many influential town leaders, including the Pagets and Clephans, from banking, the Gimsons, from engineering, and the Kempsons, from the hosiery industry.²⁸

Table 8:6 indicates that the congregation of the Great Meeting was recruited from a wide sector of the middle class, although manufacturers predominated. Nevertheless, there was still room in the congregation for a number of small businessmen, shopkeepers, white collar employees and artisans--men such as D. MacGregor, an upholsterer, Mr. Ison, a shoemaker, Mr. Grewcock, a bank clerk, W. Coltman, a commercial traveller, W. Burford, proprietor of a painting and decorating company, F.W. Brayley, a hairdresser, and James Hill, a grocer.²⁹

Numerically, the strength of nonconformity in Leicester lay with the Baptists who, by 1882, had erected 15 churches in the town. Table 8:7 includes an enumeration of the Baptist leadership in Leicester. It suggests that, although the majority of the members were recruited from the middle class, the large proportion of men who could not be traced in the local directories may indicate that the leaders were not as prominent in the community as were the leaders of the Great Meeting. If the Baptist churches are examined individually, it is evident that there

Table 8:6 Unitarians in Leicester

	Great Meeting, Members, 1875 ¹	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Gentlemen	1	1.7
Manufacturers	24	40.7
Merchants	10	16.9
Professionals	3	5.1
Shopkeepers	6	10.2
White Collar	10	16.9
Skilled Trades	<u>5</u>	<u>8.5</u>
	59	

¹50 per cent sample.

Sources: Great Meeting, Subscription and Membership Register, 1875.

Table 8:7 Religious Leaders in Leicester, 1865-80

	Unitarian 1872-73		Baptist 1865-80		Congregationalist 1869-79		Wesleyan Methodist 1880		Church of England 1870	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen			3	4.1	1	6.7			1	4.0
Manufacturers	14	37.8	20	27.0	9	60.0	2	11.8	6	24.0
Merchants	7	18.9	11	14.9	4	26.7	5	29.4	4	16.0
Professionals			7	9.5					3	12.0
Shopkeepers	6	16.2	9	12.2	1	6.7	6	35.3	7	28.0
White Collar	1	2.7	8	10.8			1	5.9	3	12.0
Skilled Trades	3	8.1					2	11.8		
Unknown	6	16.2	16	21.6			1	5.9	1	4.0
	37		74		15		17		25	

Sources: Unitarian--Free Christian Church, Founders and Trustees Minutes, April, 1872; 18 April 1873.

Baptist--Victoria Road, Deacons' Minutes, 17 October 1878; Archdeacon Lane, Officers' Minutes, 25 November 1880; Charles Street, Deacons' Minutes, 6 March 1865; 6 April 1868.

Congregationalist--Bond Street, Deacons' Minutes, 22 March 1869; 22 March 1872; 18 November 1874.

Wesleyan Methodist--Bishop Street, Leaders' Minutes, 26 October 1880.

Church of England--Churchwardens, in Leicester Journal, 22 April 1870.

was a degree of differentiation in the social composition of their respective leadership. The Deacons of the Archdeacon Lane Church comprised an assortment of men in 1880, including not only a builder, a bed manufacturer, an accountant and a solicitor but also the manager of a spinning factory and a drawing teacher. In contrast, the Deacons of the Victoria Road Church in 1878 included a number of the most prominent men of Leicester, such as the future Sir Edward Wood, a director of Freeman, Hardy and Willis, the shoe company, John Ellis and Mr. Lorrimer, 2 of the leading hosiery manufacturers, a worsted spinner, a woolstapler, a builder and an accountant. However, even though the Victoria Road Deacons were so eminent, the congregation included representatives from throughout the middle class, from J. Latchmore, a wholesaler grocer to W. Preston and E. Daniells, clerks in the water rate assessors' department of the Corporation.³⁰

The records of the Congregational Church in Leicester also suggest that, while the leadership of the nonconformist congregation was dominated by the prominent manufacturers and businessmen, less prominent individuals, including shopkeepers, small industrialists and merchants, as well as a sprinkling of white collar workers, were also in evidence. In the 1870s the Deacons of the Bond Street Congregational Church included Alderman Barfoot, a worsted spinner, Mr. Toller and Mr. Lankester, partners in a large hosiery concern, and W.H. Bates, a manufacturer of india rubber. However, Thomas Almond, a grocer, James McCall, a draper, and agents such as R. Davenport and J. Wykes, also served as Deacons.³¹

Methodism was one of the least exclusive of the nonconformist

denominations in the latter half of the nineteenth century.³² Nevertheless, it is also apparent that, despite the humble composition of the congregations, the middle class, especially shopkeepers, formed the leadership of the Bishop Street Chapel. Prior to 1880, therefore, nonconformist lay committees functioned as agents of unification; they drew together those disparate sectors of the chapel-going community. Matters of faith temporarily, it seems, conquered matters of finance, and, therefore, the occupier of a small tobacconist shop on Southampton Street could sit on the same committee as a wine merchant who catered to the wealthy of Leicester and the county, and who lived in DeMontfort Square, undoubtedly one of the town's most exclusive residential neighbourhoods.³³

Lay participation in the Church of England also drew together members of the commercial elite and the middle stratum. In 1870 shopkeepers represented over one-quarter of Churchwardens in Leicester. These men had been elected to positions which conferred dignity, as well as intimacy with the incumbent, in return for organizational effort. By helping to oversee religious associational life, shopkeepers earned the right to inclusion within the business community. They also reinforced their claims to respectability, crucial to individuals serving the needs of a genteel middle class clientele.

An examination of the membership of the Temperance movement during the mid-Victorian years both emphasizes shopkeepers' role as the elite's auxiliaries and reveals the extent to which the elite retained alternate superintendence of associational activity. Table 8:8 indicates the differentiation between those who determined the local

policy of the movement, and those who implemented that policy.

Furthermore, Table 8:8 also suggests that this differentiation was maintained despite the fact that shopkeepers were important financial supporters of the Leicester Temperance Society: entry into the select circles of the business community could not be purchased.

The Board of the United Kingdom Alliance was dominated by ministers representing the various religious denominations of the town, and by members of the commercial elite, such as the President, William Stanyon, G.R. Faire, J.L. Faire, S. Smart and G.H. Ellis, all of whom were leading industrialists. However, the Committee of the Alliance, which performed the many necessary but tedious administrative duties, such as keeping a watchful eye over the activities of off-licence holders, beerhouse keepers and publicans, was composed of men of humbler backgrounds. Admittedly there were two 2 manufacturers, 2 insurance agents and a builder on the Committee; however, the majority were small businessmen, shopkeepers and white collar employees. The shopkeepers were represented by 2 confectioners, a chemist, a bookseller, a newsagent and a general dealer.

Freemasons' Lodges were perhaps the most formally selective voluntary associations within the business community. So successful were the freemasons in their endeavour to maintain their secrecy that, despite a large amount of literature on the history of masonic ritual, there are few references to its more specific aims and principles. Nevertheless, in 1890 the Reverend Charles Martyn was able to observe that the aims of freemasonry were partly religious, partly convivial, and partly philanthropic.³⁴ As indicated in table 8:9, the majority of

Table 8:8 Leicester Temperance Movement

	Leicester Temperance Company, Shareholders, 1896	United Kingdom Alliance Leicester Branch 1880	
	No.	Board No.	Committee No.
Spinsters/Widows	5		
Gentlemen/Landowners	14		
Clergy		16	
Manufacturers	9	9	2
Merchants	7	3	5
Professionals	9	2	
Shopkeepers	10		6
White Collar	5		4
Unknown		1	
	59	31	17

Sources: Leicester Temperance Company, Shareholders Register, 1896;
The Leicester Daily Mercury, 7 January 1880.

Table 8:9 Membership of Freemasons' Lodges in Leicester

	Total		Golden Fleece Lodge, c.1880-90	John of Gaunt Lodge, 1884	Albert Edward Lodge, c.1880-90	St. John's Lodge, 1884
	No.	%	No.	No.	No.	No.
Gentlemen	14	5.9		7	1	6
Manufacturers	33	13.9	4	11	5	13
Merchants	42	17.6	4	8	9	21
Professionals	85	35.7	10	26	28	21
Shopkeepers	42	17.6	6	18		18
White Collar	22	9.2		7	2	13
	238		24	77	45	92

Sources: Lodge Membership Registers, filed with the Clerk of the Peace, Leicestershire Records Office.

freemasons were recruited from the manufacturing, merchant, professional and shopkeeping groups, with lesser support from white collar employees and the independently wealthy. They included amongst their numbers some of the most influential men in the town, such as William Kelly, formerly the Town Clerk, S.S. Partridge, a leading solicitor, W. Vincent, a wealthy hat manufacturer, Henry Eagle, a prominent builder, Osmond Tabberer, a manufacturer, William Rolleston, an estate agent of note, and so on. There is no evidence to suggest that wage-earning manual labourers, including those in a skilled trade, participated in freemasonry. The white collar employees enumerated were primarily managers or commercial travellers, or elite clerical workers such as solicitors' clerks or bank clerks. A detailed examination of those shopkeepers active in freemasonry indicates that the vast majority were recruited from those trades which, it was observed in Chapter One, were dominated by the large established shopkeepers, such as drapers, chemists and wine merchants.³⁵

Shopkeepers' inclusion within this world was proof that they had earned the right to equality within the putative business community. Furthermore, potential freemasons had to undergo a rigorous selection process. Consequently, shopkeepers who gained entry into the world of freemasonry had been accorded privileged membership. However, admittance remained at the discretion of the commercial elite.

Membership patterns of specific lodges indicate a tendency for some groups to congregate in certain lodges, although there was no clear-cut pattern. The Albert Edward Lodge appears to have catered principally to professionals, specifically to solicitors and the clergy, although these

professionals were also prominent in other lodges. A large number of shopkeepers were members of St. John's Lodge and John of Gaunt's Lodge, but no shopkeeper belonged to the Albert Edward Lodge. However, such segregation should not be over-emphasized: in most lodges were to be found representatives from the spectrum of groups which constituted the middle class.

The emergence of a shopkeeping sub-culture in Leicester

Whereas in the mid-Victorian years shopkeepers organized their social activities around events which catered to the middle class community, by 1900 they were developing their own recreational and convivial activities, most of which were oriented around the newly emergent trade associations. One feature of the development of a collectivist spirit amongst shopkeepers was the emergence of a shopkeeping sub-culture. This is not to imply that shopkeepers suddenly deserted all clubs or associations which were not attached to their trade; clearly that was not the case. However, it is an important point that as the nineteenth century progressed shopkeepers could increasingly view themselves as members of a specific trade, such as grocery or drapery, if they wished, rather than as members of the wider community. The continued growth of trade associations, particularly as social clubs, would suggest that a growing number of shopkeepers put their trade before all else.

It was argued in an earlier chapter that the emergence of trade associations acted to fragment the structure of the shopkeeping hierarchy. This fragmentation is also evident when the convivial and recreational life of such associations is investigated. It is true

that not all of the activities which catered exclusively to trades were divided on trade lines. Sporting clubs such as the Leicester Tradesmen's Cricket Club were established and, if the Chairman was correct, flourished. This club recruited its members from diverse sectors of the trading community: butchers, bakers, wine merchants, ironmongers, pawnbrokers and chemists were all present at the annual dinner.³⁶

Nevertheless, the majority of shopkeepers looked no further than their specific trade associations for their recreational needs, and, as it was noted earlier, amongst the specialist shopkeepers and at the local level, trade associations developed independently of each other. Consequently, grocers met with grocers, rather than with representatives of other trades, at their meetings and social events. The opportunities for sociability provided by trade associations soon became one of their most important drawing cards for shopkeepers.

The Leicester Scotch Drapers' Association met once a year for a smoking concert. In 1885 Mr. Bennett, the President, observed that the participants "were animated with a true desire to facilitate each others interests to the best of their ability, and he believed a genuine good feeling of unity and concord existed among them, more complete perhaps than any other combination of tradesmen."³⁷ At the first annual dinner of the Leicester Retail Newsagents' and Booksellers' Association in 1892, Thomas Spencer, the proprietor of a large established shop in the town for over 30 years, observed that in his youth shopkeepers seldom met; he was delighted that he and his fellow traders had recently started to enjoy each others company.³⁸

Leicester's chemists attempted on a number of occasions to initiate an Association which would provide educational facilities, protect trade interests and foster social ties; however, they met with little success. Consequently, in 1897, the chemists decided to form a Social Union, rather than a trade association, which would foster goodwill and allow for social intercourse between local chemists; to this end the first meeting included a lantern show on Australia.³⁹ The first reaction of the Leicester Hairdressers' Association when it discovered that it had surplus funds of £3 7½d was to put the money towards a dinner, which was a great success, at the de Montfort Hotel.⁴⁰

Leicester's bakers also commented on the opportunities for sociability offered by their Association. Indeed, they took some considerable pride in being the first association in the country to invite 'ladies' to the annual dinner. These occasions became events which were looked forward to in bakery circles and which, according to the former President of the Association, did much to generate goodwill between members of the trade.⁴¹ The Leicester members were horrified at the poor organization and the lack of amenities at the annual meeting and dinner held by the Nottingham Bakers' Association, to which 2 delegates were sent: "Distinctly below the average of previous years; no ladies present; several of the well-known members absent; about 65 sat down; the music very amateurish and on the borderland of vulgar."⁴²

Leicester's bakers may have been smug about their own success in introducing ordered conviviality into their Association's annual itinerary, but it is also clear that they recognized the advantage of forging a spirit of friendship within their ranks. In 1907, a social

gathering was held at the Highcross Coffee House to honour the retiring President of the Association, Mr. Kinton. He observed, after receiving a handsome presentation, that the Association "had much to be proud of. Instead of the jealous feeling which formerly existed, they had confidence in one another, and acted uprightly and straightforwardly."⁴³ In this matter he was echoing the thoughts of the editor of the National Association Review, the baker's journal, who observed: "With the advent of winter, local associations are making their arrangements for festive gatherings, chiefly in the form of dinners and dances. As we have often repeated, the value of the social side of an organisation intended to unite a trade cannot be well over-stated."⁴⁴

Quite aside from the economic and business reasons for the emergence of a trades sub-culture, the Leicester Grocers' Association recognized the importance of social gatherings to break down any number of small antagonisms which had plagued the trade in the past. The Association also noted that such meetings could be used to bolster the finances of the Association; whist drives were a regular feature of their calendar, and in 1912 nearly 200 people participated, thereby improving the balance of the Benevolent Fund.⁴⁵ The Grocers' Association also arranged annual summer outings for members and their families; this usually took the form of a picnic at a local beauty spot, perhaps Blaby or Bradgate Park, followed by children's games, cricket, fishing or entertainments.

During its early years the Leicester Master Bakers' Association attempted to combine pleasure and education; in 1898 a trip to visit the

Bakery Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall in London was organized.⁴⁶ However, by 1907 the Association was initiating more leisurely outings, and there was a particular concern that they "should be well within the reach of the members' pockets. Many feel that a more representative gathering of our own members would be obtained if the less ambitious trips were favoured."⁴⁷ The purpose of such outings was, after all, to create a bond between bakers, not to highlight the affluence of some of the members. "The 10/6 ticket," the Secretary of the Association noted, "is in some cases prohibitory. The man will not go and leave his wife behind and cannot afford to pay for two or three tickets."⁴⁸

Shopkeepers and the commercial elite: the retreat from reciprocity

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shopkeepers' position within the business community was transformed. The emergence of a shopkeeping sub-culture caused many traders to withdraw from the voluntary associations which comprised the formal cultural world of the commercial elite. This process did not go unnoticed by the elite who, aside from determining entry into the business community, also monitored members' subsequent performance. When shopkeepers began to relinquish their role as the elite's auxiliaries, they lost their right to merited inclusion within the business community. The elite began to recruit other groups from within the middle stratum more vigorously; for shopkeepers, withdrawal led to displacement. By the early twentieth century the reciprocal relationship between shopkeepers and the elite had been seriously undermined.

Shopkeepers' declining participation in the leadership of religious life in Leicester, one of their most important mid-Victorian functions,

can be detected. Table 8:10 suggests that, unlike merchants and manufacturers, who maintained their presence as church and chapel officers, by the end of the nineteenth century shopkeepers no longer occupied as prominent a position. This was particularly the case in Wesleyan Methodism, although shopkeeper representation was reduced throughout the nonconformist world. A similar process occurred in the Church of England, where shopkeepers' participation as churchwardens was almost halved, from 28 per cent to 15 per cent, between 1870 and 1903. It is also apparent that the positions of authority vacated by shopkeepers were appropriated by white collar employees.

The gradual withdrawal of shopkeepers from institutions in which they had previously been active is well-illustrated in the changing membership of the Leicester Widows' and Orphans' Friends Society. Unlike friendly societies such as the Oddfellows or the Foresters, which, it was noted earlier, catered principally to the working class, the Widows' and Orphans' Friends Society served the various strata of the middle class. It maintained a membership of approximately 200, and its purpose was to provide £100 to the family of a member upon his death, out of an accumulated fund of approximately £3,000.⁴⁹ The Widows' and Orphans' Friends Society was a local or 'ordinary' society. Consequently, it had no affiliated branches, unlike regional orders such as the Foresters; it did not provide regular social or recreational facilities for its members; payments were expensive; and a selective admissions policy was employed.⁵⁰ According to Sir George Young, the members of such local societies were "mostly of a high degree of respectability...who, as has often been said to me, dislike the 'nonsense' and mixed company of club nights, and look for an investment

Table 8:10 Religious Leaders in Leicester, 1897-1914

	Baptist 1904-08		Congregationalist 1903-11		Wesleyan Methodist 1905-14		Primitive Methodist 1897		Church of England 1903	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	2	3.9			3	6.1	1	6.7	2	3.3
Manufacturers	16	31.4	6	37.5	15	30.6	7	46.7	10	16.7
Merchants	12	23.5	2	12.5	8	16.3	2	13.3	8	13.3
Professionals	1	2.0	2	12.5	1	2.0			8	13.3
Shopkeepers	3	5.9	1	6.3	4	8.2	3	20.0	9	15.0
White Collar	13	25.5	5	31.3	9	18.4	2	13.3	10	16.7
Skilled Trades					5	10.2				
Unknown	4	7.8			4	8.2			13	21.7
	51		16		49		15		60	

Sources: Baptist--Emmanuel Chapel, Deacons' Minutes and Register, July, 1906; Victoria Road, Deacons' Minutes, 1904; Archdeacon Lane, Deacons' Minutes, 1893; Charles Street, Deacons' Minutes, 1905.
 Congregationalist--Bond Street, Deacons' Register, 1903; Gallowtree Gate, Deacons' Minutes, 3 July 1911.
 Wesleyan Methodist--King Richard's Road Circuit, Trustees Minutes, 1907; Bishop Street Circuit, Foreign Missionary Committee Minutes, 1905; Clarendon Park, Leaders' Minutes, 10 February 1914.
 Primitive Methodist--Hinckley Road Circuit, Trustees Minutes, 1897.
 Church of England--Churchwardens, Wright's Directory of Leicester, 1904.

of their savings 'on purely business principles'."⁵¹

The Leicester Widows' and Orphans' Friends Society did not reject recreational activities entirely; the annual dinner was a major event which was always reported in the local newspapers and usually attracted a large turnout of members to drink the many loyal toasts. Nevertheless, it is true that such gatherings only occurred once during the year, and financial benefits remained the primary purpose of the Society. An examination of the membership, provided in Table 8:11, indicates that in the mid-Victorian years, although shopkeepers provided the largest single group within the Society, the subscribers represented business, white collar and skilled artisan interests. By the period 1898-1901, however, fewer shopkeepers and skilled artisans were members; white collar workers, whose representation had doubled, started to dominate the Society.

The developing relationship between the commercial elite and the white collar stratum can be seen in the membership records of sports clubs. Lawn bowling was an activity which attracted many middle class participants in the late nineteenth century. Its popularity was due in part to the fact that, like golf, it was a non-contact sport in which individuals of any age or physical condition could participate. Table 8:12 suggests that, although some shopkeepers belonged to bowling clubs, white collar employees clearly outnumbered them. The relationship between clerical employees and the middle class is given further clarity by the activities of the members of the Banks' Cricket Club. This club was formed by the clerks and officials employed in Leicester's banks in 1878 in order to take advantage of the Thursday half-holiday. However,

Table 8:11 Leicester Widows' and Orphans' Friends Society

	Occupations of New Members			
	1860-69		1898-1901	
	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	5	4.2	1	0.9
Manufacturers	14	11.7	15	13.2
Merchants	20	16.7	18	15.8
Professionals	5	4.2	7	6.1
Shopkeepers	28	23.3	20	17.5
Innkeepers	9	7.5	5	4.4
White Collar	18	15.0	34	29.8
Skilled Trades	21	17.5	14	12.3
	120		114	

Source: Leicester Widows' and Orphans' Friends Society, Register of Members.

Table 8:12 Bowling Club Membership,¹ 1908-10

Members' Occupations		
	No.	%
Gentlemen	5	7.5
Manufacturers	8	11.9
Merchants	13	19.4
Professionals	7	10.4
Shopkeepers	4	6.0
White Collar	21	31.3
Unknown	9	13.4
	<hr/>	
	67	

¹Belgrave, Victoria Park and Leicester clubs.

Source: The Leicester Daily Mercury, 1 June 1908; 19 November 1910.

by the following year it had been discovered that the banks could not generate enough support to man the team, and it was found necessary to recruit members from the general public. It is interesting to note that even at this early date the majority of men nominated to bolster the team's ranks were from the business and professional strata; only Fred Watts, a High Street wine merchant, represented the shopkeeping community.⁵² Furthermore, this policy was maintained over the following 3 decades.⁵³

The growth of the white collar sector of the labour force was a phenomenon over which shopkeepers had no control. Geoffrey Crossick's enumeration of this sector indicates that in Great Britain the number of white collar employees rose from 144,035 in 1851 to 918,186 in 1911; proportionately, their representation in the male workforce increased from 2.5 per cent to 7.1 percent.⁵⁴ Clerks represented the most visible group within the white collar sector. The classification 'clerk' masks a tremendous internal variation in skill, salary and job prospects. Nevertheless, this group grew dramatically over the later half of the nineteenth century. Whereas there were 834 identified in Leicester in 1881, this number had risen to 2,387 by 1911, and this does not take into account all those clerks employed in local government, the civil service, transportation, industry and banking.⁵⁵ Clerks and other white collar employees, anxious to affirm their respectability through an association with the elite's world, willingly occupied the positions previously held by shopkeepers in the formal middle class culture.⁵⁶

The most significant casualty of shopkeepers' retreat from associational activity was the business ideology forged between

shopkeepers and the commercial elite through social exchange in economic institutions such as the Trade Protection Society. Once the reciprocity which cemented the relationship between the two groups was lost, the fictional sense of equality, fostered by merited inclusion within the business community, disintegrated. By the early 1900s shopkeepers were no longer as active in the administration of the Trade Protection Society as they had been in the past. Indeed, by 1903, there were only 3 shopkeepers on the Committee, whereas merchants and manufacturers occupied the remaining 11 positions.⁵⁷

The changing composition of the Committee was reflected in the issues which Committee members considered to be in greatest need of attention. Whereas in the mid-Victorian era the Society's concern had been parochial, concentrating on the task of recovering debts, by 1903 the Society was proclaiming that it was no longer a "mere" debt collecting agency. The object was to protect and stimulate trade and commerce in the town, particularly hosiery and shoe manufacturing.⁵⁸ The divergence of interests between shopkeepers and the elite can be detected in the annual reviews of the Trade Protection Society and the Grocers' Association in 1902. Whereas the former considered Leicester's trade to be "sound and healthy, and fairly prosperous,"⁵⁹ the latter bemoaned the terrible crisis in trade over the past 3 years.⁶⁰

Symbolic of the Society's increased identification with the interests of the elite was the election of C.E. Whitmore, a leading wholesaler and Treasurer of the Trade Protection Society, as President of the Leicester Chamber of Commerce in 1903. This was in stark contrast to the position adopted at the inaugural meeting of the Trade

Protection Society in 1849, when the members voted to reject formal association with the Chamber.⁶¹ By the early twentieth century most shopkeepers' commitment to the Society did not extend beyond payment of their subscription and receipt of The Gazette.

It would appear that the leaders of the business community in Leicester were acutely aware that shopkeepers were no longer performing the duties expected of conscientious auxiliaries. The elite's reaction, evident in the records of the Trustees of the General Charities, was to limit shopkeepers' opportunities to merited inclusion within the business community. By the early twentieth century shopkeepers no longer enjoyed the level of financial backing which they had received in the past. Shopkeepers were replaced in their favoured position by clerks, travellers and managers. It is true that such workers had been awarded these loans in the past; for example, in 1870, 7 of the 35 recipients held clerical or warehouse positions. However, by the early 1900s, as Table 8:13 indicates, this proportion had risen considerably, at the expense of shopkeepers. In 1904 and 1905 the proportion of loans given to white collar workers was 48 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively, whereas the proportion received by shopkeepers had deteriorated to 18.5 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively. By 1910, only 4 of the 35 recipients were shopkeepers, while 20 were either clerks, travellers or managers.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century there occurred a fundamental change in the relationship between principal shopkeepers and the middle class elite. In the mid-Victorian period shopkeepers earned inclusion within the business community by functioning as auxiliaries

Table 8:13 Leicester General Charities - Loan Recipients, 1904-10

	1904		1905		1910	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Merchants	2	7.4	2	5.9	2	5.7
Professionals			1	2.9		
Shopkeepers	5	18.5	5	14.7	4	11.4
White Collar	13	48.1	16	47.1	20	57.1
Skilled Trades	7	25.9	10	29.4	9	25.7
	27		34		35	

Sources: The Wyvern, 22 October 1904; The Leicester Daily Mercury, 2 November 1905; 9 June 1901.

for the elite. A fictional sense of equality was constructed which enabled the elite to extend its ideological and cultural hegemony. However, as pressures within the retailing trades led principal shopkeepers to create a shopkeeping sub-culture, centred around trade associations, they began to neglect the duties which they had previously performed for the elite. As the reciprocal relationship between shopkeepers and the elite began to deteriorate, the latter began to recruit new supporters. Consequently, shopkeepers' withdrawal from the business community induced their displacement by other groups within the middle stratum. The transformation in the relationship between shopkeepers and the commercial elite is clearly reflected in shopkeepers' eventual abdication from the partisan political stage in Leicester, a process which will be examined in the following chapter.

Notes, Chapter Eight

¹Robert Gray, "Bourgeois Hegemony in Victorian Britain", in Tony Bennett and Graham Martin (eds.), Culture, Ideology and Social Process (London, 1981), pp. 237-238; Robert Gray, "Religion, Culture and Social Class in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Edinburgh", in Crossick (ed.), The Lower Middle Class in Britain, pp. 134-135.

²See Christopher Kent, "Presence and Absence: History, Theory and the Working Class", Victorian Studies 29 (1986), pp. 454-455.

³The Grocery World, 1 January 1910.

⁴Gray, "Bourgeois Hegemony in Victorian Britain", p. 236.

⁵Dinah Freer, "Business Families in Victorian Leicester: A Study in Historical Sociology" (M. Phil. University of Leicester), 1975. See Chapter Five, 'Dynasty Building'.

⁶See Lenore Davidoff, The Best Circles: society, etiquette and the season (London, 1973). F.K. Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England (Oxford, 1980).

⁷Leicester Kyrle Society, Minute Book, 25 November 1880.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Perhaps the best example of W.F. Fish, The Career of Andrew Crafter: A Romance of the Drapery Trade (London, 1930).

¹⁰Leicester Chronicle, 1 April 1848.

¹¹Leicester Chamber of Commerce, 32nd Annual Report, 1892.

¹²Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Minute Book, July 1895.

¹³Leicester Chamber of Commerce, 5th Annual Report, 1865.

¹⁴Leicester Chamber of Commerce, 25th Annual Report, 1885.

¹⁵The Leicester Daily Mercury, 15 May 1890.

¹⁶Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Year Book, 1911.

¹⁷The Leicester Daily Mercury, 5 March 1885.

¹⁸The Leicestershire Trade Protection Society, 1850-1950 (Leicester, n.d.), p. 9.

- 19 The Leicester Daily Mercury, 5 March 1885.
- 20 Sir Thomas White's, and Parker and Heyrick's Charities: scheme for the administration of the above charities (Leicester, 1951).
- 21 Trustees of the General Charities, Minute Book, 26 June 1879.
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- 24 Yeo, Religious and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis, p. 164.
- 25 James Kenward, The Suburban Child (Cambridge, 1955), p. 72.
- 26 Pendered, An Englishman, p. 52.
- 27 David Thompson, "The Churches and Society in Leicestershire, 1851-1881" (Ph.D., University of Cambridge), 1969, p. 66.
- 28 Centenary Book of the Great Meeting Sunday Schools (Leicester, 1883).
- 29 Great Meeting, Membership Register, 1875.
- 30 Victoria Road Church, Minute Book, 18 October 1876.
- 31 Bond Street Congregational Church, Deacons' Minute Book.
- 32 Thompson, "Churches and Society in Leicestershire", p. 66.
- 33 Free Christian Church, Minute Book, 18 April 1873.
- 34 "Account of the Centenary Festival", in W. Maurice Williams, ed., St. John's Lodge, Number 279, 1790-1928 (Leicester, [1928]), pp. 26-28.
- 35 The 42 shopkeepers included 9 drapers, 6 chemists, 5 wine merchants, 3 hatters, 3 grocers and 3 booksellers.
- 36 The Leicester Daily Mercury, 2 February 1900.
- 37 Ibid., 7 January 1885.
- 38 Leicester Journal, 9 September 1892.
- 39 The Wyvern, 22 October 1897.
- 40 The Leicester Daily Mercury, 3 March 1895.
- 41 The National Association Review, 14 February 1908.
- 42 Leicester Master Bakers' Association, Minute Book, 10 April 1907.

⁴³Ibid., 9 November 1907.

⁴⁴Ibid., November 1904.

⁴⁵The Grocer, 10 February 1912.

⁴⁶The Wyvern, 23 September 1898.

⁴⁷Leicester Master Bakers' Association, Minute Book, 10 April 1907.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 9 October 1880.

⁵⁰Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society, p. 179.

⁵¹Fourth Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into Friendly and Benefit Building Societies, Part One, P.P. 1874, XXXIII, p. XLV.

⁵²Banks' Cricket Club, Minute Book, 7 April 1879.

⁵³Ibid., Minute Book, n.d. 1910.

⁵⁴Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain", p. 19.

⁵⁵Male commercial clerks in Leicester:

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
No.	61	154	276	834	1,288	2,020	2,387

Source: Census Reports, 1851-1911.

⁵⁶Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh, p. 109.

⁵⁷Leicester Journal, 27 February 1903.

⁵⁸Trade Protection Journal, April 1903.

⁵⁹Leicester Journal, 27 February 1903.

⁶⁰The Grocer, 6 February 1904.

⁶¹Leicester Trade Protection Society, 1850-1950, p. 9.

CHAPTER NINE

SHOPKEEPERS AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN LEICESTER

Current orthodoxy designates shopkeepers, steeped in the liberal tradition of mid-Victorian England, as renegades who switched their allegiance to the Conservative party, with its rallying cry of cheap government, in the early twentieth century.¹ In this chapter, the shopkeepers' political role will be examined from a different perspective. The fundamental feature of shopkeeping politics was not a shift in party allegiance, but an abandonment, particularly after 1891 in Leicester, of partisan politics. Shopkeepers turned instead to trade politics and a collectivist political sub-culture oriented around trade associations.

In mid-Victorian Leicester, shopkeepers formed the backbone not only of the Liberal party but also of the political process, as voters, party activists and office-holders. Shopkeepers were committed citizens who allied themselves with the commercial elite to form a commercial trinity which controlled politics in Leicester. As the century progressed, however, shopkeepers became less important at all three levels of political activity.

The commercial trinity survived the 1867 Reform Act, although the broadening of the franchise seriously undermined shopkeepers' electoral strength. However, when Leicester's boundaries were extended in 1891 to include the new suburbs, shopkeepers, who were never able to establish a foothold in suburban politics, lost much of their power, particularly as Liberal party activists and office-holders; the commercial trinity began

to fragment as white collar employees and professionals occupied the positions vacated by shopkeepers. Despite herculean efforts by the Conservatives to enlist their support, shopkeepers abandoned partisan politics and withdrew into an associational sub-culture which watched over their interests.

Party allegiance in mid-victorian Leicester

Before the political role of shopkeepers in the Victorian era can be discussed, it is necessary to identify their party allegiance in the pre-1867 political process. Historians agree that shopkeepers formed, or helped to form, the backbone of Liberal England.² After 1848, as both Joyce and Crossick argue, shopkeeping politics lost its distinctive radical edge.³ Shopkeepers were incorporated into the Liberal electoral organization and became "content with the life of the political drone."⁴ Shopkeepers became part of an "urban liberal community ... built around the often tense but viable assertion of notions of equality based on ideals that were narrowly industrialistic and specifically political."⁵

A brief examination of the 1861 parliamentary by-election in Leicester reveals much about shopkeeping politics. Firstly, it is apparent that, while shopkeepers may have accepted a liberal business ideology, they were not all tied to the Liberal party. Secondly, it is clear that shopkeepers did indeed form a numerically important group within the electorate.

The 1861 by-election was a consequence of the death of Dr. Joseph Noble, one of the two Liberal members for Leicester. The by-election, however, caught the Liberals in disarray. A disagreement between the

radicals, or 'improvers', who were willing to accept a municipal debt in order to effect local improvements, and the moderates, or 'economists', who were not prepared to incur such debt, could not be resolved; both factions decided to run their own candidate. P.A. Taylor, the radical hope, was a disciple of John Stuart Mill, an internationalist, and a supporter of manhood suffrage. John Harris, the moderate, was the son of an old Leicester banking family, who represented nonconformist middle class liberalism. The Conservative, W.U. Heygate, benefited from the division in the Liberal ranks, and won a stunning victory, the only one achieved by the Conservatives in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁶

For the purposes of this study the votes of 25 per cent of the electorate have been calculated. These voters, who represented 196 different occupations, were then distributed amongst 7 more general occupational groupings, as well as the unidentified, as indicated in Table 9:1. The results show that shopkeepers were almost exactly divided between the Liberal and Conservative parties: if the votes received by the moderate and radical candidates, representing the two factions of the Liberal party, are combined, it can be seen that 46.7 per cent of shopkeepers supported the Conservatives while 53.3 per cent supported the Liberals. Clearly, in this election, neither party could count on the unswerving support of a large majority in the shopkeeping hierarchy.

When the Liberal vote is examined, on this occasion, forced to decide between the two, more shopkeepers favoured the fiscal responsibility championed by the moderates than the civic reforms

Table 9:1 Leicester By-Election - 1861¹

	Votes											
	Liberal- Moderate J.D. Harris			Liberal- Radical P.A. Taylor			Conservative W.U. Heygate			Proportion of Total Electorate		
	No. (A)	% (A/B)	% (A/C)	No. (D)	% (D/B)	% (D/E)	No. (F)	% (F/B)	% (F/G)	No. (B)	%	
Gentlemen	10	20.8	4.0	5	10.4	2.0	33	68.8	8.1	48	5.3	
Business	51	32.7	20.2	45	28.8	18.4	60	38.5	14.8	156	17.3	
Professionals	20	37.7	7.9	2	3.8	0.8	31	58.5	7.7	53	5.9	
Shopkeepers	78	30.1	31.0	60	23.2	24.6	121	46.7	29.9	259	28.7	
Publicans	2	3.5	0.8	29	50.9	11.9	26	45.6	6.4	57	6.3	
White Collar	14	33.3	5.6	7	16.7	2.9	21	50.0	5.2	42	4.7	
Skilled Trades	62	26.7	24.6	86	37.1	35.2	84	36.2	20.7	232	25.7	
Unknown	15	27.8	6.0	10	18.5	4.1	29	53.7	7.2	54	6.0	
	C:252			E:244			G:405			901		

¹ 25 per cent sample

Source: Leicester Poll Book, 1861.

proposed by the radicals. This was a feature which did not go unnoticed by the Conservative party's leaders, who tried to exploit this point at a later date. Yet, it will also be seen that shopkeepers were not always so inclined and were not always opposed to municipal improvements.

Table 9:1 also indicates that, although shopkeepers were equally divided in their party allegiance, they were slightly more important to the Conservatives than they were to the Liberals. Whereas the Liberals could count on a majority of support from the merchants and manufacturers, and the working class vote, the Conservatives could expect support from two smaller groups: professionals and white collar workers. This meant that attracting the shopkeeping vote was a crucial aspect of the Conservative campaign strategy. Shopkeepers represented 27.8 per cent of the total Liberal vote, but they represented 29.9 per cent of the Conservative vote. However, the Conservatives could not rely on guaranteed support from the more established business groups.

Shopkeepers also occupied an extremely important position in politics because, prior to the 1867 Reform Act, they formed just over one-quarter of the electorate. Even though Leicester's electorate included one of the largest proportions of working class voters in England,⁷ shopkeepers still ranked among the largest single recognizable occupational or business groups in the town. However, observers must be careful not to treat shopkeepers as representative of a block vote in the town; it has already been seen that the shopkeeping community, divided between and within trades, was far from a homogeneous whole. Nevertheless, by sheer force of numbers, shopkeepers could not be

ignored by mid-Victorian political parties.

Shopkeepers: the backbone of municipal politics

There was, however, little chance that shopkeepers would be ignored in mid-century: they were to be found at every level of political organization in the town. Evidence suggests that they did help to form the 'backbone' of the Liberal party. Similarly, despite a paucity of extant records, it would appear that shopkeepers also performed a similar function within the Conservative party. Throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century, shopkeepers remained committed activists who ensured that the political infrastructure functioned smoothly.

Local politics in mid-Victorian Leicester remained a central component of the town's cultural world; politics and recreation were inescapably intertwined. As Patrick Joyce has observed: "The community base to politics meant that politics permeated the daily and ostensibly non-political business of men's lives."⁸ The mixture of conviviality and serious civic activity was in evidence at numerous political gatherings. Party nomination meetings for municipal elections frequently drew large crowds who cheered for their candidate and jeered his opponents. At a West St. Mary's Ward Meeting in 1869, Mr. Jarrom, one of the incumbent Liberal Councillors, was subject to much abuse by a number of onlookers. According to the Secretary, "the proceedings ... were characterized by great good humour and pleasant badinage."⁹ However, Mr. Jarrom was constantly interrupted, both because he was a staunch supporter of local improvements and because the improvements were not located in the ward. The crowd continued to laugh and jeer

throughout his speech; when he concluded by promising to represent the ward to the best of his ability, a voice was heard, above the cheers, "You won't get in."¹⁰ Mr. Jarrom's fellow Councillor observed:

Regarding the meeting it was ... one of the best humoured and best tempered of the Ward he had ever attended. There was a little cross-firing going on, but it was just to make the meeting lively-- (laughter)--and was a little of the old spice that had not quite become extinct.¹¹

The good humour of the meeting, with its undercurrent of hostility, would appear to have provided all present, except perhaps for the unfortunate Mr. Jarrom, with an excellent evening of entertainment.

Representative of the merging of politics and conviviality were the annual political balls held by the Liberals and Conservatives. These events were 2 of the highlights of the social calendar, and they provided a formal opportunity for the party faithful to meet and mingle with the town's social and political elite. The 2 balls were held within one week of each other in February; as with all politically-oriented activities of the period, an element of competition emerged as the parties struggled to provide the most successful evening. In 1885 such important Liberals as Thomas Tertius Paget, M.P. and banker, William Barfoot, J.P. and worsted spinner, Edward Clephan, banker, A.H. Burgess, solicitor, and representatives of the Town Council and their wives entertained over 100 couples.¹² The following week, J. Herbert Marshall, a music dealer who was about to begin a successful political career, hosted the Conservative Ball which, according to newspaper reports, was only slightly less successful than their competitors' effort.¹³

Annual balls were only one example of political events which

enabled concerned and active citizens to participate in local affairs and to move in circles inhabited by the leading families of the town. Political clubs also proliferated in the town during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The two principal clubs, the Constitutional and the Liberal, were joined by numerous suburban clubs, such as the Clarendon Park and Knighton Liberal Club, the Belgrave Liberal Club and the Aylestone Conservative Club, to name a few.¹⁴ The purpose of these clubs was to maintain contact between party members between election campaigns, to promote the party cause where possible, and to recruit new party members.

Ward associations, which cared for a party's standing in the various wards which constituted Leicester's political map, lay at the heart of municipal party politics. Ward associations are also the most visible examples of the importance of voluntarism in local politics. Newspaper accounts of ward association meetings are invaluable for the information they provide on the feelings of the members and their nominated representatives. Unfortunately, they are of little use in identifying the general membership of the various associations. Almost invariably, accounts of meetings commenced with a list of the party notables, but failed to mention the names of the audience. Fortunately, however, the minutes and membership register of the East St. Margaret's Ward Liberal Association have survived. They indicate that the Association included men from all groups within the electorate. Manufacturers, shopkeepers and skilled tradesmen were all well-represented. However, it is apparent from Table 9:2 that this representation was not entirely reflective of the structure of the

Table 9:2 East St. Margaret's Ward Liberal Association - Members' Occupations, 1871

	Ward Assoc. Members, 1871		Liberal Voters, 1861	All Voters, 1861
	No.	%	%	%
Gentlemen	6	8.6	3.0	5.3
Business	21	30.0	19.4	17.3
Professionals	3	4.3	4.4	5.9
Shopkeepers	20	28.6	27.8	28.7
Publicans	0	0	6.3	6.3
White Collar	4	5.7	4.2	4.7
Skilled Trades	16	22.9	29.8	25.7
	70			

Sources: East St. Margaret's Ward Liberal Association, Minute Book, 1853-1887, 20 October 1871; Leicester Poll Book, 1861.

Table 9:3 Conservative Party Activists in Leicester

	Conservative Working Men's Club, 1870 ¹		Conservative Association, 1878 ²	
	No.	%	No.	%
Business	12	14.3	15	34.1
Professionals	1	1.2	13	29.5
Shopkeepers	13	15.5	8	18.2
Publicans	12	14.3	1	2.3
White Collar	9	10.7	1	2.3
Skilled Trades	6	7.1	3	6.8
Unknown	31	36.9	3	6.8
	84		44	

¹Members present at the 'Great Conservative Demonstration', 11 November 1870.

²Members of the Leicester Conservative Association, 1878.

Sources: Leicester Journal, 11 November 1870; 26 July 1878.

electorate. Although divided by a decade and by a Reform Act which considerably added to the number eligible to register for the franchise, a comparison of the membership of the Ward Association in 1871 and the electorate in 1861 is instructive. It illustrates the concentration of power among the commercial elite of manufacturers and merchants; their representation in the Ward Association almost doubled their representation in the electorate--30.0 per cent versus 17.3 per cent--at the expense of the skilled tradesmen, whose representation in the two levels of political activity declined from 29.8 per cent to 22.9 per cent. Professional and white collar participation was low, partly because these groups had not yet experienced the rapid expansion of their occupations which followed in the latter decades of the century; the decline in professional participation also appears to confirm Derek Fraser's position that those men were more likely to support the Conservative party.¹⁵ Shopkeepers, however, maintained their high level of representation in the political process. Consequently, while merchants and manufacturers consolidated their power at the voluntary level of politics, it was not at the expense of the retail community.

Members of the ward associations performed many of the tedious but essential duties concomitant to local politics. They organized the annual meetings of burgesses to nominate candidates for their respective parties in all of the municipal and parliamentary elections. They also ensured that potential supporters were registered on the poll, and that opposition supporters were legally entitled to be registered. Members canvassed the neighbourhood prior to elections, seeking to expand their party's support. Finally, perhaps their most important duty was to

ensure that all of their eligible supporters travelled to the polling booth on the day of the election.¹⁶

Not all of the work performed by the volunteers who sat on ward associations was entirely organizational; members also had a voice in the process which determined certain aspects of local party policy. Members certainly took advantage of association meetings to hold their representatives accountable for their actions, as we saw in the case of Councillor Jarrom. During much of the year, ward associations were inactive, particularly in the summer months when most activities, social or political, were suspended for the season. However, during the month which preceded an election, associational activity required a tremendous effort from party activists. Particularly demanding were the rounds of ward meetings, held in schools, public rooms and church halls, in the weeks preceding the poll. The transcripts of these meetings, printed verbatim in the local newspapers, provide a capsule of the issue which concerned the party faithful.

It is in the political arena that the hegemony exercised by the commercial elite is most evident; the business ideology shared by the elite and shopkeepers was manifest. One of the most interesting features of the evening ward meetings was the concern expressed by the participants that politics be run in a business-like manner, preferably by businessmen. Indeed, so anxious were members that this attitude endure that they were occasionally prepared to abandon partisan politics in order to ensure that their local representatives were capable of acting in such a manner. In 1869 the Secretary of the St. Martin's Ward Liberal Association proposed that the retiring Conservative Councillors

should not be opposed as they were, he was sure everyone agreed, good men. This was in spite of canvassing by the Ward Association which indicated that, of the 459 burgesses in the Ward, a majority, 255, were Liberals. Mr. Mott, an established wine merchant, concurred with the Secretary and noted that Messrs. Sarson and Barrs, both of whom were grocers, "were undoubtedly the best men of business on the Council."¹⁷ The Chairman congratulated the members for passing the motion: "...they had two men of business, who had and would continue to represent the ward."¹⁸ The Chairman later concluded:

It was of no use beating about the bush. The fact was the time had gone past for making all these municipal elections political. (Hear, hear.) The expenses of the town were enormous, and he was of opinion that they ought to have regard rather to selecting men who would attend to their duties than on account merely of their political opinions.¹⁹

Although the Chairman's hopes for an end to political debate in municipal politics may have been sanguine, his belief in the importance of a sound business attitude was supported by members of other ward associations. In 1869 the Liberals of North St. Margaret's Ward expressed the hope that the two Conservative incumbents would be bowled out of office.²⁰ Local taxation, it was argued, had increased over the last 9 years, and during that time the borough debt had nearly doubled. Mr. Norman, one of the Liberal candidates, suggested that it was time for more men with good business talent to assume the trusteeship of the town.²¹ Similarly, in 1898, The Wyvern recognized the efforts of Samuel Squires as a local politician; it was pointed out that he was "so popular as a businessman of long-standing in the ward."²²

Quite apart from their role as party administrators and activists,

shopkeepers were also expected to bridge the gap separating the middle class political world from the working class constituency. The Conservatives, forever looking for ways to increase their share of the vote, were particularly active in soliciting aid from their supporters amongst the shopkeeping and small business groups in this respect. In the late 1860s, the Conservatives launched a rhetorically impressive campaign to mobilize support for their cause amongst working men; it is evident that one of the tools employed by party strategists to achieve this end was the small shopkeeper, who was familiar with working men and their world.

Central to their campaign was the formation of a Conservative Working Men's Association (CWMA) in December 1869. At a meeting presided over by Lord John Manners, M.P., Viscount Curzon, M.P. and A. Pell, M.P., the Secretary of the new Association, J. Healy, told the audience that, aside from promoting the Conservative party, their purposes were threefold: to resist encroachment upon the prerogatives of the Crown, to resist spoliation of the nation's Church, and to resist the inauguration of one-sided treaties which had placed the country at an "alarming disadvantage with the foreigners in the various markets of the world."²³ The Leicester Journal, the Conservative paper, announced that a crowd of 2,000, of whom 1,900 were working men, voiced their support for this program. The following day, however, a letter appeared in a Liberal newspaper, the Leicester Chronicle, from Samuel Payne, a draper, in which he claimed that the supposed 'Great Conservative Demonstration' was nothing more than a sham. He went to the meeting, he contended, to catch a glimpse of "a real live specimen of the

Conservative working man."²⁴ What did he see, he continued with disgust, but the platform filled with representatives of the country and the body of the hall and galleries filled with shopkeepers, publicans and 'roughs' whom, he speculated, were probably paid to attend. Very few working men, he asserted, were there "out of love for the cause."²⁵ Undaunted by such criticism, however, the CWMA managed to gain a foothold within the community. It would appear that this was not a consequence of support from the working man, but the result of much hard work from a few committed individuals, principally small shopkeepers and businessmen, who took advantage of the trust vested in them by the leadership of the Conservative party.

The first ordinary meeting of the Association to be reported was held in March 1870 when the more specific task of the Association was articulated by S. Catlow, a stationer, when he argued that they should work to "stem the torrent of radicalism and democracy with which they were threatened."²⁶ Later in the year, at the first annual meeting, the Association took on a number of administrative tasks, among which was the formation of committees in the various wards of the town to help in all elections.²⁷ The Association was further tied to the parent Conservative party in an editorial in the Leicester Journal which reproached the Conservative party for allowing virtually all of the wards in the Borough to be monopolized by the supporters of the Liberal party.²⁸ The newspaper went on to praise the recent activities of the CWMA. In response, the Conservative party held a demonstration to celebrate the anniversary of the Association and to reward its members, the "honest, hard working, and hard headed men of the town of

Leicester."²⁹ The crowd at this meeting comprised 3 distinct groups: the honoured guests, including Lord John Manners, Sir Henry Halford and the local M.P.'s; the leaders of the local Conservative party; and, finally, the membership of the CWMA. An analysis of the men who comprised this latter group, presented in Table 9:3, illustrates that the Association was indeed very well supported by publicans, shopkeepers and small businessmen. The 37 per cent who cannot be identified may have been working men, and yet, even if they were, it must be remembered that the majority of those in attendance who were traced were not working men.

Following the 1870 demonstration, however, interest in the Association appears to have waned, although the names of the leaders of the Association can be found in the reports of Conservative party ward association meetings. It was not until 1878 that there was a resurgence of interest in the Association; this was precipitated by a Conservative party decision to reorganize the party's administrative structure in Leicester. In June 1878 the CWMA was superseded by the Leicester Conservative Association and, so it would seem, the pretense that the party's army of volunteers was drawn from working men was jettisoned.³⁰ It is interesting that the 4 Committee members of the CWMA, 2 builders and 2 shopkeepers, were also members of the new Leicester Conservative Association.³¹ This new Association was to take over the duties previously performed by the CWMA, such as the registration of voters, tasks which the editor of the Leicester Journal believed had been sadly neglected in the past.³²

The events of 1878 transformed the day-to-day administration of the

party; the business and professional elements in the party had clearly decided that they would have to take a greater interest in party management. The small businessmen and shopkeepers who had inspired the CWMA were no longer formal intermediaries between the party leaders and the working men of Leicester. Table 9:4 suggests that the leadership would now attempt to perform that duty themselves, with help from some of the shopkeepers and small businessmen who had led the CWMA. Therefore, party reorganization meant that shopkeepers lost some of their influence within the party, but were not excluded from the administrative hierarchy. The Conservative party had certainly not abandoned the shopkeeping community. It will be seen that later in the nineteenth century the Conservatives made a determined effort to become the party which best upheld the interests of the small businessman and shopkeeper.

Office-holders: the formation of a commercial trinity

Shopkeepers were not simply silent partners in their political alliance with the commercial elite. John Vincent argues that the institutionalization of party machinery in the 1860s and 1870s was only a symbolic gesture of democracy.³³ Nevertheless, in Leicester, shopkeepers achieved distinction at the highest levels of municipal politics. An examination of office-holders in mid-Victorian Leicester suggests that shopkeepers were considered to be exactly the type of business-minded citizens required if the municipal coffers were to be well-administered, and they were active at all levels of local government.

In mid-Victorian Leicester, shopkeepers clearly considered it to be

a civic duty to make their business and administrative talents available for the public good. They performed their duties quietly and efficiently. Leicester was, in fact, considered to be a very well-run town. Malcolm Elliott concludes his study of Victorian Leicester with a delightful, if earnest, letter from a Liberal Councillor of 20 years who retired from politics in 1900.

I remember when I was a young man I held the young man's cynical faith that all governing bodies were tied up with red tape, and existed as much for personal as public benefit. I have learnt in the Leicester Council Chamber to utterly renounce that foolish faith. I have found there a representative body almost ideal in its calm wisdom, its incorruptability, its forward policy, and its absolute devotion to the best interests of the town. Old England cannot go far wrong while its Town and County Councils follow the lead of Leicester.³⁴

Tables 9:4 through 9:9 enumerate the occupations of office-holders of 6 parochial and municipal bodies. It is clear that shopkeepers were well-represented at all levels of political office in mid-Victorian Leicester. In 1882 they held half of the positions as Freeman's Deputies, who were responsible for administering the 107 acres of land, worth nearly £1,000,000 held by the Freeman of Leicester.³⁵ In 1870 shopkeepers formed half of St. Margaret's Select Vestry, composed of churchmen and nonconformists, which cared for the parish rates and property.³⁶ They provided just over one-third of the Overseers of the Poor, who supervised the collection of the poor rate in the town's parishes.³⁷

Shopkeepers were less active on the School Board. This body's activities were complicated by the direct intrusion of denominational rivalry into the political arena. Consequently, Church of England

Table 9:4 Freemans' Deputies - Occupations

	1882		1893	
	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen			1	5.0
Manufacturers				
Merchants	3	25.0	5	25.0
Professionals			2	10.0
Shopkeepers	6	50.0	5	25.0
Publicans	1	8.3	1	5.0
White Collar			2	10.0
Skilled Trades	2	16.7	4	20.0
	12		20	

Sources: Leicester Journal, 17 March 1892; 17 March 1893.

Table 9:5 St. Margaret's Select Vestry - Members' Occupations

	1865		1896		1911	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	1	5.0	0	0	2	9.1
Manufacturers	1	5.0	3	10.0	2	9.1
Merchants	2	10.0	12	40.0	7	31.8
Professionals			1	3.3	1	4.5
Shopkeepers	10	50.0	8	26.7	4	18.2
Publicans	2	10.0		0	1	4.5
White Collar			1	3.3	1	4.5
Skilled Trades	4	20.0	4	13.3	1	4.5
Unknown			1	3.3	3	13.6
	20		30		22	

Sources: Leicester Journal and Midland Counties Advertiser, 5 May 1865; Leicester Journal, 24 April 1896; Wright's Directory of Leicester, 1911.

Table 9:6 Overseers of the Poor - Occupations

	1870		1881		1893	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	3	10.7	3	10.7	4	10.0
Manufacturers	2	7.1	8	28.6	9	22.5
Merchants	7	25.0	4	14.3	9	22.5
Professionals	1	3.6				
Shopkeepers	10	35.7	8	28.6	8	20.0
Publicans	2	7.1	3	10.7	1	2.5
White Collar					1	2.5
Skilled Trades			2	7.1	2	5.0
Unknown	3	10.7			8	20.0
	28		28		40	

Sources: Leicester Chronicle, 2 April 1870; The Leicester Daily Mercury, 2 April 1881; Leicester Daily Express, 27 March 1893.

Table 9:7 School Board - Members' Occupations

	1871-1874		1897-1900	
	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	4	18.2	1	5.0
Women ¹			3	15.0
Clergy	8	36.4	3	15.0
Manufacturers	3	13.6	2	10.0
Merchants			2	10.0
Professionals	2	9.1	2	10.0
Shopkeepers	3	13.6	1	5.0
White Collar			3	15.0
Skilled Trades	2	9.1	2	10.0
Unknown			1	5.0
	22		20	

¹All listed as either married or spinster.

Sources: Midland Free Press, 14 January 1871; Leicester Journal, 2 January 1874; The Leicester Daily Mercury, 7 December 1897; 4 December 1900.

Table 9:8 Board of Guardians - Members' Occupations

	1865		1886		1907	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Women ¹					5	10.4
Gentlemen	4	10.5	7	18.4	7	14.6
Manufacturers	7	18.4	12	31.6	2	4.2
Merchants	11	28.9	5	13.2	7	14.6
Professionals	1	2.6	3	7.9	3	6.3
Publicans					2	4.2
Shopkeepers	9	23.7	7	18.4	3	6.3
White Collar	1	2.6			6	12.5
Skilled Trades	5	13.2	4	10.5	13	27.1
	38		38		48	

¹All listed as either married or spinster.

Sources: Leicester Journal and Midland Counties Advertiser, 14 April 1865; The Leicester Daily Mercury, 27 March 1886; Leicester Journal, 29 March 1907.

Table 9:9 Town Council - Members' Occupations

	1868-1870		1888-1890		1891		1910-1912	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	2	4.8	3	7.1	4	8.3	4	8.3
Manufacturers	9	21.4	10	23.8	14	29.2	5	10.4
Merchants	12	28.6	10	23.8	13	27.1	15	31.3
Professionals	5	11.9	10	23.8	10	20.8	6	12.5
Shopkeepers	14	33.3	8	19.0	5	10.4	4	8.3
Publicans								
White Collar							4	8.3
Skilled Trades			1	2.4	2	4.2	10	20.8
	42		42		48		48	

Sources: Leicester Journal, 6 November 1868; 5 November 1869; 4 November 1870; 26 October 1888; The Leicester Daily Mercury, 25 October 1889; 24 October 1890; 3 November 1891; 2 November 1910; 5 November 1911; 2 November 1912.

clergy and nonconformist ministers were much in evidence. Shopkeepers were, however, particularly active on the 2 most important elected bodies in the town: the Board of Guardians, on which they occupied nearly one-quarter of the seats in 1865, and the Town Council, on which they held one-third of the seats in the period 1868-70.

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, shopkeepers were joined in parochial and municipal activity primarily by members of the commercial elite; manufacturers, merchants and shopkeepers formed an alliance--a commercial trinity--which dominated political bodies. For example, these three groups comprised 71 per cent of the Board of Guardians in 1865 and 83.3 per cent of the Town Council in the period 1868-70. In subsequent years the level of shopkeeper participation on elected bodies decreased slightly, as did the commercial trinity's stranglehold on political office. Nevertheless, in the decades prior to 1890, shopkeepers occupied an important position within the alliance of commercial interests which ran Leicester.

Shopkeepers' abdication from municipal politics

It is evident that by the end of the nineteenth century shopkeepers occupied a less important position--as voters, party activists, and office-holders--in the political affairs of the town. Although shopkeepers still formed a significant proportion of the electorate in the latter decades of the century, there can be no doubt that the extension of the franchise in 1867 undermined the prominent position which they had held. In Leicester the number of electors increased from 5,736 to 15,161.³⁸ Shopkeepers were doubly affected by the 1867 Reform Act because, as Martin Pugh has observed, the number of white collar

employees enfranchised increased substantially, and continued to do so as the stratum expanded.³⁹ Consequently, shopkeepers' political position within the wider electorate and the middle strata was eroded.

Despite its increased electorate power, it is apparent that the enlarged working class constituency was initially prepared to accept the commercial trinity's domination of party administration. Nevertheless, changes in the political process were immediate; in particular, the new working class voters demanded an end to the politics by consensus which had often been a feature of the alliance between the commercial elite and retailers. It has already been suggested that, in their determination to ensure the presence of sound business minds in public life, the political parties entered into a number of agreements to share ward representation. Such an agreement was reached in 1867 between the Liberal and Conservative Ward Associations in East St. Margaret's. In 1869 the Liberal Ward Association was just preparing to recommend the continuation of this compact when the meeting was interrupted by Mr. Holmes. He informed the Association that this was the first time that he had ever attended a ward meeting and he was sorry, but he felt it his duty to protest against the agreement between the Liberals and Conservatives. "This was the first time many working men who had resided in the ward, some nine and some twelve years, possessed the municipal franchise, and they found that the Liberal committee had put it out of their power to exercise it."⁴⁰ He sounded a warning: "They were not parties to the compact, and ... they would not feel themselves bound by it."⁴¹ Although Mr. Holmes and his supporters were placated on this occasion, it was apparent that in future years they would not be so

accommodating. The Ward was contested the following year.⁴²

Notwithstanding such attempts to keep the political parties in Leicester honest, the commercial trinity continued to exert control over party affairs until the last decade of the nineteenth century. The shopkeepers' abdication from their alliance with the commercial elite and from municipal politics was a gradual process; nevertheless, their withdrawal can also be attributed, at the administrative and office-holding levels, to the reorganization of party machinery following the extension of the Borough in 1891. This reorganization, which transferred the focus of power from the old wards in central Leicester to the suburban wards, undermined the shopkeepers' position; shopkeepers failed to involve themselves in suburban politics.

The move to extend the Borough boundary was prompted by the need to improve the town's sewage system.⁴³ It was felt that the suburbs, most of which lay beyond the old Borough, would not be adequately provided for until they came under municipal jurisdiction. After one unsuccessful attempt and much bickering, the extension scheme was finally adopted in July 1891; Belgrave, West Humberstone, Knighton, Aylestone, Spinney Hills, Newfoundpool and Westcotes were incorporated into Leicester's political framework.⁴⁴ The town gained 5,000 acres populated by 34,000 people.⁴⁵ As a result, the 7 old wards were replaced by 16 new wards.

An examination of the level of shopkeeper participation in ward associations in the last decade of the nineteenth century suggests that their influence varied considerably from ward to ward. Table 9:10, an examination of a number of the members of the 1893 Leicester 'Liberal

Table 9:10 Leicester Liberal Ward Association - Members' Occupations, 1893

	St. Martin's Ward		Castle Ward		Newton Ward		de Montfort Ward		Wycliffe Ward	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen			1	2.2	1	2.1	3	9.1	5	9.1
Manufacturers	2	9.1	5	10.4	3	6.3	6	18.2	9	16.4
Merchants	5	22.7	6	12.5	8	16.7	6	18.2	10	18.2
Professionals	4	18.2					3	9.1	3	5.5
Shopkeepers	11	50.0	11	22.9	8	16.7	2	6.1	5	9.1
White Collar			6	12.5	4	8.3	5	15.2	12	21.8
Skilled Trades			6	12.5	8	16.7	2	6.1	5	9.1
Unknown			13	27.1	16	33.3	6	18.2	6	10.9
	22		48		48		33		55	

Source: Leicester Liberal Association, Sixteenth Annual Report, 1893.

Table 9:11 Leicester Liberal Club and Leicester Liberal Executive Committee - Shareholders' and Members' Occupations

	Leicester Liberal Club Shareholders		Liberal Executive Committee Members		Leicester Executive Committee Members	
	1887		1893		1912	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	10	6.6	7	7.8	5	2.6
Manufacturers	58	38.2	29	32.2	22	11.5
Merchants	30	19.7	19	21.1	23	12.0
Professionals	13	8.6	5	5.6	19	9.9
Shopkeepers	19	12.5	2	2.2	12	6.3
Publicans	1	0.7				
White Collar	14	9.2	9	10.0	38	19.8
Skilled Trades	2	1.3	8	8.9	37	19.3
Unknown	5	3.3	11	12.2	36	18.8
	152		90		192	

Sources: Leicester Liberal Club Co. Ltd., Shareledger; Leicester Liberal Association, Sixteenth Annual Report, 1892; Thirty-Sixth Annual Report, 1912.

650', which comprised all those who belonged to the Liberal ward associations, indicates that the number of shopkeepers active on these associations varied throughout the city. In St. Martin's Ward, in which most of the principal shopping thoroughfares surrounding the Market Place were located, shopkeepers held half of the seats on the Ward Association. Similarly, in Castle Ward, another of the older districts in central Leicester, shopkeepers controlled nearly one-quarter of the Ward Association. Shopkeepers were also active in the poorer wards of the town. Newton Ward, according to one writer, was full of humble alleys, pokey shops and architecture with a tired look;⁴⁶ it constituted a great part of medieval Leicester. Retail traders were active in the Ward Association, but their representation, in a ward characterized by a high proportion of unidentified members, stood at only 16.7 per cent.

Shopkeepers did not exert influence in suburban political circles; this was of crucial significance after 1891 when the extension of the Borough transferred much of the town's political representation to the suburbs. De Montfort Ward, a wealthy enclave adjacent to the New Walk, relied on little shopkeeper participation in its ward business. However, the best indication of shopkeepers' inability to establish their influence in suburban Leicester is reflected in the membership of the Wycliffe Ward Liberal Association. The figures are particularly revealing because they illustrate the emergence of the white collar stratum as an important force within local suburban politics. Wycliffe Ward, created during the Borough reorganization of 1891, represented the southern, newest portion of the former East St. Margaret's Ward. The Ward incorporated the region known as Highfields, which lay to the east

of London Road. It was seen that in 1871, only 2 decades earlier, shopkeepers formed nearly 30 per cent of the old Ward Association; by 1893, their representation had dropped to 9 per cent. In the same period white collar participation increased to 21.8 per cent from 5.7 per cent.

If the Borough extension of 1891 undermined the shopkeepers' position within the Liberal hierarchy, then so too did the accompanying centralization of the party executive. As the General Committee of the party grew, due in large part to the redistribution of the wards, the party's leaders determined that it was becoming too unwieldy to run election campaigns. The ward associations still functioned well at the neighbourhood level, but a smaller body was required to coordinate the party strategy at the municipal level.⁴⁷ The Executive Committee, recruited principally from the leadership of each ward association, emerged as the influential core of the party in Leicester. In 1893 it is apparent that the manufacturers and merchants of the town had a firm grip on the Liberal party's administration. Only 2 shopkeepers, representing 2.2 per cent, were members of this central elite. The membership of the Executive Committee also accurately reflected the individuals supporting the Liberal cause who were prepared to finance their party's activities. Table 9:11 enumerates the men who provided the capital for the construction of a home for the Liberal Club, which opened in 1888 at a cost of £11,000.⁴⁸

Although the Executive Committee of the Liberal party grew quite considerably, shopkeepers benefited little from this expansion; by 1912 they had only increased their representation on this diluted body to 6.2

per cent. The most significant developments were the dramatic reduction in representation by manufacturers and merchants, and the increase of representation by white collar employees and skilled tradesmen. The expansion of the Executive Committee, which coincided with the abdication of many Liberal manufacturers and merchants from administrative office, did not initiate a revival of shopkeepers' influence on party affairs. Those manufacturers and merchants who remained active in party activities relied on support from other groups, such as members of the clerical and managerial workforce, the skilled working class, and, to a lesser extent, professionals.

It is also apparent that in the latter decades of the nineteenth century the level of shopkeeper representation on public bodies began to decline, precipitously so in some instances. Once again it must be emphasized that this abdication from political office was a gradual process. Nevertheless, it can be seen that both the extension of the Borough and the growth in importance of the suburbs in the political arena were pivotal events in this process. Prior to 1891, shopkeepers' representation on the Town Council had declined from its mid-century level, but in 1891, when elections were held to create the first Council under the reorganized Borough, their position was substantially reduced. On the Council which retired in 1890 shopkeepers formed 19 per cent of the membership, whereas on the 1891 Council they formed only 10.4 per cent of the membership. By 1910-12, shopkeepers' representation had declined even further to 8.3 per cent, one-quarter of the 1868-70 position. Their standing on the Board of Guardians slipped almost as much, a process evident in each of the Boards examined. Although

shopkeepers retained a greater presence on the parochial bodies, their power was still declining.

Shopkeepers were not the only group affected by the reorganization of Leicester's political map in 1891. The influence of the commercial trinity was also undermined. Its representation on the Board of Guardians sank to 29.2 per cent in 1907,⁴⁹ while its hold on the Town Council decreased to 50 per cent. The collapse of the alliance between shopkeepers and the commercial elite was not due entirely to shopkeepers' abdication from the political process. The largest businessmen within the commercial elite were also withdrawing from political activity. It has already been seen that in the Liberal party, following the 1891 extension of the Borough, the elite only temporarily tightened their control over the Executive Committee. As successful manufacturers moved their families into country homes, and established ties with county society,⁵⁰ many clearly lost interest in the affairs of ward and municipal politics.

Of the groups which had comprised the mid-Victorian commercial trinity, merchants alone remained consistently active in local politics; they inherited the political leadership of the town and it was they who had to fashion new alliances between the remnants of the commercial elite and the middle strata. It is evident that prominent among this latter group, replacing the positions vacated by shopkeepers, were professionals and white collar employees. These two groups formed 20.8 per cent of the 1910-12 Town Council and 18.7 per cent of the 1907 Board of Guardians. The decline of political influence among middle class business interests was not entirely counteracted by the rise of the new

middle class political groups. By the early twentieth century, representatives of the working men and women of Leicester were increasing their hold on municipal bodies. Their proportion of seats on the Board of Guardians doubled, from 13.2 per cent, and their representation on the Town Council improved from nothing to 20.8 per cent. Institutionalized class politics replaced the commercial politics of mid-Victorian Leicester.

Before leaving the world of the public official, it is necessary to look at one further aspect of occupational differentiation: party affiliation. In order to combat the poor showing of the Conservative party in municipal elections, the political allegiance of all those who contested an election, rather than just those who actually won has been examined. Tables 9:12 and 9:13, therefore, provide a breakdown of the occupations of all candidates for the Board of Guardians in 1880 and 1907. The data suggest that shopkeepers were initially active in both parties, and that Conservative shopkeepers were relatively, and perhaps absolutely, more influential in their party than were Liberal shopkeepers. Significantly, the Tables indicate that the fortunes of both were declining.

These Tables also confirm the emergence of independent working class politicians in the early twentieth century. The majority of working people running for office opted for membership in the Labour party; furthermore, within that party they represented two-thirds of the membership. The two shopkeepers who ran as Labour candidates, John Barratt and Alfred Grant, were both newsagents. However, by the time the Labour party was making its greatest impact in municipal elections,

Table 9:12 Board of Guardians - Candidates' Occupations and Party Affiliations, 1880

1880						
Liberals		Conservatives		Independent		
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Gentlemen	6	17.1	2	7.4	1	20
Manufacturers	16	45.7	5	18.5	1	20
Merchants	6	17.1	5	18.5	2	40
Professionals			2	7.4		
Shopkeepers	7	20.0	8	29.6	1	20
Publicans			4	14.8		
Skilled Trades			1	3.7		
	35		27		5	

Source: The Leicester Daily Mercury, 3 April 1880.

Table 9:13 Board of Guardians - Candidates' Occupations and Party Affiliations, 1907

1907								
Liberals		Conservatives		Labour		Independent		
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Women	7	17.5		1	6.7	1	33.3	
Gentlemen	4	10.0	6	12.5		1	33.3	
Manufacturers	2	5.0	7	14.6				
Merchants	12	30.0	14	29.2	1	6.7		
Professionals			6	12.5				
Shopkeepers	4	10.0	6	12.5	2	13.3		
Publicans			4	8.3				
White Collar	7	17.5	3	6.3	1	6.7		
Skilled Trades	4	10.0	2	4.2	10	66.7	1	33.3
	40		48		15		3	

Source: The Leicester Daily Mercury, 15 March 1907.

in the years after 1900,⁵¹ it has been indicated that many shopkeepers had abandoned direct participation in civic affairs. Shopkeepers had, in part, decided that the municipal socialism proposed by the Labour party could best be opposed by indirect action, through the auspices of their trade associations.

The Conservative party and shopkeepers in Leicester

There is little information to suggest that the Conservative party benefited from the withdrawal of shopkeepers from active voluntary involvement in the organization of the Liberal party. Unfortunately, no evidence comparable to that concerning the Liberal ward associations exists from the Conservative party. Nevertheless, newspaper accounts of party activity suggest that, despite efforts to harness the shopkeeping vote, the Conservatives did not extend their position significantly. Although the Conservatives occupied the wings of the political stage in Leicester throughout most of the nineteenth century, they represented an extremely vocal opposition and they were led by a number of dedicated and, ultimately, desperate men. Throughout the latter decades of the century the Conservative leadership clearly believed that they should concentrate on increasing their support amongst such groups as shopkeepers, and other small business groups, in an attempt to undermine the dominance of the Liberals.

Evidence suggests that the Conservatives believed shopkeepers to be the potential vanguard of a revival in Conservative fortunes which would sweep them to eventual power. The party's reliance on shopkeepers was natural considering the support they provided for the Conservative candidate in the 1861 by-election. While the Conservatives did, on a

number of occasions, whip up support for their activities, these campaigns must ultimately have been considered failures; short-term support was not transformed into lasting allegiance. The associations which were encouraged by the Conservative party and directed towards shopkeepers remained almost entirely on the fringes of Leicester's political world. Furthermore, it is also evident that in the early twentieth century the Conservative party was increasingly directing its rhetoric toward other potential groups of supporters in the community.

The Conservative party in Leicester employed a number of tactics in its effort to boost shopkeeping support. Particularly during the 1890s, Conservatives attempted to exploit the parsimonious streak common to many shopkeepers and businessmen. Conservatives urged them to join associations established by Conservative party organizers so that attempts could be made to embarrass the Liberal administration in Leicester. The majority of these associations were not only short-lived, but they usually relied on the same individuals to organize them and they seldom acquired widespread support. In short, it may well be that the desire held by many shopkeepers for a reduction in municipal expenses, which would in turn ensure that local rates did not rise, and their sporadic support for agencies such as the Leicester Ratepayers' Association (LRA), were not transformed into a growing loyalty to the Conservative party. Although a number of small shopkeepers did lend their support to such associations over the years, it was clearly not enough to enhance the electoral standing of the Conservative party. Furthermore, the continued presence on these associations of a small number of men indicates the existence of a few committed individuals

rather than a broadly based network of members.

Throughout its various incarnations the LRA was committed to its primary belief: the reduction, wherever and whenever possible, of municipal expenditure. Although it appeared briefly in 1873,⁵² the LRA did not become a truly active organization until 1893, when a meeting was held on 16 March in the Co-operative Hall. The following day The Leicester Daily Mercury, a Liberal newspaper, drily remarked that "like the last, [it] is designed in the interests of the Tory party."⁵³ It was at this inaugural meeting that Christopher Oldershaw, a tobacconist, and David Wright, a commercial traveller, emerged as the leaders of the LRA, although they maintained a close relationship with the Conservative administration.⁵⁴

The meeting at the Co-operative Hall was precipitated by a letter from Oldershaw to the Leicester Daily Express.⁵⁵ The newspaper supported this call to action and referred to the planned meeting as a step in the right direction.⁵⁶ The editor observed: the Association "must devote itself to securing the ratepayers against lavish expenditure and extravagance in the future."⁵⁷ At the meeting Mr. Mason, a Conservative Councillor, illustrated the thinking of the Association for he observed that the "worst failure of the present rating system was that the larger kind of working class houses and small shops were more heavily taxed proportionately than the better class of dwelling."⁵⁸ A twelve-man provisional Committee, including Councillor Mason, Wright and Oldershaw, was then created. David Wright argued that the Association would have no connection with politics; it was not a 'Tory dodge'.⁵⁹ The Leicester Daily Mercury, after noting the presence

of well-known Conservatives on the Committee, including Councillor Mason, remained skeptical.⁶⁰

The LRA's first important foray into municipal politics came in October 1893 when a meeting was held in Wyggeston Ward in support of Christopher Oldershaw's bid to run as a representative of the Ratepayers' Association in the November municipal elections. Oldershaw announced that, if elected, he would "remedy the evils of the town--extravagance and debt."⁶¹ The Leicester Daily Mercury immediately dismissed the Association's plan, and unkindly remarked that their candidate was "not a very influential personage."⁶² Soon after, the LRA's claims to independence from the Conservative party were ridiculed by the Liberal press when it was announced that the Conservatives were declining to run a candidate in Wyggeston Ward, thereby leaving the field open to Mr. Oldershaw.⁶³ This had the immediate effect of boosting Oldershaw's support; however, in a ward which had voted solidly Liberal since its creation in the Borough reorganization of 1891, he lost handsomely and, in the process, destroyed any fiction that the LRA was truly independent of the Conservative party.

Following this electoral setback it would seem that the LRA lapsed into a state of virtual inactivity until March 1896 when it made its strongest bid to enlist the support of small shopkeepers by sponsoring a number of public meetings to oppose Sir John Lubbock's Early Closing Bill. The first meeting was held at the Co-operative Hall and was presided over by Wright and Oldershaw. The latter, as a tobacconist, told the meeting of shopkeepers and traders that the Bill "would prevent them from conducting their business by their own methods."⁶⁴ He agreed

that shop hours were, in many cases, far too long, but legislation was not the solution; rather the matter should be arranged between shopkeepers, assistants and customers. He then proposed an amendment opposing the Bill.⁶⁵ He was supported by Councillor Edwards, a wholesale confectioner, who argued that the sole purpose of the Bill was to "help large shopkeepers against the small."⁶⁶ The amendment was then put to a vote and the LRA was taken aback when it discovered that it lost by 36 votes to 7. The following day a letter from 'Liberty' appeared, denouncing the meeting and claiming that the Early Closing Association had swamped the meeting with assistants who were supportive of the Bill, and who outvoted the smaller shopkeepers.⁶⁷ However, as one observer noted, the significant point was that, despite small shopkeepers' opposition to Sir John's Bill, only 7 small shopkeepers turned out to support the LRA.⁶⁸

This attempt to gain support from small shopkeepers also failed to improve the LRA's standing at the polls in the elections of 1897, its next foray into municipal politics. In an attempt to shake off criticism which implied that his Association was only an appendage of the Conservative party, David Wright announced that "personally he had no politics at all" and would contest the Charnwood Ward election against a Liberal and a Conservative. He claimed to have at least 800 supporters, all of whom were concerned only with economy.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, his support evaporated on election day and he managed only 79 votes, some 570 less than the second place Conservative candidate.⁷⁰ The Wyvern observed that the LRA could scarcely have any supporters outside its own ranks.⁷¹ An attempt was made to revive it in

1903 when A.F. Holland told an audience composed primarily of Conservative Councillors and party members that "they did not want a little miserable society which would die in a few years."⁷² However, after sending a deputation to oppose the closing of the pleasure fair in Humberstone Gate, the Association once again appears to have disappeared, this time for a decade. It made its final reappearance in 1913, prior to the Great War, for the purpose of opposing recent raises in rates and guarding the interests of all property owners, small or large.⁷³

This examination of the LRA, in all of its manifestations, is important because it illustrates that historians must be careful before they make general observations about a move towards the Conservative party by small shopkeepers. The LRA was an unofficial arm of the Conservative party which directed its rhetoric, indirectly and directly, at shopkeepers. Yet, after creating a certain degree of interest amongst what the LRA considered to be its potential membership, the results must have been considered disappointing. It never maintained its impetus and, while it attracted the efforts of a few dedicated members, it never achieved any widespread support. Clearly, this does not necessarily mean that small shopkeepers were not voting for the Conservative party; that point cannot be determined with any certainty. However, it is apparent that shopkeepers did little to maintain a Conservative organization which attempted to appeal to shopkeepers. This, in itself, is instructive.

Closely associated with the LRA's campaign was the attempt by the Conservative party to gain support from shopkeepers and other small

businessmen by taking advantage of their fear of socialism. Much of this fear was due to the perceived relationship between socialism and the co-operative stores; the National Chamber of Trade referred to shopkeepers as a class "whom co-operation threatens and socialism would sweep clear out of existence."⁷⁴ Shopkeepers took little comfort from socialists who suggested that it would be expedient to sell their business to the community rather than be driven out of business by the trusts and combines.⁷⁵ Such an argument was, in one writer's opinion, "the most illogical and unconvincing thing I have read for many a day."⁷⁶

The Conservative party in Leicester also argued that the plans proposed by the socialists would cost money. The editor of The Wyvern observed that socialist and labour promises, such as the provision of more baths, more libraries, more parks, cheaper tram fares, cheaper gas and so on, were "all very estimable and desirable things, but only to be obtained at the expense of more rates."⁷⁷ There was, he was sure, a direct relationship between the increase in Labour's influence on Leicester's governing bodies and the increase in the town's rates. No doubt the readers were well-aware that Leicester's municipal debt was rising dramatically; indeed, it increased 72 per cent between 1903 and 1906.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the Conservative party had planned its campaign well; for a number of years it had assured shopkeepers that, in the party's opinion, they were overtaxed. In 1896, Sir John Rolleston, a leader of the Conservative party in Leicester, noted that

local rates fell unduly heavily upon small shopkeepers and retail traders, and that the assessment of the

class of property they occupied was not at all in proportion to the large works and more pretentious buildings.⁷⁹

The tax system, he concluded, had to be more equitable. Certainly Sir John would have had a supporter in Frank Bullen, the small London shopkeeper who started on his journey to the bankruptcy court on the day he opened his shop.

I had lost all hope of ever doing any good for myself and my family.... Despite all my efforts I got deeper and deeper into debt, and among other things the crushing load of the rates, then going up by leaps and bounds, owing to the socialist tendency of the local authorities, made me feel particularly bitter.⁸⁰

While many small shopkeepers undoubtedly held similar feelings, although perhaps without the same bitterness, it must be noted that not one of the shopkeepers whose bankruptcies were traced in Chapter Three made mention of the rate issue as a cause, however slight, of their distress.

Socialists responded over the years by arguing that rising rates were due to the growth of the town and commensurate growth in services, rather than a consequence of their actions. Even the editor of The Pioneer, organ of the Labour Representation Committee, agreed that "increasing rates have proved a heavy burden to the middle-class householder and small shopkeeper class."⁸¹ He continued:

...the aim must be to place the [rate] burden upon the right shoulders. The small shopkeeper, fighting the battle of competition with the multiple shop proprietor, is entitled to every consideration. At present he bears more than his share of the burden.⁸²

Shopkeepers were unlikely to have been converted solely by a sympathetic editorial, however, which neglected to mention the close relationship between The Pioneer and the Leicester Co-operative Society.

Furthermore, shopkeepers and other small businessmen were also unlikely to have been impressed by The Pioneer's editorial immediately preceding the 1906 General Election. Readers were reminded that "EVERY VOTE GIVEN TO THE TORY OR WITHHELD FROM EITHER OF THE PROGRESSIVE CANDIDATES IS ... A VOTE FOR CAPITALISTIC EXPLOITATION."⁸³

If the Conservative party attempted to woo shopkeepers by sympathizing with the heavy burden they carried as ratepayers, then its leaders also sought to gain shopkeepers' allegiance by supporting them on matters which were more directly related to their businesses. The Conservatives maintained a watchful eye over local affairs and endeavoured to exploit any apparent dissatisfaction among shopkeepers with the ruling Liberal Town Council. However, the Conservatives were continually frustrated in their efforts to translate public condemnation of specific Liberal programs into committed support for their party. It has already been suggested in Chapter Two that many shopkeepers favoured the existence of the local markets; it was felt that the crowds drawn by the stalls also benefited the shopkeepers, although there were periodic concerns about rowdiness. Yet, as Leicester grew in the second half of the nineteenth century, it became clear that the town's markets and fairs, which had remained virtually unchanged since medieval times, needed to be reorganized. The Conservatives, sensing that shopkeepers were wary of the reforms proposed by the Liberals, sought to undermine the shopkeepers' confidence in the redevelopment plans which periodically emerged from the Town Hall. Specifically, given the shopkeepers' general belief that markets complemented their trade, they were apprehensive about proposals by the authorities to remove the

markets from their long-standing locations. This occurred a number of times between 1860 and 1914, and in each case the Conservatives attempted to transform this apprehension into outright opposition to the plan in order to embarrass the Liberals.

The most significant of the proposals to reform the markets occurred in 1883; it concerned the plans of the Corporation to either abolish or remove the market held on Wednesdays in Highcross Street. The Town Clerk placed the proposal before the Toll Committee at a special meeting May 1883. He noted that the market was a great inconvenience to vehicular and other traffic, and there seems to have been little disagreement with the contention that the market was too busy for such a narrow yet important street.⁸⁴ A correspondent to the Leicester Daily Post observed: "The market now held in that thoroughfare was very well in 'Good King George's glorious days', but it is decidedly out of place now. I trust we shall hear of the removal before a loss of life or limb takes place."⁸⁵ The Town Clerk agreed with this sentiment and suggested that the Corporation felt that a free market might be substituted in the Market Place on Wednesdays to appease the Highcross Street stallholders. He continued, "Council must be prepared for a vigorous opposition." from the innkeepers and shopkeepers of Highcross Street.⁸⁶

The Committee was not surprised, given the warning of the Town Clerk, when it received a petition from 75 owners and tenants of Highcross Street opposing the removal of the vegetable market which, they argued, "will cause serious loss and inconvenience to your Petitioners and to the inhabitants of the West End generally."⁸⁷

Nevertheless, the Toll Committee recommended the acceptance of the Town Clerk's plan and arranged for preliminary steps to be taken for the establishment of a permanent Wednesday free market in the Market Place. The proposal was then put before the Town Council, which was told that much of the town's growth was to the south and east and that the Market Place was now much more central than Highcross Street; the Council approved of the plan despite the attempt of two Conservative Councillors, Millican and Almond, to refer the matter back to the Toll Committee. Before the new market could be set up, however, an Act of Parliament was required and, consequently, the plan was included in a Leicester Corporation Bill which was due to be put before the ratepayers for approval in December 1883. It was at this point that the Conservative party, endeavouring to harness the unrest of the shopkeepers in Highcross Street, attempted to block the Corporation Bill, which also contained a number of important provisions. Foremost amongst these were a proposal to consolidate the town's debt and a plan to negotiate a further loan of £60,000 to complete the flood works on the River Soar, which was prone to regular flooding.⁸⁸

The gathering of ratepayers which considered the Bill was, according to the Leicester Post, an "uproarious meeting" which was held in the Old Town Hall under the chairmanship of the Mayor. The Town Clerk then determined, following a show of hands, that the majority favoured the Bill. The opponents of the plan disagreed and immediately demanded a poll of the town.⁸⁹ The editor of the Leicester Post was angry at this turn of events; he pointed out that this was the third stage of the Conservative party's attempt to oppose the measure. The

first had been Councillor Millican's attempt to "scuttle" it in Council; and the second was an alleged meeting between the Conservatives and Highcross Street malcontents prior to the ratepayers' meeting.⁹⁰

The plebiscite provided a victory, however, for the Town Council: the Bill was approved by 10,751 votes to 6,619 and, after due procedure, it received Royal Assent on 19 May 1884.⁹¹ Before this could occur, however, the Conservatives made one last attempt to halt the Bill. Councillor Millican, on behalf of the Conservative party, wrote to the Local Government Board to complain about irregularities in the actions of the Leicester Town Council. This letter did not halt the passage of the Bill, but the signatures appended to the letter of complaint confirm that the principal opponents of the Bill, aside from the leading Conservatives, were the shopkeepers and publicans of Highcross Street.⁹²

The Conservatives also attempted to exploit the parochial concerns of shopkeepers in order to embarrass the Liberals when the Corporation introduced a plan to terminate the biannual pleasure fair in Humberstone Gate. The 1888 report of the Assistant Commissioner on Market Rights and Tolls concluded:

There is a fierce dispute in this town with respect to the pleasure fair which is held in one of the chief thoroughfares and at which large sums are received by the owners and occupiers of adjacent houses for the liberty to erect shows in front of their premises. The Corporation desire to abolish this fair.⁹³

Specifically, the Town Council was concerned about the disruption to the tram system that was caused by the fair, as well as the general disorder and immorality concomitant with the festivities.⁹⁴ Mr. Fowler, a lawyer

hired by the property owners and occupiers of the south side of Humberstone Gate, admitted that his clients were concerned about the prospect of losing £500 a year in rental if the fairs were removed. The debate simmered on until 1903 when the Corporation, with the support of the town's churches and the School Board, finally acted to initiate legislation which would abolish the fairs. At this point a Committee for the Maintenance of the Pleasure Fair was formed to coordinate attempts, including a petition by 5,000 ratepayers, to oppose the Corporation.⁹⁵ It was unsuccessful in its efforts, and the last pleasure fair was held in 1904.⁹⁶ However, it is interesting to note that the Conservative party, under the auspices of the LRA, was responsible for the Committee to oppose the Corporation. Indeed, of the 8 members of the Committee formed to save the pleasure fair, 7 were also on the Committee of the LRA, which had been re-established earlier in 1903. Once again, it would appear, the Conservatives attempted to appropriate the concern of shopkeepers and other ratepayers about potential financial loss in order to undermine Liberal authority. Certainly, the 1903 reincarnation of the LRA and the Committee for the Maintenance of the Pleasure Fair seem to have led brief and, in the case of the latter, futile existences.

Despite its efforts to increase support from shopkeepers, there is little evidence to suggest that the Conservative party was successful. Unfortunately, because party records comparable to those of the Liberal party are unavailable, it is difficult to ascertain the level of shopkeeper participation on Conservative municipal and ward associations. Newspaper accounts were never as comprehensive as the

official Liberal reports. Nevertheless, attendance registers in the press, although incomplete, suggest that, while there is no doubt that some shopkeepers were active volunteers in the Conservative party administration, they did not form a group which was consolidating its position within the party. Table 9:14 indicates that the Conservatives were organized, at the municipal and ward levels, principally by merchants and, increasingly, by professionals, with the support of manufacturers, white collar employees and shopkeepers.

Indicative of both their abdication as volunteers for the Conservative cause and their political parochialism was the absence of shopkeepers from the administration of the Tariff Reform League. Throughout the latter decades of the nineteenth century, shopkeepers in Leicester paid little attention to national affairs unless they directly impinged upon their businesses. Shopkeepers, who had been important agents in the mid-Victorian campaigns to channel the votes of working men into the Conservative party, did not actively support the protectionist cause. Shopkeepers failed to participate in a movement which, Conservatives argued, would put men and women back to work and rekindle working class support for the party.⁹⁷

The Tariff Reform League had established 6 branches in Leicester by 1907.⁹⁸ The chairman was a former Liberal, Samuel Faire, who had been one of the founders of the Liberal-Unionist party of Leicester in 1886.⁹⁹ He emerged as an influential Unionist and party organizer. Faire adopted a two part strategy to advance the cause of tariff reform. Firstly, he worked privately, as a member of the Leicester Chamber of Commerce, to persuade that organization to adopt a resolution which

Table 9:14 Conservative Party Activists

	Committee Leicester Conservative Association 1890		Committee Leicester Conservative Association 1903		East St. Mary's Ward Conservative Association		Newfoundpool Ward Conservative Association	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Manufacturers	3	10.3	2	6.5			1	5.0
Merchants	8	27.6	4	12.9	9	36.0	3	15.0
Professionals	4	13.8	8	25.8	5	20.0	6	30.0
Shopkeepers	3	10.3	5	16.1	1	4.0	2	10.0
Publicans	1	3.4	2	6.5				
White Collar	3	10.3	6	19.4	4	16.0	1	5.0
Unknown	7	24.1	4	12.9	6	24.0	7	35.0
	29		31		25		30	

Sources: The Leicester Daily Mercury, 27 February 1890; 30 October 1890; 26 March 1895; Leicester Journal, 13 February 1903.

Table 9:15 Leicester Tariff Reform League - Committee Members, 1907-12

	No.	%
Manufacturers	4	18.2
Merchants	7	31.8
Professionals	6	27.3
Shopkeepers	1	4.5
Publicans	1	4.5
White Collar	3	13.6
	22	

Sources: Leicester Journal, 31 May 1907; 5 April 1912; The Leicester Daily Mercury, 15 March 1910.

called for modifications to the "system of Free Trade hitherto pursued by this country."¹⁰⁰ Secondly, he worked publicly with the Committee of the Tariff Reform League to initiate a propaganda campaign extolling the benefits which would accrue if protection was adopted. He was aided in this task, as Table 9:15 indicates, principally by manufacturers and merchants, with help from professionals and white collar employees; the shopkeeping community was represented by only one member, S.W. Knight, an outfitter and hatter.¹⁰¹ Once again, there is little to suggest an increase in support, at the participatory level, for the Conservatives amongst shopkeepers.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the voting habits of shopkeepers after the 1872 Ballot Act, which introduced voting in secret. However, it has been suggested that if voluntary participation in political activity, at either the organizational or the office-holding level, is examined there can be little doubt that the shopkeepers' influence was languishing. The material confirms tentative suggestions that shopkeepers were becoming less active in the Liberal party; however, it also indicates that this did not precipitate a rush by shopkeepers to help in any active way the Conservative party.¹⁰² Indeed, it is evident that the influence of shopkeepers within Leicester's political community declined after the mid-Victorian years. This decline was due in part to social changes over which shopkeepers had no control. The political alliance between the commercial trinity of manufacturers, merchants and retailers could not survive the middle class political realignment which accompanied the emergence of independent working men on the municipal stage.

Associational politics: the emergence of a collectivist political sub-culture

By the 1890s, and particularly the 1900s, most principal shopkeepers and a significant minority of domestic shopkeepers were represented in the political arena by trade associations. Consequently, the shopkeepers' abdication from municipal politics was not solely a result of social pressures; shopkeepers made a conscious decision to reject individual political activity because they were increasingly well-served in the political world by their associations. In Chapter Eight it was indicated that in the mid-nineteenth century shopkeepers shared a business ideology, based on the image of the self-made man, with the commercial elite. However, as shopkeepers adopted collectivist measures to defend themselves from real or perceived competition, some of which originated amongst the elite, they began to modify their business ideology. Shopkeepers surrendered their position in the power bloc within which the elite constituted the hegemonic fraction. Shopkeepers still considered the individualistic spirit to be a vital force, but they were prepared to adopt collectivist methods to create an environment in which individualism could prosper.

Trade associations appropriated and developed the role of watchdog over trade matters which had previously been performed, if at all, by individual traders. Associations also provided a new forum for shopkeepers who wanted to exercise their leadership qualities. In the process, however, Leicester lost the initiative of a once important group in municipal politics. Consequently, the departure of shopkeepers from political activity was to some degree illusory; rather, partisan

politics were replaced by trade associational politics. This represented the shopkeepers' clearest gesture that they were ending their alliance with the commercial elite.

Lord Avebury, the champion of early closing, could not comprehend how shopkeepers had ever found time to accomplish anything other than the running of their own businesses: "Men so overworked cannot be useful citizens."¹⁰³ It is not surprising that many shopkeepers, particularly those with few or no assistants and unable to leave their shops, began to allow their associations to act and speak for them; they delegated their political responsibilities to the elected officials of their trade. Freed from the onerous duties incumbent upon citizens of past times, shopkeepers were able to direct all of their energies into their businesses. Associations, the Grocers' Journal suggested, were enabling shopkeepers to occupy once again positions of importance within the political world and to add "to the reputation they enjoyed in the 'good old times'."¹⁰⁴

Trade associations publicly professed a reluctance to entangle themselves in partisan political debate. Instead, they argued that shopkeepers should combine to maintain a watch over trade concerns. Throughout the Victorian era it is possible to detect a strain of opposition to the political process when it impinged upon the retailing community. As late as 1910, The Ironmonger reflected such hostility on a number of occasions during the course of the second General Election of that year. The editor noted that the "prospect of a general election before Christmas is not alluring."¹⁰⁵ The following week he was more specific:

...in the case of the small shopkeeper, who, with only a small working capital depends on the Christmas trade to give a big 'boost up' to his year's turnover, the holding of a General Election immediately before the busiest shopping season of the year must in many cases spell disaster.¹⁰⁶

Many trade associations initially considered political manoeuvring to be counter-productive: partisan bickering could rapidly revive petty jealousies. Trade journals were conscious that to stray only briefly into partisan politics could bring instant rebukes from readers. In 1905 the bakers' National Association Review tested the political waters by attempting to initiate a discussion on the implications of tariff reform. The response was swift. One respondent argued:

I trust that you will preserve the non-political character of the paper and not develop into a Radical organ. The tendency of the leading article is very much that way this week. I daresay the majority of the members of our trade are that way of thinking [free traders] but at the same time there is a very strong minority who, like myself, are Conservatives, and whose opinions are certainly worthy of a little consideration.¹⁰⁷

The editor then observed that he had been attacked by both sides in the debate, for others accused him of being the organ of tariff reformers.¹⁰⁸

The hands-off attitude was also initially adopted by the Grocers' Journal in 1892, after a correspondent attempted to start a debate on the political role of shopkeepers. The writer argued that shopkeepers should unite and organize their enormous electoral power,

for the protection of their own legitimate interests Imagine the traders at the forthcoming General Election, organised in each electoral district or division and voting unitedly they would simply hold the key of the position.¹⁰⁹

The editor's response reflected the attitude of both the trade press and

the associations over the ensuing years. In the first instance the journal decided that the wisest course would be "to exclude all correspondence of so decidedly a controversial subject."¹¹⁰ The following month, however, the editor clarified his position:

Whilst adhering to our resolve ... to conduct this Journal on strictly non-political lines, we are at the same time glad to notice, altogether irrespective of party considerations, that, as regards the General Election now proceeding, the grocers of the United Kingdom are showing commendable energy in bringing under the notice of Parliamentary candidates questions of importance to the trade generally, with a view to elicit their opinions and secure their advocacy in the House of Commons.¹¹¹

Yet there is little doubt that the early trade associations, despite their statements to the contrary and the rhetoric of the trade press, were only scantily disguised political lobby groups. It is important to note, however, that these early associations seldom initiated political activity; they merely reacted to events initiated by others.

The Leicester Butchers' Association, the first identifiable trade group in the town, was born out of the partisan bickering which erupted over the attempts of the Liberal Corporation to remove the Cattle Market from its central location, immediately south of the Market Place, to a new site on the outskirts of town. It was observed earlier that the Corporation considered the land occupied by the Cattle Market to be a prime site for the projected Town Hall. Objections to the removal came initially from the farmers, who argued that the new site, on Welford Road, would be inconvenient. This criticism was invalidated, however, when the railway company agreed to create a sub-station opposite the new Cattle Market.¹¹² Also opposed to the move were 140 residents of St. Martin's Parish, which adjoined the Cattle Market.¹¹³

The most vocal opponents of the plan, however, were the butchers of Leicester who complained bitterly about the inconvenience which would occur as a consequence of the removal. In particular, they argued that the removal of the public slaughterhouse to Welford Road would damage the business prospects of the small butchers who, unable to afford their own slaughterhouse, would be forced to have a horse and cart, as well as an extra man, at a total cost of £100 a year, in order to transport their meat.¹¹⁴ At a meeting held on 22 September 1865, at the Bull's Head Inn by the Market Place, Leicester's butchers agreed to meet again the following week to create an association to retain the old Cattle Market.¹¹⁵ The number of butchers who attended the second meeting was so large that the organizers, including Councillors C. Harding and J. Wilford, were forced to move the gathering to the Corn Exchange. However, despite much rhetoric, and the efforts of the new Association, the Town Council voted to continue with the planned removal of the Cattle Market in November. The butchers' campaign failed largely because of outside political circumstances beyond their control. The victory for those who wanted the removal of the Cattle Market was also a victory for the 'improvers'. The battle waged between 'improvers' and 'economists' over the Cattle Market in 1865 proved to be the last act of a drama played out over a 30 year span,¹¹⁶ which, it was noted earlier, had cost the Liberal party a parliamentary seat in 1861.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, trade associations did not merely react to events initiated by others in the political arena; they also articulated their own specific demands. In Chapter Six the battle over early closing, at both the national and the

local level, was discussed in some detail. While the attempt to persuade politicians that legislation was required if the perceived evil was to be remedied was in itself a political manoeuvre, the campaign also led to the further politicization of trade associations. In particular, it spawned the habit of canvassing politicians, usually during election campaigns, to determine their positions on specific issues of importance to shopkeepers. Once again the grocers were among the first to realize the worth of this tactic. In November 1910, the Grocers' Journal, feeling that shop legislation was inevitable, warned the grocer that it would "be better for him to bow to the inevitable and do his best to secure that his parliamentary candidate would pledge himself to make the proposed Bill as workable as possible."¹¹⁷ To aid grocers in this task they were provided with a long questionnaire which asked candidates if they supported compulsory closing for shops, rather than legislation to regulate the hours of shop assistants.¹¹⁸

Such methods of lobbying parliamentary candidates were developed and directed by the National Federation of Grocers' Associations. As early as 1900, Arthur Giles, the Secretary, was releasing lists of questions which local Associations could use without compromising the non-political nature of the Federation. Candidates would be supported, it was argued, purely on their responses to trade issues, rather than on the party to which they were affiliated. In 1905 candidates were asked if they were in favour of 12 specific proposals including: the creation of a Select Committee into the adulteration of butter; the removal of the sugar tax; greater control over municipal trading; and an amendment to the law for making an invoice a warranty.¹¹⁹ Similarly, questions

for candidates in municipal elections aimed to secure the election of those in favour of a fair rate assessment for shopkeepers and a curtailment in municipal trading.¹²⁰

The National Chamber of Trade (NCT) was more direct, and aggressive, than the Grocers' Federation in its treatment of political bodies in the country. By 1910 the NCT was an umbrella organization which represented nearly 200 associations, federations and chambers.¹²¹ Its Parliamentary Committee plainly stated its position:

...the traders of Great Britain, if they wish their interests to be considered by those in the seats in Whitehall, must put their own shoulders to the wheel ... to assert and protect their threatened rights and liberties.¹²²

The NCT, through the Retail Trader, worked to inform shopkeepers of legislation which would affect their businesses, and to protect shopkeepers from what it considered to be arbitrary actions of public bodies. For example, in 1913 the Retail Trader assailed the practise, apparently common amongst Boards of Guardians, of only accepting tenders for goods at less than cost price. This was municipal extortion, the editor argued, because no shopkeeper could afford not to bid, as his competitors might gain the valuable advertisement which accompanied a contract.¹²³ Such concerns might have appeared foolish to the Guardians, but to the shopkeeper they were matters of importance which justified the existence of trade associations.

Shopkeepers increasingly adopted collective action in order to remedy real or perceived problems. Trade associations began to represent the business interests of shopkeepers in the political arena. They were not interested in assuming responsibility for the civic duties

which shopkeepers had at one time performed. It is true, however, as indicated in Chapter Eight, that associations began to provide shopkeepers with an alternative social and convivial framework to that which had been so much a part of mid-Victorian politics. It was assuredly no coincidence that, as combination amongst shopkeepers developed, the level of individual participation in municipal and ward politics by shopkeepers declined. Citizen shopkeepers, who pronounced their individuality by their acts of voluntarism in partisan politics, were disappearing. By the time of the Great War the Small Trader and Shopkeeper could announce: "To-day the individual counts for little or nothing.... The only way to make your influence felt is by organised effort."¹²⁴

Notes, Chapter Nine

¹See Winstanley, Shopkeeper's World, pp. 102-3; T.J. Nossiter, "Shopkeeper Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century", in T.J. Nossiter, A.H. Hanson and Stein Rokkar (eds.), Imagination and Precision in the Social Sciences (London, 1972), pp. 407-438; Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain", p. 39; Crossick, "The petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain", p. 77.

²Winstanley, Shopkeeper's World, p. 20.

³See Nossiter, "Shopkeeper Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century", pp. 102ff.

⁴Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, p. 317.

⁵Crossick, "The petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain", p. 74.

⁶For a detailed discussion of this, and subsequent elections, see A History of the County of Leicester, vol. IV, The City of Leicester (London, 1958), pp. 221-3.

⁷Derek Fraser, Urban Politics in Victorian England: The structure of politics in Victorian cities (Leicester, 1976), p. 223.

⁸Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, p. 282.

⁹Leicester Chronicle, 30 October 1869.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²The Leicester Daily Mercury, 12 February 1885.

¹³Ibid., 17 February 1885.

¹⁴See for example The Leicester Daily Mercury, 16 February 1887; 1 March 1887.

¹⁵Fraser, Urban Politics, pp. 228-9.

¹⁶East St. Margaret's Ward Liberal Association, Minute Book, 16 March 1874.

¹⁷Leicester Chronicle, 30 October 1869.

- ¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Ibid.
- ²¹Ibid.
- ²²The Wyvern, 7 October 1898.
- ²³Leicester Journal, 17 December 1869.
- ²⁴Leicester Chronicle, 18 December 1869.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Leicester Journal, 18 March 1870.
- ²⁷Ibid., 17 October 1870.
- ²⁸Ibid.
- ²⁹Ibid., 11 November 1870.
- ³⁰Ibid., 27 September 1878.
- ³¹Ibid.
- ³²Ibid., 21 June 1878.
- ³³John Vincent, Formation of the Liberal Party, 1857-1868 (London, 1966), p. 94.
- ³⁴Elliott, Victorian Leicester, p. 167.
- ³⁵Leicester Journal, 17 March 1893.
- ³⁶St. Margaret's Select Vestry, Minute Book, 6 May 1885; 1 July 1885.
- ³⁷Fraser, Urban Politics, pp. 55ff.
- ³⁸A History of the County of Leicester, vol. IV, p. 224.
- ³⁹Martin Pugh, The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939 (New York, 1982), p. 89.
- ⁴⁰Leicester Chronicle, 30 October 1869.
- ⁴¹Ibid.
- ⁴²Leicester Journal, 28 October 1870.

⁴³ Extension of the Borough Boundaries Committee, Minute Book, 26 September 1862.

⁴⁴ Elliott, Victorian Leicester, pp. 148-151.

⁴⁵ Pritchard, Housing and the Spatial Structure of the City, p. 194.

⁴⁶ Gould, The Life-Story of a Humanist, p. 100.

⁴⁷ East St. Margaret's Ward Liberal Association, Minute Book, 16 March 1882.

⁴⁸ Leicester Liberal Club, Minute Book of the General Meetings of the Shareholders, 10 April 1889.

⁴⁹ Including publicans.

⁵⁰ See Freer, "Business Families in Victorian Leicester", pp. 175ff.

⁵¹ Labour party representation rose from 1 of 48 seats in 1896, to 4 in 1900, to 9 in 1904, and to 18 in 1910.

⁵² Leicester Journal, 28 March 1873.

⁵³ The Leicester Daily Mercury, 17 March 1893.

⁵⁴ Oldershaw was a Conservative member of the Board of Guardians between 1894 and 1904. The Leicester Daily Mercury, 15 March 1901.

⁵⁵ "Sir--The Borough rates are to be 7s 6d in the £! Is it not time for the formation of a Ratepayers' Association? Verbum Sap". Leicester Daily Express, 11 March 1893.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 15 March 1893.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 17 March 1893.

⁵⁸ The Leicester Daily Mercury, 17 March 1893.

⁵⁹ Leicester Daily Express, 18 March 1893. Sitting on the Committee were: 2 builders, 2 insurance agents, 4 shopkeepers, 2 travellers and 2 unknowns.

⁶⁰ The Leicester Daily Mercury, 7 June 1893.

⁶¹ Ibid., 19 October 1893.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 31 October 1893.

- ⁶⁴Ibid., 20 March 1896.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
- ⁶⁶Ibid.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., 21 March 1896.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., 23 March 1896.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., 1 September 1896.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 2 November 1897.
- ⁷¹The Wyvern, 5 November 1897.
- ⁷²Leicester Journal, 24 April 1903.
- ⁷³Midland Free Press, 3 May 1913.
- ⁷⁴Retail Trader, July 1911.
- ⁷⁵Small Trader and Shopkeeper, 15 May 1915.
- ⁷⁶Ibid., 15 June 1915.
- ⁷⁷The Wyvern, 28 October 1905.
- ⁷⁸It rose from £3,757,995 in 1903 to £5,201,224 in 1906. Elliott, Victorian Leicester, p. 132.
- ⁷⁹Leicester Journal, 3 January 1896.
- ⁸⁰Bullen, Confessions of a Tradesman, p. 169.
- ⁸¹The Pioneer, 24 March 1906.
- ⁸²Ibid.
- ⁸³Ibid., 13 January 1906.
- ⁸⁴Toll Committee, Minute Book, 30 May 1883.
- ⁸⁵Leicester Daily Post, 27 August 1883.
- ⁸⁶Toll Committee, Minute Book, 30 May 1883.
- ⁸⁷Ibid., 31 July 1883.
- ⁸⁸Leicester Post, 21 December 1883.

⁸⁹Leicester Town Council, Minute Book, 13 March 1884.

⁹⁰Leicester Post, 22 December 1883. John Storey, the Town Clerk, discussed the incident 12 years later, and could still scarcely conceal his indignation over the demand for a poll of the town. "May I here take the opportunity," he wrote, "of saying that, in my opinion, it is almost a disgrace to the statute book that a single ratepayer may, ... have an owners' register formed, and a poll of owners and ratepayers taken against the action of the duly elected representatives of the inhabitants." John Storey, Historical Sketch of some of the Principal Works of Undertakings of the Council at the Borough of Leicester (Leicester, 1895), p. 35.

⁹¹Toll Committee, Minute Book, 20 May 1884.

⁹²Leicester Town Council Minute Book, 13 March 1884. They argued that 2,560 voting papers were not delivered and that 3,074 papers were not properly filled out; consequently the 10,751 votes registered in favour of the Bill did not mean that the majority of ratepayers in Leicester were in favour of the Corporation Bill.

⁹³R.C. on Market Rights and Tolls, P.P. 1890-91, p. 32.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 40.

⁹⁵Leicester Journal, 17 July 1903.

⁹⁶Simmons, Life in Victorian Leicester, p. 32.

⁹⁷Leicester Chronicle and Leicester Mercury, 1 January 1910.

⁹⁸Leicester Journal, 31 May 1907.

⁹⁹The Leicester Daily Mercury, 26 June 1886.

¹⁰⁰Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Minute Book, 9 March 1910. The motion was narrowly defeated by 51 to 43 votes.

¹⁰¹Leicester Journal, 5 April 1912.

¹⁰²Crossick, "The petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain", p. 75.

¹⁰³The Right Honourable Lord Avebury, "On the Early Closing Bill", Essays and Addresses: 1900-1903 (London, 1903), p. 135.

¹⁰⁴The Grocers' Journal, 26 March 1910.

¹⁰⁵The Ironmonger, 16 November 1910.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 23 November 1910.

- 107 National Association Review, 17 February 1905.
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 The Grocers' Journal, 10 June 1892.
- 110 Ibid., 17 June 1892.
- 111 Ibid., 8 July 1892.
- 112 Leicester Journal, 15 September 1865.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Ibid., 29 September 1865.
- 115 Ibid., 22 September 1865.
- 116 Elliott, Victorian Leicester, pp. 41-42.
- 117 The Grocers' Journal, 26 November 1910.
- 118 Ibid., 3 December 1910.
- 119 Ibid., 23 December 1905.
- 120 Ibid., 27 October 1900.
- 121 National Chamber of Trade, Souvenir of the Twelfth Annual Meeting and Conference at Bradford, May 27th to 31st, 1910 (Bradford, 1910), p. 72.
- 122 Retail Trader, July 1911.
- 123 Ibid., January 1913.
- 124 Small Trader and Shopkeeper, 15 May 1915.

CONCLUSION

The intention of this study has been to examine an occupational group which has recently been the subject of more speculative comment than detailed analysis. It is apparent that the shopkeeping world should more properly be considered a hierarchy within which there existed two primary fractions. This point is central to an understanding of the experience of late Victorian and Edwardian shopkeepers. Crossick is correct to stress that only a sensitivity to stratification within the petite bourgeoisie, including the shopkeeping community, will enable historians to trace the social, cultural and ideological position of its members. This exploratory investigation of Leicester has been a response to Crossick's call for a detailed treatment of shopkeepers in their true environment, which he correctly identifies as the local and parochial.¹ Such an emphasis indicates that when shopkeepers are considered central, although not heroic, characters on the urban stage, rather than residual and peripheral figures, they emerge as people who may well have felt embattled, but who were not simply figures buffeted by events over which they exerted no control and to which they offered no response.

An examination of shopkeepers' occupational world suggests that in Leicester it was a complex hierarchy stretching from the small shop operating out of a front parlour, to the lavishly stocked drapery emporium overlooking the Market Place. Measurements of shopkeepers' stock valuations and turnovers, insurance claims, wealth at death and residence patterns all suggest considerable differentiation within this

hierarchy. Despite this, there existed a fundamental division between small and large shopkeepers. The gulf separating small domestic shopkeepers from large principal shopkeepers was based less on size than on location, clientele, status and ideology. Furthermore, these two shopkeeping fractions had little in common, as traders or citizens.

In the late nineteenth century independent shopkeepers were confronted with what appeared on the surface to be an ominous array of challengers for their custom. Trade journals continually charted the development of such external competitors as co-operative societies, multiples and department stores. Even more threatening, particularly to domestic shopkeepers, was the internal competition which raged within the shopkeeping world, both between and within the specialist trades, and amongst the growing number of small shops. However, a detailed analysis of shop turnover rates suggests that, although the business prospects of many shopkeepers were extremely poor throughout the period, they only deteriorated in a few trades. It is also evident that the trades dominated by domestic shopkeepers suffered from a much worse turnover expectancy than those trades dominated by principal shopkeepers. This feature is confirmed by bankruptcy rates, reflecting the performance of larger businesses, which suggest that after a period of distress in the late 1880s and early 1890s, conditions for principal shopkeepers appear to have improved, particularly after the early 1900s.

There can be little doubt that, whatever the true state of the business environment, domestic and principal shopkeepers perceived their worlds to be under attack. Their response was varied and, in many cases, ineffective; yet these actions reflected shopkeepers'

determination to protect their livelihoods. Initially shopkeepers attempted to combat competition individually by improving their trade skills and by adopting new sales techniques, such as advertising. However, while the belief in the importance of personal effort remained a central canon of the entrepreneurial ideal, a growing number of shopkeepers began to recognize the benefits of collectivist action: firstly, through buying combines which were devised to provide individual trades with the purchasing power of large concerns; secondly, through trade associations which were organized to protect their interests at the local and, later, the national level. Trade associations, which primarily, but not exclusively, served principal shopkeepers, moved to limit the opportunities for competition in a number of fields. Co-operative societies were confronted over the divi, which created bonds of allegiance between the customer and the co-operative. Associations confronted price competition by attempting to fix the price of goods sold in the town and by working with national bodies, such as the Proprietary Articles Trade Association, to convince manufacturers to implement resale price maintenance. Finally, and most significantly, associations representing principal shopkeepers confronted internal competition, particularly that offered by domestic shopkeepers, by lobbying for legislation to limit the hours when shops could open for business. This conflict was institutionalized in the early 1900s when domestic shopkeepers began to organize more effectively to counter agitation for legislation, thereby reinforcing the divisions between the two shopkeeping worlds.

One feature of shopkeepers' functional role as distributors was

their integration into the cultural and social fabric of their constituencies. Domestic shopkeepers' familial and business ties entrenched them in the working class, yet their relationship with their customers was ambiguous. To consider shopkeepers a divisive force within the working class, however, is to overlook the complexity of the reciprocal relationship which existed between trader and customer. Their relationship also produced tension which was evident at two levels. Firstly, because of their ability to grant or withhold credit, and because of their shops' function as a clearinghouse for gossip, shopkeepers were intimate with the domestic culture of working class women. However, partly as a consequence of this intimacy, and partly as a consequence of their hours behind the counter, shopkeepers were seldom active in the formal, male-oriented culture of the working men's club and the friendly society. Secondly, tension was generated by contradictions within shopkeepers' entrepreneurial and social ideology. While it is evident that the prospect of personal independence attracted recruits to an unstable business environment, domestic shopkeepers shared a community of interest with the working class which was only partly calculative. Consequently, during the campaign launched by temperance reformers to restrict the number of off-licences, shopkeepers agreed that their response was partly prompted by a fear of potential business losses, but it was also apparent that shopkeepers identified with, and defended, working class notions of respectability.

Whereas the world of the domestic shopkeeper changed little over the course of the late nineteenth century, the world of the principal shopkeeper was transformed. In mid-Victorian Leicester shopkeepers

represented an important group within the middle stratum. The commercial elite ruled the town by co-opting this middle stratum into a business community over which they exerted hegemonic control. The central feature of this business community was a shared ideology based less on rhetoric than on the shared experiences of institutional and associational life. The elite integrated shopkeepers into the putative business community by fostering a fictional sense of equality, based on merited inclusion, which created the flattering assumption that shopkeeping members should be recognized as successful businessmen. Shopkeepers' relationship with the elite was reciprocal: shopkeepers acted as the auxiliaries of the elite; in return the elite accorded them a greater measure of association within their world. This reciprocal relationship was most evident in the political arena in Leicester. Shopkeepers--important as voters, party activists and office-holders--were allied to the commercial elite of manufacturers and merchants in a commercial trinity which reflected their concern that the town be run in a business-like manner.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, principal shopkeepers had developed a sub-culture, oriented around trade associations, which undermined their ideological bond with the commercial elite. When shopkeepers withdrew from their role as the auxiliaries of the elite, they relinquished their right to merited inclusion within the business community and dissolved the fictional sense of equality which had united otherwise disparate occupational and social strata. Shopkeepers' withdrawal was acknowledged by the elite, who responded by replacing shopkeepers with other groups from the middle

stratum. By the 1890s white collar employees began to supplant shopkeepers as the auxiliaries of the elite in the voluntary associations which comprised the formal middle class cultural world.

The 1890s was also a pivotal decade with respect to shopkeepers' abdication from their political trinity with the elite. The extension of the Borough boundaries in 1891 initiated the redistribution of political power in Leicester. In particular, the reorganization of the Liberal party to reflect the growing influence of suburban politics increased the level of white collar participation in the political process. However, this reorganization also coincided with the disintegration of the business ideology uniting shopkeepers and the elite. The former appear to have ignored the attempts of the Conservative party to enlist their support; shopkeepers rejected partisan politics and relied on the developing shopkeeping sub-culture to lobby local and national governments on their behalf over trade issues.

Shopkeepers have come under scholarly scrutiny as members of the lower middle class. However, the tendency to treat shopkeepers as an occupational group which was also a fundamentally uniform social stratum has created a number of problems. It has been suggested that within the shopkeeping hierarchy were two distinct fractions which had little in common beyond a shared belief in personal independence, albeit reinforced by collective action. Unlike the emerging lower middle class of white collar employees, who occupied a residual social position between the working class and the middle class, shopkeepers were well-integrated into their respective constituencies. Although frequently

suffering from real or perceived economic marginality, shopkeepers do not appear to have suffered from status anxiety. It seems that they had the ability to assume the class identity of the community which they served. Shopkeepers' relationships with their customers were not deferential, but were based on a sense of social service and duty. Shopkeepers considered themselves to be useful members of the community which they served. Consequently, despite a concern for their business prospects, shopkeepers enjoyed a security of status seldom achieved by white collar employees. The relationship between shopkeepers and the white collar stratum clearly warrants detailed examination.

It was observed in the introduction that there has been a tendency to identify the things which shopkeepers did not do, rather than those which they did. Although this study has attempted to indicate that shopkeepers were not passive, compliant individuals who failed or were unable to take control of their lives, it must be acknowledged that some traders were fatalists. Impressionistic literature suggest that some, like the small London shopkeeper Frank Bullen, were resigned to eventual catastrophe.² Yet the creation and diversification of a shopkeeping sub-culture suggests that many shopkeepers did not follow H.G. Wells' solution to Mr. Polly's business reverses and run away.³ The efforts of shopkeepers in Leicester indicate that as traders and as citizens they were constantly sensitive to their role within the community and their relationship with its members. It was this sensitivity which enabled shopkeepers to assert their independence from the elite, particularly in the 1890s and 1900s, by rejecting old alliances and forging new trade allegiances. Shopkeepers' developing

trade identities represented their determination to make a stand in order to defend their position within the retailing community.

Notes, Conclusion

¹Crossick, "The petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain",
p. 78.

²Bullen, Confessions of a Tradesman, p. 203.

³Wells, The History of Mr. Polly, pp. 147ff.

APPENDIX

Occupational Classifications

The ambiguity and imprecision of occupational designations in the census enumerators' books, trade directories, marriage registers and manuscript sources make detailed classifications impossible. Except when greater precision was feasible, the following classifications were employed.

- Gentlemen: including local landowners and those listed as 'Mr'.
- Manufacturers: including manufacturing chemists, ironmongers and clothiers.
- Merchants: including wholesalers, builders, estate agents and business agents.
- (Business: 'Merchant' and 'Manufacturer' classifications combined).
- Professionals: Clerks in Holy Orders, nonconformist ministers, doctors, lawyers, architects, accountants (but not bookkeepers), school masters (but not School Board teachers).
- Shopkeepers: fixed-retail outlet principal and domestic traders.
- White Collar: clerks, commercial travellers, shop assistants, bookkeepers, School Board teachers, managers (but not company directors or bank managers), insurance agents and warehousemen.

Skilled Trades: artisanal workers, including framework knitters and shoemakers, as well as tailors; factory workers, including hosiery and shoe hands, classified by a trade.

Labourers: including factory workers not classified by a trade.

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1899-1901 St. John the Divine, Christ Church, St. Andrew's, All Saints, Holy Trinity, St. John the Baptist, St. George's, St. Matthew's, St. Mary de Castro, Church of the Martyrs, St. Mark's, St. Luke's, St. Leonard's, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Martin's.

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