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**CIVIC CULTURE, POLICY-MAKING
AND MUNICIPALIZATION IN NOTTINGHAM,
1870 TO 1900**

Duncan Charles Smith, B.A., M.Litt.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of
Nottingham Trent University for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

September 2004

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Abstract

This study examines the civic culture and policy-making processes within Nottingham Corporation between 1870 and 1900. It identifies and evaluates the distinctive and exceptional characteristics of that municipal culture. The analysis is based principally upon a case study of the policy processes of municipalization and the practice of municipal trading. Nottingham's experience is located in the context of the findings of other municipal authorities.

The approach taken in this study is unusual in a number of ways. Firstly, the focus is upon municipalization and municipal trading as a means of understanding civic culture, rather than housing or public health, which have been used more typically in analyses of the operation of late Victorian municipal government. Secondly, within that policy area of trading, the main emphasis is on the relationships of politicians and officers in making policy for the four utilities, instead of more narrowly on the economic performance and profitability of particular utilities. Thirdly, prominence is given to the detailed contributions of the Town Clerk and specialist engineers to municipal life, rather than leaving them on the margins of formal political activity. This examination of the dynamics of the political culture of a singular municipal corporation helps to provide insights into the operation of authorities more generally, especially that group of boroughs which grew from medium-sized towns to large municipalities in the later part of the nineteenth century.

The distinctiveness of the operation of municipal government in Nottingham, as in other corporations, was influenced, at least in part, by the traditions of the Borough, the values, norms and meanings of civic life and the town's particular socio-economic framework. Some of the individual features of municipal practice in the town were not uncommon, and could be found in the political processes of other boroughs. However, a particular combination of characteristics in the policy-making processes of the Corporation made the political culture of Nottingham, between 1870 and 1900, exceptional. That exceptionalism was based upon the specific relationships that were developed between the Liberal and Conservative politicians and their senior officials in policy formation, decision-taking and policy implementation. It was the nature of the political chemistry of partisanship, non-partisanship and civicism in the political discourse of the Council, together with the professionalism and rational knowledge of the Town Clerk and engineers, which provided the foundations of Nottingham's particular civic culture. The politicians' pursuit of the principles of municipal capitalism and the practice of municipal trading were fundamental to the political and financial strategy of the Council.

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Abbreviations

Archives

BL	British Library
MRC	Modern Records Centre
NAO	Nottinghamshire Archives Office
NUMD	Nottingham University Manuscripts Department
PRO	Public Records Office

Newspapers

NDE	<i>Nottingham Daily Express</i>
NDG	<i>Nottingham Daily Guardian</i>
NEP	<i>Nottingham Evening Post</i>
NMCDE	<i>Nottingham and Midland Counties Daily Express</i>
NJ	<i>Nottingham Journal</i>
NWEJ	<i>Nottinghamshire Weekly Express and Journal</i>
TT	<i>The Times</i>

Nottingham Corporation Archives

AR/G	Auditor's Report : Gas Committee
AR/W	Auditor's Report : Water Committee
ECAR	Electricity Committee Annual Report and Accounts
ECR	Electricity Committee Report
ELCAR	Electric Lighting Committee Annual Report and Accounts
ELCR	Electric Lighting Committee Report

/ EN	Engineer's Report
FC	Full Council Minutes and Reports
GCAR	Gas Committee's Annual Report and Accounts
GCR	Gas Committee Report
GWCR	Gas and Water Committee Report
GWHCR	General Works and Highways Committee Report
GWOCR	Gas and Water Opposition Committee Report
HCR	Health Committee Report
HOCR	Housing Committee Report
LCR	Lighting Committee Report
MOHR	Medical Officer of Health's Report
PCR	Parliamentary Committee Report
TCR	Town Clerk's Report
TRCR	Tramways Committee Report
TRCAR	Tramways Committee Annual Report and Accounts
WBCR	Water Bill Committee Report
WCAR	Water Committee Annual Report and Accounts
WCR	Water Committee Report

Chapter 1

Introduction

The rationale

Organizations do have their own history and identity, and the people that make them up are axiologically acting, thinking and feeling creatures. They are driven – often intuitively and non-rationally – by values, norms and meanings. That indeed may be called [civic] culture'.¹

This study examines the civic culture and policy-making processes within Nottingham Corporation between 1870 and 1900. It identifies and evaluates the distinctive and exceptional characteristics of that municipal political culture. The analysis of the nature of Nottingham's culture and the performance of municipal government in the town is based principally upon a case study of the policy processes of municipalization and the practice of municipal trading, in the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities. The relationships of the municipal politicians, the political parties and the senior officials in policy formation, decision-taking and policy implementation are at the heart of the examination. The links between a number of key concepts are central to the argument. An assessment is made of the contributions of matters of partisanship, non-partisanship, civic ethos, modernity, professionalism, rational knowledge and municipal capitalism to Nottingham's civic culture. The experience of Nottingham Borough Council is located in the context of the findings of other municipal authorities.

The approach taken in this study is unusual in a number of ways. Firstly, the focus is upon municipalization and municipal trading as a means of understanding political culture, rather than housing or public health, which have been used more typically in analyses of the operation of late Victorian municipal government. Secondly, within that policy area of trading, the main emphasis is on the relationships of politicians and officers in making policy for four utilities, instead of more narrowly on the economic

¹ A.C. Zijderveld, *A Theory of Urbanity: the Economic and Civic Culture of Cities* (Transactions Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1998), pp. 10-11.

performance and profitability of particular utilities. Thirdly, prominence is given to the detailed contributions of the Town Clerk and specialist engineers to municipal life, rather than leaving them on the margins of formal political activity.

In 1870 Nottingham was a municipality with distinctive political traditions and a major provincial town with an idiosyncratic economic structure. Between 1874 and 1897 Nottingham Borough Council created four municipal businesses. Nottingham was the first of the large authorities in England and Wales to own and operate all four gas, water, electricity and tramway utilities, a few months ahead of Leeds City Council.² With Leicester, the Council was one of only two significant boroughs to remain under uninterrupted Liberal control for the seventy-three years after the Municipal Corporations Act 1835.³ It had the hallmarks of a highly individual authority. Yet it was one of a group of large provincial English towns, each of which was apparently faced with similar challenges to meet the pressures of a rapidly expanding population and the effects of urbanisation. Nottingham was essentially a medium-sized town that became large during the later part of the nineteenth century, in common with, for example, Leicester, Sheffield and Bradford.⁴ An analysis of its political culture, therefore, offers the potential to reveal the dynamics of a singular municipal corporation, but one that could provide useful insights into the operation of large authorities more generally.

Politically, Nottingham was recognisably different to most other large municipalities, both in terms of council control and traditions. The Whigs and Liberals had a stranglehold on municipal power until 1908, although not on the town's parliamentary seats. In the late eighteenth century and for much of the nineteenth, Nottingham was associated in the national mind first with radical causes and later with socialist movements.⁵ In 1865 it was still reported that 'political feeling governs everything

² Appendix C, Table 14.

³ M. Elliott, *Victorian Leicester* (Phillimore, 1979), pp. 161-163; J. Moore, 'Liberal Unionism and the Home Rule Crisis in Leicester, 1885-1892', *Midland History*, XXVI (2001), p.193; G.L. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies, 1900-1914: Three Case Studies', *The Historical Journal*, 26, 3 (1983), p. 630.

⁴ D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979).

⁵ M.I. Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham, 1785-1835* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1969); J. Hill, 'Nottingham Socialists in the 1880s: a Comment on Sources', *Bulletin of Local History: East Midland Region*, XIV (1979), pp. 12-15; P. Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement, 1880-1939* (Lawrence

and everybody in Nottingham'.⁶ Wyncoll has claimed that Nottingham remained a 'banner town' in 1873 and the town was temporarily at the forefront of the socialist movement even in the early 1880s.⁷ However, Beckett has argued that, from the 1880s, the Borough was 'no more radical than any other town for its size and composition' and indeed, by the end of the century, 'had at last been tamed'.⁸ It has been contended that in the last two decades of the century, Nottingham was 'not a centre of provincial influence', unlike Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.⁹ This judgement has been based mainly on the Corporation's tardy response to the need for social housing.¹⁰

Economically, Nottingham's structure was distinctive. Throughout the period, the local economy was characterised by the predominance of mainly small and some medium-sized firms. The general configuration of companies had significant implications for the nature of the social and political leadership of the town. Nottingham had been traditionally dominated by the lace and hosiery trades. In 1877 well over half of all the firms operating in the newly enlarged town, including all manufactories, trades and retail outlets, were still based on the textile industries.¹¹ If trading conditions became depressed, as they did for example in the mid-1880s, this dependence on lace and hosiery could produce high levels of unemployment and acute financial difficulties across the community. However, Nottingham's economic structure was undergoing changes from the 1880s which were to produce an industrial and commercial base that was more balanced than the economies of many of the other large municipal authorities. The development of the pharmaceutical, tobacco, bicycle and coalmining industries, each with their separate markets and economic cycles, altered the pattern of trading and employment in the town. The diversification of the

and Wishart, 1985), pp. 76-88; J. Beckett, 'Radical Nottingham', in J. Beckett et al (eds.), *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997), pp. 310, 312.

⁶ Beckett, 'Radical Nottingham', p. 309.

⁷ P. Wyncoll, 'The First International and Working Class Activity in Nottingham', *Marxism Today*, (December 1968), p. 372.

⁸ Beckett, 'Radical Nottingham', p. 312.

⁹ L.F. Wilson, 'The State and the Housing of the English Working Class, with Special Reference to Nottingham, 1815-1914' (University of California, Berkley, Ph D thesis, 1970), p. 18.

¹⁰ L.F. Wilson, 'Housing', pp. 292, 300; R. Smith, P. Whysall, and C. Beuvrin, 'Local Authority Inertia in Housing Improvement, 1890-1914', *Town Planning Review*, 57, 4 (1986), pp. 406-409.

¹¹ G. Oldfield, 'The Nottingham Borough Boundary Extension of 1877', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, XC (1990), p. 89; L.A. Tong, 'A Local Study of Carrington, Nottingham: Industrial Village to Disappearing Suburb' (University of Nottingham, MA dissertation, 1995), pp. 232-239.

town's industries gave the community more effective opportunities to contend with adverse economic circumstances, as they arose in the various sectors.¹² Nottingham was increasingly recognised as a leading commercial centre.¹³ Generally, the period between 1870 and 1900 is considered to be a time when both the political temperature and the economic structure of the town were undergoing significant change. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the local economy had profound implications for the income of the Corporation and its decisions on policy priorities.

During the period of this study, Nottingham's standing was enhanced from that of a long-established corporation to a county borough in 1888 and to city status in 1897.¹⁴ Nationally, Nottingham continued to be regarded after 1870 as one of the major municipalities. The pattern of its growth in size was not uncommon. The population had grown from 50,680 in 1831 to 86,621 in 1871, making it the thirteenth largest provincial town.¹⁵ The suburbs at that stage housed a further 51,000 people in Basford, Radford, Sneinton, Lenton and Bulwell.¹⁶ The economic region, therefore, had in reality a population in excess of 137,000. The creation of the Nottingham and Leen District Sewerage Board in 1872 brought that wider catchment area together for operational purposes and in 1877 the borough boundaries were extended to include the territory supervised by the Board in the greatly enlarged town.¹⁷ In 1881 Nottingham was the sixth largest provincial town with a population of 186,575, ten years later it was ranked eighth and in 1901 ninth with 239,743 residents.¹⁸

The historiography of the different themes of this study reveals significant variations in the quantity and scope of available scholarship. However, the findings of historians on matters of partisanship, non-partisanship, civic consciousness, professionalism, rational knowledge, municipalization and municipal trading, both for

¹² R.A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900* (Frank Cass, 1966), pp. 241-245; S.D. Chapman, 'Economy, Industry and Employment', in Beckett, *Centenary*, pp. 480-495.

¹³ L.F. Wilson, 'Housing', p. 19.

¹⁴ P.J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991), p. 247; J. Beckett, 'City Status in the Nineteenth Century: Southwell and Nottingham, 1884-1897', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, CIII (1999), p. 149; *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 22 June 1897 (hereafter *NDG*).

¹⁵ *Census Report: 1871* (Vol. IV, pp. 40-45); J. Beckett, 'An Industrial Town in the Making', in Beckett, *Centenary*, p. 192.

¹⁶ Beckett, 'Industrial Town', pp. 192-193.

¹⁷ G. Oldfield, 'Boundary Extension', p. 83.

¹⁸ *Census Reports: 1881* (Vol. 1, pp. xiii-xvi); *1891* (Vol. 1, pp. vi-vii); *1901* (Digest, pp. 28-62).

individual authorities and corporations generally, provide the starting point for the analysis of municipal political culture in Nottingham.

Partisanship, non-partisanship and civic consciousness

The key concepts of partisanship, non-partisanship and civic consciousness have been the subject of significant historical analysis, albeit often in contexts dissimilar to the focus of this study. Municipal party political activity, policy-making processes and notions of political consensus have each been explored from a number of standpoints across local government generally and in a limited range of individual corporations. However, there has been only limited systematic evaluation of the relationships of politicians and officials during the processes of municipalization and the operation of all four of the major municipal utilities. As such, the findings of historians in a number of distinct areas of the practice of municipal politics and municipal trading are relevant to this research. In terms of this study, many of the findings are partial in their coverage, but taken together they nevertheless provide insights into a broad range of issues that help to locate this evaluation of civic culture in Nottingham between 1870 and 1900.

The examination of partisanship in municipal politics is, perhaps, best approached by consideration of several criteria that help to signal the presence of party political conflict and division. The use of party labels, the presence of clear political agendas, the patronage of political candidates, the organisation of caucus meetings and the contesting of municipal seats have all been raised as a means of measuring the scale and potency of party political activity. It is generally agreed that the operation of party politics was often most easily observed during the annual municipal elections. The hustings provided what Lawrence has called a visible sign of 'political legitimacy'.¹⁹

Historians have presented a picture of great variation in both the onset of party conflict in municipal corporations and the relative success enjoyed by the Liberal and

¹⁹ J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), p. 164; J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society* (Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1997), p. 96.

Conservative parties in elections. Whilst Hanham has provided a general template of party successes, categorizing broad periods of ascendancy across the country, Young has emphasised that the incidence of partisanship was uneven around the municipalities.²⁰ Bulpitt has identified issues of religion, borough boundaries and public utilities as the most common sources of party disagreement.²¹ The stranglehold of a single party on municipal power over the whole period between the Municipal Corporations Act 1835 and the end of the century was very unusual. In some corporations no one party achieved overwhelming control.²² Indeed, Trainor has contended that in a number of boroughs the outward trappings of partisanship actually declined from the 1880s.²³ The party caucuses were seen as a mixed blessing. On the one hand they organised and controlled political activity and thereby enabled electoral success, but on the other they created negative feelings amongst many voters because the caucuses employed 'wire-pulling' techniques and interfered unduly in the selection of candidates at ward level.²⁴ Within this highly differentiated pattern of party activities, Nottingham has been perceived as an authority that was particularly partisan and inward-looking.²⁵ In the case of Nottingham, the debate about levels of partisanship in municipal government raises, in particular, the impact of the primacy of party on the council's political structures, the nature of party control and the manipulation of the procedures of candidate selection and promotion to senior posts within the political elite.

It has been argued that there were few differences of policy between Liberal and Conservative municipal parties around the nation and their policies had little ideological coherence.²⁶ The presence of partisanship, it is contended, had little practical effect on policy formation. Doyle has claimed that policies and programmes were slow to be developed as party political election platforms in municipal boroughs

²⁰ J. H. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management* (Longman, 1959), pp. 387-388; K. Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1975), p. 31.

²¹ J.G. Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government* (Longman, 1967), pp. 6-7.

²² R.H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: the Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area, 1830-1900* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993), pp. 260-262.

²³ R.H. Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 260-261.

²⁴ J. Redlich, and F.W. Hirst, *Local Government in England, Vol. 1* (Macmillan, 1903), pp. 272-273.

²⁵ J. Garrard, 'The History of Local Political Power-Some Suggestions for Analysis', *Political Studies*, XXV, 2 (1978), p. 264.

²⁶ J.G. Bulpitt, *Local Government*, p. 7; Lawrence, *Party*, p. 5.

generally.²⁷ The parties did not fight elections on national issues but rather on the basis of their local interests.²⁸ There were few 'burning issues' around which candidates could fight for seats each November.²⁹ Few party organisations expressed their policy intentions as a single philosophic case, an overarching vision for municipal improvement in their borough.³⁰ However, historians are generally agreed that it was the structural and political relationships of each locality that helped to shape the specificity of politics in that place.³¹

As such, the political ideologies that underpinned the appeal of local parties to their electorates also varied significantly. Thane has claimed that the nature of the Liberalism that was articulated by party adherents in each borough was, to a large extent, distinctive to that place.³² Political culture had within it strong elements of continuity and adaptation.³³ In many municipalities, Gladstonian beliefs continued to dominate municipal thinking and old Liberal values survived into the new century.³⁴ In some boroughs, New Liberal ideas took root more quickly, spurred on, for example, by the strength of local Conservatism.³⁵ The attitudes of local Liberal elites towards working-class preferences in their boroughs varied considerably across the country. Those different stances helped to determine the timing and scale of the independent representation of working men in municipal government.³⁶ Where Liberal organisations were especially adaptive and pragmatic, forms of Lib-Lab arrangements were often able to flourish. This was particularly the case in places where Labour activists took a more communitarian and a less class-based approach to

²⁷ B.M. Doyle, 'The Changing Functions of Urban Government: Councillors, Officials and Pressure Groups', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 301-302.

²⁸ K. Young, *Local Politics*, p. 33.

²⁹ Redlich, *Local Government*, pp. 277-278.

³⁰ E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government* (Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 104-130 (the 'Civic Gospel' in Birmingham) and pp. 253-268 (the 'New Era' in Leeds); A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Vol. 2; Borough and City, 1865-1938* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952), pp. 67-72.

³¹ Lawrence, *Party*, pp. 17-19.

³² P. Thane, 'Labour and Local Politics: Radicalism, Democracy and Social Reform, 1880-1914', in E.F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), pp. 258-259.

³³ P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics* (Harvester, Brighton, 1980), pp. 301-303.

³⁴ K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: the State of the Debate', *History*, 80 (1995), pp. 216, 219-220, 225-226.

³⁵ P.F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', *Royal Historical Society Transactions*, 24 (1974), pp. 168-172.

³⁶ Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 256-257.

representation and policies.³⁷ Liberal Unionism provided a stern political test to Liberal party management in a number of municipalities after 1886, with examples of both consequent party political division and strengthened organisations.³⁸ However, in many boroughs, it was the challenge of more effective Conservative Party organisations in the 1890s that reduced the Liberal hold on municipal politics.³⁹ But in Nottingham that was not the case. There, Liberal ideology and policy proposals were articulated and developed in a political context of the uninterrupted dominance of the Liberal elite for a period of seventy-three years, weak Conservative opposition and the slow development of independent Labour representation on the Council.

Historians have also emphasised the significance of important non-partisan influences in municipal politics between 1870 and 1900. They have pointed to the relative absence of party political contention and division in many municipalities. In practice, politicians could express that non-partisanship in a number of organisational forms, in a hierarchy of possibilities ranging from formal party agreements to much looser individual alliances. For example, bipartisanship, consensus and collaboration each offered opportunities for joint political action. Bipartisanship involved explicit, structural arrangements between two political parties over policy-making and decision-taking. Consensus, on the other hand, might be achieved by a 'historically unusual degree of agreement', in comparative terms, allowing politicians to speak 'with different accents and different emphases, even if generally in the same language'.⁴⁰ A majority political view could be assembled from the membership of two parties, building upon a shared understanding of overall goals and a commonality of interests. Political consensus could enable fundamental party principles to be reflected in the approach selected without the need for formal agreement. Collaboration offered other opportunities for much looser cooperative arrangements. Individuals could combine to produce specific outcomes without particular party interests being at stake. Each approach had the potential, in different circumstances,

³⁷ Lawrence, *Party*, pp. 96-97; Bernstein, 'Liberalism', pp. 638-640; J. Lawrence, 'The Complexities of English Progressivism: Wolverhampton Politics in the Early Twentieth Century', *Midland History*, XXIV (1999), pp. 148-149; A. Croll, *Civilizing the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c. 1870-1914* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2000), pp. 217-218.

³⁸ J. Moore, 'Liberal Unionism', pp. 189-193.

³⁹ Lawrence, *Speaking*, pp. 104-110.

⁴⁰ R. Lowe, 'The Second World War, Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1, 2 (1990), pp. 156, 168.

to provide the basis for political cooperation. Indeed, it could be argued that partisanship as a spur to distinctive policy formation became less relevant.

Putnam has argued that 'tolerant, collaborative pragmatism' provided a sound basis for more cooperative government.⁴¹ Effective governance could benefit from a focus on the values of moderation, practical management and enlightened self-interest. He claimed that the practical performance of politicians was shaped by the social context in which they operated.⁴² Putnam's thesis supports the more general contention that the particularism of different localities was of fundamental importance to the exercise of power. A number of historians have pointed to other less partisan features of local government. For example, Croll has argued that politicians of all persuasions in each municipality had to respond to a much broader political challenge after 1870, the need to civilise and rationalise the urban experience, as communities moved on from the urban to a civic stage of development.⁴³ Redlich has claimed that many of the issues that faced politicians within their municipal agendas were in themselves non-controversial in practice.⁴⁴ Cannadine has stressed the commonality of middle-class endeavour in this 'civic project', which enabled party differences to be put aside.⁴⁵ Zijderveld has underlined the crucial importance of the values, understandings and symbols that municipal politicians shared in this period.⁴⁶ They inherited the traditions of place, handed down over the generations, which helped to establish shared notions of local identity.

It has been contended that the levels of civic consciousness, identity and pride in the municipal boroughs increased significantly in the late nineteenth century. Bailey has claimed that the sense of civic culture meant different things to different people at different times, with new understandings constantly emerging over time.⁴⁷ Baxendale has gone further and argued that a precise meaning of what was understood by

⁴¹ R.D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993), p. 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-11.

⁴³ Croll, *Civilizing*, pp. 3-11.

⁴⁴ Redlich, *Local Government*, pp. 265-266.

⁴⁵ D. Cannadine, 'The Transformation of Civic Ritual in Modern Britain: the Colchester Oyster Feast', *Past and Present*, 94 (1982), pp. 115-122.

⁴⁶ Zijderveld, *Theory*, pp. 10-14.

⁴⁷ P. Bailey, 'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up? Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability', *Journal of Social History*, 12, 3 (1978-1979), pp. 347-349.

inhabitants of a consciousness of their place was less important than the fact that it meant something at all.⁴⁸ The ideologies of political parties and individual politicians in different localities might well have varied, but the social, economic, religious and political experiences that they had shared with fellow council members provided them with a common basis for tackling the pressing demands of local governance. This 'symbolic identity' helped to shape policy priorities and consequently the feelings that residents might have for their town.⁴⁹ That identity and sense of pride was enhanced by the modernization of services, in terms of both quantifiable improvements and less measurable features of civic life. Feelings of 'civicness' were often a matter of intuitive and non-rational response.⁵⁰ Modernity could involve decisions to tackle municipal provision in new ways or simply to use existing practices more effectively.⁵¹ Putnam and Zijderveld have claimed a reciprocal relationship between economic performance and civic consciousness.⁵² Indeed, Millward has argued that civic pride and high standards of municipal service were inextricably linked.⁵³ Residents were able to judge the commitment of their local politicians to modernization, in part, by their willingness to invest in civic improvements and to demonstrate that they valued citizenship.⁵⁴

The composition and role of the political elites, who formulated policy and took decisions in the municipal corporations, have been the subject of significant debate amongst historians. The political implications of the occupational background of members of the elite and the extent to which influential businessmen continued in office after the 1880s have been keenly disputed. Firstly, historians have contested the significance of the contribution made by substantial local employers in the

⁴⁸ J. Baxendale, 'You and All of Us Ordinary People: Renegotiating "Britishness in Wartime"', in N. Hayes and J. Hill (eds.), *'Millions Like Us?' British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1999), pp. 296, 299-301.

⁴⁹ Zijderveld, *Theory*, pp. 19-21.

⁵⁰ R.J. Morris, 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 397-398; R.J. Morris, 'Governance: Two Centuries of Urban Growth', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 11; Zijderveld, *Theory*, pp. 22-23.

⁵¹ M. Bromley and N. Hayes, 'Campaigner, Watchdog or Municipal Lackey?', *Media History*, 8 (2002), pp. 203-205, 208.

⁵² Putnam, *Making Democracy*, pp. 11, 83-86; Zijderveld, *Theory*, pp. 11-14, 63-65.

⁵³ R. Millward, 'The Political Economy of Urban Utilities', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), p. 328.

⁵⁴ H.E. Meller, 'Urban Renewal and Citizenship: the Quality of Life in British Cities, 1890-1990', *Urban History*, 22, 1 (1995), pp. 63-68; Croll, *Civilizing*, pp. 36-37.

expansion of municipal expenditure. Hennock claimed that the 'natural leaders' in the municipalities were more willing to approve spending on major improvements than lower-middle-class groups and professional men.⁵⁵ Whilst Garrard has broadly supported this thesis, Daunton has contended that political struggles within local councils were of more fundamental importance in determining whether corporations increased spending or economised.⁵⁶ Secondly, it has been argued that either the withdrawal of those men of substance from municipal government from the 1880s, or their persistence in office, was influential in helping to determine the quality of leadership and the extent of the entrepreneurial spirit of municipal bodies in the final two decades of the century.⁵⁷ The systematic comparison of the practice of political elites in a range of corporations is made difficult by fundamental differences in the structure of their local economies. For Nottingham in particular, variations in the general size of firms hinders direct comparisons with some established studies of municipal elites.⁵⁸

In Nottingham, three broad issues are especially pertinent to the debate about the nature of non-partisanship and civic consciousness: the role played by municipal politics in the achievement of social status in the town, the political implications of shared values and understandings for consensus and collaboration in policy-making and the existence of both partisan political structures and a less partisan approach to policy-making undertaken by Liberal and Conservative politicians on a day to day basis.

⁵⁵ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 317-324.

⁵⁶ J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1830-1880* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983), pp. 13-35, 222-223; M.J. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870-1914* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1977), pp. 149-177.

⁵⁷ R.H. Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 241-243; R.H. Trainor, 'Urban Elites in Victorian Britain', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1985), pp. 2-13; J. Garrard, 'Urban Elites, 1850-1914: the Rule and Decline of a New Squirearchy?', *Albion*, 27,3 (1995), pp. 615-621; J. Garrard, *Leaders and Politics in Nineteenth Century Salford: a Historical Analysis of Urban Political Power* (Department of Sociological and Political Studies, University of Salford, Salford, 1976), pp. 9-13, 35-43; M. Savage, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective', *The Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 10, 1 (1990), pp. 1-2; Doyle, 'Changing Functions', pp. 298-301.

⁵⁸ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 34-38, 202-204; Daunton, *Coal*, pp. 151-159; Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, pp. 14-17, 20, 22; H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 87-90; J. Smith, 'Urban Elites c. 1830-1930 and Urban History', *Urban History*, 27, 2 (2000), pp. 258-262, 269-271.

The political elites, whatever their composition, required both a determination to use the permissive statutory powers available to them and access to large amounts of capital, if they were to pursue major civic projects effectively. Historians are generally agreed that, in the period between 1870 and 1900, local relations with central government operated essentially on a 'partnership model'.⁵⁹ However, different elements of those partnerships have been highlighted. For example, Bellamy has stressed the variability of action by municipal corporations within a system of 'local possessive pluralism'.⁶⁰ In the absence of strategic leadership by central government, considerable discretion was left to each borough to determine priorities and to design and implement policies. Rhodes has also emphasised that the local bids differed significantly because they were ad hoc, pragmatic and negotiable, but he has claimed that it was a 'power dependency model' that lay at the heart of the relationships between town halls and the different tiers of central government departments.⁶¹ Hennock has focused on the importance of the changing nature of the relationships over time.⁶² He has contended that power was increasingly shared with central government as local authority action became much more complex and increasingly expensive. Within these highly differentiated relationships between the municipal corporations and Whitehall, Waller has underlined an unhelpful consequence. He has argued that the vigorous approach taken by the more enterprising authorities was dampened by the red tape of central government departments.⁶³ In the case of Nottingham, relationships between locality and centre raised issues about the relative levels of initiative and enterprise for civic development shown by politicians and officials, and the views formed by civil servants of the effectiveness of municipal government in the town.

⁵⁹ C. Bellamy, *Administering Central-Local Relations, 1871-1919* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), pp. 1-5; R.A.W. Rhodes, *Control and Power in Central-Local Government Relations* (Gower, 1981), pp. 14-21; J. Anderson, 'The Relation of Central to Local Government', *Public Administration*, (1925), pp. 36-37; W. Hampton, *Local Government and Urban Politics* (Longman, 1987), pp. 164-171.

⁶⁰ Bellamy, *Administering*, pp. 10-16.

⁶¹ Rhodes, *Control*, pp. 97-102.

⁶² E.P. Hennock, 'Central-Local Government Relations in England: an Outline 1880-1950', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1982), pp. 38, 40-44, 47-48.

⁶³ Waller, *Town*, pp. 278-280.

Professionalism and rational knowledge

The roles played by municipal officials in policy-making have been the subject of only limited evaluation. Relatively few detailed studies are available of the contributions that town clerks, engineers and other senior officers made to policy formation and decision-taking, in the period between 1870 and 1900, which focus on either an individual authority or the country more generally. The coverage of most of the significant research in this area has been on the growth of professionalism and the use of expert knowledge, rather than on the detail of the interactions between officers and politicians. Despite the centrality of the role of the town clerk in late Victorian administration, little systematic analysis has been undertaken of their relationships with members or the nature of their influence in the processes of policy-making.

Historians have highlighted different elements of the town clerk's role in their efforts to explain the basis of the official's influence. Redlich stressed the importance of the town clerk's comprehensive knowledge of municipal law and his role as a 'conduit pipe' for the Council's administration, whilst Headrick emphasised the strength of personality of the post-holder in helping to determine his standing and influence.⁶⁴ Maver and Garrard have both underlined the individual assets and expertise that different town clerks brought to their tasks.⁶⁵ Generally, it has been claimed that before 1900 almost all town clerks continued to act as lone individuals rather than as the heads of bureaucracies. Most undertook the duties expected of them, with little innovation.⁶⁶ The experience of town clerkship in Nottingham, during the late Victorian period, challenges a number of these interpretations, in terms of the nature and extent of the role.

As the responsibilities of municipal corporations grew during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, so the roles of officials who were charged with offering

⁶⁴ Redlich, *Local Government*, p. 341; T.E. Headrick, *The Town Clerk in English Local Government* (George Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 23.

⁶⁵ I. Maver, 'The Role and Influence of Glasgow's Municipal Managers, 1890s-1930s', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 72; J. Garrard, 'Bureaucrats Rather Than Bureaucracies: the Power of Municipal Professionals, 1835-1914', *Occasional Paper in Politics and Contemporary History*, 33 (1992), p. 24.

⁶⁶ Waller, *Town*, p. 285; Doyle, 'Changing Functions', p. 297.

specialist advice and implementing policies increased. Senior officers supervised larger teams of staff, with bigger budgets and more complex technical duties.⁶⁷ Their contributions to negotiations with central government were often critical and many masterminded the preparation and delivery of major civic projects.⁶⁸ The professional institutes of the various branches of engineering helped to formalise training and determine professional standards, thereby giving greater legitimacy to the engineers' specialist claims.⁶⁹ Hennock has contended that many of the engineers and technical managers became the local representatives of national professions.⁷⁰ Garrard and Waller have underlined the contribution made by the officers' dissemination of research knowledge, so important to a variety of modernization projects.⁷¹ Such professionals often provided greater credibility to proposals for civic schemes.⁷²

It is generally agreed that technical and scientific knowledge became the bedrock of policy-formation and decision-taking in many municipal corporations.⁷³ That knowledge was viewed by many local politicians as an objective source of authority and its rationality helped to create greater confidence in the services that authorities provided.⁷⁴ Indeed, it has been argued that the evidence of rational calculation, research, planning and prediction gave policy proposals feasibility, authority and legitimacy in the eyes of the electorate.⁷⁵ Politicians often looked to their senior staff for a combination of business acumen, initiative and creativity.⁷⁶ Morris has contended that the ability to explain complex, technical ideas in an accessible way to non-specialists, 'communicative rationality', was the hallmark of the more successful

⁶⁷ Maver, 'Role', pp. 69, 72-73.

⁶⁸ Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', p. 15; Morris, 'Governance', p. 9.

⁶⁹ M. Laffin and K. Young, *Professionalism in Local Government* (Longman, 1990), pp. 13-15; T.R. Gourvash, 'The Rise of the Professions', in T.R. Gourvash and A. O'Day (eds.), *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900* (Macmillan, 1990), pp. 24, 30-31; J. Garrard and V. Parrott, 'Craft, Professional and Middle-Class Identity: Solicitors and Gas Engineers, c.1850-1914', in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle-Class?* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1998), pp. 148-162; Doyle, 'Changing Functions', p. 296.

⁷⁰ Hennock, 'Central-Local', p. 43.

⁷¹ Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 18-19; Waller, *Town*, p. 288.

⁷² Maver, 'Role', pp. 69, 72-73.

⁷³ Morris, 'Governance', pp. 8-10; Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 15-17; Doyle, 'Changing Functions', p. 297.

⁷⁴ Morris, R.J. 'Governance', pp. 6-7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9; M. Hill and G. Bramley, *Analysing Social Policy* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986), p. 147.

⁷⁶ Waller, *Town*, p. 282; Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 15, 26.

officials.⁷⁷ Despite the existence of helpful rational knowledge, the policy processes, then as now, rarely proceeded in a logical, comprehensive and purposive manner.⁷⁸ The pathways to decisions and their implementation might well have involved a mixture of techniques, including incrementalism, muddling through and more dynamic approaches.⁷⁹ The contributions of members and officers to the different steps in the process varied considerably over time, both within and between authorities. Depending upon the circumstances, their inputs to, for example, the identification of issues, the consideration of alternatives and the choice of action could well change.⁸⁰ This study's analysis of the relationships of members and officers within Nottingham Corporation, in the pursuit of municipalization, offers an insight into the nature of the influence that could be exerted by technical experts in the processes of policy formation and implementation, in one large borough.

Municipalization and municipal trading

Research into both the processes of municipalization and the operation of municipal utilities has tended to focus on the performance of private and public businesses, their efficiency and their profitability. Most studies have explored individual utilities, particularly gas and water, in a national context, with an emphasis on the commercial nature of the municipal businesses, their cost-effectiveness and their profits.⁸¹ Although the general pattern of the uptake and timing of municipalization was uneven and incremental across the country, the motivation to municipalize has been located in a wider political drive to achieve municipal economies. Many authorities had

⁷⁷ Morris, 'Governance', pp. 7, 10.

⁷⁸ C. Ham and M. Hill, *The Policy Process in the Modern Capitalist State* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, 1993, Second Edition), p. 82.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-87; W. Parsons, *Public Policy: an Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis* (Edward Elgar, Aldershot, Hampshire, 1995), pp. 284-287.

⁸⁰ K.G. Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy* (Macmillan, 1979), pp. 10-11. Banting identified five phases of policy-making; awareness, salience, definition of the problem, specification of alternatives and choice.

⁸¹ M. Falkus, 'The British Gas Industry Before 1850', *Economic History Review*, XX (1967), pp. 502-505; D. Knoop, *Principles and Methods of Municipal Trading* (Macmillan, 1912), pp. 126-179; R. Millward and R. Ward, 'The Costs of Public and Private Gas Enterprises in Late Nineteenth Century Britain', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 39 (1987), pp. 725-730; R. Millward, 'The Market Behaviour of Local Utilities in Pre-World War I Britain: the Case of Gas', *Economic History Review*, XLIV, 1 (1991), pp. 105-112; R. Millward, 'Emergence of Gas and Water Utilities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Contested Markets and Public Control', in J. Foreman-Peck (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Late Victorian Economy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), pp. 96-98, 115-19.

insufficient income from the rates with which to fund vital civic projects. They viewed the possibility of maximising the profits from utilities as a means of keeping in check otherwise rapid rises in the rates.⁸² Emphasis has been placed on the politicians' desire to eliminate the avoidable costs of the private company and to translate the shareholder's dividend into a profit for the ratepayer.⁸³ In some boroughs, the existence of private 'natural monopolies' highlighted the unsatisfactory nature of local competition. Unnecessary expenditure was committed to wasteful duplication of works and mains, especially in the cases of gas and water.⁸⁴ Anti-private monopoly sentiments were not uncommon amongst municipal politicians when consideration was given to the municipalization of each utility, but they were particularly marked when decisions had to be taken about the control of local electricity supplies.⁸⁵

Both the sluggish approach to innovation by some private companies and consumer dissatisfaction with supplies have also been identified as spurs to municipalization.⁸⁶ The willingness of politicians to establish municipal utilities was encouraged by the availability of cheaper loans than those in the private sector and opportunities to offer investors better returns from the municipal projects.⁸⁷ Within individual utilities, specific conditions affected the timing of decisions in some boroughs. For example, in the case of water some authorities wished to take a more integrated approach to

⁸² J.N. Peters, 'Anti-Socialism in British Politics, c.1900-1922: the Emergence of a Counter-Ideology' (University of Oxford, D Phil thesis, 1992), p. 163; H.R. Meyer, *Municipal Ownership in Great Britain* (Macmillan, 1906), pp. 173, 322-325; D.N. Chester, *British Public Utility Services* (Longman, 1948), p. 23; J.R. Kellett, 'Municipal Socialism, Enterprise and Trading in the Victorian City', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1978), p. 43; J.F. Wilson, *Lighting the Town: a Study of Management in the North West Gas Industry, 1850-1880* (Paul Chapman Publishing, 1991); M. Falkus, 'The Development of Municipal Trading in the Nineteenth Century', *Business History*, 19 (1977), pp. 152-153.

⁸³ J.A. Hassan, 'The Growth and Impact of the British Water Industry in the Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, XXXVIII, 4 (1985), pp. 531-532; D. Fraser, 'The Politics of Leeds Water', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, 15 (1973), p. 58; Kellett, 'Municipal Socialism', pp. 42-43; Meyer, *Municipal Ownership*, pp. 1-2, 325; R. Millward and R. Ward 'From Private to Public Ownership of Gas Undertakings in England and Wales, 1851-1947: Chronology, Incidence and Causes', *Business History*, 35, 3 (1993), p. 9; Millward, 'Political Economy', pp. 332-333.

⁸⁴ Falkus, 'Development', pp. 141-144; Knoop, *Principles*, pp. 27, 382, 387.

⁸⁵ R.H. Morgan, 'The Development of the Electricity Supply Industry in Wales to 1919', *The Welsh History Review*, 11 (1983), pp. 319-321; L.W. Jones, 'The Municipalization of the Electricity Supply Industry in Birmingham', *West Midlands Studies*, 13 (1980), pp. 19, 22-23.

⁸⁶ Millward, 'Market Behaviour', pp. 102-104, 108-109, 117-118; Falkus, 'Development', p. 146.

⁸⁷ M.J. Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: the Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1799-1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), pp. 273, 277-280; Bellamy, *Administering*, pp. 79-101; Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', pp. 171-172; Millward, 'Political Economy', p. 321.

their investment in water supply, drainage and sanitation.⁸⁸ In the electricity sector, the implications of competition between municipal electricity and gas businesses and the high cost of initial investment in generation provided particular obstacles.⁸⁹ In the case of Nottingham, Roberts' study of the private gas monopolist, the Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company, identified particular market conditions that helped to determine the timing of gas municipalization in the town.⁹⁰ Problems of capital obsolescence and the rapid deterioration of plant over a short time span contributed significantly to municipal action in 1874. Nottingham's municipal experience highlights particular issues about the political and financial motives of members and the timing of their decisions.

Municipal trading was essentially concerned with the ownership and operation of productive undertakings which, if they were carried out by companies or individuals, would have been organised as commercial ventures to make a profit.⁹¹ Many have argued that municipalization was prompted more by the pragmatism and business motives of local politicians than party political principles.⁹² There is general agreement that the theoretical explanations that were used to justify municipal trading were borrowed once municipal businesses had been established, rather than paraded as philosophic arguments in favour of change, ahead of their creation. However, attempts to define any such underlying theory have produced a range of responses. For example, Kellett has claimed that municipal trading lacked a specific doctrine as such.⁹³ Peters, on the other hand, has taken the view that municipal trading had become, by 1900, an 'ideological, economic and political reality'.⁹⁴ This 'reality' may not have been based on a sophisticated theory, but it was implicitly based on a

⁸⁸ Knoop, *Principles*, p. 38; Falkus, 'Development', pp. 145-146; Millward, 'Market Behaviour', p. 117; R. Millward, 'Urban Government, Finance and Public Health in Victorian Britain', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), pp. 50-51.

⁸⁹ Meyer, *Municipal Ownership*, pp. 221-228 (Report of the Birmingham Committee, 1882); Chester, *Utility Services*, p. 93; Falkus, 'Development', p. 156.

⁹⁰ D.E. Roberts, 'The Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company, 1818-1874' (University of Loughborough, MA thesis, 1976), pp. 273-274.

⁹¹ J.L. Mackenzie, 'Municipal Trading', *Public Administration*, (1927), p. 244; Wilson, *Lighting*, pp. 185, 197, 207, 210; Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', pp. 161-165.

⁹² Jones, 'Electricity Supply', pp. 22-24; Millward, 'Political Economy', pp. 328-329; Millward, 'Private to Public', p. 9.

⁹³ Kellett, 'Municipal Socialism', p. 44.

⁹⁴ Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', pp. 161, 209.

notion of public goods. Waller has argued that the strength of municipal trading lay in its capitalist principles. 'If there was a distinct ideology about it, it was rather municipal capitalism than municipal socialism.'⁹⁵ What is undisputed is that by 1902 municipal trading was sufficiently established as a municipal activity, and resilient enough in its operation, to withstand the anti-socialist sentiments that were so forcibly expressed during the Edwardian period.⁹⁶ The views of Waller and Peters in particular prompt fundamental questions about the relevance of the notion of municipal capitalism in Nottingham and the priority given to municipal trading, rather than other social policies, by the Corporation.

The operation of municipal utilities was sustained in most cases by the profit motive, particularly in the gas sector.⁹⁷ Water was generally viewed as a non-profit making utility, with the focus on civic improvements in health and sanitation. However, one third of municipal businesses failed to achieve a profit, including many tramways, and most water authorities ran at a loss.⁹⁸ Profits and prices were broadly similar in both private and public companies.⁹⁹ The true nature of profits was in many cases disputed because of the accounting techniques employed by different authorities and the failure of some corporations to tackle appropriately the redemption of debt and the depreciation of plant.¹⁰⁰ Overall, municipal undertakings were just as cost-effective as private concerns and the municipalities administered their businesses efficiently.¹⁰¹ Millward has argued that costs were the most significant factor in determining the level of efficiency achieved by local authorities.¹⁰² Some corporations showed greater enterprise in the scale of their trading, for example undertaking very ambitious projects in the provision of water supplies.¹⁰³ Several demonstrated commercial

⁹⁵ Waller, *Town*, p. 300.

⁹⁶ *The Times*, 19, 23 and 28 August and 2, 5, 8, 9 and 16 September 1902 (hereafter *TT*); Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', pp. 177-192.

⁹⁷ R. Millward and S. Sheard, 'The Urban Fiscal Problem, 1870-1914: Government Expenditure and Finance in England and Wales', *Economic History Review*, XLVIII, 3 (1995), pp. 507-509; Millward, 'Costs', p. 136; Millward, 'Private to Public', pp. 8-9; Millward, 'Market Behaviour', pp. 22-123.

⁹⁸ J.F. Sleeman, 'The British Tramway Industry: the Growth and Decline of a Public Utility', *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, X (1939), pp. 173-174; J. Dalrymple, 'Municipal Tramways Administration', *Public Administration*, (1924), p. 413; Falkus, 'Development', p. 157.

⁹⁹ Millward, 'Market Behaviour', pp. 120-123; Wilson, *Lighting*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁰ Waller, *Town*, p. 308.

¹⁰¹ H. Finer, *Municipal Trading* (George Allen and Unwin, 1941), pp. 404-411; Falkus, 'Development', pp. 156-158.

¹⁰² Millward, 'Costs', pp. 731-732.

¹⁰³ Fraser, *Power*, p. 46; Briggs, *Birmingham*, pp. 90-91.

enterprise in making use of spare capacity in gas supply.¹⁰⁴ For Nottingham, issues of economy, efficiency and enterprise were central to the management of the four utilities.

The structure of the argument

The analysis of the research is presented in two main sections. The distinctive and exceptional characteristics of the municipal political culture in Nottingham, between 1870 and 1900, are identified and evaluated in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. A detailed case study of the processes of municipalization and the operation of four municipal utilities is examined in Chapters 5 and 6. Both sections investigate the Corporation's policy-making processes, with particular reference to the relationships of the municipal politicians and the senior officials, and the nature of the civic ethos in which policy was formed, decisions taken and policy implemented.

The Corporation's civic culture and policy-making processes are evaluated in the context of the Council's wider responsibilities in the final chapter. The implications of Nottingham's approach to municipalization are examined in the light of the Borough's decisions in other major policy areas, particularly public health and housing. Nottingham's experience is located in local government more generally, by means of comparisons with other large municipalities in terms of both their vision and sense of purpose and the policies that they chose to pursue.

The nature, extent and limitations of partisanship are explored in Chapter 2. In particular, the Borough's political structures, the role, organisation and ideologies of the municipal political parties, party policies and the characteristics of the town's political elite are examined. The study includes an assessment of the campaigns and results of all the annual municipal elections from 1870 to 1900, including detailed analysis of seven sample Councils.¹⁰⁵ The civiness of policy-making is evaluated in Chapter 3. The non-partisan features of Nottingham's political culture are identified.

¹⁰⁴ F. Goodall, 'Appliance Trading Activities of British Gas Utilities, 1875-1935', *Economic History Review*, XLVI, 3 (1993), pp. 545-546, 556.

¹⁰⁵ Appendix A, Tables 2, 3 and 4. The sample years are 1871, 1877, 1881, 1886, 1891, 1896 and 1900.

The extent of political consensus and collaboration, the town's civic ethos, the notion of municipal capitalism and attitudes to modernity are investigated, in the context of the Corporation's decisions to establish four municipal utilities.

The roles played by the Corporation's senior officers in policy-making are analysed in Chapter 4. The role of the Town Clerk, Samuel Johnson, is considered in terms of both his contribution to the work of the Borough Council and town clerkship more generally. The professionalism and expertise of the Town Clerk, Borough Engineers and specialist gas, water, electricity and tramway engineers and departmental managers are assessed, together with the impact of rational knowledge on Nottingham's policy processes. An evaluation of the nature of the relationships between members and officers, and the extent to which officers influenced developments, underpins the exploration of the formation and implementation of civic projects.

The motives that lay behind the decisions to own rather than simply control four municipal utilities, and the timing of those decisions, are examined in Chapter 5. Political attitudes towards the private 'natural monopolies' of gas and water and the publicly protected monopolies of electricity and tramways are considered in detail, in the context of both the political discourse and rational planning. The particularities and commonalities of the four ventures are assessed, together with the implications of municipalization for civic consciousness. The key features of policy implementation and the performance of the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities are evaluated in Chapter 6. The practice of municipal trading in Nottingham is examined in terms of the notion of municipal capitalism. Political approaches, economy, efficiency and enterprise are explored, together with the effects of their outcomes on civic identity and pride.

For each of the chapters, the availability of statistical data for comparisons of different aspects of political activity in a range of municipal corporations varies considerably. For most of the themes tackled in this study, the data is insufficiently systematic to enable consistent comparisons to be made across all similarly sized authorities. It has been necessary to assemble the data that is available from different authorities for each theme, even if the coverage is partial. In the case of studies of individual

municipal corporations, the coverage provided by the existing research data differs for particular municipalities in both extent and depth. This is especially true where evaluations of policy-making processes and municipalization are sought. In the case of the national picture, nationally-collected comparative data is more readily available, particularly for some measures of the timing and outcomes of municipal trading in gas, water, electricity and tramways.¹⁰⁶ A detailed sample study of fifteen authorities in England and Wales has been gathered as the basis for these comparisons.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ For example: House of Commons (hereafter HC) (1900) VII (*Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons on Municipal Trading*); HC (1903) VII (*Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons on Municipal Trading*).

¹⁰⁷ Appendix C, Table 14. The fifteen county boroughs in England and Wales included in the sample are: Bradford, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Derby, Hull, Leeds, Leicester, Lincoln, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Sheffield and Wolverhampton. The sample includes the largest municipalities, Nottingham's neighbouring borough authorities and several county boroughs that grew from medium-sized to large authorities in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 2

Partisanship: municipal political parties, politicians and elections

Partisanship

The political culture of municipal government in Nottingham between 1870 and 1900 was distinctive and complex. Both partisanship and non-partisanship provided significant strands of that culture. The strength and scope of party political conflict and division in this period can best be evaluated by an examination of the composition of the political elite and the political structures in which it operated, including the use of party labels, the nature of the party caucuses, the patronage of political candidates, the contesting of the annual municipal elections and the presence of clear political agendas. In Nottingham, as elsewhere, the most obvious outward signs of partisan activity could most easily be observed during municipal elections, although partisanship was not exclusive to election periods. Non-partisanship was more evident in the internal processes of policy-making, in both the meetings of the Full Council and its committees. Members of Nottingham Corporation operated in both partisan and non-partisan modes. Their political behaviour embraced both party-based contention and consensus. The Borough Council derived strength from both the open partisanship of party conflict and the preparedness of municipal politicians, on occasions, to put the needs of the 'civic project' before party ideology.¹ Decision-taking was often characterised by a form of 'tolerant, collaborative pragmatism', but with sufficient flexibility to allow distinctive party appeals to the local electorate.²

Nottingham's political elite

The successful candidates who joined the local political elite on Nottingham Borough Council achieved their ambitions through the party political framework. Their membership of a party was a far greater determinant of their entry into the arena of

¹ A. Croll, *Civilizing the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c. 1870-1914* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2000), p. 3.

² R.D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993), p. 60; R.H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: the Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area, 1830-1900* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993), pp. 258-262.

the Corporation than their occupation or their social standing alone. In Nottingham, membership of the political elite conferred social status and prestige. The Borough was unusual in the absence of the local gentry and landed element playing any part in municipal affairs. Whilst in some municipal boroughs the active assistance of the parties was the easiest route into the council, in Nottingham it was the only way to the Chamber in reality.³ Nottingham Borough Council had a long tradition of party political rivalry and the experience of single party domination between 1835 and 1908. The Liberal Party's senior politicians exerted patronage over the selection of municipal candidates and manipulated appointments to the aldermanic bench.

Historians have given prominence to the role of manufacturers and self-made businessmen, and their demise, in shaping the processes of municipal policy formation and decision-taking. It has been contended that the presence of substantial local employers was instrumental in helping to determine the nature and scale of civic development in the major municipal corporations.⁴ A link has been claimed between the control of councils by elite businessmen, the 'natural leaders', and the expansiveness of municipal expenditure and, for example in Birmingham and Leeds, the hostility of lower-middle-class groups to manufacturers and professional men.⁵ It has also been argued that political struggles within councils have been of more fundamental importance in determining whether corporations should increase spending or economise.⁶ The withdrawal of men of substance from municipal government from the 1880s, or their persistence in office, has also been claimed to be an influential factor in helping to establish the quality and extent of the entrepreneurial spirit of municipal bodies in the later years of the century.⁷

³ J. Redlich and F.W. Hirst, *Local Government in England, Vol. 1* (Macmillan, 1903), pp. 264-265, 273.

⁴ J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1830-1880* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983), pp. 13-35.

⁵ E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government* (Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 317-324.

⁶ M.J. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870-1914* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1977), pp. 149-171.

⁷ J. Garrard, 'Urban Elites, 1850-1914: the Rule and Decline of a New Squirearchy?', *Albion*, 27, 3 (1995), pp. 615-621; J. Garrard, *Leaders and Politics in Nineteenth Century Salford: a Historical Analysis of Urban Political Power* (Department of Sociological and Political Studies, University of Salford, Salford, 1976), pp. 9-13, 35-43; R.H. Trainor, 'Urban Elites in Victorian Britain', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1985), pp. 2-13; Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 241-243; B.M. Doyle, 'The Changing Functions of Urban Government: Councillors, Officials and Pressure Groups', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 298-301; M. Savage, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective', *The Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 10, 1 (1990), pp. 1-2.

Nottingham's experience was distinctive and, in a number of ways, dissimilar to that of most other corporations. The occupational backgrounds of members of the Council as a whole and the senior figures within it, their tenure of office and their links with other bodies with responsibility for local governance provide evidence of the particular characteristics of Nottingham's political elite. The nature of their party political engagement was idiosyncratic, as significant as that in Cardiff, Birmingham and Glasgow, but different in style and complexion.⁸ The consequences that flowed from changes in the balance of occupational groups within the Nottingham Borough Council between 1870 and 1900 did not replicate those of Leeds, Manchester or the south Lancashire cotton towns.⁹ The relative importance of the ideology of well-defined occupational groups to policy-making in Bristol, Birmingham and Leeds contrasted sharply with the ways in which occupational groups in Nottingham operated.¹⁰ Very unusually, for example, Nottingham's manufacturers, retailers and small tradesmen often found themselves supporting the same case for civic expenditure.

In Nottingham, manufacturers formed an influential group within the total membership of the Borough Council, and indeed as the largest single occupational group, from 1835 to 1900, their continuity in office had a positive impact on the policy-making processes of the Corporation.¹¹ Lace manufacturers were the dominant group within that larger body of manufacturers throughout the period.¹² Numerically they were at their greatest in the 1850s when 42.8% of seats were held by leaders of the lace industry. In 1871 they secured 28.6% of the seats held by councillors and aldermen. Although their number reduced to 15.6% in the first elections for the

⁸ L.J. Jones, 'Public Pursuit of Private Profit? Liberal Businessmen and Municipal Politics in Birmingham, 1865-1900', *Business History*, 25 (1983), pp. 240-244; D.P. Leighton, 'Municipal Progress, Democracy and Radical Identity in Birmingham, 1838-1886', *Midland History*, XXV (2000), pp. 115-116; W.H. Fraser, 'Tackling the Problems', in W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), pp. 428-431; I. Maver, 'Glasgow's Civic Government', in W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), pp. 441-443, 469-475; A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Vol. 2: Borough and City, 1865-1938* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952), pp. 67-99; Daunton, *Coal*, pp. 163-177.

⁹ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 202-204, Appendix 1(a) and (b); J. Smith, 'Urban Elites c. 1830-1930 and Urban History', *Urban History*, 27, 2 (2000), pp. 262-268; Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, pp. 13-35, 222-223.

¹⁰ H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 87-90; Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 34-38, 202-204.

¹¹ Appendix A, Table 2.

¹² Appendix A, Table 3.

enlarged Council in 1877, their representation steadied at 14% in the 1880s and at about 11% in the 1890s. However, their positions of seniority and influence within the Corporation continued to be significant and disproportionate. Manufacturers running companies that supported lace manufacture secured representation of around 8% or 9% throughout the period from 1870 to 1900. As a group of business leaders, those in lace manufacture and the wider lace industry provided a formidable force in the Chamber. In contrast, hosiery manufacturers were never as well represented as lace on the Council and after the mid-1850s their numbers remained small. From 1886 there were no hosiers on the Council.

Representatives of the professions in the town were returned in significant numbers between 1835 and 1900. Their numbers declined marginally and steadily from a high point of 19.7% in 1835 to 12.5% in 1871. Their representation was at its lowest in 1877 and through the 1880s with some 11% of the seats, but numbers increased in the 1890s to 17% or 18%. Solicitors remained the dominant professional group until 1891. In 1896 there were more doctors on the Council and an equal number of medical practitioners and lawyers in 1900. Shopkeepers, like the professionals, were consistently well represented. Nottingham never became a 'shopocracy', but numbers steadily increased from 14.2% in 1871 to 21.8% in 1900. The drink trade was poorly represented before 1871, at its highest number in the 1880s with 9% or 10% and at 6% in the last decade of the century. But the combined retail interests were slightly larger than the manufacturers in the 1890s. Those involved in small trades and building concerns had modest representation on the Council in the 1860s and 1870s but a consistently significant number of seats after 1877, at around 20% or 21%.

Overall, recruitment became more open and ultimately more legitimate.¹³ In 1871 the Council had a predominance of manufacturers, as did the new Borough Council of 1877. But, from the enlargement of the Borough, the major interest groups of manufacture, the professions, retailing and the trades were increasingly of similar proportion on the Full Council, particularly in the 1890s. No occupational category was the total preserve of one party, but the relative preponderance of some

¹³ Trainor, *Black Country*, p. 242.

occupations in either the Liberal or Conservative ranks was noticeable.¹⁴ The lace manufacturers who served on the Corporation were predominantly representatives of the Liberal Party. In the 1870s only two of their number were Conservatives, whilst in the 1890s the average was just one. One of the three independent councillors to be elected also led a lace company. Generally, it was the individual heads of family firms who secured election.

The councillors who led bleaching companies were also predominantly Liberal. Only George Hunter served as a Conservative. The hosiers who secured seats were staunchly Liberal too. However, the retailers represented both parties, though favouring the Liberal cause until late in the century. The number of Conservative retailers increased during the 1890s and by 1900 they were in a majority. Both parties, uncharacteristically, had publicans as councillors, but the drink trade was mainly Conservative in Nottingham, as it was elsewhere. Whilst there were more Conservative solicitors, doctors were more evenly divided between the parties. The small traders who were elected to the Council were all Liberals in the 1870s and even in 1891 included only one Conservative. Yet by 1900, 40% of small tradesmen on the Council were Conservatives.

Whilst the Borough's political elite undoubtedly displayed some characteristics common to those in municipal corporations across the nation, their views, attitudes and priorities owed much to the particular social and economic makeup of the town. Nottingham's economy was more balanced than those of many large boroughs, particularly in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The well-established lace and hosiery industries were complemented by the establishment of tobacco, cycle, pharmaceutical and coalmining companies in the Borough from the 1870s.¹⁵ However, the lace and hosiery industries were the key sectors on which the town's economic well-being had depended for most of the century and they produced many

¹⁴ The occupational analysis is based on data from the following sources:

Trade Directories- Wright 1866, Kelly 1876, Kelly 1881, White 1885, Wright 1887, Wright 1889, Wright 1891, White 1893, White 1894, Wright 1895, Wright 1897, Wright 1900, Kelly 1900, Wright 1902.

Nottingham Red Books- 1872, 1875, 1878, 1881, 1882, 1885, 1891, 1895, 1901.

Newspapers- *Nottingham and Midland Counties Daily Express*, 1861-1883 (hereafter *NMCDE*); *Nottingham Daily Express*, 1883-1901 (hereafter *NDE*); *NDG*, 1861-1901.

¹⁵ S.D. Chapman, 'Economy, Industry and Employment', in J. Beckett et al (eds.), *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997), pp. 480-482, 485-494.

members of the political elite. They were intermediate or middle middle class in status, much like the comfortable medium-scale manufacturers, professional men and prosperous traders of Birmingham, Blackburn, Bristol, Dudley and West Bromwich.¹⁶ By national industrial standards, Nottingham's lace and hosiery firms were small or medium-sized concerns, mostly family businesses. Few had more than a hundred employees, even by 1900.¹⁷ Many of these firms grew steadily and cautiously as technology advanced and markets grew at home and abroad and were incorporated, but the lace and hosiery sectors remained essentially small company marketplaces before 1900. Resident owner-managers were the dominant form of the organisation of local capital.¹⁸

However, there were a few exceptions. Richard Birkin employed over eight hundred people at the height of his company's success and a few other lace businesses, such as Thomas Adams and Company and Pratt, Hurst and Company, were reasonably large employers.¹⁹ Lace companies generally were smaller units of production and in the last three decades of the century there were in excess of 200 firms producing lace in the town.²⁰ By 1900, when lace was at its peak, there were some 250 such businesses. In addition, specialist lace curtain manufacturers numbered over 20 in the 1890s. There were about 30 associated dressing, bleaching and dyeing firms in the 1870s and over 100 in 1900, also small-scale enterprises. The businesses that made and provided lace machinery for the manufacturers were in excess of 230 in the 1880s and 1890s and about 175 at the end of the century. Hosiery firms, though fewer in number than lace, were also relatively small-scale enterprises in the main. There were over 50 companies producing hose in the 1870s and over 70 in the 1890s. Only I and R Morley was a large-scale enterprise with truly national links.

Longevity in post was a common feature of municipal life in Nottingham for members of both parties, with significant implications for approaches to policy-making. John Barber represented the town for a marathon fifty-four years, forty of

¹⁶ Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 241-242; Trainor, 'Urban Elites', p. 4.

¹⁷ Chapman, 'Economy', p. 482.

¹⁸ R.J. Morris, 'Governance: Two Centuries of Urban Growth', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁹ R. Mellors, *Men of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire* (J. and H. Bell, Nottingham, 1924), p. 222; Chapman, 'Economy', pp. 480-482.

²⁰ Trade Directories: Wright 1866, Kelly 1881, White 1893, Wright 1902.

them as an alderman. Eight others served thirty years or more, twenty-three between twenty and twenty-nine years and a further nineteen politicians were in power for between fifteen and nineteen years. Because of the Liberal Party's stranglehold, long-serving Conservatives such as Thomas Bentley, Richard Fitzhugh, John Robinson, Thomas Adams, John McCraith and Samuel Turner were councillors without any real prospect of political leadership, either on the aldermanic bench or as a committee chairman. Long service ensured that the political leadership of both political parties had continuity across the three decades from 1870. Each succeeding generation of new politicians joined well-established senior figures giving cohesion to party organisation and policy development. Strong family connections added another layer of cement to the Liberal Party edifice.

That longevity in office helped to ensure that there would be no catastrophic decline in the participation of Nottingham's business elite in the Borough Council before the end of the century. Nottingham's experience largely refutes the 'decline theory'.²¹ Major self-made manufacturers continued to serve on the Corporation, retaining the core of their power, even if their influence was eroded at the margins. They showed greater resilience than the manufacturers in, for example, the south Lancashire towns and Leeds.²² Their determination to maintain a direct interest in municipal affairs shared more in common with the leading business figures of Bristol and Colchester.²³ The leading manufacturers continued to live within the Borough's boundaries, especially in areas such as The Park and Mapperley Park, as municipal politicians did in the centre of towns like Leicester and Norwich.²⁴ They were less subject to the suburbanisation of business leaders that occurred in many other municipalities. The business elite on Nottingham Borough Council, mainly from small enterprises, worked alongside the professional men and many of the shopkeepers, in the later years of the century, who were of considerable substance themselves. Together, they had a major impact on policy formation.

The manufacturers continued to exert a disproportionate influence on the senior posts within the Council, including the aldermanic bench, the mayoralty and the

²¹ Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 241-243.

²² Garrard, 'Elites', pp. 615-621; Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 204, 225-227, 324-326.

²³ Trainor, *Black Country*, p. 242.

²⁴ Doyle, 'Changing Functions', p. 300; Smith, 'Urban Elites', p. 270.

chairmanship of the major committees. The aldermanic bench, reserved by the Liberal Party for their own members, was dominated by lace manufacturers between 1835 and 1877, and especially during the 1850s and 1860s, reflecting their wider presence on the Council as a whole and the pre-eminent position of their industry.²⁵ They suffered a significant decline in aldermanic appointments after 1877 and often there were proportionately fewer lace manufacturers who were aldermen than their numbers on the Council generally might suggest. There were no more than two on any Council. However, those manufacturers who were on the aldermanic bench, such as George Ward, James Oldknow and Samuel Sands, continued to exert significant influence on policy formation. After 1877 it was other manufacturers associated with lace production, such as bleachers and dyers, who increased in number. There were typically three such representatives on the bench. Other manufacturers, for example of leather, bricks or aerated water, accounted for an average of two aldermen and, on occasion, three. After 1877 there were no aldermen from the hosiery industry amongst the six or seven manufacturers out of the sixteen to be found on the bench each year.

The professions generally had one of their number amongst the aldermanic group in the period before 1877, but usually two and, on occasion, three thereafter. Tradesmen saw their representation increase from one in the earlier period to three after the enlargement of the Borough. It was not until the mid-1880s that a builder joined the bench and then it was a single representative. Shopkeepers typically had three out of the fourteen aldermanic seats on the old Council and two or three out of sixteen on the new Nottingham Council, including the influential senior Liberals John Barber, John Manning, John Bowers and Frederick Pullman.

Most councillors served their wards as councillors for typically eleven to seventeen years before stepping up to the aldermanic bench. However, a few key members of the Liberal Party hierarchy were promoted more quickly. For example, Edward Gripper was invited onto the bench when the Council was reconstituted in 1877 without any experience as a councillor, although he had served as a member of

²⁵ Appendix A, Table 4.

Basford Local Board and as vice-chairman of the Nottingham School Board.²⁶ Renals served just two years, Ford five, Goldschmidt six, Manning and Turney seven and Oldknow eight before being elevated.

The post of mayor provided the highest visible public office for municipal politicians, bringing with it considerable social prestige. The mayoralty was dominated by lace manufacturers between 1835 and 1877.²⁷ Twenty of the twenty-nine different politicians who held the post were manufacturers in the town, including eleven lace manufacturers, three hosiers and four in associated trades such as thread making and bleaching. Four shopkeepers became mayor. Two particular wards, with the highest number of residents from the professional and administrative occupational groups, were the power bases for eleven mayors. Park Ward provided six and Sherwood five incumbents, the latter having the post for six of the seven years between 1864 and 1871. The latter included three lace men and three grocers. St Ann's Ward never had a representative selected as mayor before 1877, and Byron and Exchange Wards had just one each. The poorer wards in the east of the Borough exerted less influence amongst the powerbrokers of the Liberal Party.

However, between 1877 and 1900, the mayors represented a broader cross-section of occupational groups.²⁸ Of the eighteen politicians who served as mayor in this period, four were lace manufacturers, three were manufacturers in associated trades, two were merchants, three were solicitors and two shopkeepers. Only one small tradesman and no hosiers became mayor. The professions and other commercial interests joined the lace interest in taking on the social prestige of the mayoralty. Mayors were chosen mainly from the aldermanic bench. One alderman Edward Fraser, a solicitor, occupied the post on three occasions, whilst a lace manufacturer, a leather manufacturer, a silk merchant and another solicitor did so twice. William Parsons, a solicitor, and Richard Fitzhugh, a chemist, were the only two Conservatives to be selected to serve as mayor between 1835 and 1900.

²⁶ Mellors, *Men*, p. 232.

²⁷ Appendix A, Table 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

The chairmen of the Gas, Water, Electricity, Tramways, Lighting, General Works and Highways, Health, Parliamentary and Finance Committees were some of the longer-serving and most powerful political operators on the Borough Council.²⁹ Samuel Johnson claimed that the longevity of the chairmen brought considerable strength to Nottingham Corporation. 'If you have a constant changing body, that constantly changing body is thrown more and more into the hands of the official staff.'³⁰ Indeed, longevity engendered the accumulation of technical expertise in its chairmen. Manufacturers were proportionately very well represented amongst these chairmen between 1873 and 1900.³¹ Seven major industrial leaders chaired important committees, together with three small tradesmen and two shopkeepers. John Thackeray, Samuel Sands and James Oldknow were respected employers from the lace industry. John Turney, leather, Edward Gripper, bricks, and William Ford, aerated water, brought their business expertise from other significant manufacturing concerns. John Barber and John Bowers were well-known grocers, whilst David Heath and Edward Fraser brought their legal expertise to Council business. The silk merchant, Edward Goldschmidt, led both the Finance and Parliamentary Committees during the 1880s and 1890s.

A number of structural difficulties exist in making appropriate comparisons of the experience in Nottingham with the research data gathered for other municipal authorities. Firstly, whilst the roles of manufacturers in the corporations of Birmingham, Leeds, Cardiff, Bolton, Rochdale and Salford have been analysed on the basis of the size of firm that they owned, large and small, such an evaluation would be unhelpful in the case of Nottingham given the great similarity in the size of businesses in the town.³² Secondly, the corporations in Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow served very large communities that had different economic functions to Nottingham. They were the focus of major industrial and commercial regions.³³ Their socio-economic elites included commercial and professional figures operating in much more complex organisations than those in albeit large boroughs like Nottingham, Leicester

²⁹ Appendix A, Table 6.

³⁰ HC (1894) XVII *Royal Commission to Consider the Amalgamation of the City and County of London*, p. 337 (hereafter *RC* (1894)).

³¹ Appendix A, Table 6.

³² Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 34-38, 202-204; Daunton, *Coal*, pp. 151-159; Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, pp. 14-17, 20, 22.

³³ Smith, 'Urban Elites', pp. 258-262, 269-271.

and Sheffield. Thirdly, in some respects medium-sized boroughs such as the Black Country towns offer more pertinent comparisons with the political elite in Nottingham, given the nature and size of their manufacturing concerns.³⁴ Thus, the individuality of Nottingham's situation can be highlighted most effectively by reference to a range of municipal corporations of varying size. Such authorities can offer helpful comparisons with particular facets of the experience of Nottingham, but none provides a single comprehensive comparator council.

In Birmingham, the manufacturing interest on the Council changed in a way that it did not in Nottingham.³⁵ From 1838, when Birmingham achieved municipal status, much later than Nottingham, until the mid-1860s small manufacturers and tradesmen had dominated. From the 1870s large businessmen played a more significant role. By 1882 the town's socio-economic elite had 23% of the Council seats and the small manufacturers 17%. In 1896 the two groups accounted for 22% and 15% respectively. The representation of the professions was much lower than Nottingham until the 1870s. In the 1890s they had a similar share of the seats as the professionals in Nottingham. The trade union and manual worker element grew more quickly than in Nottingham, reaching 5.6% in 1896. In Birmingham there was a more direct religious non-conformist influence on the Council's policy-making, particularly amongst the Quaker and Unitarian denominations, than in Nottingham.³⁶

The experience in Leeds was different to both Nottingham and Birmingham.³⁷ The large wool and cloth merchants had been in the ascendancy until the early 1850s. By 1876 they had only 4.7% of the seats, at a time when the business elite was gaining control in Birmingham. By 1892 very few large businessmen sat on the Council. The retail interest in Leeds secured more seats much earlier than was the case in Nottingham. It grew from the 1850s and had reached 26.5% of the seats by the 1870s. However, the professional element was never as strong as those in Nottingham and Birmingham. The professions were unrepresented in Leeds in 1872, reached a high point of 14.0% in 1892 before reducing to 10.8% in 1896.

³⁴ Trainor, *Black Country*, p. 241.

³⁵ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, p. 34.

³⁶ R. Hartnell, 'Art and Civic Culture in Birmingham in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Urban History*, 22, 2 (1995), pp. 230-231; Briggs, *Birmingham*, pp. 67-69.

³⁷ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, p. 203.

The experience in Bristol contrasted with Birmingham, Leeds and Nottingham.³⁸ The major merchants carried significant influence throughout the period. Bristol's small social elite was the governing elite. The boundary changes in 1898 came a generation later than Nottingham and with them a reduction in the merchants' control. By 1900 they held 27% of the seats. The professions had a similar proportion of seats to Birmingham and Nottingham, whilst the shopkeeper and tradesmen's interests grew to a level in 1900 greater than those in the other two authorities. The socio-economic elite, with their local reputation for high-profile social and philanthropic work, maintained a presence not seen in the other large corporations.

Leicester experienced a decline in the number of large businessmen serving on the Council and a rise in the number of small businessmen and professional men, broadly similar to Leeds but with less dramatic reversals in fortunes.³⁹ Larger employers held about a third of the seats in 1861 and 1881 and less than a fifth in 1900. Small manufacturers accounted for a fifth of the seats in 1861 and just less than a third between 1871 and 1900. Leicester had fewer professionals than Nottingham, with 6% in 1871, nearly 10% in 1881 and around 15% in the 1890s. Unlike Nottingham, the shopkeeper interest in Leicester declined after 1871 to just below 8% in 1881, only about half the seats achieved in 1871. Retailers dropped further to 4% in 1891, less than a quarter of the representation in Nottingham, before rising to 8% in 1900. Leicester's boundaries were extended in the early 1890s, accompanied by a high turnover in personnel.

Wealthy manufacturers and merchants, an 'urban squirearchy', dominated the councils of the Lancashire cotton towns of Salford, Rochdale and Bolton until the 1890s.⁴⁰ They were replaced by the leadership of small businessmen thereafter, in part as the result of the development of the limited company and increasing suburbanisation. By contrast, in Cardiff, the town's shipping elite played a far less significant role on the council.⁴¹ In the 1870s almost a third of the seats were held by

³⁸ Meller, *Leisure*, p. 87.

³⁹ P. Jones, 'The Recruitment of Office Holders in Leicester, 1861-1931', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, LVIII (1981-1982), p. 73.

⁴⁰ Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, pp. 14-17, 20, 22.

⁴¹ Daunton, *Coal*, pp. 152-153.

shipping and coal interests that were not part of the elite. Between 1884 and 1900 those interests held steady, whilst lawyers and the drink trade made significant gains. The building trades lost seats and the number held by small traders reduced from eleven to only four. The pattern of elite influence in neither south Lancashire nor Cardiff matched Nottingham's experience.

Beyond the operation of the municipal councils, significant responsibilities for local governance were carried out by the Poor Law Boards, School Boards and the Magistracy. In Nottingham, members of the Council and the Boards achieved local status through political activity with its social leverage. It has been argued more generally that in the later part of the nineteenth century, overlapping membership of the various local bodies by the political elite enhanced coordination across those municipal groups. Whilst some rivalry existed between such bodies in most authorities, there were few squabbles with serious consequences for the governance of the towns.⁴² In Nottingham multiple office-holding and the use of a network of connections resulted in a more coherent elite, but competitiveness between the bodies continued to cause dispute and contention in the delivery of the various services. The party political dimension to civic organisation in the town brought with it disagreements about policy and process. The Borough Council in particular provided local politicians with a theatre for their ideas and ambitions, an arena with visibility and the opportunity of social respect. And yet, the fabric of political culture in Nottingham was such that the evident partisanship was accompanied by a collective ethic of local government service, a consciousness of place and shared civic pride.⁴³ Nottingham's exceptionality lay in the chemistry of its political contention and collaboration. Whilst Nottingham showed, in Trainor's terms, a growing coherence of representation on the full range of local bodies and a greater exploitation of the connections they offered, there were some major differences in the Borough compared with many other municipal areas. Arguments between the bodies over specific political issues related to the rates and the burden of debt, together with the

⁴² Trainor, *Black Country*, p. 246.

⁴³ R.J. Morris, 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), p. 415; M.E. Rose, 'Culture, Philanthropy and the Manchester Middle Classes', in A.J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds.), *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985), p. 104.

general polarisation of views at election time for each institution, underlined the partisan nature of local governance in Nottingham.

No serving member of the Nottingham Borough Council held office simultaneously on the Poor Law Board, the School Board and the Magistracy. Four local councillors held two such additional posts. Many other councillors held one additional office, but the vast majority served as a member of the Corporation only. Over forty councillors and aldermen were appointed to the Magistrates Bench between 1852 and 1900. Their nomination resulted in disputes between the Lord Chancellor's office which appointed magistrates and the Borough Council that nominated members of the local political elite. In effect Liberal nominations came from the Council and Conservative nominations from the Lord Chancellor. Partisan disputes were particularly prevalent between 1869 and 1886.⁴⁴ Thereafter the appointments created less political tension. Before 1877 there were typically between six and eight magistrates who were serving members of the Corporation in any one year. Of these two or three were normally councillors and the remainder aldermen, in part reflecting the presence of Conservative members who were in permanent opposition. After 1877, the aldermanic group of JPs was larger, ranging from six to fifteen, and the councillor group much smaller varying between none and five. The Liberals who sat as JPs for lengthy periods were, in almost all cases, aldermen and former mayors of the Borough. They included key members of the political elite such as the retailers Barber and Manning, and the manufacturers Lambert, Goldschmidt, Gripper, Turney, Renals and Sands.

Members of the Borough Council were well represented on the Nottingham Poor Law Board, whose area was not, however, co-terminus with the municipal authority until 1899. Between 1857 and 1900 there were usually between five and fourteen members acting as Guardians. The average dual membership was ten. For a large number of future councillors, the Poor Law Board provided helpful experience of political organisation, elections and debate. Those members who combined municipal duties with those of the Guardians were almost always councillors rather than aldermen.

⁴⁴ For example: Nottinghamshire Archives Office (hereafter NAO) CA.CM., Minutes and Reports of Full Council Meetings (hereafter FC), 1 November 1869, 7 November 1877, 7 June 1880, 9 January 1882, 28 April 1884, 3 May 1886.

There was not normally more than one alderman on the Board. The ongoing disputes between the Council and the Board, particularly during their negotiations with the Local Government Board between 1894 and 1899 over the issue of co-terminus territories, underlined the partisanship of their memberships as well as the advantages of greater awareness of their mutual objectives that common membership brought.⁴⁵ In contrast to the experience in Nottingham, few municipal politicians in Leicester pursued seats on both the Council and the Poor Law Union.⁴⁶ Those who did were mainly small businessmen, shopkeepers and representatives of organised labour.

Nottingham councillors also combined their municipal duties with membership of the Nottingham School Board, established in 1870. Between 1870 and 1900 ten councillors served on both bodies, eight of them simultaneously. There was greater overlap of membership in the elections of 1877 and 1881, following the reorganisation of both the Council and the School Board, when six and five members respectively had combined posts. At other times the overlap was more typically a single member. As with the Poor Law Board, the School Board and Council had a history of contention, particularly over finance.⁴⁷

The primacy of party

The primacy of the political parties in Nottingham helped to shape the particular nature of partisanship in the Borough Council. The Council was distinctive in its domination by one party and its long-established party rivalry. The Whigs and the Liberal Party maintained an uninterrupted majority on the Nottingham Borough and City Councils from the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835 to 1908, the Whigs already having controlled proceedings on the unreformed Corporation. The partisan press claimed in 1896 that there was 'not another town where local administration is so completely in the hands of the Liberal Party'.⁴⁸ The Liberal Party apparatus maintained effective control of the municipal electoral process and delivered an

⁴⁵ For example: NAO CA.CM., 8 April 1889, 27 May 1895, 10 April 1899.

⁴⁶ Jones, 'Recruitment', p. 64.

⁴⁷ For example: R.A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900* (Frank Cass, 1966), p. 357 (opposition from Borough Council to Nottingham School Board finances, 1872-1873); *NDE*, 30 October 1895 (friction between the Liberal and Conservative members).

⁴⁸ *NDE*, 3 November 1896.

overall majority in the Chamber at every election from 1870 to 1900. Of the major provincial corporations, only Leicester experienced such a lengthy period of single party dominance.⁴⁹ As such, Hanham's model of the general pattern of Liberal and Conservative municipal electoral successes is inappropriate for Nottingham.⁵⁰ The achievements of the Conservatives elsewhere, in the periods from 1867-1878, 1886-1890 and 1896-1900, had little resonance for Nottingham Corporation. In three of the four years when the local Conservative Party secured as many seats at an annual election as their opponents, their success coincided with results in corporations more generally, but their improved performance did not produce control of the Chamber.

The Borough was unusual too in its long tradition of party political rivalry on its municipal body and the primacy of party in local government. It was perceived as very partisan and inward-looking, an 'outwardly self-contained' authority.⁵¹ Local politicians with party affiliations and labels had represented the town since the period before the reforms of 1835.⁵² Fraser has argued that the caucuses developed by municipal authorities after 1867 were not essentially a new departure, but rather a formalisation and systematization of earlier political structures.⁵³ In Nottingham's case, the Council's experience of party political organisation and conflict had occurred earlier and was more sharply focused than that encountered in many other boroughs. In contrast to many towns, the outward trappings of partisanship did not lessen from the 1880s.⁵⁴ It has been claimed generally that party conflict and division were often associated with issues related to religion, public utilities and borough boundaries.⁵⁵ These were not fundamental sources of party political disagreement in Nottingham.

⁴⁹ M. Elliott, *Victorian Leicester* (Phillimore, 1979), pp. 161-163; J. Moore, 'Liberal Unionism and the Home Rule Crisis in Leicester, 1885-1892', *Midland History*, XXVI (2001), p. 193; G.L. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies, 1900-1914: Three Case Studies', *The Historical Journal*, 26, 3 (1983), p. 630.

⁵⁰ H.J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management* (Longman, 1959), pp. 387-388.

⁵¹ J. Garrard, 'The History of Local Political Power- Some Suggestions for Analysis', *Political Studies*, XXV, 2 (1978), p. 264.

⁵² M.I. Thomis, 'The Politics of Nottingham Enclosure', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, LXXI (1967), pp. 92-95.

⁵³ D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1976), p. 194.

⁵⁴ Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 260-261; Trainor, 'Urban Elites', p. 7.

⁵⁵ J.G. Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government* (Longman, 1967), p. 6; Hanham, *Elections*, p. 393.

The Liberal Party's dominance of the Nottingham Borough Council was based on continuing success in municipal elections and its control and manipulation of all the seats on the aldermanic bench. The Liberal majorities were consistently secure between 1870 and 1901.⁵⁶ They acquired between 26 and 39 seats, out of the 48 on offer, for all the elections following the extension of the Borough boundaries in 1877. The strategy of almost universally packing the sixteen appointments to the aldermanic bench with senior Liberal politicians consolidated the party's grip on power, with the overall number of party seats in the Chamber reaching between 42 and 55. As the Town Clerk observed in 1894, 'the aldermen come in to strengthen the side that is the winning side, the strong side they make stronger'.⁵⁷ Only once did the Liberals invite a Conservative to serve as an alderman, and that in 1901 when James McCraith was over eighty and posed no threat to the Liberal stranglehold on the business of the Corporation. The practice in other authorities varied considerably. For example, in Leeds the ruling Liberal and Conservative parties kept all the aldermanic seats for their own members before 1900, with the exception of three years, whilst in Reading councillors filled vacant aldermanic places on the basis of seniority, irrespective of party allegiance.⁵⁸

Between 1870 and 1876 the Liberal Party secured 68% of Nottingham Council's seats at elections, the Conservatives 32% and none were taken by candidates independent of the two parties.⁵⁹ In the period from 1877 to 1901 the Liberals gained 67% of the ward seats on offer, the Conservative Party 32% and independent candidates 1%.⁶⁰ The Conservatives remained within the range of 8 to 14 Council seats until 1881. During the following two decades their representation increased to between 13 and 22 seats on any one Council. Their best results came in 1883, 1886, 1898, 1900 and 1901 when they secured at least 7 seats from the 16 on offer annually. The Conservatives' most successful election periods were between 1883 and 1888 and from 1899 to 1901. The Conservatives were at their weakest numerically inside the Chamber in 1878, 1879, 1888, 1890 and 1896 when they failed to secure more than a

⁵⁶ Appendix B, Table 7.

⁵⁷ RC (1894), p. 337.

⁵⁸ D. Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1980), pp. 283, 363; A. Alexander, *Borough Government and Politics: Reading, 1835-1985* (George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 172.

⁵⁹ Appendix B, Table 8.

⁶⁰ Appendix B, Table 9.

quarter of the available seats. The primacy of party in Nottingham was underlined by the success of only three independent candidates between 1835 and 1901 and each of them was known to be sympathetic to one of the parties. Samuel Johnson noted that, 'Independents as a rule have no chance of election'.⁶¹

During the periods when the municipalization of Nottingham's four utilities were debated and decisions taken, the Liberal majorities were very strong. When gas was being considered for municipalization the Liberals had 29 or 30 councillors to the Conservatives 12 or 13, whereas when the water utility was moving towards municipal control the figures were 39 and 11 respectively. In 1890-1891 during the debate and decision about electricity the Liberal lead was some 34 or 35 councillors to the Conservatives 13 or 14, whilst there were 32 or 33 Liberal councillors and 15 or 16 Conservatives when the tramways were under consideration for municipal ownership.

In the other major municipal corporations, the incidence of partisanship was uneven between 1870 and 1900.⁶² For example, in Birmingham the Liberals held on to power throughout the period, using their 'caucus' organisation which provided the model for a number of municipal Liberal parties, including Nottingham.⁶³ In Leeds, Bristol, Sheffield and Cardiff political control moved between the Liberal and Conservative parties.⁶⁴ The Liberals in Leeds and the Tories in Bristol used appointments to the aldermanic bench to maintain their control. In Sheffield party political conflict became a reality in 1878, much later than in Nottingham. In the medium-sized boroughs, the scale of partisan activity varied considerably. For example, in Wolverhampton local party labels were generally not used before the turn of the century and councillors tended to act individually.⁶⁵ Party action was largely covert

⁶¹ *RC* (1894), p. 337.

⁶² K. Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1975), p. 31.

⁶³ C. Green, 'Birmingham's Politics, 1873-1891: the Local Basis of Change', *Midland History*, II, 2 (1973), pp. 84-87; Hanham, *Elections*, p. 391.

⁶⁴ Fraser, *History*, pp. 283, 363; Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, p. 359; B. Barber, 'Sheffield Borough Council, 1843-1893', in C. Binfield et al (eds.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993, Vol. 1* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), pp. 39-61; Meller, *Leisure*, p. 86; Daunton, *Coal*, pp. 163-177.

⁶⁵ G.W. Jones, *Borough Politics: a Study of Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888-1964* (Macmillan, 1969), pp. 29-30, 34; J. Lawrence, 'Popular Politics and the Limitations of Party: Wolverhampton, 1867-1900', in E.F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 67.

and had its greatest influence during the candidate selection process. No Black Country town had one overwhelming political party.⁶⁶ In Reading party labels were not used before 1900.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the borough councils of the south Lancashire cotton towns in Salford, Bolton and Rochdale were 'political' authorities and each had used party labels from 1848.⁶⁸ In Keighley, the Liberals maintained a majority on the council for almost the whole period from its creation as a municipal borough in 1882 until the Conservative success of 1908, the same year in which Nottingham's municipal Conservatives made their breakthrough.⁶⁹

The stranglehold that the local Liberal Party was able to exert on municipal elections between 1835 and 1900 was not always reflected in parliamentary elections, particularly in the 1890s. From 1835 until the redistribution of seats in 1885, Nottingham was represented by two members each sharing the same constituency. During that half century, the Whigs and Liberals were dominant, gaining twenty-two seats to the Conservatives' seven.⁷⁰ However, the situation was more complicated from 1885 when Nottingham had three single member constituencies, each with its own social complexion and each exhibiting different patterns of voting behaviour. Nottingham West returned a Liberal member from 1885 to 1900, the successful candidate being Lib-Lab in 1886. Nottingham East inclined to Liberalism initially, with three consecutive successes, before Conservative victories in 1895 and 1900. Nottingham South constituency inclined to Conservatism. Having returned a Liberal in 1885, it then returned Conservative members between 1886 and 1900. Despite never achieving a majority on the municipal Council, the Conservative vote secured two of the three parliamentary seats in 1895 and 1900. On only two occasions, in 1886 and 1900, did the local Conservatives produce an improved municipal performance whilst enjoying success in their search for parliamentary seats. In other years, the Liberals maintained their clear municipal election advantage despite Conservative victories in the Westminster elections. Indeed, in 1874 the

⁶⁶ Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 260-262.

⁶⁷ Alexander, *Reading*, pp. 169-170.

⁶⁸ Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, pp. 110-113, 137-140, 160-164, 209-212.

⁶⁹ D. James, *Keighley, 1880-1914: Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town* (Ryburn Publishing, Keele University Press, Keele, 1995), pp. 116-117, 195-204.

⁷⁰ F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1832-1885* (Macmillan, 1977), pp. 228-230; F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918* (Macmillan, 1974), pp. 162-164.

Conservatives secured both parliamentary seats but only three of the fourteen wards in the municipal vote. The Liberal stranglehold on the Corporation was maintained.

The Nottingham Liberals were generally inward-looking and never played a significant role in regional party matters, although their contacts had been strengthened by the establishment of a Nottingham branch of the Birmingham Education League in 1868.⁷¹ Birmingham retained leadership of the Party's organisation in the Midlands until the splits between the Gladstonians and the Liberal Unionists from 1886. Thereafter the Leicester Liberals perceived themselves to be the heirs of Chamberlain's earlier leadership of the regional structure.⁷² Nottingham's Liberal elite focused their energies on municipal affairs within their own Borough boundaries, rather than on regional or national aspirations. The leadership of Nottingham Borough Council was the object of their political ambitions.

No municipal politician became an MP for Nottingham between 1835 and 1900. David Heath, County Coroner and Councillor for St Ann's Ward from 1863 to 1875, put himself forward as an Independent candidate at the 1874 General Election.⁷³ He came fifth out of six candidates, receiving significantly fewer votes than the Liberals and the two Conservatives who were elected. On the first occasion when a municipal Liberal alderman was nominated as a Liberal Party candidate in 1900 in the Nottingham East constituency, he lost the election.⁷⁴ Edward Fraser was a well-known local solicitor, a councillor and alderman for twenty-two years. He was Chairman of the Finance Committee from 1895 until the election and had been mayor three times. His Conservative opponent branded his political proposals as vastly too expensive, with the slogan 'Vote for Fraser and a million on the rates'.⁷⁵ He polled 8.6% fewer votes than the Conservative candidate in a marginal constituency. A city father from the dominant municipal party found that he could not depend on the Liberal party machine to see him elected.

⁷¹ Church, *Midland Town*, p. 317.

⁷² Moore, 'Liberal Unionism', p. 193.

⁷³ H. Field, *The Date-Book of Remarkable and Memorable Events Connected with Nottingham and its Neighbourhood, 1750-1879, from Authentic Records* (Nottingham, 1880), p. 573; Church, *Midland Town*, p. 221.

⁷⁴ Anon, *Men of the Period* (The Biographical Publishing Company, 1898), p. 151; Mellors, *Men*, p. 193; Craig, *1885-1918*, p. 162.

⁷⁵ A.C. Wood, 'Nottingham Parliamentary Elections, 1869-1900', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, LX (1956), p. 64.

The Nottingham Liberal Party had a strong caucus-based organisation. It was, in comparison to municipal corporations generally, early to organise and subsequently refine its electoral machine. The Party's organisation was harnessed to rally support for both municipal and parliamentary elections, although the structure had been primarily configured to win seats at Westminster. The Liberal Party locally maintained a base for both major interest groups, the Whigs and the Radicals, until 1874. Before the changes to the parliamentary franchise in 1867, the old Liberals had developed what was in practice a self-perpetuating oligarchy of individuals known as 'Number 30', who wielded the power to choose those candidates who would contest the municipal elections.⁷⁶ In August 1868 they had been judged to be 'so wrapt up in their own insufferable conceit that they thought no human beings could be as wise, as good tacticians as they were'.⁷⁷

In 1869 the General Committee of the Nottingham Liberal Party Registration Association was given the power to select candidates. This group of some three hundred included representatives from the wards.⁷⁸ By 1874 it had grown to some four hundred. From that year moderate Liberals were in the ascendancy on the caucus.⁷⁹ By 1885 they had established a Liberal association in the three new parliamentary constituencies, the three combining to form the Nottingham Liberal Union. They endeavoured to organise their election campaigns in a more professional manner through set piece speeches, fund raising banquets, factory visits, political clubs and ward associations.⁸⁰ The real power within the organisation lay with the Executive Committee of the Union, a group of twenty-two members, partly elected and partly co-opted. In essence they were a small controlling group not dissimilar in size to the Whig 'Number 30'.⁸¹

The political clubs and organisational bodies provided the bases for the Liberal Party's initiatives, first at constituency level and subsequently at ward level. Their

⁷⁶ P. Wood, 'Political Developments in Nottingham, 1868-1885' (University of Nottingham, MA thesis, 1989), p. 4.

⁷⁷ *Nottingham Journal*, 28 August 1868 (hereafter *NJ*).

⁷⁸ Wood, 'Political Developments', p. 25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

number and range expanded significantly in the 1880s and especially from 1885.⁸² Members of the Borough Council were well represented at all levels of the Nottingham and County Liberal Club's organisation, as vice-president, trustees, treasurer and committee members. The Liberal political support apparatus was much more effectively structured than the Nottingham Conservative organisation. By 1881 the Liberals had political agents in post for the Borough and the surrounding districts, under the presidency initially of Alderman Howitt and later Alderman Gripper, and an Electoral Vigilance Association. By 1885 ward based Liberal clubs had been formed in, for example, Radford, Lenton and Sneinton, areas new to the enlarged Borough in 1877. Each had leading councillors and aldermen in management positions, thereby enabling more continuous direction to the party's political efforts between municipal and parliamentary elections. From the late 1880s the creation of additional clubs reflected the splits within the Liberal Party nationally over Home Rule. 'Gladstone' and 'Liberal Unionist' labels reflected the divisions, albeit small-scale, within local ranks. Borough councillors continued to serve on the committees of the former but were not visible on the latter. By the early 1890s the Nottingham Women's Liberal Association was active from the Wheeler Gate premises, underlining the Party's continuing response to new demands for political organisation.

By contrast the Conservative apparatus remained limited before 1900. The clubs based on the parliamentary constituencies rather than municipal wards, together with the longer standing Nottingham and County Club, provided the main centres of electoral activity.⁸³ Unlike the Liberals, this club was not manned by members of the Corporation. It had been 'formed upon the same principle, and conducted in a similar manner to the London clubs', operating more like the socially-orientated Conservative clubs in Bradford and Pontefract than the more politically active bodies in Leeds and Sheffield.⁸⁴ The Party had the backing of the clubs for electioneering purposes, but the ward associations were short-lived.

The agents' perceptions of the different electorates in the Borough's sixteen municipal wards helped determine the amount of effort and resources that were

⁸² NAO CA.TC. 28/14,18.

⁸³ NAO CA.TC. 28/8.

⁸⁴ C. Stevens, 'The Conservative Club Movement in the Industrial West Riding, 1880-1914', *Northern History*, XXXVIII (2001), pp. 123-135.

committed during the municipal elections each November. For example, the Conservatives viewed St Mary's and Market Wards, the two in the heart of the old Borough with by far the greatest rateable value, as the natural territory for their businessmen candidates.⁸⁵ On the other hand, Manvers Ward had been recognised by John Turney as a 'safe Liberal seat' and Byron Ward, a predominantly manufacturing ward, was seen as 'one of the strongholds of Liberalism', as was Wollaton, an essentially working-class district.⁸⁶ Bridge, Broxtowe, Castle, St Alban's and Sherwood wards also produced extensive Liberal victories. More problematic for the party organisations were the more marginal wards of Trent and St Ann's, which provided more Conservative than Liberal councillors, and Mapperley, which was 'always fairly evenly divided' although favoured the Liberal Party overall.⁸⁷

The Liberal caucus was generally effective in securing majorities in their target wards but its activities received much negative comment. Its critics portrayed it as a narrow and impenetrable group. For example, in 1874 and 1888 these 'wire-pullers' were accused of interfering in the management of the election process.⁸⁸ In 1884 the Liberal '400' were reckoned to be 'in want of principle'.⁸⁹ By 1900 the party's critics scorned the 'Tammany Hall' approach of Sir John Turney and his Liberal caucus.⁹⁰ There were complaints that the Liberals used closed meetings to establish the party line before debates in the Council Chamber. Yet, by the late 1890s both parties were using pre-meetings to clarify tactics for the business of Full Council meetings. In 1886 it had been suggested that in order to open up the Liberal Party to younger members, debating societies should be formed to encourage greater active participation in municipal affairs.⁹¹ In 1888 the activists in Forest Ward were told not to expect any inspiration from the Liberal Party headquarters in Nottingham as they worked to challenge the political apathy they found in their area.⁹² The perceived closed nature of the Liberal apparatus led to a call in 1893 for the Party 'to allow the ventilation of ideas by the rank and file'.⁹³ At its most extreme, the Conservative

⁸⁵ *NJ*, 2 November 1869; *NDG*, 31 October 1900.

⁸⁶ *NDE*, 27 October 1886; *NDE*, 22 October 1898.

⁸⁷ *NDE*, 31 October 1895.

⁸⁸ *NJ*, 7 November 1874; *NDG*, 2 November 1888.

⁸⁹ *NDG*, 28 October 1884.

⁹⁰ *NDE*, 23 October 1900.

⁹¹ *NDE*, 29 October 1886.

⁹² *NDE*, 23 October 1888.

⁹³ *NDE*, 2 November 1893.

opposition on occasion charged the leaders of the Liberal caucus with jobbery, but no specific proof of private advantage over public duty was ever offered.⁹⁴ However, unlike Wolverhampton, that negative view did not limit the continuing significance of party organisation in Nottingham.⁹⁵ Indeed, the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* blamed the poor municipal results of the Tories on the Conservative Party itself in 1896. 'The contest between a party which strains every nerve to win and one which cannot be stimulated to exertion, under any circumstances, is too unequal.'⁹⁶

The Nottingham Liberal and Conservative organisations exerted patronage by means of the selection of candidates for the annual elections. Almost all municipal election candidates were chosen by the political party machines between 1870 and 1900. The virtually insuperable difficulties experienced by genuinely independent candidates reflected the controls exerted by the parties, especially the Liberals, in the choice of candidates and their management of the municipal election process. It was claimed in 1870 that only those 'who have the golden key' have realistic opportunities of reaching the Council Chamber.⁹⁷ Three years later the system's critics accused the Liberal Party of making a laughing stock of Nottingham because it employed 'imperial politics' on the municipal stage and the parties required 'puppet' like behaviour of their candidates.⁹⁸ The electorate was implored to 'choose the best man and hang the party'. It was claimed that the predominance of party politics left 'a bad odour'. During the first election to the newly enlarged Council in 1877, both Conservative and Liberal candidates were charged with taking 'the money for party purposes'.⁹⁹ The partisan Conservative press called for an end to the abuses which resulted from such party political domination in Nottingham. In 1887 candidates were observed critically being attached 'as a rule to professed party principles'.¹⁰⁰ In 1891 the 'Liberal clique' was attacked for apparently demanding a 'Public Morals Council'.¹⁰¹ In 1888 one Liberal candidate was praised as an 'admirer of Gladstone' but one who did not support the 'imperial politics'.¹⁰² In 1899 the editor of the

⁹⁴ *NDE*, 30 October 1900.

⁹⁵ Lawrence, 'Popular Politics', p. 84; Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 260-261.

⁹⁶ *NDG*, 3 November 1896.

⁹⁷ *NJ*, 2 November 1870.

⁹⁸ *NJ*, 31 October 1873.

⁹⁹ *NJ*, 27 October 1877.

¹⁰⁰ *NDE*, 2 November 1887.

¹⁰¹ *NDE*, 29 October 1891.

¹⁰² *NDE*, 26 October 1888.

Nottingham Daily Guardian argued that the quality of Liberal candidates had reached a very low ebb.

The character and efficiency of the City Council have for years been deteriorating...Membership of this clique demands a sacrifice of principle and consistency which very few really capable men are willing to make.¹⁰³

The dominance of party in the selection process and the parties' determination to ensure that seats were won were underlined by Samuel Johnson.

No matter how well that man has discharged his duty qua councillor, if they thought they could get a party victory, out they would go...

These facts are well known; no one doubts them.¹⁰⁴

In many boroughs, ward associations were left to select candidates by themselves, with little interference from the constituency organisations.¹⁰⁵ However, in Nottingham, the Liberal Party apparatus was more willing to interfere at ward level to help increase the chance of electoral success.

Candidates elsewhere tended not to be subjected to the more systematic party political selection processes that prevailed in Nottingham. They were chosen for their personal qualities, local connections, business experience and interest in the major issues facing the town. For example, the electorates in Wolverhampton and the Black Country towns normally expected their candidates to have had long residence in the ward, be a large ratepayer and have the welfare of the ward at the forefront of their priorities for action.¹⁰⁶ In Birmingham, the very essence of a political authority and the model for the organisation of the Nottingham Liberal Party, many Liberal candidates in the 1870s and 1880s were chosen for presenting a blend of humanitarianism and sound business sense.¹⁰⁷ Despite the rhetoric of the 'Civic Gospel' many were still entrepreneurial individualists at heart.

¹⁰³ *NDG*, 31 October 1899.

¹⁰⁴ *RC* (1894), p. 337.

¹⁰⁵ Redlich, *Local Government*, p. 273.

¹⁰⁶ Trainor, *Black Country*, p. 243; Jones, *Borough Politics*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, 'Public Pursuit', pp. 240-244, 254-255.

In the partisan atmosphere of Nottingham's municipal elections, the Liberal and Conservative parties supported their candidates by accentuating their personal qualities, business experience and social standing. Observers in the partisan press regarded these characteristics as important elements for selection to the Council. The candidates themselves commonly stressed their personal contribution to local matters and their willingness to find the necessary time to meet the needs of local ratepayers. In 1873 the editor of the *Nottingham Journal* called for more businessmen to offer themselves as candidates.¹⁰⁸ Four years later, he lamented that the Conservative Party lacked sufficient 'respectable' men, but instead had too many candidates from the drink trade.¹⁰⁹ In 1878 the same partisan editor recalled a golden age, in reality a myth, when local politicians had been men of position, educated middle-class citizens, people of 'unquestioned integrity'. By comparison the current candidates were perceived to be 'unfit educationally, morally and socially'. He expressed the fear that the best men were not offering themselves as municipal candidates because of 'the dirt and the mire of municipal election'.¹¹⁰ However, unlike the experience of the south Lancashire boroughs, a significant number of Nottingham's business leaders continued to seek election to the Council during the following two decades.¹¹¹

The Conservative Party, in permanent opposition, at times found it helpful for their candidates to appeal to the electorate on their personal qualities alone and indeed offering no specific policy proposals. The notion of standing above the affray of party activity was employed by Conservative candidates in, for example, 1886, 1890 and 1898, despite using the label of their party and the apparatus of the party's electoral organisation. In 1886 Soar actually claimed not to be a politician but a man 'simply doing the work he is set to do'.¹¹² Given their place as permanent opposition, the Tories used this political tactic to seek votes. During the 1890 campaign, the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* praised the Party's candidates for giving priority to 'local considerations' rather than 'merely political influences'.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ *NJ*, 31 October 1873.

¹⁰⁹ *NJ*, 27 October 1877.

¹¹⁰ *NJ*, 31 October 1878.

¹¹¹ Garrard, 'Elites', p. 603.

¹¹² *NDE*, 27 October 1886.

¹¹³ *NDG*, 3 November 1890.

Experience as self-made businessmen and business acumen generally were used by both Liberal and Conservative candidates in support of their candidacy throughout the period. For example, during the 1884 election Liberal candidates appealed as experienced businessmen, used to handling large expenditure without an extravagant approach.¹¹⁴ One retired builder offered himself as a practical businessman, a Gladstonian and one with time to give to the demands of municipal affairs. In 1886 a Liberal appealed to the voters as a man of 'practical experience and the knowledge needed to serve the ward'.¹¹⁵ The argument was developed further in 1895 when the proposition was put that candidates needed two essential qualities, professional qualifications and an interest in town development.¹¹⁶ One successful Conservative councillor was judged to have 'great business ability and experience'.¹¹⁷ In 1891 the Conservative Party presented the whole group of its municipal candidates to the Nottingham electorate as 'well qualified with complete knowledge of local affairs'.¹¹⁸

Local roots and family ties helped to provide organisational continuity in party arrangements at ward level. Many candidates for both major parties had long associations with their wards.¹¹⁹ For the Conservatives, Thomas Bentley (St Ann's), John McCraith (St Mary's), John White (Trent), Richard Fitzhugh (Market), George Horner (Broxtowe), Samuel Abbott (Forest) and Walter Hunter (Bridge) each had at least eleven years continuous service by 1900. They provided the core of the Conservatives' opposition in the Chamber. For the Liberals, a similar continuity of representation was provided by Charles Smith (Wollaton), Thomas Hardy (St Alban's), Cyrus Lovett (Wollaton), James Roberts (Wollaton) and Frederick Gregory (Byron). The three Wollaton councillors exemplified the continuity of representation that a party could achieve at ward level. Many of the most successful Liberal Party councillors went on to serve for lengthy periods as aldermen, thus further cementing the party's hold on the organisation within the wards. It was very unusual for a councillor to represent more than one ward during his municipal career. John Robinson, Conservative, was such an exception, representing Byron Ward, a largely Liberal area, from 1877 to 1880 and Mapperley Ward, a more mixed constituency,

¹¹⁴ *NDE*, 25 October 1884.

¹¹⁵ *NDE*, 1 November 1886.

¹¹⁶ *NDE*, 23 October 1895.

¹¹⁷ *NDG*, 2 November 1895.

¹¹⁸ *NDG*, 31 October 1891.

¹¹⁹ Analysis of Trade Directories, Red Books, *NMCDE*, *NDE*, *NDG*.

from 1886 to 1895. A number of families provided generations of party representatives on the Borough Council. Some of the best known were the Gregory, Manning and Ford dynasties, all Liberal stalwarts.

Whilst notions of 'party' were firmly established in the minds of the local electorate, the two major political organisations came, on occasion, to behind the scenes 'arrangements' at election time for mutual expediency. Although it was usual for some wards to be keenly contested at each election, the number of uncontested seats ranged from two to fourteen out of the sixteen possible contests. The timing of those party 'understandings' might, for example, follow a recent parliamentary election with all its associated efforts and costs for the two parties or for other reasons that indicated the need to keep party expenditure in check. At times the political manoeuvring was camouflaged by an apparent softening of the more systematic use of the full party apparatus to win seats. For example, in 1882 the Liberal and Conservative leaders came to such an 'arrangement' for no contests in all but two wards.¹²⁰ In 1892 they agreed not to canvass or use party lists to rally their support, but otherwise to conduct the campaign on 'political grounds'.¹²¹ The open meetings of candidates continued to be a permanent feature of electioneering, because the party officials knew that they still remained the visible sign of party legitimacy.¹²²

Between 1870 and 1900 the outcome of the uncontested seats in Nottingham favoured neither party. Both Liberals and Conservatives secured at least one uncontested seat in most years, and on occasions such as 1876, 1883 and 1888 received an equal number of these seats. Such was the lack of real political engagement in the wards in some years that ten or more seats were uncontested in the municipal elections of 1879, 1882, 1893, 1897 and 1898. In 1898 just three wards were contested. No ward remained unaffected over the three decades. Most wards failed to have a contest in two or three of the elections between 1876 and 1900. Three wards had at least five such uncontested occasions, all were strongly Liberal and all returned a Liberal candidate unopposed. Other wards with strong traditions for either party had above

¹²⁰ *NDG*, 2 November 1882.

¹²¹ *NDE*, 22 October 1892.

¹²² J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998) p. 164; J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society* (Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1997), p. 96.

average numbers of 'no contests'. From 1877 twelve wards were essentially Liberal and four Conservative in their voting tendencies. Three of the 'Liberal' wards were more evenly contested. Forest Ward returned Liberal candidates in the earlier years and subsequently more Conservatives. Conversely, the Mapperley and Meadows Wards became more strongly Liberal over time.

Contests could be very few in number in other municipal boroughs. For example, in Wolverhampton there were often only one or two contested wards in the annual elections between 1849 and 1902.¹²³ In three elections during the 1880s there were no contests at all and from 1896 to 1902 six of Wolverhampton's twelve wards had no contests. In Birmingham, only 98 contests took place out of a possible 304 between 1873 and 1891.¹²⁴ There were very few indeed in the five years from 1873, the period when the Council was at the height of its activity in taking public utilities into municipal ownership. In Reading too contests were few and they were non-partisan.¹²⁵

Although the municipal elections were characterised by the parties as partisan struggles, the turn out in Nottingham's contested seats was often relatively low, with charges of apathy levelled at the voters. For example, in 1879 46.7% of the electorate voted in the five wards where contests were needed.¹²⁶ In 1886 'little more than half' turned out and the consequence was evenly divided honours for the two parties.¹²⁷ In 1890 and 1894 the Conservative voters were accused of indifference and in both elections results were very favourable for the Liberals.¹²⁸ Indeed, it was claimed in 1894 that Conservative apathy would result in a 'Radical reserve' in the Chamber. Conversely, poor Liberal turn outs in 1898 and 1900 were blamed for the Conservative successes.¹²⁹ In both elections each party took eight seats. The overall vote totalled 57.9% in 1900.¹³⁰

¹²³ Jones, *Borough Politics*, p. 30.

¹²⁴ Green, 'Local Basis', pp. 84-87.

¹²⁵ Alexander, *Reading*, p. 174.

¹²⁶ *NJ*, 3 November 1879.

¹²⁷ *NDG*, 2 November 1886.

¹²⁸ *NDG*, 3 November 1890; *NDG*, 1 November 1894.

¹²⁹ *NDE*, 2 November 1898; *NDE*, 31 October 1900.

¹³⁰ *NDE*, 2 November 1900.

Party political ideologies and election agendas

The nature and extent of partisanship in Nottingham's municipal politics reflected, in large part, the ways in which the Liberal and Conservative parties and the supporters of Labour were prepared to put into practice their political beliefs and policy priorities. Liberalism held sway in a borough where municipal Conservatism remained ill-defined and organisationally weak and Labour, in the main, pursued communitarian approaches to municipal politics rather than a confrontational and class-based philosophy.

Municipal Liberalism

Nottingham's dominant municipal Liberalism had a number of distinctive features, supporting the contention that towns developed different varieties of Liberalism to suit local needs.¹³¹ In common with many municipalities, the old Liberal values provided the dominant strand of thinking in Nottingham's Liberal Party.¹³² Local Liberal leaders had little need to embrace New Liberal ideas, such as those that took root in Lancashire, given the weakness of their political opponents and their continued success in municipal elections.¹³³ However, Nottingham's political culture was marked by strong elements of continuity and adaptation, as was the case in many other boroughs.¹³⁴ The Liberal Party's ability to adapt was demonstrated by its construction of a particular and politically effective form of Lib-Labism in the town.¹³⁵ The local Party's approach to municipal politics rested on more than the pursuit of its own fundamental beliefs and underpinning principles. Despite the town being one of the nation's longest lasting one-party municipalities, the outcomes of municipal Liberalism in the Borough were conditioned by a particular mixture of both high profile partisanship and day to day collaboration with the Conservative members. In practice the Party's Liberal theory was rarely tested, but when Liberal Unionism

¹³¹ P. Thane, 'Labour and Local Politics: Radicalism, Democracy and Social Reform, 1880-1914', in E.F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 258.

¹³² K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: the State of the Debate', *History*, 80 (1995), pp. 219-220, 225-226.

¹³³ P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971), pp. 1-4.

¹³⁴ P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics* (Harvester, Brighton, 1980), p. 301.

¹³⁵ Bernstein, 'Liberalism', pp. 617-618, 631, 638.

challenged the existing thinking, Gladstonian Liberalism emerged as strong as ever. Indeed, internal disagreement, as well as external opposition, encouraged the Party to define itself more clearly and to strengthen party management yet further.¹³⁶

The Liberals who served on the Borough Council were fundamentally municipal politicians who favoured a centrist, Gladstonian position. They administered the work of the Corporation essentially on the basis of sound finance, business efficiency and a relatively modest public profile. The Conservative opposition was weak and slow to increase its presence on the Council. It was the old Liberal values that produced the basis of the link with emerging Labour and the representation of working men in the Council Chamber. The Council's Liberal leadership took a pragmatic, tolerant approach to working-class preferences.¹³⁷ Nottingham's Liberal elite had few substantial contacts with the deliberations of the party in Westminster, preferring to develop policy that addressed the specific needs and circumstances of the socio-economic conditions of the town. An approach of pragmatic gradualism has been identified in the case of social housing policy.¹³⁸ Such pragmatism was also often the hallmark of matters of social and commercial policy more generally between 1870 and 1900. Nottingham's Liberalism was characterised by a considerable continuity of purpose, often aided by long-serving generations of municipal politicians. In Nottingham the party's uninterrupted domination of the Council did not result in political complacency, but rather in a persistent and indeed energetic pursuit of 'progress' and 'improvement' within what members perceived to be the valid economic framework. This was especially true of the Party's policies of municipalization. In some towns, local parties were divided by conflicts on political lines, producing a context for resistance to party rather than a triumph of party.¹³⁹ In Nottingham the party triumphed.

Liberal pragmatism was keenly underpinned by Liberal principles. Indeed, during the municipal elections in 1872, the editor of the *Nottingham Journal* accused Liberals

¹³⁶ Moore, 'Liberal Unionism', p.193.

¹³⁷ Trainor, *Black Country*, pp. 256-257,280. Trainor has argued more generally that middle-class men were making such appeals for working-class votes in the Black Country during the 1880s and 1890s.

¹³⁸ L.F. Wilson, 'The State and the Housing of the English Working Class, with Special Reference to Nottingham, 1815-1914' (University of California, Berkeley, Ph D thesis, 1970), p. 251.

¹³⁹ Lawrence, *Speaking*, p. 164.

such as David Heath of 'an absurd display of their party principles'.¹⁴⁰ In 1884 Cleaver, the successful Liberal candidate in Wollaton Ward, proclaimed that they were 'earnest Liberals...faithful to their great leader, Mr Gladstone'.¹⁴¹ In the following election Steele, the Liberal nominee in Market Ward, said that the Liberals were a 'party of progress, and what was good for the nation was good for the town'.¹⁴² The notion of loyalty to Gladstonian principles acquired new urgency after 1886 when the spectre of Liberal Unionism had to be confronted. Thus in 1887 Dowson, the Liberal candidate in Robin Hood Ward, professed himself to be 'an ardent follower of Mr Gladstone', whilst John Sylvester bathed in the glory of being introduced to his electorate as 'a Liberal of Liberals', one who always defended individual and personal rights.¹⁴³ When Gladstone visited Nottingham during the election to rally support, both Gripper and Cropper spoke from the platform.¹⁴⁴ In the following year the anti-Chamberlain sentiment was clear when Unionism was labelled 'cynical self-complacency'.¹⁴⁵ In 1889 William Nicholls, the successful Liberal candidate in Trent Ward, was proud to be 'Gladstonian to the backbone'.¹⁴⁶ Another, Wright, who had dabbled with Unionism and feared the consequences in Robin Hood Ward, declared that not only was he now Gladstonian, but indeed he supported the Party's Irish policy.¹⁴⁷

From the late 1880s references to the 'Radical' party became commonplace in the Conservative press and the term 'progressive' was used with approbation by their Liberal counterparts. The Liberal Party sought to strengthen 'the progressive majority' on the Council.¹⁴⁸ However, this was progression with a modest and carefully costed face. In 1892 the appeal was for 'strict economy'.¹⁴⁹ The Liberal leader spoke of 'no room for extravagance'. Liberals such as Manning advocated 'true economy'. Expenditure had to be carefully considered but needed to include spending on vital services like education. In the following election various candidates

¹⁴⁰ *NJ*, 4 November 1872.

¹⁴¹ *NDE*, 24 October 1884.

¹⁴² *NDE*, 27 October 1885.

¹⁴³ *NDE*, 27 October 1887; *NDE*, 28 October 1887.

¹⁴⁴ *Nottinghamshire Weekly Express and Journal*, 21 October 1887 (hereafter *NWEJ*).

¹⁴⁵ *NDE*, 29 October 1888.

¹⁴⁶ *NDE*, 23 October 1889.

¹⁴⁷ *NDE*, 30 October 1889.

¹⁴⁸ *NDE*, 31 October 1889.

¹⁴⁹ *NDE*, 22 October 1892.

claimed that whilst there was a need to pay for improvements on health and the comfort of the town, some other large items of expenditure were unnecessary.¹⁵⁰ Liberal candidates in different wards took opposing stances on the need, for example, for major work to be undertaken on the problems posed by the River Leen. Candidates such as Brown Sim in Manvers Ward argued that the Liberal Council had been more economic and efficient during the preceding three years in their efforts to improve the health of the Borough's citizens. 'The Liberalism of the town is as pronounced as ever', judged the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express*.¹⁵¹ It was based on sound finance and business-like efficiency.

In 1895 the Liberals appealed to the electorate as the 'Party of true progress and true economy'.¹⁵² Pyatt saw himself as a 'member of the Liberal Party and the Progressive Party'. The following year Edwards, in St Ann's Ward, summed up his beliefs as being 'for the broad principles of Liberalism not just street improvements'.¹⁵³ These twin pillars of policy continued to underpin the Party's cause. In 1898 it was claimed that 'all elections should be fought on principles and not personalities' and these were 'the principles of progressive development, of justice, of democratic equality'.¹⁵⁴ As always the Party prided itself on its 'brilliant service in the past', making it 'the best-governed municipality in the kingdom'.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, in 1899, the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express* eulogised that, 'Liberalism stands for the sound, progressive and enlightened municipal government which has made Nottingham what it is today'.¹⁵⁶ Liberal candidates were men of common sense, good works and arduous service, 'thorough going and trusted'. In 1900 Liberal achievements were summarised as providing 'something very substantial to show for their spending'.¹⁵⁷ The Liberals had delivered public utilities economically and efficiently, with a General District Rate lower than that levied in several other large municipal boroughs.

¹⁵⁰ *NDE*, 26 October 1893; *NDE*, 28 October 1893; *NDE*, 31 October 1893.

¹⁵¹ *NDE*, 2 November 1893.

¹⁵² *NDE*, 31 October 1895.

¹⁵³ *NDE*, 23 October 1895.

¹⁵⁴ *NDE*, 28 October 1896.

¹⁵⁵ *NDE*, 27 October 1898.

¹⁵⁶ *NDE*, 1 November 1898.

¹⁵⁷ *NDE*, 30 October 1900.

In a highly politicised authority like Nottingham, the Conservative interpretation of the Liberals' claims to principle and economy was predictably challenging and harsh. They looked to the voters to give priority to 'a well-governed city' and to ensure that the Corporation represented the interests of the whole city.¹⁵⁸ In 1897 the Conservatives branded their opponents as,

a narrow clique... Whatever they were in the past they are now a compound of trade unionism, self-interest and socialism... a most unwholesome mixture.¹⁵⁹

The Conservative press labelled the Liberals as 'inexperienced spouters and people who represent nothing but selfish class interests'.¹⁶⁰

There had been a long heritage of political vitriol about the domination of the Borough Council by the Liberal Party. In 1886 it was accused of 'bias' and of continuing to bring 'Imperial politics into municipal matters'.¹⁶¹ The Liberal response in 1888, as expressed by Henry Hill in Robin Hood Ward, was that politics could not be eliminated from the municipal system any more than it could from Westminster.¹⁶² In 1893 the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* wrote that the Liberal's radical caucus was 'a small clique of busybodies whose chief characteristics are prejudice and narrowness of mind'.¹⁶³ The Liberal Party's critics perennially accused it of over-confidence at election times and producing apathy amongst large sections of the municipal electorate. The Party's supporters claimed in 1897 that generally 'Liberalism in this city is in a healthy and vigorous position'.¹⁶⁴ Nottingham's Liberals took great satisfaction in hosting the annual meeting of the National Liberal Federation in both 1887 and 1900.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ *NDG*, 31 October 1898.

¹⁵⁹ *NDG*, 1 November 1897.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *NDE*, 27 October 1886.

¹⁶² *NDE*, 30 October 1888.

¹⁶³ *NDG*, 1 November 1893.

¹⁶⁴ *NDE*, 2 November 1897.

¹⁶⁵ *NDE*, 19 and 20 October 1887; *NDE*, 27, 28 and 29 March 1900 (the *NDE*'s coverage was particularly hyperbolic in 1887 when Gladstone addressed the Party's representatives); *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 and 20 October 1887 (hereafter *NEP*); *NEP*, 29 March 1900.

Nottingham's version of Liberalism was consistently supported and promoted by one section of the town's politically partisan press, although this was not as all-pervasive and dominant as the press was in Birmingham on behalf of its Liberal caucus. To some extent, Joseph Chamberlain headed a benevolently despotic party that focused its efforts on municipal centralisation and consolidation.¹⁶⁶ In some cases, decisions were taken at Chamberlain's house and then presented to the electorate as a fait accompli. Political control was never as tight in Nottingham. Conditions were different too from those experienced in Liverpool and Wolverhampton, where the Liberal parties were also reorganised on Birmingham's model. For example, whilst the Liberals in Wolverhampton were bullish in denouncing Liberal Unionism, they were more uncertain and faltering in explaining their own policies.¹⁶⁷ Religious nonconformity was less influential in Liverpool than Nottingham.¹⁶⁸ Here the sectarian divide between the Established Church and the Roman Catholic Church was more significant. In Wolverhampton, nonconformity had helped to bind together many Liberal adherents as it had done earlier in the century in Nottingham. But the Liberals in this Black Country town were less consistent than those in Nottingham and lost control of the Council to populist Tories.¹⁶⁹ Neither were Sheffield's Liberals as united as the Nottingham Liberals. They 'never agreed on anything'.¹⁷⁰ Different sectional interests within the party were in direct conflict with each other and they often voted as individuals. They lacked a coherent approach. Even in Leicester divisions were much deeper over a wide range of issues, than those experienced by Nottingham's Liberal Party members. These tensions were evident between official and radical Liberalism and both were influential.¹⁷¹

The partisan division between the Liberal and Conservative parties at election time was highlighted by the manner in which the Liberal elite handled the potential threat of Liberal Unionism between 1887 and 1889. The Liberal Party underlined its continuing commitment to Gladstonianism and the established approaches to

¹⁶⁶ Green, 'Local Basis', p. 88.

¹⁶⁷ Lawrence, *Speaking*, p. 208.

¹⁶⁸ N. Collins, *Politics and Elections in Nineteenth Century Liverpool* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), pp. 109, 113-114, 203, 232.

¹⁶⁹ Lawrence, *Speaking*, pp. 104-108.

¹⁷⁰ H. Mathers, 'The City of Sheffield, 1893-1926', in C. Binfield et al (eds.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993, Vol. 1* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), p. 63.

¹⁷¹ Thane, 'Labour', p.256.

municipal policy-making. The Liberal caucus marginalised Liberal Unionist opinion and then defeated it in the municipal elections. Unionist politicians were branded as closet Tories. For example, Frederick Acton, a solicitor, Liberal councillor for Forest Ward from 1877 and an alderman from 1883, was General Secretary of the Nottingham Liberal Union Association in the town. In 1887 he was said to be 'flirting with the Tories' and in the following year to be espousing the 'lying spirit of Toryism'.¹⁷² By 1889 he was felt to be 'actively playing the Tory game' despite claiming to remain a Liberal.¹⁷³ Acton objected to the 'dictation of the caucus' and had voted against their candidate for the aldermanic bench on the death of Oldknow in 1888. Other Unionists 'remained loyal, in appearance at least'.¹⁷⁴

In the event, no official Liberal Unionists were elected to the Council under that group's banner, but their 'influences were quietly at work'.¹⁷⁵ Two stood as Liberal Unionists in 1888. Smith, a former Liberal in Sherwood Ward, and Fisher, with 'the hearty assistance of the Conservatives' in Wollaton Ward, were defeated.¹⁷⁶ Thereafter, no official Unionist candidates were offered to the electorate. They emerged as Conservative candidates. Publicly, Liberal candidates were quick to dissociate themselves from Chamberlain's views, 'a malignant and unrepentant sinner', and to assert their true Liberalism.¹⁷⁷ For example, Henry Hill in Robin Hood Ward in 1888 felt the need to defend himself against what he claimed were the lies of the Tories, to rebut the suggestion that he asked his employees if they were Unionists, to reaffirm his Gladstonian credentials and to write to Acton to sever his connections with the group. In 1889 John Wright, the Liberal candidate in Sherwood Ward, similarly had to refute the accusations of his Conservative opponent, Lovegrove.¹⁷⁸ He was said to be not only a Liberal Unionist member, but a very active and energetic worker on the Association's Executive Committee who had welcomed Joseph Chamberlain on his visit to Nottingham. For his part Wright claimed not to be a supporter, having not attended a Unionist meeting for a year and now reconciled to

¹⁷² *NDE*, 1 November 1887.

¹⁷³ *NDE*, 2 November 1889.

¹⁷⁴ *NDE*, 1 November 1889.

¹⁷⁵ *NDE*, 30 October 1888.

¹⁷⁶ *NDE*, 2 November 1888.

¹⁷⁷ *NDE*, 1 November 1888; British Library (hereafter BL) ADD 56445. Their wish to assert their Gladstonian views was similar to the pronouncements of several key Liberals in Birmingham, two years earlier.

¹⁷⁸ *NDE*, 29 and 30 October 1889.

the concessions Gladstone had made to the Party's Irish policy. The Liberal Party organisation in Nottingham closed ranks. It asserted its commitment to Gladstone, leaving Acton and any other 'dissentients' isolated and a spent force within Liberal circles in the town. In contrast, the Liberal Unionist cause had much greater municipal impact in the other long-standing East Midlands Liberal stronghold, Leicester.¹⁷⁹

Municipal Conservatism

The scale and potency of partisanship in Nottingham was, to a considerable extent, determined by the continuing weakness of the Conservative Party throughout the period from 1870 to 1900 and the consequent 'one-sided' municipal government.¹⁸⁰ Municipal Conservatism remained ill-defined. The Conservatives lacked both worked-through alternative policies and the organisational strength to offer Nottingham's voters a credible opposition to the dominant Liberal Party. As such, they did not attract the same amount of municipal success in the 1890s that many other Conservative organisations enjoyed.¹⁸¹ This had important repercussions for their tactics in the policy-making processes within the Chamber and their willingness to commit themselves to collaborative arrangements in the Council.

The Conservative Party's weakness caused electoral frustration, exemplified in many elections by the low turnout and apparent apathy. They were ineffective in getting out their own voters. The Conservatives complained of the unfairness of the Liberals' occupation of all the aldermanic seats, which they regarded as rewards given for service to the party and not the town, and the 'grossly unfair arrangement of committees', the Liberals' chairmanship of all the strategic committees.¹⁸² Their critics focused on the quality of their municipal candidates and their lack of clear, constructive policy proposals. By default rather than by design, the Conservatives in Nottingham could be distinguished from their political adversaries by their slowness to adapt to change and their unwillingness to commit themselves explicitly to large-

¹⁷⁹ Moore, J., 'Liberal Unionism', pp. 192-193.

¹⁸⁰ For example: *NDG*, 1 November 1893; *NDG*, 2 November 1897.

¹⁸¹ Lawrence, 'Popular Politics', p. 66. In Nottingham, the trend was not a 'lurch towards Conservatism', either in terms of electoral results or Council policy.

¹⁸² *NDG*, 2 November 1895.

scale expenditure for municipal improvement schemes. They adopted a more distinctively populist approach in the 1890s, with greater electoral success in 1898 and 1900, but they were much slower to make inroads into the Liberal majorities in Nottingham than many Conservative party organisations in other municipal boroughs.¹⁸³

The lack of influence commanded by the Conservative Party in municipal affairs was evident throughout the period from the enlargement of the Borough. For example at a meeting in Manvers Ward in 1877 Conservatives complained that 'the minority has no influence'.¹⁸⁴ In 1878 the editor of the *Nottingham Journal* referred to the Conservatives as a 'miserable minority...feeble opposition', a very different judgement to that presented more recently about an 'influential minority' in the 1880s.¹⁸⁵ In 1886 the Conservative candidate in Manvers Ward, Soar, called on his party to provide a better scrutinising opposition.¹⁸⁶ Even in 1900 the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* was still calling for a party that could hold the balance of power rather than continue to act as 'a weak minority'.¹⁸⁷ Despite showing real electoral strength in the 'Khaki' parliamentary contest, they gained only two additional municipal seats from the Liberals. Four years earlier the *Nottingham Daily Express* had labelled the Tories as 'a reactionary minority party'.¹⁸⁸ Even when the Home Rule crisis was at its height within the local Liberal Party, the Conservatives failed to press home the advantage they may have had with the potential Liberal Unionist vote. It was not until 1895 that they succeeded with full party backing to get Billyeald, a Liberal Unionist, elected as a Conservative nominee. In the same election another Unionist, Botterill, failed to take Mapperley Ward as the official Conservative candidate.

The Party's candidates gave out inconsistent messages about their partisanship to the municipal electorate. On the one hand, many appealed for the abandonment of 'municipal politics', wanting service to the interests of the town to be put above the interests of party. Such views were evident, for example, in the elections of 1887,

¹⁸³ Hanham, *Elections*, p. 388.

¹⁸⁴ *NJ*, 27 October 1877.

¹⁸⁵ *NJ*, 31 October 1878; Wilson, 'Housing', p. 180.

¹⁸⁶ *NDG*, 27 October 1886.

¹⁸⁷ *NDG*, 1 November 1900.

¹⁸⁸ *NDE*, 3 November 1896.

1891, 1894-1896 and 1900. On the other hand, some vociferous voices relished the party political approach. In 1891 Charles Wells-Lucas in Bridge Ward said he was 'a Conservative pure and simple' and called for politics to be introduced into the campaign.¹⁸⁹ He won the seat. In 1893 the election was fought on 'distinctly party lines'.¹⁹⁰ The *Nottingham Daily Guardian* urged Conservative candidates to fight for Conservative principles rather than for personal reasons. However, Conservative candidates drew the line when ward campaigns descended into 'disgraceful attacks' that 'degrade political strife', such as the challenge to Billyeald about his trade union views.¹⁹¹ In 1898 Brown in Market Ward called for a contest 'on the old lines'.¹⁹² It is likely that many Conservatives would have sympathised with a partisan Liberal appeal in 1900 for a straight fight between Liberalism and Toryism.¹⁹³ Indeed, by 1900 the Conservative Party was taking a more corporate line on Council issues and holding monthly pre-meetings to discuss the Full Council agenda.¹⁹⁴ For many Conservatives party political approaches to electioneering were commonplace. In 1888 Dr Roberts, the Liberal candidate in Wollaton Ward, perceptively summed up the general approach taken by the Conservatives.¹⁹⁵ They opposed Westminster-style politics in wards where they feared their Liberal opponent, but otherwise made it their own practice too. What the Conservatives lacked was the more systematic and responsive political organisation of the Liberals and a consistent policy platform.

Conservative councillors and election candidates, however, did maintain one consistent line throughout the period from 1870 to 1900. They sought to identify their Conservatism as the pursuit of economy and opposition to Liberal 'extravagance'. Their public appeal was constantly for sound finance, prudent limits on municipal expenditure and the more effective management of the Borough's finances. However, even when their call for careful spending attracted the notice of the electorate, as in 1889, and their total vote exceeded the Liberal vote, their organisational problems and the distribution of their vote across the wards still conspired to prevent them from

¹⁸⁹ *NDE*, 23 October 1891.

¹⁹⁰ *NDG*, 1 November 1893.

¹⁹¹ *NDG*, 1 November 1895.

¹⁹² *NDE*, 29 October 1898.

¹⁹³ *NDE*, 2 November 1900.

¹⁹⁴ *NDE*, 23 October 1900.

¹⁹⁵ *NDE*, 26 October 1888.

taking a majority of the seats on offer.¹⁹⁶ Hostility to public expenditure figured prominently in their campaigns in 1883, 1887, 1889, 1891-1892 and 1895. Whilst they successfully focused on Liberal extravagance, they failed to define their own alternative, constructive policies. They did not indicate how they might reduce the rates and manage the finances more effectively. The Liberals were able to respond, with some justification, that the Conservatives' advocacy of economy was simply 'an ancient device'.¹⁹⁷ Such was the history of the Conservatives' inability to create their own distinctive programme that the Liberal-supporting *Nottingham Daily Express* claimed in 1900 that it was 'hopeless that they will'.¹⁹⁸ This failure to offer clear proposals came in a town that was chosen to host the annual conferences of the national Conservative Party in both July 1878 and November 1889.¹⁹⁹ Indeed the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express* argued in 1900 that the Liberals had provided four utilities with little initiative shown by the opposition.

The Tories have of course voted for these improvements, but they initiated none of them and judging from their talk of reducing the rates, it may fairly be agreed that they would not have carried out at least some of the schemes, even if they had been in power.²⁰⁰

The improved performance of the Conservative Party in the late 1890s came as the result of the increased energy of a new generation of candidates rather than new policies. The Party's supporters claimed in 1895 that these younger men brought that essential quality of great business ability to the polls and they went so far as to contend that the cohort at the 1896 election were generally 'excellent'.²⁰¹ They claimed in 1900 that the 'new wants and new interests' of the city could be met by their younger business leaders. The Council needed,

new men possessed of a higher order of intelligence and animated by new ideas. It is quite time that the old order was changed and a new order

¹⁹⁶ *NDG*, 2 November 1889.

¹⁹⁷ *NDE*, 31 October 1895.

¹⁹⁸ *NDE*, 30 October 1900.

¹⁹⁹ *NJ*, 18 July 1878; *NDG*, 26 November 1889; *NEP*, 26 November 1889. In 1889, Lord Salisbury was given an 'enthusiastic reception'.

²⁰⁰ *NDE*, 1 November 1900.

²⁰¹ *NDG*, 3 November 1896.

originated.²⁰²

They looked to a new spirit of enterprise to replace the old Liberal order that for so long had 'largely by means of bribery obtained the entire control of the Corporation'.²⁰³ There was even some rather rose-tinted spectacle talk in 1898 of the Conservatives having laid the basis of the authority's progressive policies.²⁰⁴ A more realistic judgement on Nottingham's municipal Conservatism had been proffered by Dawson, the unsuccessful Liberal candidate in Market Ward in 1889, when he claimed that the Conservatives sometimes supported municipal developments and on occasions introduced small improvements.²⁰⁵ They were clearly not the party that proposed the major improvement projects in the Borough, but neither were they implacably opposed to policies for a healthier and more comfortable town that were developed on the basis of sensible pragmatic expenditure. The issues that divided Liberals and Conservatives at the hustings each November were not necessarily obstacles to agreement in the day to day business of the Council. Beneath the predictable partisan rhetoric of both parties, Nottingham's Gladstonian Liberals and local Conservatives shared much in common in terms of sound finance and a business-like approach to the routines of municipal administration.

In many ways, the approach of Nottingham's Conservatives was akin to the methods of the Conservatives who held control of Exeter Council. The Devonians were 'unadventurous but pragmatic', reacting to events as they occurred.²⁰⁶ However, the Conservatives in Nottingham shared far less in common with Conservative politicians in Liverpool and Wolverhampton. The Liverpool Tories had a very distinctive organisation that gave closer control to its Executive Committee and Board of Management than even the Liberals in Birmingham did to their party caucus.²⁰⁷ In Wolverhampton, 'brassworker' Tory populism was successful in the 1890s, at least in part, because of its elaborate organisation of ward groups, district sub-committees and an active Borough Conservative Association.²⁰⁸ In Birmingham too the

²⁰² *NDG*, 31 October 1900.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *NDG*, 2 November 1898.

²⁰⁵ *NDE*, 29 October 1889.

²⁰⁶ R. Newton, *Victorian Exeter* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1968), p. 189.

²⁰⁷ Collins, *Politics*, p. 191.

²⁰⁸ Lawrence, 'Popular Politics', pp. 75-76; Lawrence, *Speaking*, pp. 104-106.

Conservatives were more adept at absorbing the nascent Labour vote and taking advantage of the ratepayers' revolt.²⁰⁹

Municipal Lib-Labism and the representation of Labour

In many municipalities, early Labour was rooted in the existing political culture.²¹⁰ Whilst class was an important ingredient in the development of independent Labour representation, it was not the only one.²¹¹ In the case of Nottingham, class cooperation and industrial collaboration had been developed in a local economy in which the lace, hosiery, coal and non-unionised industries played a significant role.²¹² The focus had become more communitarian than class based and Labour generally continued to find a political relationship with the dominant Liberal Party acceptable. This had important implications for the Corporation's policy-making processes. Labour's strategies were ultimately grounded in the 'practical politics' of every day life, rather than in formal politics, at the municipal level.²¹³

Labour was slow to develop independent representation on Nottingham Borough Council. Socialist groups, such as the local branches of the First International and the Social Democratic Federation, were established in the 1870s and 1880s but they tended to be short-lived.²¹⁴ The Workers' Electoral Federation was set up in 1891 in an attempt to form 'one solid Labour party'.²¹⁵ However, the four municipal candidates who were subsequently selected by the Labour Representation Committee found themselves candidates of the old parties. A branch of the Independent Labour Party was established in Nottingham in 1893, but its first municipal success was the

²⁰⁹ Green, 'Local Basis', pp. 94-95.

²¹⁰ Lawrence, *Party*, p. 92.

²¹¹ Croll, *Civilizing*, pp. 59-60.

²¹² R. Gray and D. Loftus, 'Industrial Regulation, Urban Space and the Boundaries of the Workplace: Mid-Victorian Nottingham', *Urban History*, 26, 2 (1999), pp. 223-227; Modern Records Centre (hereafter MRC) MSS 140/1/1. In 1906, the Nottingham Trades Council affirmed its determination to continue to give priority to its existing approaches to securing representation for the Labour interest, on both the City Council and the Nottingham Board of Guardians; R. Bell, 'Late Starter? The Rise of the Labour Party in Nottingham', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, CIV (2000), p. 127.

²¹³ Savage, 'Rise', pp. 8-11.

²¹⁴ P. Wyncoll, 'The First International and Working Class Activity in Nottingham', *Marxism Today*, (December 1968), pp. 372-379; P. Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement, 1880-1939* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), pp. 76-87; Bell, 'Late Starter', p. 125; J. Hill, 'Nottingham Socialists in the 1880s: a Comment on Sources', *Bulletin of Local History: East Midlands Region*, XIV (1979), pp. 12-15.

²¹⁵ Wyncoll, *Labour Movement*, p. 47.

election of Ernest Gutteridge in 1908.²¹⁶ ILP councillors were elected in Bristol, Sheffield and Keighley much earlier.²¹⁷ Even in October 1900 a motion was passed at the Nottingham Trades Council 'that we have no politics in the Council', a clear reference to the rejection of Labour representation.²¹⁸ As late as 1906 the Trades Council voted not to affiliate to the Labour Party.²¹⁹

The size and nature of businesses and trades in the area and the economic trade cycles experienced by local commerce and industry helped to mould a particular approach to labour relations in Nottingham that was less confrontational than in some other local economies. The leaders of the elite trade unions, for example in the lace and mining industries, were willing to continue to work with an accommodating Liberal Party organisation to meet the needs of working men, in the context of uninterrupted Liberal majorities until 1908. The local Liberal organisation recognised the need to absorb union leaders such as William Bailey of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association. Local politicians developed a distinctive form of Lib-Labism and thereby helped to delay further significant partisan divisions in the town.

From 1886 the Liberal Party adopted Labour men as candidates, beginning with Lovett in Wollaton Ward, a suitably working-class district of the town. At Lovett's introductory meeting with the voters, Vickers, on behalf of the local Liberal Association, said that the Party was 'proud of their first workman representative on the School Board'. The electorate could now do with 'less talkers and more workers on the Town Council'.²²⁰ The following year William Bailey, the Miners' Agent and official Liberal candidate in St Alban's Ward, appealed to Liberal voters for more Labour representation for 'the cause of Liberalism and progress'.²²¹ In that election the key themes were the representation of Labour, the economy and the opportunities offered by University College, all important to Labour leaders if working men's ambitions were to be met more effectively. Proctor, the Labour candidate in Byron

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 115.

²¹⁷ Meller, *Leisure*, p. 86; K. Kelly and M. Richardson, 'The Shaping of the Bristol Labour Movement, 1885-1985', in M. Dresser and P. Ollerenshaw (eds.), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Radcliffe Press, Tiverton, 1996), p. 217; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', pp. 67-68; James, *Keighley*, pp. 202-203.

²¹⁸ Wyncoll, *Labour Movement*, p. 135.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²²⁰ *NDE*, 28 October 1886.

²²¹ *NDE*, 26 October 1887.

Ward, called for an end to jobbery and corruption and the presence of the press at Council meetings to bring greater transparency to Council business.²²²

In the elections from 1888 to 1891, the official Liberal candidates generally spoke in favour of the trade unions and trade union wage rates.²²³ In 1889 some candidates of both the Liberal and Conservative parties looked to capture the working men's votes with their support for trade unionism, that 'precious possession'.²²⁴ However, some of the older Liberals remained aloof and examples of 'self-satisfied respectability' acted as an irritant to some Labour candidates.²²⁵ Experience was patchy in the first few years of co-operation. For example, Skerritt, the Lib-Lab candidate in St Ann's Ward, received wholehearted support in 1891. But Bower, the lace workers' leader in Trent Ward, and Cheetham, of the Typographical Society in Forest Ward, were undermined by absentee Liberal votes. Whilst Skerritt, a joiner and Chairman of the Labour Representation Committee, was presented as 'an advanced Liberal', Cheetham declared his priorities as Labour first and Liberal second.²²⁶ In 1892 the candidature of George Robinson was withdrawn because he could not count on Liberal support. 'He was too good a man to be dashed against the wall without a hope of success.'²²⁷ Bailey found local Liberals claiming that he should not receive their votes because he had turned on the Lib-Lab MP, Henry Broadhurst. In the event, Bailey suffered 'discreditable attacks' and Liberal voters did stay away from the polls.²²⁸ He secured only 28% of the vote, even in a ward with a significant proportion of his fellow miners. Sceptics claimed he would not have obtained 5% elsewhere.

Increasingly during the 1890s Liberal candidates declared their support for the miners, the trade unions, fair wages and the 'labour interest'. Lovett, fighting the Wollaton seat once more in 1895, pronounced his support for the Labour programme.²²⁹ But, in the previous election, Ward, a Liberal spokesman in Bridge Ward, called the ILP

²²² *NDE*, 28 October 1887.

²²³ For example: *NDE*, 27 October 1888; *NDE*, 29 October 1889; *NDG*, 29 October 1890; *NDE*, 29 October 1891.

²²⁴ *NDG*, 1 November 1889.

²²⁵ *NDE*, 3 November 1891.

²²⁶ *NDE*, 23 October 1891.

²²⁷ *NDE*, 22 October 1892.

²²⁸ *NDG*, 2 November 1892.

²²⁹ *NDE*, 30 October 1895.

'selfish', not caring whether they smashed the Liberal or Conservative parties in their bid for Labour representation.²³⁰ In the event, Dr Hunter took the seat for the Conservatives. On occasion, Lib-Lab arrangements worked particularly well at ward level. In 1897, for example, the Liberal Association and the working men electors of Manvers Ward combined their efforts to see Hardstaffe, the miners' leader, successfully elected.²³¹

Between 1889 and 1900 the Liberal Party put forward nine working men candidates, in fifteen different ward contests, amongst the many more traditional Liberal candidates chosen to fight municipal seats.²³² In the cases of some two thirds of the candidates, they were selected for seats that had enjoyed significant Liberal success in previous elections and were winnable. That was a measure of the Liberal's accommodating response to working-class interests. In the event, three of the four successful candidates, Bailey, Skerritt and Robinson, fought at least one unsuccessful contest before securing their victory. Robinson ultimately succeeded Bailey in the St Alban's seat in 1900, four years after Bailey's death. Bower, Cheetham, Kilborne, Davis and Appleton were unsuccessful. The Lib-Lab victories came in just three of the sixteen wards, in St Alban's, St Ann's and Manvers.

Beyond the reaches of the dominant Liberal Party organisation, partisan Labour activity continued to increase steadily. However, the Independent working men, Trades Union and Labour candidates were all unsuccessful in their efforts to win municipal seats. On many occasions they suffered heavy electoral defeats. For example, Independent working men candidates, Smith and Chilton, were trounced in Robin Hood Ward in 1896 and Trent Ward in 1899 by the Liberal and Conservative parties respectively.²³³ Similarly ILP nominees, Staton in Wollaton and Camm in Robin Hood Ward, were heavily defeated in 1896 and 1900 by Liberal and Conservative candidates.²³⁴ Indeed, Frank Camm mustered only forty-six votes.

²³⁰ *NDG*, 24 October 1894.

²³¹ *NDE*, 2 November 1897.

²³² *NDE*, *NDG* coverage of the municipal elections, 1889-1900.

²³³ *NDE*, 3 November 1896; *NDE*, 2 November 1899.

²³⁴ *NDE*, 3 November 1896; *NDE*, 2 November 1900.

Overall, working men fought some twenty-seven contests between 1890 and 1900 with no nominees submitted in either 1891 or 1898, when only three wards were contested by the major parties at each election.²³⁵ In other years there were normally between one and three such working men aspirants, whilst in 1890 and 1896 there were four and in 1894 six, of whom four were the first cohort of ILP candidates. The wards that they targeted were widely spread, eleven wards receiving an independent working man challenger during the decade. The ILP fielded ten candidates in four wards, Wollaton, Robin Hood, Bridge and Manvers, between 1894 and 1900. Wollaton became the preferred arena in four successive campaigns from 1894. Trade Unionist candidates stood in Broxtowe in 1891 and in Manvers and Mapperley Wards in 1896. 'Independent' candidates contested seats in eight of the eleven elections from 1890 to 1900, with fewer men presenting themselves as independents at the polls once the ILP put forward its own candidates. There were just six independent working men on the ballot papers between 1894 and 1900.

In many other boroughs, ILP branches were successful in getting their candidates elected before Gutteridge enjoyed his success in Nottingham in 1908. For example, Leicester had three ILP councillors in 1895 and Sheffield one in 1900.²³⁶ In Wolverhampton, Labour became a disruptive force to the Conservatives and conservative Liberals during the 1890s.²³⁷ In Keighley, the Liberal employers were not prepared to support working-class candidates and a separate Labour party was created much earlier than in Nottingham.²³⁸ In 1900 Keighley had one of the largest ILP memberships in the country. In some other authorities, such as Burnley, forms of Lib-Labism had greater tenacity, with evidence of more inter-class cooperation and Liberal resilience.²³⁹ However, the Liberals in Leeds were too concerned with their intense struggle with the Tories to be sufficiently mindful of the ILP.²⁴⁰ In each authority where Lib-Lab arrangements succeeded, different local factors tended to be at work.

²³⁵ *NDE*, 3 November 1891; *NDE*, 2 November 1898.

²³⁶ Elliott, *Leicester*, pp. 164-165; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', p. 68.

²³⁷ Lawrence, *Speaking*, pp. 114-122.

²³⁸ James, *Keighley*, pp. 73-78.

²³⁹ J. Hill, 'Lib-Labism, Socialism and Labour in Burnley, c. 1890-1918', *Northern History*, XXXV (1999), pp. 185, 193-194.

²⁴⁰ Bernstein, 'Liberalism', pp. 625-629.

Party election agendas

The issues that were raised by the candidates during Nottingham's annual municipal elections reflected both partisan and non-partisan matters. The partisan rhetoric focused upon economy, efficiency, progress and waste. At election time this language was used to divide candidates on the basis of party, whilst in the Chamber the beliefs that underpinned the same vocabulary could be used to ease the way to political cooperation. Each political group displayed caution and concern for cost. Different perceptions of what was implied by 'economy' underpinned the key messages of the Liberalism, Conservatism and Lib-Labism that were presented to the local electorate. The *Nottingham Journal* raised objections to the assumptions made by commentators about the rhetoric of the parties in 1873. It pointed to the unfairness of,

the idle rubbish talked about Liberalism in the Council Chamber, always meaning progress, and Conservatism in the Council Chamber, always meaning something wickedly and absurdly stationary.²⁴¹

The arguments of the Liberal and Conservative parties polarised around two quite different political views of the nature of 'economy'. Conservatives advanced general arguments throughout the 1880s and 1890s about Liberal extravagance, wastefulness, unnecessary spending and the need for the 'strictest economy'. They sought to limit overall expenditure and keep the rates in check. For example, in 1880 the Conservatives argued that Nottingham was 'the most heavily taxed town' in the kingdom and that in particular the development of University College should not have been initiated.²⁴² In 1890 the Conservatives warned of rate rises that would 'prevent capitalists from settling in Nottingham' and in 1898 they accused the Liberals of pursuing projects that were a 'scandalous waste of money'.²⁴³ The editor of the Conservative-inclined *Nottingham Daily Guardian* expressed, in 1889, his concern about the scale of municipal debt. 'The Liberal Party have piled up an enormous debt, the interest and repayment of which require nearly half of the district rates.'²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ *NJ*, 31 October 1873.

²⁴² *NJ*, 27 October 1880.

²⁴³ *NDG*, 1 November 1890; *NDG*, 31 October 1898.

²⁴⁴ *NDG*, 1 November 1889.

Normally, candidates expressed their sensitivity to the needs of local ratepayers through the machinery of the parties. Occasionally, individual candidates felt the need to go further to make clear their particular view of what constituted realistic municipal economies. In 1884 George Elder decided to stand as an Independent in Castle Ward, even though he had been selected by his Conservative Association to represent the Party. Elder felt that only as an Independent could he ensure that the full interests of the ratepayers would remain unmistakably supreme.²⁴⁵ Independent candidates, such as Henry Wright in 1886, echoed the importance of 'economy'. He contended that the aldermen of Nottingham 'are the most extravagant spendthrifts'.²⁴⁶

Generally, the Liberal focus was on 'true economy'. They argued for an economic and efficient approach to managing the municipal finances, but not in a way that denied the town of vital improvements. On occasions, some Liberal candidates contended, like Pyatt in 1886, that given the level of the existing municipal debt it would be 'unwise to go into further schemes of expenditure', or like Fraser in 1887 that he too was concerned about 'unwise schemes of expenditure', ever vigilant of their effect on rate rises.²⁴⁷ In 1892 Gregory called for 'strict economy wherever advisable and practicable', political language very similar to his Conservative opponents.²⁴⁸ Appleton, a trade union leader and Lib-Lab candidate in Trent Ward in 1898, also took a cautious view. Although he wanted improvements, they should 'not be to the point of bankruptcy'.²⁴⁹ After all, working men carried a disproportionate cost of the expenditure on improvements. Appleton reflected a more general Lib-Lab approach. They felt the need to explain their proposals using a political vocabulary similar to their Liberal colleagues. Essentially they recommended meeting the needs of working men within reasonable cost limits but without being too cheese-paring. They advocated a scale of spending within the parameters already established by the Liberals for the Party's planned expenditure. More typically for the Liberals, Bradley spoke in Castle Ward in 1894 of opposition to large expenditure 'unless absolutely necessary for health and welfare' and Perry in Forest Ward in 1895 claimed that it

²⁴⁵ *NDE*, 27 October 1884.

²⁴⁶ *NDG*, 26 October 1886.

²⁴⁷ *NDE*, 28 October 1886.

²⁴⁸ *NDE*, 22 October 1892.

²⁴⁹ *NDE*, 28 October 1898.

was 'impossible for the Conservatives to do business in a more economic way'.²⁵⁰ In 1900 Butler presented Liberal policies as being 'value for money'.²⁵¹

Most specific issues raised by candidates were usually related to recurrent and regular matters of interest across the Borough and to specifically ward-based concerns. In only a handful of elections were more partisan 'burning issues' evident. However, whilst it has been argued that nationally there were few differences over policy and little ideological coherence in policies in municipal elections, the Liberal Party candidates in Nottingham espoused Liberal principles in their efforts to secure election within an essentially pragmatic approach to securing votes.²⁵² Policies and programmes were slow to be developed as party political election platforms in municipal boroughs generally and this was largely the case in Nottingham.²⁵³ Although the Liberals in Nottingham never produced a single philosophic case of a vision for improvement, such as those that were developed over time in Birmingham and Leeds, their well-organised party machinery fought municipal elections to win with determination and, when necessary, a robust defence of their political record.²⁵⁴ As Samuel Johnson observed of municipal elections, 'political issues were raised, members are returned on political grounds avowedly'.²⁵⁵

Local elections were contested on party lines, but with few precise and explicit divisions between party policy aspirations. No one party was singularly ideological about public policy proposals during election campaigns. The rhetoric of electioneering remained distinct from the longer-term policy-making processes. However, it would not be true to say for Nottingham, as Redlich has argued more generally, that the differences between Liberal and Conservative candidates were unreal.²⁵⁶ The parties did not fight on national policy lines but they fought for their

²⁵⁰ *NDG*, 1 November 1894; *NDE*, 24 October 1885.

²⁵¹ *NDE*, 25 October 1900.

²⁵² Bulpitt, *Local Government*, pp. 6-7; Lawrence, *Party*, p. 5.

²⁵³ Doyle, 'Changing Functions', p. 301; J. Moore and R. Rodger, 'Municipal Knowledge and Policy Networks in British Local Government, 1832-1914', *Yearbook of European Administrative History*, 15 (2003), pp. 54-55. The ILP encouraged some Liberal boroughs to adopt more left-wing programmes. This was not true of Nottingham.

²⁵⁴ Briggs, *Birmingham*, pp. 67-70; P. Bartley, 'Moral Regeneration: Women and the Civic Gospel in Birmingham, 1870-1914', *Midland History*, XXV (2000), p. 143; Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 253-255.

²⁵⁵ *RC* (1894), p. 336.

²⁵⁶ Redlich, *Local Government*, pp. 265-268.

interests.²⁵⁷ In the absence of clearly defined and documented programmes, the parties relied on individual candidates to make clear the differences between their views and proposals and those of their opponents at their open meetings and through Nottingham's partisan political press. The Liberal supporting *Nottingham Daily Express* and the Conservative perspective of the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* provided a continuing voice for the parties between 1870 and 1900 and detailed coverage of the municipal elections. Essentially both newspapers showed respect for the standing of the Borough Council and civic developments, but challenged individual members and candidates over what their respective editors saw as the worst aspects of party activity.²⁵⁸ They helped to fix the meanings of parties and candidates in the minds of the electorate.²⁵⁹ What was not in doubt to the municipal aspirants in Nottingham's elections was the importance of both their own locality and the specificity of the politics of their place.²⁶⁰

The visibility of common party themes amongst the election addresses of many candidates during a single election was unusual, but particularly evident in the 1884 and 1896 campaigns. In 1884 the parties made a purposeful effort to attract the new voters after the recent reform of the franchise, whilst in 1896 the municipalization of the Borough's tramways was centre stage, the nearest Nottingham came to a 'burning issue' in a municipal election.²⁶¹ It was more usual for themes to become familiar and repeated during the course of a series of elections. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the question of the size of municipal expenditure and the so-called 'extravagance' of the Liberal leadership was a regular and persistent theme of most campaigns.

One issue, however, that did divide the parties was the matter of fair wages. In 1889 and 1892 William Bailey, the Lib-Lab candidate in St Alban's Ward, raised concerns about the low wages of some Corporation employees.²⁶² Brown, the Conservative candidate in Market Ward, warned of the need to safeguard against extravagance in

²⁵⁷ Young, *Local Politics*, p. 33.

²⁵⁸ For example: *NDG*, 1 November 1887; *NDE*, 3 November 1896; *NDG*, 1 November 1897.

²⁵⁹ Croll, *Civilizing*, p. 35.

²⁶⁰ Lawrence, *Party*, p. 17; Savage, 'Rise', p. 13.

²⁶¹ For example: *NDE*, 25 October 1884; *NDG*, 27 October 1884; *NDE*, 24 October 1896; *NDE*, 29 October 1896.

²⁶² *NDE*, 30 October 1889; *NDE*, 27 October 1892.

increased wages.²⁶³ In 1890 a number of Liberal candidates raised the matter of the need for good wages for working men, accusing the Conservatives of being opposed to fair wages.²⁶⁴ The importance of the representation of working-class voters on the Council also figured significantly in the 1899 election.²⁶⁵ Smith, Lindley and Carey were amongst a number of Liberals who stressed their commitment to the appropriate representation of the Labour interest.

On occasion, the tone of the candidates from both parties was less partisan and they spoke out against the same items of expenditure. For example, in 1883 Cockayne for the Conservatives and Bayley for the Liberal Party both argued for caution on the level of expenditure on the proposed new municipal buildings in the interests of the ratepayers.²⁶⁶ Between 1885 and 1892 the apparently high salaries of municipal officials became the target of, amongst others, Robinson, Farrands and Yeatman for the Conservatives and Steele, Whalley and Mutch for the Liberals.²⁶⁷ But the issue that tested the very boundaries of the political commitment of existing councillors and aspirant candidates to far-reaching permissive legislation on social policy was the establishment and development of University College. Support for or opposition to increasing expenditure on this project became the measure of how much extravagance particular candidates were prepared to tolerate. Whilst Conservatives generally opposed this expenditure, so too did a few Liberals. In 1880 Brewster, the successful Conservative candidate in the Meadows Ward, argued that the College should never have been begun.²⁶⁸ In the following year Stevenson took a similar stance when winning a seat in the same ward, whilst Wootton also condemned the University building programme, believing it to be a £100,000 extravagance.²⁶⁹ Some Liberal candidates such as Cleaver in 1881 and Barlow in 1887 felt that too much had been spent on the buildings, thereby compromising their business-like, Gladstonian approach to expenditure.²⁷⁰ Most Liberals defended their policy but they were cautious about the language they used to express their support. Vickers in 1881,

²⁶³ *NDE*, 22 October 1892.

²⁶⁴ *NDG*, 29 October 1890.

²⁶⁵ *NDE*, 24 and 25 October 1899.

²⁶⁶ *NJ*, 25 October 1883.

²⁶⁷ For example: *NDG*, 28 October 1886; *NDE*, 28 October 1887; *NDE*, 26 October 1892.

²⁶⁸ *NJ*, 27 October 1880.

²⁶⁹ *NJ*, 25 and 27 October 1881.

²⁷⁰ *NJ*, 29 October 1881; *NDE*, 22 October 1887.

Cowen and Jacoby in 1883, and Dowson and Raven in 1884 all pointed to the advantages of the University in their election addresses.²⁷¹ Occasionally, candidates went so far as to call for further development. For example, in 1883 Hancock pressed the voters to make the University 'valuable to the working class', whilst four years later Fraser spoke of the need to involve the working class more in technical education.²⁷² Fraser argued that although there was a need to cut down on 'unnecessary expenditure', the University's role should be enlarged.

Issues related to the municipalization of the four public utilities were referred to relatively sparingly by candidates, despite them being amongst the highest profile policies of the Council and involving some of the largest items of expenditure between 1870 and 1900. Generally, the Council's municipalization and municipal trading policies were not partisan issues. Matters tended to be raised by individual candidates for personal reasons, often as a way of demonstrating their own contribution to the success of the ventures. It was only in 1896 that a public utility became the focal point of municipal electioneering. The handling of the municipal utilities highlights a fundamental feature of the conduct of elections by the political parties. Municipal elections were occasions to call on the voters' loyalties to the Liberal and Conservative causes, with the assistance of all the apparatus of a politicised confrontation. But the party fight was not conducted on the basis of a systematic debate about major party policy proposals. That debate occurred within the Council Chamber between elections and in the case of municipalization received unanimous support from both parties when decisions were taken.

Gas issues received little attention at election time. The views that were offered were from Liberal candidates and largely non-partisan. For example, in 1876 when Jacoby argued in favour of water municipalization on the basis of the success of the gas undertaking, he was careful to claim that 'he did not wish to excite party feelings'.²⁷³ In 1884 Walker and Dowson, both Liberals, praised the Corporation's policies for respectively the low price of gas and the benefits of the gas profits for the Library and

²⁷¹ *NJ*, 27 October 1881; *NJ*, 25 October 1883; *NJ*, 27 October 1883; *NDE*, 24 October 1884; *NDE*, 30 October 1884.

²⁷² *NJ*, 27 October 1883.

²⁷³ *NJ*, 2 November 1876.

Museum.²⁷⁴ The following year Liberals such as Loverseed, Brown and Steele emphasised the advantages of the gas profits to the rates and local amenities.²⁷⁵ In 1888 Loverseed, a member of the Gas Committee, spoke of the cheapness of the product and he ventured to predict that in sixty years time the utility would still be 'absolutely in the hands of the municipality without encumbrance'.²⁷⁶ The only mildly contentious issues raised related to gas price rises in 1887 and the maintenance of meter rents in 1892.²⁷⁷ Both were used to highlight the importance that the Liberals attached to controlling rises in the General District Rate.

The water undertaking similarly did not provoke partisan feeling, even in the early months of its existence. When it was eventually raised as an election matter, Liberal candidates underlined the utility's importance to municipal finances. For example, at the end of its first year of operation, Vickers forecast that it 'would yield increasing income and would in a short time contribute a much larger sum even than at present to meet the expenditure of the town'.²⁷⁸ In 1883 Cropper predicted 'a considerable income' to follow.²⁷⁹ Brief reference was made to the commercial success of the operation by Walker in 1884, Loverseed and Steele in 1885 and Goldschmidt in 1895.²⁸⁰ The main area of contention lay with the extension of the water supply to outlying districts and the need to recoup the cost of those services from consumers beyond the Borough's boundaries. The case was argued by Cheetham, a Lib-Lab candidate, in 1891 and Butler in 1900.²⁸¹

Ward-specific issues were the fundamental matters that provided the focus for most candidates in most years. They were normally presented as individual proposals rather than as official party policy, but such recommendations had clear implications for the candidates' parties. Expenditure would be required to improve sanitation, drainage, streets and lighting. As ward representatives, councillors felt the need to give high priority to the immediate concerns of the electorate in their neighbourhood.

²⁷⁴ *NDE*, 24 and 28 October 1884.

²⁷⁵ *NDE*, 27 and 30 October 1885.

²⁷⁶ *NDE*, 30 October 1888.

²⁷⁷ *NDE*, 26 October 1887; *NDE*, 27 October 1892.

²⁷⁸ *NJ*, 27 October 1881.

²⁷⁹ *NJ*, 25 October 1883.

²⁸⁰ *NDE*, 28 October 1884; *NDE*, 27 October 1885; *NDE*, 30 October 1885; *NDE*, 23 October 1895.

²⁸¹ *NDE*, 30 October 1891; *NDE*, 24 October 1900.

Indeed, on occasion, councillors opposed spending on, for example, sanitary schemes in other parts of the town when that expenditure would bring no benefit to their own voters. In 1890 Adcock, the Conservative candidate in Byron Ward, spoke of the inappropriate timing of the proposed, expensive ‘unhealthy area’ scheme.²⁸² When improvements were proposed for the River Leen, political interest was split between those wards in the west of the Borough that were directly affected by the horrors of the waterway and those in the east of the town that would not benefit specifically from high expenditure on the Leen’s insanitary problems.²⁸³

More typically candidates spoke in favour of developments such as recreation grounds, branch libraries, reading rooms, gardens, parks, baths and omnibus services for their wards. Such ‘pet projects’ included, in 1899, Alfred Manchester’s continued advocacy of improved communications into the city for his constituents in Trent Ward.²⁸⁴ In 1877 the three Liberal candidates in Trent Ward joined forces to advocate street improvements, sewerage schemes and branch libraries for the area.²⁸⁵ In 1885 Steele propounded the value of local gardens in Market Ward.²⁸⁶ In 1892 the issues in St Alban’s Ward were the hospital, the local baths and a new railway bridge, whilst in Robin Hood Ward Anderson Brownsword campaigned for allotments and public baths.²⁸⁷ In 1893 the issue for Abbott in Forest Ward was a reading room for the area.²⁸⁸ Some election issues were inevitably of interest to a number of wards. These included the Library and Museum, the Races and the Sewage Farm. In 1882 Loverseed, the successful Liberal in St Ann’s Ward, drew attention to educational provision and hospital facilities.²⁸⁹ In 1885 and 1889 the matters arising out of the appointment of a stipendiary magistrate were given publicity by Steele, Brown Sim and Gregory.²⁹⁰

²⁸² *NDG*, 30 October 1890.

²⁸³ For example: Against the expenditure (Sharkey, Liberal) *NDE*, 26 October 1893; For (Brown Sim, Liberal) *NDE*, 28 October 1893.

²⁸⁴ *NDE*, 31 October 1899.

²⁸⁵ *NJ*, 27 October 1877.

²⁸⁶ *NDE*, 27 October 1885.

²⁸⁷ *NDE*, 27 October 1892.

²⁸⁸ *NDE*, 31 October 1893.

²⁸⁹ *NJ*, 26 October 1882.

²⁹⁰ *NDE*, 27 October 1885; *NDE*, 23 October 1889; *NDE*, 26 October 1889.

Generally, the municipal candidates fought their elections in a partisan manner, assisted by the party apparatus and a partisan daily press. However, once elected many members of the political elite brought to their work in the Council important non-partisan experiences and views. Many had shared common social experiences, occupational backgrounds, empathy for the economic effects of local business cycles and similar contributions to philanthropic causes. In the particular social and economic context of the town and away from the partisan atmosphere of the elections, the intermediate-middle-class manufacturers and the lower-middle-class retailers and tradesmen found sufficient common ground to forge agreement about the major civic needs of the Borough.

Partisanship and its limitations

Partisanship was a key element of municipal politics in Nottingham between 1870 and 1900. The parties' control of candidate selection determined entry to the Borough Council and they subsequently dealt with promotion in their ranks within the council. The Liberal Party used nomination to the aldermanic bench to strengthen its control within the Chamber, even though it secured a majority of councillors each year until 1908. It was party that had primacy too in shaping policies and priorities. In Nottingham, occupation was not by itself the determinant of attitudes to civic expenditure, for economy or improvement. The Liberal Party organisation, in particular, was kept in a state of readiness to fight elections and win. A number of issues that were raised at the hustings increased the appearance at least of a polarised and partisan engagement. The daily press gave expression to partisan political opinion on key issues related to improvement, economy, progress and waste.

However, the partisanship was not unfettered, even at election time. It was limited, to some extent at least, by the weakness of the Conservative Party's position in permanent opposition and by that Party's lack of thought-through alternative policy proposals. Nottingham's brand of municipal Liberalism also showed adaptability and a tactical awareness of how it might broaden its appeal to the electorate. The construction of the local version of Lib-Labism necessitated a less ideologically entrenched view of the wider electorate's needs, than might otherwise have been the case. Municipal elections involved very few 'burning issues' that underlined the

parties' differences in an unconstrained way. There was evidence, too, of the natural inclination of many candidates to recognise the realities of their shared backgrounds, economic experiences and values across the party divides. The political press also honoured more general notions of the Borough's civic identity and aspirations of civic progress, as well as vilifying individual party politicians for what they perceived as the worst aspects of 'party'. It was evident during the municipal elections that the chemistry of Nottingham's political culture was much more subtle, and varying with circumstance, than any simplified categorization of partisan and non-partisan could indicate.

Chapter 3

Non-partisanship: municipal policy-making with a civic ethos

Non-partisanship

Policy formation and decision-taking were carried out within the Nottingham Borough Council in a political environment that was characterised by both partisanship and non-partisanship. What appears at first glance to be two mutually exclusive approaches were in reality both present and both significant in the operation of municipal government in the town. The nature of the non-partisanship between members was complex. The available organisational strategies included bipartisanship, consensus and collaboration, a hierarchy of possibilities ranging from the most to the least party-controlled. Bipartisanship, the involvement of the two political parties in formal, structural arrangements for policy-making, was not the norm. Whilst party organisation and patronage underpinned the framework of political engagement, no explicit agreements as such were made about policy formation and decision-taking by the party hierarchies.

Consensus and collaboration were more usual. Consensus was built upon a 'historically unusual degree of agreement', allowing politicians to speak 'with different accents and different emphasis, even if generally in the same language'.¹ Reaching a consensus could imply either a positive agreement about a course of action or a tacit understanding to do nothing.² A majority view could be assembled from the membership of the two parties that reflected a shared understanding of overall objectives, based on a commonality of interests and a collective pride. Such an approach need not have been formally agreed by the party machines, but could nevertheless have reflected fundamental party principles. Agreements could most easily be arrived at amongst the senior members of both parties. They carried greater

¹ R. Lowe, 'The Second World War, Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1, 2 (1990), pp. 156, 168.

² P. Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (Cape, 1975), pp. 14, 164-165. Addison contrasts the species of consensus evident in the policy-making of the British Government in the 1920s, which aimed to 'prevent anything unusual happening', with the 'positive and purposeful' consensus displayed in the 1940s.

influence on the major committees. Civic culture involved, amongst other features, accepted ways of doing things, often based upon unspoken meanings, values and norms.³ Collaboration offered members yet looser arrangements by which to cooperate. When party interests were not at stake, members could combine to produce specific policy outcomes. Each of the three arrangements might well take a pragmatic approach, looking for practical, workable solutions in a business-like and realistic manner. However, broad party principles underpinned policy priorities. Putnam has argued that 'tolerant, collaborative pragmatism' provided a sound basis for effective government, with a focus on moderation, practical management and the pursuit of an enlightened self-interest alive to the interests of others.⁴ Those characteristics reflected much of the style of municipal government in Nottingham between 1870 and 1900.

Within a broad party political framework, individual Liberal and Conservative members of Nottingham Borough Council expressed the views of their party, their own beliefs on particular policy proposals and the direct comments of their constituents in meetings of the Full Council and in the committees. Many municipal issues proved to be non-controversial in terms of party, but, on occasion, partisanship was evident in the processes of policy-making. Although explicit agreements were not made by the two parties about policy formation and decision-taking, in practice municipal politicians found it possible to decide what was politically, financially and administratively acceptable. The Tories were excluded from office and in permanent opposition. They regarded consensus as an expedient way forward. In reality, few more effective alternatives were available to them. At a purely organisational level, this political device helped to ensure their involvement in crucial decisions when they were heavily outnumbered by the Liberals. However, they maintained that approach even at times when their representation in the Chamber was greater than usual and Conservative partisanship might have had more significant impact. That which they

³ R.J. Morris, 'Governance: Two Centuries of Urban Growth', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 11; R.J. Morris, 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', in M.J. Dauntton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 397-398; A.C. Zijderveld, *A Theory of Urbanity: the Economic and Civic Culture of Cities* (Transactions Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1998), pp. 10-11.

⁴ R.D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993), pp. 20, 88.

shared in common, outweighed the issues that separated them as a matter of principle. The differences between the parties normally concerned either details in policy proposals or operational issues arising out of the implementation of policy, rather than strategic matters. The arguments at the heart of municipal debates were about the scale of civic projects, their cost, and matters of economy and efficiency. The pursuit of political power at election time and the maintenance of political control in the Chamber remained intensely partisan, but the development of a civic ethos in the policy processes helped to strengthen attitudes that promoted greater consensus and collaboration.

It has been argued that political institutions are devices for achieving purposes and not just agreement, and that the practical performance of politicians is shaped by the social context in which they operate.⁵ In Nottingham, the commonality of that social context, in terms of the composition of the political elite, the nature of the local economy and the members' strategic view of civic priorities, contributed to a convergence of purpose and agreement. Cannadine has claimed that, 'the Council was not so much the embodiment of party exclusiveness as the location of corporate, middle-class endeavour'.⁶ Municipal politicians in Nottingham embodied both party and shared values. Together, members representing both the Liberal and Conservative parties were 'the most prominent supporters' of the 'civic project' in Nottingham that 'attempted to order, civilize and rationalize the urban experience'. They provided a new 'civic landscape'.⁷ But, they achieved their goal with different priorities and by alternative means to many other municipal authorities.

Nottingham Borough Council gave higher priority to the municipalization of public utilities than to other social issues, such as social housing. Members were prepared to support progressive policies with a social conscience, but they were not radical on social issues. In the case of Nottingham, municipal capitalism was the 'distinct ideology'.⁸ Members decided to own rather than simply control the public utilities. A huge investment in gas, water, electricity and tramways was central to the town's

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-11.

⁶ D. Cannadine, 'The Transformation of Civic Ritual in Modern Britain: the Colchester Oyster Feast', *Past and Present*, 94 (1982), p. 116.

⁷ A. Croll, *Civilizing the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c. 1870-1914*, (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2000), pp. 3, 9.

⁸ P.J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991), p. 300.

civic culture. Common ground was found between the Liberal Party's Gladstonian values of sound finance and the business-like ethos of the local Tories. Waller has argued that for municipal government generally, 'the dominant science was muddling through'.⁹ Whilst Nottingham's politicians did muddle through in a number of policy areas, policy planning and policy formation in the area of municipalization and municipal trading was characterised more significantly by rationality, combined with supportive civic rhetoric. The logical processes prompted by high-quality professional advice became intertwined with political priorities and political initiative. A measured pragmatism was brought to bear by politicians and officials on a changing civic agenda, to produce workable solutions for the Corporation. The experience of Nottingham's politicians suggests that the presence of partisan politics, in the form of patronage within the Chamber and 'wire-pulling' and the annual electoral contests beyond, was never too distant from the more collaborative aspects of municipal policy-making.

A civic ethos

Consensus and collaboration in policy-making, between the parties and amongst the individual aldermen and councillors on the Nottingham Borough Council, was particularly consistent and persistent between 1877 and 1900. The Town Clerk, Samuel Johnson, believed that the extension of the Borough's boundaries supported increasing economic integration and underlined the Corporation's need and ability to move forward by political cooperation. In his judgement, it helped to 'widen the minds' of the municipal politicians. Johnson also believed that the establishment of the municipal utilities brought the town closer together. They became 'one community, one water supply'.¹⁰ The decisions to create a Greater Nottingham and the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities were strengthened by the cooperative efforts of the two parties and their municipal representatives.

A sense of civic pride was tangible throughout the period. That consciousness of place was often linked to notions of Nottingham as a 'progressive' town, as it made

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

¹⁰ HC (1894) XVII *Royal Commission to Consider the Amalgamation of the City and County of London* (hereafter *RC* (1894)), p. 339.

the journey from the urban to the civic stage of its development.¹¹ In a Borough dominated by one political party, it is perhaps not surprising that partisan claims were made for improvements in the town. Hyperbole was never far from the rhetoric of writers and journalists commending Nottingham's achievements. For example, in 1880 it was described by a local writer as 'the healthiest and handsomest town' that 'charms visitors'.¹² The following year the editor of the *Nottingham Journal* referred to it as 'one of the finest towns of England'.¹³ In 1883 the same journalist deployed the identical phrase to justify the Liberal Party's expenditure on the Borough's amenities.¹⁴ In 1898 Cook, a Liberal candidate at the municipal elections, promised that the Liberals would maintain 'their beautiful city as an enlightened and progressive municipality and an example to others'.¹⁵ In 1899 the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express* took the partisan claims to their ultimate conclusion. 'Liberalism in politics is synonymous with progress in civic life, as the past municipal history shows.'¹⁶ Beneath these self-referential and party-specific eulogies lay processes within the Corporation that relied upon political consensus and collaboration for their success. The senior politicians tended to conduct themselves in what they perceived as a more statesmanlike way, preferring to announce the Council's achievements in a more restrained and quietly self-confident manner. They saw themselves as pragmatists, effective civic managers, who ensured that 'strict economy' was integral to their policy-making.

Nottingham's experience involved, in practice, the municipal politicians expressing both their sense of civic consciousness and pride, and their party political aspirations. Municipal politicians of both parties in Nottingham displayed a strong attachment to their home town and a commitment to effecting improvements at the local level.¹⁷ The Corporation's policy-making generally reflected Croll's claim for Merthyr, that 'while ideology may have been an attribute of the civic project, it should not be seen

¹¹ Croll, *Civilizing*, p. 217. Croll has identified the general principle of a movement from the urban to the civic stage of development during the late nineteenth century.

¹² H. Field, *The Date-Book of Remarkable and Memorable Events Connected with Nottingham and its Neighbourhood, 1750-1879, from Authentic Records* (Nottingham, 1880), p. 606.

¹³ *NJ*, 1 November 1881.

¹⁴ *NJ*, 2 November 1883.

¹⁵ *NDE*, 28 October 1898.

¹⁶ *NDE*, 26 October 1899.

¹⁷ Croll, *Civilizing*, p. 36.

as its essence'.¹⁸ Nottingham's distinctive approach to policy-making in the period between 1870 and 1900 was greatly influenced by the politicians' shared understanding of the town's civic interest.

The sense of civic identity and belonging of the people of Nottingham were, like those in other municipalities, shaped by the values, understandings and symbols that they shared, the 'symbolic infrastructure' of their community.¹⁹ As elsewhere, civic culture was driven by those values, norms and meanings, 'often intuitively and non-rationally', that could overcome party political differences.²⁰ In Nottingham the values of the municipal politicians were the product of their social, religious, economic and political experiences. On the Borough Council, membership of either non-conformist or Anglican religious denominations did not present insuperable barriers to collaboration after 1870. Divisions were, however, more sharply drawn during elections for the Nottingham School Board. Spiritual and social commitments and experiences were clearly important to personal identity and they influenced personal political views, but they did not impede cooperation on policy formation within the Council. Each member, Liberal or Conservative, had passed on to him the traditions of his place over the generations, with all its memories, the collective identity of his town with its particular sense of civic pride.²¹

Inevitably their actions as members of the Borough Council were informed by those values. Their understanding of the needs of their community was constructed through their perception of their inherited civic culture and their political beliefs. Some of those fundamental understandings were shared by politicians of both parties, a number were representative of only one. The interaction between the two parties and individuals within their membership, together with external pressures exerted by interest groups within the community, especially the ratepayers and the employers, both modified and reinforced those understandings over time. The physical symbols that their generation bequeathed to Nottingham's civic culture took the form of civic buildings: a new town hall, gas works, electricity power stations, tramways and the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁹ Zijderveld, *Theory*, p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11; D.J. Monti, *The American City: a Social and Cultural History* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1999), pp. 40-41. Richard Hofstadter argued that 'a covenant of comity' existed in American cities, 'a subtler, more tangible, but vital kind of moral consensus'.

²¹ Zijderveld, *Theory*, p. 20.

like. Municipal capitalism and municipalization were central to the civic culture between 1870 and 1900.

One particularly distinctive feature of civic life in Nottingham helped to determine the relative strengths of partisanship and non-partisanship in the policy processes. That was the means by which local status and prestige were achieved within the community in the Borough. In most communities, local status could be acquired within local society irrespective of political status. For example, land ownership, inherited wealth or ownership of a major business might provide individuals with such social standing.²² In Nottingham, unusually, social standing came with political status, given the socio-economic makeup of the town. The Liberal and Conservative party organisations provided the mechanisms for selection to the Borough Council and the approval of promotion within the Chamber for Nottingham's small and medium-sized business leaders, professional men, tradesmen and retailers. However, each member had to reinforce his social recognition, once elected, and ensure the continuation of his social standing during his period in office. That provided him with a powerful motivation to conform socially and play by the locally accepted 'rules of the game'. Each member, after all, had his own local roots and ties beyond the party system. He might well feel that a statesmanlike approach to municipal business would enhance his social standing. He felt encouraged to be pragmatic, search for 'strict economy' and be seen to put town before party when necessary. Yet, his continuation in office depended on his ongoing acceptability to the party hierarchy. The tension that existed between the demands of party and wider social considerations impacted significantly on the attitudes and behaviour of members whilst policy was being formulated and decisions taken.

Bailey has contended that the sense of civic culture meant different things to different people at different times, with new understandings constantly emerging over time.²³ Baxendale has gone further and argued that a precise meaning of what was understood by inhabitants of a consciousness of place was less important than the fact

²² H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 87; J. Garrard, 'Urban Elites, 1850-1914: The Rule and Decline of a New Squirearchy?', *Albion*, 27, 3 (1995), pp. 586-587; L.J. Jones, 'Public Pursuit of Private Profit? Liberal Businessmen and Municipal Politics in Birmingham, 1865-1900', *Business History*, 25 (1983), p. 241.

²³ P. Bailey, 'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up? Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability', *Journal of Social History*, 12, 3 (1978-1979), pp. 347-349.

that it meant something at all.²⁴ Politically, in Nottingham, shared understandings helped to create an environment in which consensus could be achieved for major policies, but the two parties expressed their interpretation of those policies in different ways. Strategic objectives may have been shared but, on occasions, partisan political tactics were employed. Liberals and Conservatives brought their own specific political principles to the negotiating table and, when required, explained their decisions to their electorates in different terms. The Liberals in particular continued to show a determination to win the optimum number of municipal seats at the annual elections. Despite its dominance of the Chamber, the Party did not allow undue complacency to creep into the policy formation processes. The momentum to create and maintain the Corporation's position as a strong municipal trader, indeed as a policy leader, was sustained.

The values, understandings and symbols of Nottingham's political culture reflected, in varying proportions, political principle, collaboration and pragmatism. The trend was towards moderation, tolerance and the practical management of civic policy.²⁵ As politicians of both parties grappled with the realities of municipal finance, their commitments were essentially pragmatic. Many of their anxieties were shared. Liberals and Conservatives attempted to carry the community with them in support of their policies. They sought prosperity for the town and safety for its citizens.²⁶ The vehicle of municipalization, central to investment and income, was not seen as a strictly party political matter.²⁷ Municipal capitalism and a political commitment to some aspects of modernity underpinned policy-making during the last three decades of the century.

Municipal capitalism

The Liberal and Conservative parties had no formal, explicit agreement about the desirability or nature of municipalization in the town. The purchase and management of the four utilities was not regarded as a partisan issue. However, the fundamental

²⁴ J. Baxendale, 'You and All of Us Ordinary People: Renegotiating "Britishness in Wartime"', in N. Hayes and J. Hill (eds.), *'Millions Like Us?' British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1999), pp. 296, 299-301.

²⁵ Putnam, *Making Democracy*, p. 20.

²⁶ Monti, *American City*, pp. 30-33, 37-38.

²⁷ Waller, *Town*, pp. 298-299.

economic beliefs of both the Liberals and Conservatives emphasised economy and efficiency in municipal investment and expenditure. Both could subscribe to the belief that the strength of municipal trading lay in its capitalist principles, 'municipal capitalism'. The Liberals' adherence to Gladstonian sound finance and the Conservatives' search for reduced expenditure provided them with sufficient common ground to achieve a consensus in the development of the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities. In practice, the two parties were keen to keep in check undue increases in the General District Rate. The Council invested more capital in its municipal trading operations, taken as a group of four businesses, than in any other policy initiative. Nottingham Corporation agreed to secure loans for some £2.839 million between 1874 and 1900, which included the purchase costs of three private companies and the capital investment in all four businesses.²⁸ A detailed analysis of the Corporation's policies is undertaken in Chapters 5 and 6. The Council was persistent in its commitment to its utilities. Municipalization was a vital component of the Council's overall financial strategy between 1874 and 1900. Indeed, Nottingham Corporation was a leading authority in municipal trading, both in terms of its early creation of three of the town's utilities and in the achievement of significant profits. The latter was especially true of the gas and water concerns.²⁹

The focus on municipal trading had clear implications for other possible policy choices. The speed with which the Borough Council took up permissive powers varied considerably from policy area to policy area. The high priority that the Corporation gave to municipalization contrasted markedly with the Council's earlier policies for baths and washhouses, and libraries and museums and the later schemes for social amelioration. In the case of the earlier projects, permissive powers were taken up relatively cautiously. Initially, the Council's response to the possible acquisition of responsibilities for establishing baths and washhouses seemed positive. A committee was set up in 1849, three years after the permissive legislation, to consider the opportunities for Nottingham. Although the first baths were opened in 1851, no further projects were developed until 1878.³⁰ In the case of Free Public Libraries and Museums, the Council was even tardier. The enabling legislation of

²⁸ NAO CA.TR. 20/1/1-2.

²⁹ Appendix C, Table 14.

³⁰ R.A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900* (Frank Cass, 1966), p. 180.

1850 was translated into action in 1867.³¹ However, between 1864 and 1900, the Corporation was active in the promotion of some twelve improvement schemes for the town, as well as piloting through central government 'one of the largest schemes of borough extension ever presented to Parliament' in 1877, with unanimous support from the Town Meeting.³² The Council secured £1.589 million in loans for improvements to sanitation, sewerage, drainage, streets and civic initiatives, between 1860 and 1900.³³ Of these funds, 84% was spent on the problems caused by insanitary conditions and street schemes, and the remainder on civic projects such as the Guildhall, the Courts, University College and the Asylum. Overall, the equivalent of just 56% of the total loans taken out for the four municipal utilities was acquired for the implementation of social and environmental policies.

In the case of housing, Wilson has claimed that the Gladstonian concern for economy inhibited the planning of a more expansive policy.³⁴ Just two lodgings houses were developed in 1875 and then a gradualist approach was pursued for public housing until 1909. Smith, Whysall and Beuvrin have also contended that Nottingham, like many other corporations, lacked radical policies to tackle social housing issues.³⁵ For example, action was not taken until 1895 to require water closets to be provided in the town's houses, and then only for newly-built properties.³⁶ 'Unhealthy areas' were identified by the Corporation in 1875, 1876 and 1881, but more substantial slum clearance had to await the building of the Central Railway Station at the end of the century, when little municipal expenditure was involved.³⁷ Glasgow Corporation undertook significant slum clearance schemes from 1866 and Birmingham from 1875, whereas the housing problems in Nottingham remained unresolved in 1914.³⁸ The

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

³² G. Oldfield, 'The Nottingham Borough Boundary Extension of 1877', *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, XC (1990), p. 86.

³³ NAO CA.TR. 20/1/1-2.

³⁴ L.F. Wilson, 'The State and the Housing of the English Working Class, with Special Reference to Nottingham, 1815-1914' (University of California, Berkley, Ph D thesis, 1970), p. 292.

³⁵ R. Smith, P. Whysall and C. Beuvrin, 'Local Authority Inertia in Housing Improvement, 1890-1914', *Town Planning Review*, 57, 4 (1986), pp. 406-412, 423.

³⁶ Full Council Minutes and Reports (hereafter FC), 1 April 1895.

³⁷ Wilson, 'Housing', p. 236; J. Beckett and G. Oldfield, 'Greater Nottingham and the City Charter', in J. Beckett et al (eds.), *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997), pp. 270-273.

³⁸ Beckett, 'Greater Nottingham', p. 273; Wilson, L.F., 'Housing', p. 274; Smith, 'Inertia', p. 409; I. Maver, 'Glasgow's Civic Government', in W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), p. 461; A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Vol. 2: Borough and City, 1865-1938* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952), pp. 77-81.

Borough Council was not as attracted to the cost of the provision of public, working-class housing as it was to the income that could be generated from municipal trading.

Nottingham's municipal politicians appeared at times to have a narrow focus in policy-making. Whilst many in the electorate saw their policies to be progressive and enlightened, some important opportunities that could have addressed acute social issues more directly were put to one side. However, members did not choose to pursue the principles of municipal capitalism to extremes, but placed the weight of their policies on income generation rather than large-scale social amelioration. The politicians were small businessmen, professionals, tradesmen and retailers who pursued policies in the business-like manner they best understood. In the case of municipal trading, a political consensus was achieved in pursuit of a positive goal, whilst in the case of more deep-seated social matters, the Liberals and Conservatives chose not to formulate more radical and costly policies.

The Corporation's no-nonsense, business-like approach to policy-making, also applied to the decisions to build a replacement Town Hall. It was deemed necessary to provide sufficient workspace for the Corporation's increasing administrative and clerical workforce and to bring together its scattered employees.³⁹ Proposals had been shelved by an earlier generation, who decided against a grand design in 1857.⁴⁰ Much financial caution was exercised between 1883 and 1888 in the building of the new Guildhall.⁴¹ The complex was symbolic of the Council's sense of corporate pride, and reflected the shared values of both parties. The Guildhall was prudently costed and less ostentatious than those built in many other large boroughs.⁴² Johnson caught something of the Corporation's mood of quiet self-confidence and self-sufficiency in 1888. The Local Government Board had initially proposed that Nottingham should be one of only ten municipal corporations to be granted County Borough status. In the event sixty-one authorities were given the new legal standing. Johnson's response to that external civic recognition was matter-of-fact. 'We did not need it. We were a County before the act was passed. It added nothing to our labours, not in the slightest

³⁹ NAO CA.CM. MISC/6.

⁴⁰ J. Beckett and K. Brand, 'Municipal Reform and Parliamentary Enclosure', in Beckett, *Centenary*, p. 249.

⁴¹ NAO CA.CM. MISC/6.

⁴² Morris, 'Structure', p. 414.

degree.⁴³ The Council's wariness of too much outward show was also evident in its modest response to the surprise announcement of city status in 1897.⁴⁴ The Corporation's priorities lay elsewhere. The Council did not lack initiative and forcefulness when it chose to invest for profit.

Municipal capitalism was an ideology accepted by both parties. When political differences were aired in public, the opponents of policy proposals focused on the impact of expenditure on the rates and inefficiencies within the operation of the utilities, and not on the principle of municipal trading. Nottingham was distinctive in its approach to civic expenditure because members of both parties and all occupation groups supported significant spending, even when local economic conditions were adverse. The middle and lower-middle-class politicians had each enhanced their social standing in the town through the possession of political office and they were determined to hold on to that status. The tolerance of distinctions and differences, that may have separated councillors in many boroughs, provided Nottingham's political elite with a broad base of commonality. Liberal and Conservative manufacturers, professionals, retailers and tradesmen together endorsed spending on the four utilities and ensured that momentum was maintained in the policy-making processes.

The Borough's income and expenditure grew dramatically from the 1860s until the end of the century. In the financial year 1836-1837 Nottingham's new Municipal Corporation had an income of £10,118 and inherited debts of some £20,000 from the unreformed Corporation.⁴⁵ By 1900 the income of the City Council was £174,878, from the General District Rate alone, and the Corporation's debts had reached £2.25 million.⁴⁶ At the turn of the century, the Corporation was handling a turnover of £1.02 million from its revenue and capital accounts. The general direction of income and expenditure between 1835 and 1900 was clearly upwards, but the pattern of increases was neither smooth nor consistent. The range and proportion of the sources of income and the breadth of the Council's expenditure targets changed very

⁴³ *RC* (1894), p. 341.

⁴⁴ J. Beckett, 'City Status in the Nineteenth Century: Southwell and Nottingham, 1884-1897', *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, CIII (1999), pp. 149-150, 156.

⁴⁵ Nottingham University Manuscripts Department (hereafter NUMD) Nottingham Borough Accounts, 1836-1837; Church, *Midland Town*, p. 180.

⁴⁶ NAO CA.TR.6/43-44. Nottingham City Council's Abstract of Accounts.

significantly over the period. The rateable value of Nottingham's properties tended to rise during periods of expansion in the local economy. However, as in local authorities generally, the income generated by the rates did not keep pace with the Corporation's expenditure plans, particularly between 1870 and 1900.⁴⁷ Income from non-rate sources became relatively small as a proportion of overall income. It grew from £24,621 in 1862 to £36,274 on the eve of the extension of the Borough's boundaries.⁴⁸

Capital expenditure before 1863 was relatively low. Projects had included street improvements, baths and washhouses, a gaol, a replacement bridge over the River Trent, restoration work on Nottingham Castle, a new asylum and Papplewick pumping station. The period of greatest municipal activity came in the late 1870s and early 1880s when a series of civic buildings were planned. This spending was authorised despite difficult economic conditions locally. For example, by 1879 there had been a downturn amongst the smaller hand frame hosiery units and between 1884 and 1886 the lace industry experienced very difficult trading conditions.⁴⁹ The estimates of £73,400 for University College were agreed by the Borough Council in 1882, for the Guildhall and new administrative offices £161,257 in 1883, for a new Infectious Diseases Hospital £25,475 in 1885 and for a new Cattle Market £22,688 in the same year.⁵⁰ A further period of high municipal spending came in the late 1890s. For example, in 1896 a new electricity generating station was authorised at a cost of £40,000 and in the following year £80,000 worth of investment was agreed for municipal tramways. In 1900 expenditure of £335,000 was agreed for sewage disposal facilities at Stoke Farm.⁵¹ Loans trebled between 1878 and 1886 and then increased by a quarter between 1897 and 1899. They included a £40,000 mortgage and a £48,000 loan for the Guildhall, two loans totalling £85,000 for the initial electric lighting scheme and its later extension and a £90,000 loan for the purchase of the tramways, together with some working capital.⁵²

⁴⁷ H. Haward, 'Financial Control in Local Government Administration', *Public Administration*, (1924), p. 156; E.P. Hennock, 'Finance and Politics in Urban Local Government in England, 1835-1900', *The Historical Journal*, VI, 2 (1963), pp. 215-216, 224-225; C. Bellamy, *Administering Central-Local Relations* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), pp. 25, 52, 65, 80.

⁴⁸ NUMD Nottingham Borough Accounts, 1861-1862, 1876-1877.

⁴⁹ HC (1886) XXI *Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade and Industry*, p. 234.

⁵⁰ FC, 5 July 1882, 13 August 1883, 1 June 1885.

⁵¹ FC, 2 March 1896, 14 June 1897.

⁵² FC, 1 January 1900.

The levels of the General District Rate, first levied in 1860 at 1s 1d in the pound, reflected this trend in civic spending.⁵³ The rate trebled between 1878, when the levy was still 1s 8d in the pound, and the high point of 5s 6d in 1896. It fell to 4s 2d for the final three years of the century. The most dramatic rise came in 1881 when the Council set a rate of 3s 6 1/2d, more than double the level of the previous year.⁵⁴ Ratepayers were politically sensitive to changes in the rate demands throughout the period. In 1887, a year of generally depressed trade in the town, ratepayer pressure helped to persuade the Corporation to hold the rate at 4s 0d in the pound rather than charge 4s 3d, the figure initially proposed.⁵⁵ In the same way, the rate was set at 4s 6d rather than the proposed 4s 8d in 1891, the figures were repeated in 1892 and then held at 5s 0d instead of 5s 2d in 1894. Lewis Wilson has argued that 'local issues were determined by pressure from ratepayers much more than normal party rivalry'.⁵⁶ However, that is to over-simplify a causal link between ratepayer pressure and political response and to underestimate the complexity of the politicians' debate about policy priorities. Members were naturally mindful of the electorate and the effects of the level of the rate on the municipal vote, but issues of economy, efficiency and waste featured significantly in their deliberations in the Chamber, irrespective of immediate public protest.

Importantly, the profits of the Corporation's municipal trading enabled the Council to keep the General District Rate lower than it otherwise would have been. Indeed, the profits that were transferred to the Borough Fund were central to the Council's overall management of the Corporation's finances. The profits of the Gas Committee from 1876, the Water Committee from 1883, the Tramways Committee from 1901 and the Electricity Committee from 1903, each made an important contribution to that strategy.⁵⁷ Throughout the period from 1876, it was the income from the Gas Committee which underpinned the political calculations that were made by the politicians when determining the annual rate. In the 1870s gas profits provided

⁵³ FC, 23 April 1860.

⁵⁴ FC, 4 May 1896, 2 December 1878, 2 May 1898, 5 June 1899, 11 June 1900.

⁵⁵ FC, 13 June 1887.

⁵⁶ Wilson, L.F., 'Housing', p. 87.

⁵⁷ FC, 11 September 1876, 2 July 1883, 7 October 1901, 8 June 1903.

between 14% and 16% of the total income raised by the General District Rate.⁵⁸ Gas and water together contributed between 8% and 11% during the 1880s.⁵⁹ In 1890 the income from the utilities equated with 16% of the General District Rate and then throughout the rest of that decade with over 13%.⁶⁰ Once the Tramways' profits were included in the subsidy to the General District Rate, the figures increased to over 19%.⁶¹

To the local ratepayer, the utility income saved him the equivalent of 3d or 3 1/2d in the pound in the 1870s, 4d to 5 1/2d in the 1880s and between almost 7d and 9d in the 1890s.⁶² From 1889 utility profits provided a consistently greater source of income for the Corporation than either the funds received from the national Exchequer or the fees gathered from the Council's estates, markets, fairs and burials.⁶³

The input of funds from the gas undertaking grew from £6,000 in 1878-1879 to a high point of £27,000 in 1896-1897.⁶⁴ In the mid-1880s and then continuously from 1889, its annual contribution lay between £20,000 and £27,000.⁶⁵ The profits of the water undertaking provided much smaller amounts for the Borough Fund, but they were of symbolic importance to the Corporation's municipal capitalist approach and they were greater than those in most other municipalities. They ranged from just £400 in 1885-1886 to a high point of £3,900 in 1893-1894.⁶⁶ The profits from the utilities also contributed to civic projects such as University College.⁶⁷ The scale of the funds transferred from the Tramways Committee was much larger than those from the Water Committee, but less than those provided by the gas undertaking. They amounted to £12,000 in 1901-1902 and £18,000 in the following year.⁶⁸ In contrast,

⁵⁸ For example: FC, 11 September 1876, 5 August 1879.

⁵⁹ For example: FC, 5 June 1882, 6 October 1884, 26 May 1887.

⁶⁰ For example: FC, 6 October 1890, 1 October 1894, 7 October 1895, 10 September 1900.

⁶¹ FC, 7 July 1902.

⁶² For example; FC, 11 September 1876, 5 August 1879, 5 June 1882, 6 October 1884, 26 May 1887, 6 October 1890, 1 October 1894, 7 October 1895, 10 September 1900.

⁶³ For example: FC, 6 October 1890, 1 October 1894, 7 October 1895, 10 September 1900.

⁶⁴ FC, 11 August 1879, 19 July 1897.

⁶⁵ For example: FC, 6 October 1884, 7 December 1885, 6 October 1890, 19 July 1897, 10 September 1900.

⁶⁶ FC, 26 May 1887, 1 October 1894.

⁶⁷ B.H. Tolley, 'Technical Education in the East Midlands: a Case Study in Educational Administration and History' (University of Nottingham, Ph D thesis, 1979), p. 189.

⁶⁸ FC, 7 July 1902, 8 June 1903.

the Electricity Committee contributed £6,000 in 1902-1903.⁶⁹ If the Council had not taken the decision to own the four utilities, it would have had to manage the serious financial consequences, by means of altering either the level of the General District Rate or the scale of civic expenditure, or both.

The business-like approach to civic finances, supported by both parties, was underlined by the Council's determination to acquire the necessary permissive powers to be more efficient in its investments. In 1874 the Corporation gained the right to create debenture stock, as part of the Nottingham Improvement Act.⁷⁰ This policy was presented by the *Nottingham and Midland Counties Daily Express* as an arrangement that would 'save the ratepayers a considerable sum of money' and provide an opportunity that would 'open up to the industrious classes a safe and simple method of investing their savings'.⁷¹ In 1880 the Nottingham Corporation Loans Act enabled the Council to borrow £100,000, carry debts of £1.8 million, issue capital stocks and pay dividends.⁷² In 1894 the arrangements were amended so that the new civic spending plans could be fully financed.⁷³ Finally, in 1900, the Corporation obtained the consent of the Local Government Board to issue stock to the value of £1,008,000, based on the Council's past sound financial reputation.⁷⁴ Nottingham was one of the first three large corporations, with Leeds and Sheffield, to gain central government approval for more general capital raising powers.⁷⁵ The Council gave priority to obtaining sufficient funds for the capitalisation of and reinvestment in its four municipal utilities.

From the mid-1870s, Birmingham Corporation had paved the way for systematic spending on major improvement schemes with its civic programme.⁷⁶ The Council secured significant loans in 1876, 1881 and 1887 and, like Nottingham, used some of the considerable profits from its municipal trading to help finance other civic projects.

⁶⁹ FC, 8 June 1903.

⁷⁰ FC, 1 September 1874.

⁷¹ *NMCDE*, 4 August 1874.

⁷² FC, 6 December 1880.

⁷³ Nottingham Corporation Act, 17 August 1894.

⁷⁴ FC, 7 May 1900.

⁷⁵ H. Page, *Local Authority Borrowing: Past, Present and Future* (George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 263.

⁷⁶ Briggs, *Birmingham*, p. 81.

Leeds, Cardiff, Leicester and Nottingham soon followed Birmingham's lead.⁷⁷ Whilst there was a general upward movement in the level of General District Rates across the country from the late 1870s, the rates levied in the large corporations reflected different local circumstances. Nottingham's rates were either lower than or similar to most of the other large boroughs. For example, the rates in Leicester were generally higher than in Nottingham.⁷⁸ Leicester ratepayers were paying almost four times as much in 1880, the same as Nottingham in 1890 and 10d in the pound more in 1900. Leicester had debts that were some fifty per cent greater than those of Nottingham Corporation in 1877 and 1900. In Birmingham, the pattern of annual rate demands was higher than in Nottingham, whilst in Leeds they were broadly similar.⁷⁹ However, the rates in Sheffield tended to be less than those levied in Nottingham.⁸⁰ The differences were relatively small in the 1880s, within a range of 1d to 2 1/2d in the pound, but in 1893 Nottingham's ratepayers contributed 1s 4d more.

Modernity

Within the broad political consensus that municipal capitalism offered, the municipal politicians looked to the notion of modernity as a guide for some specific aspects of policy planning. A link between economic performance and civic consciousness has been claimed by a number of historians. For example, Putnam has argued that economic modernity is associated with high performance public institutions and that authorities needed to be effective problem solvers and service providers.⁸¹ Authorities could engender greater civic engagement by the modernization of local services and the consequent raising of public expectations. Zijderveld has contended that the 'symbolic infrastructure', the civic identity and pride felt by inhabitants, was

⁷⁷ B. Barber, 'Aspects of Municipal Government, 1835-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1980), pp. 319-324; M.J. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870-1914* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1977), pp. 160-165; M. Elliott, *Victorian Leicester* (Phillimore, 1979), pp. 131-133.

⁷⁸ Elliott, *Leicester*, p. 159.

⁷⁹ B. Barber, 'Municipal Government in Leeds, 1835-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1982), pp. 103-107; E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government* (Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 31, 33, 116, 280.

⁸⁰ B. Barber, 'Sheffield Borough Council, 1843-1893', in C. Binfield et al (eds.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993, Vol. 1* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), pp. 44-46; H. Mathers, 'The City of Sheffield, 1893-1926', in C. Binfield et al (eds.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1893, Vol. 1* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), p. 54.

⁸¹ Putnam, *Making Democracy*, p. 65.

enhanced by modernization, as well as the improvement of the 'quantitative and statistically measurable'.⁸² Indeed, it is Millward's view that 'civic pride ensured high standards of service'.⁸³ Such service might require either the use of new enterprises and methods or the more efficient use of old approaches.⁸⁴ Morris believes that 'gas and water were at the centre of municipal culture'.⁸⁵ He has claimed that during the phase of municipal service provision, local government income was dominated by the flow of funds from the gas and water, and later tramways, accounts. The link between the mutually supportive economic and civic cultures took a distinctive form in Nottingham.

Nottingham Corporation focused much of its energy on municipal trading. The Borough Council perceived itself to be a leading authority at the 'cutting edge' of service development. It saw the provision of municipal utilities as financially advantageous to the ratepayer, supportive of local business and a means of integrating further the town's growing population. The tangible assets of the undertakings were symbols of civic growth, a statement of ambition and modernity. Amongst the large authorities, both the long-established and those that moved from being medium-sized to large during the later part of the nineteenth century, Nottingham was relatively early in its creation of three businesses. In 1874 Nottingham became the fourth large local authority to create a municipal undertaking for gas, in 1894 the sixth for electricity and in 1897 the fourth for tramways. The establishment of the water utility in 1880 was, by comparison, relatively late.⁸⁶ In 1897 Nottingham became the first municipal corporation in England and Wales to establish four public utilities for gas, water, electricity and tramways, followed by Leeds a few months later.⁸⁷ That was just three years after Glasgow had become the first corporation in Britain to own those four utilities.⁸⁸ By 1901 only six municipalities managed four such businesses.

⁸² Zijderveld, *Theory*, pp. 11-13, 20.

⁸³ Millward, 'Political Economy', p. 328.

⁸⁴ M. Bromley and N. Hayes, 'Campaigner, Watchdog or Municipal Lackey?', *Media History*, 8, (2002), pp. 197, 203-205, 208.

⁸⁵ Morris, 'Structure', p. 417.

⁸⁶ HC (1903) VII *Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons on Municipal Trading*, Appendix A, pp. 232-399. A number of smaller-scale water and gas utilities were created by some small and medium-sized boroughs prior to Nottingham's decision to municipalize. In addition, Huddersfield established a tramways utility well before Nottingham and Burnley an electricity utility just ahead of Nottingham.

⁸⁷ Appendix C, Table 14.

⁸⁸ Maver, 'Civic Government', pp. 455-457, 467-468.

Nottingham was regarded by many other authorities as an example of good practice, both in its expertise in handling the municipalization processes and managing the performance of its businesses.

The Corporation presented itself as cost-conscious, but willing to invest in the new technologies for lighting and heating, greater supplies of good quality water for public health and more rapid and cheaper transport for the journey to work. By the 1880s the provision of basic necessities was largely in place and the civic objective was to deliver 'luxury' services. Addressing the new technical demands of modernity became more important. The Council was willing to sell the products and services of the utilities to the districts beyond the Borough's boundaries.⁸⁹ Prices were normally similar to those charged within the town. The Corporation combined its instinctive desire to make profits with its provision of the elements of a more civilised life. The willingness of authorities, like Nottingham, to incur debt for great projects, complete with the symbols of municipal achievement, demonstrated their willingness to value citizenship.⁹⁰ The Liberals in Nottingham enjoyed their association with the political rhetoric of municipal progress. Indeed, the words 'Liberal' and 'progress' were often used interchangeably in their partisan press, particularly in the 1890s.⁹¹ However, Conservative councillors supported the policy proposals of the ruling elite because they also shared a belief in efficient and economic civic development. Together they could subscribe to progressive services that supported the improvement of social conditions in the Borough, but neither party wished to pursue radical social policies.

Croll has argued that, for many towns, strong rivalry with neighbouring settlements provided manifestations of civic pride.⁹² This was not noticeably true of Nottingham, especially in the case of its high-profile policies for municipal trading. Explicit references to other rival corporations were rare in committee debates, the deliberations of the Full Council or on the municipal hustings. However, knowledge of successful projects elsewhere would no doubt have been quietly noted and acted as a further unspoken spur to local politicians to undertake initiatives in the town.

⁸⁹ *RC* (1894), p. 341.

⁹⁰ H.E. Meller, 'Urban Renewal and Citizenship: the Quality of Life in British Cities', *Urban History*, 22, 1 (1995), p. 65.

⁹¹ For example: *NDE*, 31 October 1895; *NDE*, 3 November 1896; *NDE*, 1 November 1899.

⁹² Croll, *Civilizing*, p. 26.

Nottingham Borough Council was inward-looking but sufficiently self-confident to maintain an adequate momentum to its policy planning and implementation. Generally, it did not perceive the successes achieved elsewhere to be a threat to Nottingham's standing. When references were made by politicians to activities in other authorities, they tended to be for reasons of considering the relevance of best practice elsewhere to Nottingham's own planning. It was unusual for those references to be quoted simply to score partisan points. Nottingham acquired the label 'Queen of the Midlands' by the turn of the century and, even if unintentionally, the soubriquet reflected a calm and deliberative approach to policy development.⁹³ Matters were raised, for example, about oil lighting in Romford, cheaper gas prices in Leeds and Hull, electricity developments in Manchester, Leicester and Bradford and tramway power systems in Sheffield and Glasgow.⁹⁴ But, they were offered as comparator authorities that had experience to share, rather than as competitors to be overtaken. Leicester and Sheffield, Nottingham's nearest neighbours amongst the large municipalities, were used very little as comparisons in the Borough Council's analysis of its civic needs. Nottingham's policy planning processes for its municipal undertakings were largely based on a rational model, with considerable use of technical data, research and expert advice. The outcomes of that planning were often presented by all participants as the logical conclusion to their deliberations. Liberal and Conservative members endeavoured to find pragmatic solutions to civic needs, to create a modern town that worked.

Rational planning was based upon an increasingly complex knowledge and information culture, that required high-quality, expert advice. A. L. Lowell, an American observer of English local government, claimed in 1908 that 'the excellence of municipal government was very roughly proportional to the influence of permanent officials'.⁹⁵ The ruling elite of Nottingham Borough Council were prepared to pay the necessary salaries to attract high calibre officials, trusted officers who had nationally-recognised professional standing. The Corporation's policy-making culture was characterised by secure, long-serving aldermen working in tandem with competent

⁹³ C. Griffin, 'The Identity of a Twentieth-Century City', in Beckett, *Centenary*, pp. 421-423; Beckett, 'Greater Nottingham', p. 253.

⁹⁴ For example: *NMCDE*, 25 September 1877; *NMCDE*, 14 November 1882; *NDE*, 6 January 1885; *NDE*, 8 September 1896.

⁹⁵ A. L. Lowell, *The Government of England, 2 Vols.* (Macmillan, New York, 1917). Cited in Waller, *Town*, p. 281.

and credible permanent professionals. Garrard has argued that as the issues facing committees became more complex, power was increasingly devolved to specialised committees, and more particularly to a scattering of knowledgeable councillors and the paid officials who served them.⁹⁶ As those officials became more visible, confident and assertive, the more indispensable they became to decision-taking. Maver has contended that the trustworthiness of the senior officers, their advocacy and their professional gravitas helped politicians to gain broad acceptance of the arguments in favour of public ownership in the interests of the community.⁹⁷ They were able, as circumstances necessitated, to influence policy development by either promoting initiatives or acting as a restraining influence on less viable political proposals.

In Nottingham, a Town Clerk and two Borough Engineers, supported by specialist engineers in the four utilities, shared an understanding of the policy priorities with the key political decision-takers. They provided not only a thoroughly professional and committed service to the politicians, but they helped to guide and influence policy-making. Members and officials together had to generate sufficient momentum to ensure the success of their municipal policies and then combine forces to monitor the progress of those policies.⁹⁸ The officials provided the professional knowledge that enabled the political elite to justify their decisions.⁹⁹ The trust and confidence of the politicians of both parties in their permanent officials was of fundamental importance to policy-making in the Borough.

Samuel Johnson's role as Town Clerk from 1870 to 1908 was pivotal in influencing the nature of the relationships between members and officers, as they created and managed all four utilities. The way in which he developed the office of town clerk is examined in Chapter 4. For Johnson, 'the unity of administration is most important'.¹⁰⁰ Marriott Ogle Tarbotton, the Borough Engineer from 1859 to 1880,

⁹⁶ J. Garrard, 'Bureaucrats Rather Than Bureaucracies: the Power of Municipal Professionals, 1835-1914', *Occasional Paper in Politics and Contemporary History*, 33 (1992), pp. 5-8.

⁹⁷ I. Maver, 'The Role and Influence of Glasgow's Municipal Managers, 1890s - 1930s', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 69.

⁹⁸ Waller, *Town*, p. 308.

⁹⁹ Morris, 'Governance', pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ *RC* (1894), p. 352.

was influential in the establishment of the gas and water utilities. He worked closely with Heath, Thackeray and Oldknow, the chairmen of the relevant committees. Arthur Brown, Tarbotton's assistant for seven years and his successor as Borough Surveyor in 1880, played a major role in the establishment of the electricity and tramways undertakings and the management of all four municipal businesses. He worked particularly closely with Barber, Gripper, Sands, Turney and Brownsword.

The chairmen gained political support from fellow aldermen, who played key roles as both chairmen and committee members on the four trading concerns. For example, Barber led the Gas Committee and was a member of both the committee chaired by Oldknow that supervised the municipalization of water and the Tramways Committee led by Brownsword. Gripper led the Water Committee, but supported Barber on the Gas Committee. Ford chaired the Lighting Committee and served at various stages on three other trading committees. Turney led the Electricity Committee with support from Brownsword, whilst their roles were reversed in the case of the Tramways Committee. These arrangements helped to create a closely knit group of members and officers, each having longevity of service and experience of a broad swathe of responsibilities for municipal trading. Mutual influence was brought to bear on policy proposals. This was clearly an essentially partisan feature of committee work since the Liberals monopolised the chairmanship of all committees, but they used the power they acquired to achieve a consensus for their policy proposals.

The overall policy priorities and the financial parameters involved, required political determination. However, the politicians were greatly influenced by trusted, professional advice from experts who empathised with their objectives. The recommendations of the officials for both municipalization and the running of the utilities were almost always accepted. This was by no means the case in all authorities. For example, in Reading members refused to accept the advice of their officials to municipalize the tramways.¹⁰¹ Scientific and technical expertise was needed in large measure in Nottingham for the development of the gas and water utilities in the 1870s and 1880s. Yet, the implications of the new technologies for the generation of electricity and the supply of power for the tramways undertaking made

¹⁰¹ A. Alexander, *Borough Government and Politics: Reading, 1835-1985* (George Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 84-85.

officer input even more vital. Good quality advice was available and taken up by all four utility committees, but the dependence of members on experts increased significantly over the course of thirty years. The ability to explain complex issues to non-specialists, 'communicative rationality', was at a premium by the 1890s, with the Corporation's continued pursuit of modernity.¹⁰² As Garrard has argued more generally, municipal politicians in Nottingham benefited from the presence of officers who had professional standing and respect beyond the boundaries of their own borough, when they were in negotiation with central government or other authorities about civic projects.¹⁰³ The quality of the professionalism and expertise of Nottingham's senior officers is evaluated in Chapter 4.

The quality of the knowledge and information available for Nottingham's policy-makers was underpinned by the personal professional networks of the senior officials, and particularly those of the Town Clerk. Samuel Johnson had a considerable network of contacts with town clerks who provided up-to-date assessments of policy developments in their authorities. For example, Johnson was in correspondence with Bartholemew Gidley in Exeter, in November 1875, offering guidance on the market price of gas stock and the level of profits made by Nottingham's gas undertaking.¹⁰⁴ In the following year he consulted the Guildhall, London, about the public auction of shares and Thornton Andrews in Swansea about their remuneration of gas shareholders. In 1880 the Town Clerks of Birmingham and Reading sought Nottingham's experience of raising mortgages and selling stock.¹⁰⁵ Two years later Birmingham provided their perspective on improvement rates. In 1876 and 1879 he consulted Manchester and Birmingham, authorities with acknowledged effective practice, to help with Nottingham's review of its standing orders.¹⁰⁶ Johnson also used his contacts to extend Nottingham's interests on the Derwent Valley Water Board in 1899.¹⁰⁷ He stood as a candidate for the post of Standing Arbitrator and sought the backing of Hughes Hallett, Clerk to Derbyshire County Council. Johnson approached his contacts in the Sheffield authority to arrange a private meeting between Alderman Jelley and the Lord Mayor of Sheffield. Aldermen Fraser and

¹⁰² Morris, 'Governance', p. 7.

¹⁰³ Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ NAO CA.TC.10/33/1, 18 November 1875, 7 March 1876.

¹⁰⁵ NAO CA.TC.10/3/3, 20 February 1880.

¹⁰⁶ NAO CA.CM. MISC/5, 17 February 1876, 23 April 1879.

¹⁰⁷ NAO CA.TC.10/96/2, 9 November 1899.

Jelley were anxious that the path was cleared for members and officers from Nottingham to have influential positions on the first Board.

The Town Clerk also made effective use of the professional contacts of other senior officers of the Corporation. For example, in 1873, Johnson was keen to know about the possible difficulties that might face Nottingham if the boundaries of the water district were extended. Tarbotton approached his opposite number in Liverpool to find out more about their misgivings.¹⁰⁸ Then shortly before his death in 1887, Tarbotton used his professional network to provide useful comparative data from several authorities as Nottingham Corporation prepared its defence in the legal case brought by Firth.¹⁰⁹ Johnson, Tarbotton and Brown used their knowledge of major new developments in public utilities in other authorities to guide the debate in Nottingham. They arranged for deputations of politicians to observe innovative practice at first hand. For example, in October 1878 Tarbotton led a deputation of the Gas Committee to Paris, to observe developments in their gas and chemical works and electric light operation.¹¹⁰ Following the visit, Tarbotton costed an electric light experiment for central Nottingham but the Council decided not to proceed at that stage. In 1898 Samuel Johnson arranged for members of the Tramways Committee to observe the system that was operating in Edinburgh. The deputation received 'a very kind reception' with 'admirable arrangements'. Further deputations went to Bristol and Dover. Johnson rated the Bristol Tramways to be 'one of the best and most complete in the country'.¹¹¹ In July 1899 Arthur Brown and Henry Talbot, the relevant engineers, were commissioned by the Tramways Committee to examine both the underground and overhead power systems in the United States. They reported back in September on their assessment of the systems in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Niagara Falls City and Boston. As a result of these site visits and additional data obtained from tramway undertakings in Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Hull, the Committee made their decision to adopt the recommendations of their professional officers.¹¹² The detailed planning undertaken for the decision to have an overhead system of electric power for the

¹⁰⁸ NAO CA.CM.MISC/4, 25 February 1873.

¹⁰⁹ NAO CA.TC.10/36/1-2.

¹¹⁰ Gas Committee Report (hereafter GCR)/Engineer's Report (hereafter /EN), FC, 12 August 1878.

¹¹¹ NAO CA.TC.10/86/12.

¹¹² Tramways Committee Report (hereafter TRCR), FC, 4 April 1898.

tramways, came as close to the textbook model of rational planning as anything handled by Nottingham Corporation.

The senior officers of the Corporation also chose the independent experts who were engaged to advise the Council's committees on major civic projects. They thereby helped to significantly influence policy formation. In March 1869 Tarbotton decided to invite Simpson, 'an eminent water engineer', Miller and Frankland, water analysts, and Hull, a geologist with the Government's Geological Survey, to advise on the local water supply.¹¹³ The experts persuaded members that the supply should be in public ownership rather than in private hands. In November 1894 Hull was again employed to look at possible new sources of water supply for the Borough, and to recommend courses of action that would meet Nottingham's needs for the following twenty-five years.¹¹⁴ Hull's second report was equally influential in guiding municipal policy. Two electricity experts, Professor Hopkinson of King's College, London, and Preece, a Consulting Engineer to the Postmaster General, were engaged in 1891 to advise the Council on its electric lighting policy.¹¹⁵ Both experts had advised many public bodies, including Manchester Council. Their report was acted upon promptly by Nottingham Borough Council.

In addition to the strategies employed to bring an up-to-date focus to Nottingham's detailed policy-making, much broader deliberations also helped the Corporation to assess alternative policy options and ultimately influence local decisions. Johnson played a major role on the Association of Municipal Corporations, perhaps the pre-eminent voice of municipal opinion by the 1890s. Johnson was a member of the Executive Committee and chaired the Law Committee, which scrutinised Government Bills.¹¹⁶ Nottingham Corporation had early warning of the implications of all intended legislation. The sessions held in 1879, for example, provided an insight into the powers of private electricity companies.¹¹⁷ In subsequent years, there were helpful analyses of legislation relating to electric lighting and tramways.¹¹⁸ Johnson worked alongside, and indeed was chairman of the committee that included, the town

¹¹³ NAO CA.CM.MISC/3, 8 March 1869.

¹¹⁴ Water Committee Report (hereafter WCR)/Independent Consultant's Report, FC, 6 May 1895.

¹¹⁵ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 3 June 1891.

¹¹⁶ Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) 30/72/14.

¹¹⁷ PRO 30/72/9.

¹¹⁸ PRO 30/72/14 and 23.

clerks of the large, influential municipalities such as Leeds, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leicester and Portsmouth. Senior politicians of the Council also participated in the debates of the Association. Barber, Bowers, Sands and Fraser contributed to discussions about municipalization and Edward Fraser was nominated by the Association to give evidence on their behalf to the Joint Select Committee on Municipal Trading in 1900. In the event he was not called to speak, but his choice underlines the national credibility of members and officers of Nottingham Corporation on matters relating to municipal trading.

Nottingham played host to meetings of the General Committee of the Association in April and August 1878.¹¹⁹ In January 1898 a group of authorities met in Nottingham to formulate a strategy by which to oppose the General Power Distributing Company's Bill, which threatened local authorities with greater private company opposition in the provision of electricity.¹²⁰ Twelve of Nottingham's senior Liberals were involved. Members and officers alike took pride in and gained prestige from hosting these national gatherings.

The extent of consensus and collaboration

The relative balance of partisanship and non-partisanship in the policy-making processes of Nottingham Borough Council, and the strength of their respective influences, helped to shape a distinctive civic response to the municipal agenda between 1870 and 1900. Partisanship was built into the structures that the Council devised to handle policy development, but non-partisanship thrived as the result of a complex set of political and socio-economic relationships that came together at a time of unprecedented expansion of municipal responsibilities. Contention and conflict occur naturally within political debate and their presence was evident in the work of the Corporation. But the conditions suitable for a more cooperative approach were also available.

The pattern of voting at meetings of the Full Council, the conduct of and contributions made to committee meetings and the response of members to the independent scrutiny

¹¹⁹ NAO CA.TC.10/3/5, 31 January 1878.

¹²⁰ NAO CA.CM.MISC/7, 14 January and 9 February 1898.

of municipal audit, each provided evidence of the various levels of contention, consensus and collaboration generated by specific policy matters. They revealed the parts played by party, occupation and status in decision-taking. Some issues received apparently wholehearted support from Liberals and Conservatives, some intense opposition, whilst others produced sufficient but undemonstrative approval.¹²¹ Recorded votes, rare and called for when feelings ran particularly high, offered members opportunities to formally register their opposition to policy proposals. The committee structure that drove Nottingham's municipal system was dominated by powerful Liberal Party chairmen and populated by a membership in proportion to the electoral success of the two parties. The Liberals had in-built majorities on every municipal decision-making body between 1870 and 1900.¹²² The reports of municipal auditors, too, provided a means to publicise the shortcomings of the ruling party and to give openings for partisan debate.

The potential for political conflict often remained disguised. Samuel Johnson took the view that although deliberations within the Council were led by the Liberal elite, he found it hard to discern the party allegiances of the speakers in the Chamber.

When they enter the Guildhall politics are lost sight of; in fact I could not discover from the votes the side of politics of a member of the Council. I often make a mistake in my own mind in adjusting what his policies might be; they are entirely lost sight of. But I must say that outside the strings are pulled by each political party.¹²³

Redlich shared Johnson's analysis of the conduct of parties generally in council chambers across the country.

On the whole, and as a general rule, the distinction between Liberals and Conservatives tends to disappear in the everyday work of a Municipal Council.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Baxendale, 'You', pp. 301, 314.

¹²² Appendix B, Table 7.

¹²³ *RC* (1894), p. 336.

¹²⁴ J. Redlich and F.W. Hirst, F.W., *Local Government in England, Vol. 1* (Macmillan, 1903), p. 336.

Most debates in the Nottingham Council Chamber achieved general assent and were concluded without a vote. Indeed, in spite of impassioned speeches from the floor of the Chamber in opposition to proposals, most matters ultimately received unanimous support. When voices were formally raised in dissent, they tended to be few and in a small minority. Negotiations behind the scenes, the use of independent expert advice and careful planning and research all played their part in gaining very substantial agreement to recommendations. In 1883 Edward Fraser, Liberal councillor and local solicitor, reflected the view of many members when he said that 'very few questions had been decided in the Council by the vote of one party solely'.¹²⁵ From the late 1880s the convention in many debates was for policy recommendations in the Chamber to be proposed by a Liberal and seconded by a Conservative.¹²⁶ Members of both parties could be relied upon to hold true to Council decisions once they were agreed.

Recorded votes of meetings of the Full Council were notable by their rarity, with only small numbers called for by members between 1879 and 1894. The issues had to be particularly contentious and, unusually, the policy proposals had to have a clearly identified and significant group of opponents. The incidence of recorded votes, on matters related to municipalization, was greater between 1880 and 1885, and from 1888 to 1893.¹²⁷ Three recorded votes were needed in 1883, 1884, 1885 and 1890. Two were taken in 1882. In other years there was no more than one such vote. The new generation of councillors who entered the restructured Borough Council in 1877 were closely involved in the contentious issues that led to the recorded votes after 1880, whilst a further influx of new councillors by 1888 made clear their opposition to some policies in the later period. The senior figures in both parties provided the backbone of the consensus.

The votes were not linked directly to specific levels of party success at the elections. For example, after the Conservative gains in 1883 and 1884, the parties were a little more closely ranged against each other in the Chamber than was usual, whereas

¹²⁵ *NJ*, 25 October 1883.

¹²⁶ For example: FC, 3 September 1888, 5 September 1892, 10 September 1894.

¹²⁷ Analysis of recorded votes and proposed amendments is based on the Minutes of the Full Council and Committee Reports submitted to the Council, 1873-1901.

between 1888 and 1893 the Liberals had much more comfortable majorities.¹²⁸ On only one occasion did the Liberals and Conservatives divide on strictly party lines. In September 1880 all seven of the councillors who voted against the proposed gas prices and the use of the utility's profits were Conservatives.¹²⁹ On a number of other occasions significant numbers of Conservatives voted against the Liberals' policy proposals, but the decisions were nevertheless supported or opposed across the party divide. In July 1884, eight out of eighteen Conservatives and a small number of Liberals opposed the proposed extensions to the town's water supply.¹³⁰ In March 1885 almost half the Conservative members, with very few Liberals, objected to the proposed salary of the Gas Manager.¹³¹ In November 1887 some three quarters of the Conservative group voted against the appointment of a new Water Engineer, but so too did half the Liberal councillors.¹³² Further significant groups of Conservatives recorded their votes against Liberal proposals in February 1890 and January 1894 over other salary and appointment issues.¹³³

The cross-party nature of voting was underlined by Liberals ignoring their Party's whips, particularly in 1879, 1880, 1887 and 1898. The issues related to negotiations over the purchase of the Nottingham Water Works Company, gas profits, the appointment of the Water Engineer and a proposed omnibus service for Sneinton. Political opposition in the Chamber was not often decisive in reversing policy, but it was dramatic, symbolic and drew attention to matters that had resonance for the electorate in the wards particularly affected by the decisions taken. Councillors and aldermen from all occupational categories and of different social status were involved in the recorded opposition to proposed policies. They included manufacturers, professionals, retailers and tradesmen. In most debates it was not party, nor occupation, nor status alone that determined opposition. It was for individual reasons. One such reason given by members was to put the needs of the town before the interests of the party. Such an apparently statesmanlike stance enhanced the social standing of the member concerned. At times, very senior figures within the Liberal Party were prepared to make such a stand and voted against their Party's

¹²⁸ Appendix B, Table 7.

¹²⁹ FC, 6 September 1880.

¹³⁰ FC, 7 July 1884.

¹³¹ FC, 16 February, 9 March 1885.

¹³² FC, 21 November 1887.

¹³³ FC, 3 February 1890, 8 January 1894.

recommendations. It was very unusual for an alderman to take such action, but several did. For example, Goldschmidt opposed the particular proposals that related to the purchase of the Nottingham Water Works Company in May 1879, whilst his aldermanic colleagues Barber, Burgess and Thackeray chose to abstain in the same debate.¹³⁴ In December 1890 Acton voted against the sale of the Water Offices, and the Mayor, Sands, abstained.¹³⁵ Aldermen Mutch, Pullman and Woodward opposed their Party's proposals in the Sneinton omnibus debate in 1898, whilst Aldermen Renals abstained.¹³⁶

Within the overall pattern of voting, lay the responses of a number of individual Liberals and Conservatives who often followed their own inclinations and prejudices rather than the Party's wishes when votes were taken. For example, Walter Gregory was accepted by other members to be such a Liberal individualist in the 1870s and 1880s.¹³⁷ Bexon, Roberts, Lovett and Sutton all registered their opposition to Party policy in the late 1880s and during the 1890s.¹³⁸ On the Conservative side Bentley, Lees, Truman, White and Elliott regularly pursued their own personal views on contentious issues.¹³⁹ Three Conservatives and one Liberal councillor opposed proposals relating to the gas, water and tramways undertakings on a number of occasions.

Less dramatic than registering opposition by means of a recorded vote, were the many instances when individuals and groups of councillors called for amendments to substantive motions. They sought to harry the ruling elite and delay the implementation of policies. Again, participants were not restricted by their party allegiance, occupation or status. They included Liberals and Conservatives, manufacturers, professionals, retailers and tradesmen. The availability of these debating tactics was important to rank-and-file politicians. They provided members with opportunities to demonstrate their disapproval of proposals either for their personal political beliefs or on behalf of the voters in particular wards. Such

¹³⁴ FC, 5 May 1879.

¹³⁵ FC, 1 December 1890.

¹³⁶ FC, 5 September 1898.

¹³⁷ For example: FC, 6 September 1880, 16 February 1885, 9 March 1885, 21 September 1887, 1 December 1890, 2 October 1893, 8 January 1894.

¹³⁸ For example: FC, 21 November 1887, 3 February 1890, 8 January 1894, 5 September 1898.

¹³⁹ For example: FC, 21 November 1887, 3 February 1890, 8 January 1894.

opposition resulted in successes in debates on water utility issues in both October 1885, when a report was withdrawn, and in April 1895, when an amendment was carried. Similar successes were achieved on issues related to the tramways in 1882 and 1901.¹⁴⁰ More typically, amendments were either withdrawn or lost in the vote. Very occasionally amendments were used by members of committees as a rearguard action, if they faced opposition from the Full Council to their committee's recommendations. However, those committee members were well aware that the Finance Committee would, in the last analysis, demand that spending committees conform to the overall financial needs of the Council.

Individual councillors also gave voice to the misgivings of ratepayers who expressed opposition to proposals from both local and central government. For example, in June 1885 the Nottingham Ratepayers Association requested the Borough Council to petition Parliament against the repeal of the Borough Funds Act, so that the profits from the gas and water undertakings could not be appropriated.¹⁴¹ Both Liberal and Conservative spokesmen proposed that the matter be referred to the Council's Parliamentary Committee for further consideration. In December 1890 public disquiet enabled Robinson, a Conservative councillor, to threaten to call a town meeting rather than acquiesce to the Liberal proposal to acquire new offices for the water undertaking.¹⁴² Two other Conservative members, Brittle and Bentley, called for the matter to be deferred. Seven other members supported the amendment in a recorded vote.

The relative rarity of any formal action in meetings of the Full Council against the ruling party's recommendations tends to support Redlich's general contention that much municipal legislation was 'non-controversial'.¹⁴³ However, when controversy was evident the opponents of policy proposals included members of both parties, all occupational groups and men of different social standing.

Much of members' time was taken up in committee work. The operational practices of the committee structure, which lay at the heart of the Corporation's processes for

¹⁴⁰ FC, 13 November 1882, 5 October 1885, 1 April 1895, 2 September 1901.

¹⁴¹ FC, 25 June 1895.

¹⁴² FC, 1 December 1890.

¹⁴³ Redlich, *Local Government*, p. 265.

policy-making and decision-taking, were the source of continual party political contention. The Liberals used patronage to monopolise the posts of chairmen of committees, who were given considerable powers. The committees reflected the proportional strength of the Liberal and Conservative parties in the Council Chamber, thereby ensuring that the Liberal Party had control of all policy-formation groups. In 1879 Samuel Johnson emphasised the fundamental role of the Council's committees and their chairmen.

We look upon the Council as the legislative body and the committees as executive. So long as the committees act within the powers they are entrusted, the Town Council does not interfere with them, but any member giving notice to the chairman, can ask a question as to the proceedings of any committee – this, however, is seldom done.¹⁴⁴

Fifteen years later, Johnson's view remained essentially the same.

The Council is a quasi-legislative body, and it lays down the policy of the Corporation and declares to what extent it shall be carried, and what committee shall carry it out. After that it interferes no more with the committees.¹⁴⁵

By 1894 the practice had been established that each committee had a distinct chairman, elected by its members, and a vice chairman.¹⁴⁶ With one exception, no member of the Council was chairman of two standing committees simultaneously. Johnson regarded the twenty-three chairmen as 'very competent'.¹⁴⁷ A sense of continuity was assured by the chairmen from the preceding year proposing the membership of the committee, with nominations being confirmed by the whole Council. The chairmen controlled attendance. Every member of the Council served on at least one committee and some on two or three. 'As a rule the members are continuous from year to year.'¹⁴⁸ Whilst members could attend other committees, 'a

¹⁴⁴ NAO CA.TC.10.3/5, correspondence with the Town Clerk of Sunderland, 13 January 1879.

¹⁴⁵ RC (1894), p. 344.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

member adverse to the policy of a committee would not be permitted'.¹⁴⁹ In principle, the Conservatives continued to object to the partisan stranglehold the Liberals had on both the chairmanship of the committees and the consequent 'bias' that they claimed was built into the system. But, in practice, the committee system helped to promote consensus with its regularity of committee membership and its predictability of operation.

The chairmen, in their capacity as senior and influential figures in the Liberal hierarchy, established a grip on policy development.¹⁵⁰ A group of long-serving chairmen provided the driving force behind the formation and delivery of the policy for municipal trading between 1870 and 1900. The core group was reinforced and replaced by new senior Party members during each decade, but the overlap in their terms of office enabled policy to be developed steadily and persistently. All became aldermen and contributors to a cohesive political group. They took the view that their wide municipal experience and long tenure in office provided them with greater insight into the bigger policy picture, both in terms of party and civic needs. They simply had to convince the aldermanic group that particular policies were appropriate and viable. Samuel Johnson accepted the benefits of this political reality. He believed that the post of alderman, with its longer and broader perspective, offered a positive counterbalance to the short-term political expediency of councillors who were anxious to secure their own political futures in forthcoming elections.

These aldermen are all well removed from the immediate influence of public opinion, and can take that view of the matter which they think is fair and just without yielding to the passing passion of the moment, and they do serve to steady the municipal machine; they make it go more regularly and steadily forward.¹⁵¹

Johnson also felt that their long service and knowledge of 'the work, traditions and policy of the Town Council' brought greater certainty and effectiveness to the

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

¹⁵⁰ J. Moore and R. Rodger, 'Municipal Knowledge and Policy Networks in British Local Government, 1832-1914', *Yearbook of European Administrative History*, 15 (2003), pp. 40-42. They have argued that committees were 'semi-autonomous fiefdoms ruled by their chairmen' and that those chairmen had strong bonds of mutual self-interest.

¹⁵¹ *RC* (1894), p. 337.

management of the Borough's affairs.¹⁵² On only one occasion did any one of their number vote against their party's policy proposals, and on one issue another abstained. Their business experience and their religious beliefs led many to share common values and aspirations, including a common perspective of Nottingham's civic identity. Barber, Turney, Goldschmidt, Fraser, Ford, Gripper, Brownsword, Oldknow and Cropper chaired a number of the strategic and major spending committees, including the Finance, Parliamentary, Gas, Water, Electricity and Tramways Committees.¹⁵³ Barber chaired the Gas Committee and sat on the Water, Tramways, Finance and Parliamentary Committees, whilst six of the group served on two of these strategic committees. Their skill in securing support for proposals was often evident. On occasion, that leadership skill was recognised by those most intimately aware of the political difficulties that the chairmen faced. For example, in December 1891, the Town Clerk wrote to Sir John Turney to compliment him on his handling of the protracted issue of developing electrical supply in the town. 'Evidently you have succeeded in steering your Committee along the middle course which is the safest.'¹⁵⁴

Their social, economic and political networks were widespread. Of these nine politicians, five were manufacturers, one a solicitor, one a tradesman and one a retailer.¹⁵⁵ Four of them had additional business experience in other companies as directors, three were prominent non-conformist figures and two had experience of other agencies of local governance. Three represented the same ward. Each carried great influence within the Liberal associations at ward and municipal levels. Gripper became President of the Nottingham Liberal Union and Brownsword was President of the Eastern Association of the Liberal Association.¹⁵⁶ Cropper introduced Prime Minister Gladstone at the tenth annual meeting of the National Liberal Federation, held in Nottingham in October 1887.¹⁵⁷ Between them they were influential in

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Analysis of the committees is based on the minutes and reports of: Gas 1874-1900, Water 1880-1900, Health 1873-1879, Lighting 1882-1895, Electric Lighting/Electricity 1894-1900, Tramways 1898-1900, Finance 1878-1900, Parliamentary 1879-1898, General Works and Highways 1875-1900.

¹⁵⁴ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 9 December 1891.

¹⁵⁵ Analysis is based on Trade Directories: Wright 1866, Kelly 1881, White 1893, Wright 1902.

¹⁵⁶ NAO CA.TC.28/18 and 24; J. Potter Briscoe and W.T. Pike, *Contemporary Biographies: Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire at the Opening of the Twentieth-Century* (Pike, W.T., Brighton, 1901), p. 175.

¹⁵⁷ *NWEJ*, 21 October 1887.

guiding the Corporation towards municipalization and helping to ensure the Council was a successful municipal trader.

Despite the evidently partisan arrangements for the leadership of the committees, the longevity of the membership of those committees allowed close working relationships to be established across the party divide. The chairmen may well have been the powerbrokers, but for the most part their committee members supported the strategic objectives of their committees and corporately agreed on the policy recommendations to be put to the Full Council. Liberals and Conservatives from the various committees spoke with one voice when business was debated by the whole Council. Generally, committee members were able to build trusting and respectful relationships that enabled policy to be consistently and persistently pursued, even when structural changes were required in the committee system.

The committee structure in which the Liberal and Conservative members operated was adapted, refined and streamlined by successive generations of municipal politicians to meet the new demands and increased responsibilities of the Borough Council. Whilst the volume of work undertaken by the Corporation increased dramatically between 1870 and 1900, the number of meetings of the Full Council rose only modestly. In the period from 1835 to 1877 there were, on average, 13.7 meetings of the Full Council each year, and from 1878 to 1900 on average 15.3 sessions.¹⁵⁸ The committees took the strain, with sub-committees being appointed when agendas became further crowded. The committee system underwent its first major reorganisation following the Local Government Act in 1858, when the Council assumed the responsibilities of the Local Board of Health for Nottingham.¹⁵⁹ Between 1859 and the extension of the Borough's boundaries the number of standing committees ranged from thirteen to sixteen.¹⁶⁰ The enlargement of the Council in 1877 necessitated the biggest single upheaval in the committee structure. Initially, twenty-one standing committees were created, they were reduced to eighteen in 1880

¹⁵⁸ Analysis of the Full Council's structure of standing and special committees is based on the Minutes of and Reports to the Full Council, 1870-1901; D. Gray and V.W. Walker (eds.), *Nottingham Corporation Records of the Borough of Nottingham, Vol. IX, 1836-1900* (Thomas Forman, Nottingham, 1956), pp. 1-205 (hereafter *RBN*, IX).

¹⁵⁹ FC, 15 August 1859.

¹⁶⁰ *RBN*, IX, pp. 137-251; FC Minutes, 1873-1876.

and by 1900 had increased to twenty-two.¹⁶¹ The fundamental structure proved sufficiently effective to meet the general requirements of the Council and adaptable enough to enable additional municipal responsibilities to be taken onboard without far-reaching changes to the essential framework. Nottingham chose to conduct its municipal business with far more standing committees than some other major municipalities. In 1901 Leeds operated with fifteen standing committees and Liverpool with eleven, despite those corporations serving much larger populations.¹⁶²

The four public utility committees were given fully devolved powers to act on behalf of the whole Council.¹⁶³ In effect, members acted as a board of directors for each municipal business. All four committees were characterised by a senior Liberal politician in the chair, a significant number of long-serving members from both parties and some common cross-membership of the utility committees and the influential Finance Committee. These factors of continuity supported greater collaboration in policy planning and decision-taking between the Liberal and Conservative representatives. The response of the politicians in Nottingham was to develop closer ties within the committees and to establish greater trust in the relevant permanent officials. The parties did not view municipal trading as a partisan activity and, as such, they contributed to the utility committees in a non-partisan and cooperative manner. A shared experience of the major issues facing the committees, together with a growing awareness of the scientific and technological implications of policy proposals, tended to bring with them an increased uniformity of view of preferred solutions. This conformity of opinion was underpinned by close working relationships with the relevant engineers for the utilities and an increased reliance on their technical expertise as the basis for policy decisions. Trust in the professional experts and the Town Clerk, Samuel Johnson, was fundamental to the effective operation of the devolved powers of the committees. The esprit de corps to be found amongst the elites on many committees in the Salford, Bolton and Rochdale Councils enabled them to take decisions *nem con*, despite their party political viewpoints.¹⁶⁴ Nottingham's committees developed a considerable sense of camaraderie too, but it

¹⁶¹ FC Minutes, 1877-1901.

¹⁶² Redlich, *Local Government*, pp. 312-313.

¹⁶³ For example: General Works and Highways Committee Reports (hereafter GWHCR), FC, 8 August 1874, 19 November 1877.

¹⁶⁴ Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 7-8.

was a consensus rooted in its own particular municipal culture. Whilst committee members could act as a single, largely like-minded, deliberative body for much of their search for policy solutions, they were acutely aware that beyond the Guildhall partisanship prevailed.

Matters relating to gas had been in the hands of various special committees between the 1850s and 1873, at which stage a Gas and Water Committee was organised to provide concerted opposition to impending private legislation promoted by the local gas company.¹⁶⁵ Following the Nottingham Corporation (Gas) Act in 1874, a standing committee managed the undertaking for the whole of its existence. For twelve years from 1882, this committee also assumed responsibility for electric lighting.¹⁶⁶ The Gas Committee had only three chairmen in the period up to 1900. Barber led the Committee from 1883 with J P Ford, the chairman of the Lighting Committee until 1893, as his deputy. This link reflected a number of overlapping personnel between associated committees. A core membership of Liberals on the Gas Committee provided continuity to policy formation. Ford, Gripper and Cropper gave lengthy service from the 1870s, Acton, Love seed, Woodward and Bexon from the 1880s and Froggatt and Jelley during the 1890s. Baines, Eyre, Fitzhugh and Truman were the core of Conservative representation on the Committee.¹⁶⁷ Even after only four years of devolved powers, the Chairman of the Gas Committee, Thackeray, claimed with some justification that its members 'had been assiduous in their attention to the management of the concern'. He said that several members were 'becoming thoroughly well-versed' in the practicalities of the undertaking.¹⁶⁸ His view was non-partisan.

A similar approach was taken to the development of the Water Committee, which was formally appointed as a standing committee in November 1879. General water supply and quality issues had been considered by the Sanitary Committee from 1847 to 1872, then the Health Committee until municipalization.¹⁶⁹ Additional special committees

¹⁶⁵ FC, 7 April 1873.

¹⁶⁶ FC, 3 July 1882.

¹⁶⁷ Analysis of the membership of the Gas Committee is based on the Committee's Minutes and Reports (hereafter GCR), 1874-1900.

¹⁶⁸ NDE, 13 August 1878.

¹⁶⁹ FC Minutes and WCR, 1880-1900; Gas and Water Opposition Committee Reports (hereafter GWOCR), 1873-1874; Water Bill Committee Reports (hereafter WBCR), 1878-1880.

had been convened in the early 1870s. Five significant Liberal Party figures chaired the Water Committee for the last two decades of the century. Gripper led the undertaking from 1882 to 1893 and Sands until 1899. The Liberals Barber, Acton, Cropper, Loverseed and Jelley provided links with the work of the Gas Committee from the 1880s. In the 1890s Green, Davis, Skerritt, Wright and Manning were core members from the Liberal group, whilst McCraith, Elliott, Dabell and Denman were the key Conservative representatives.

The Electric Lighting Committee succeeded the Watch, General Works and Highways and Lighting Committees, in 1894, in the supervision of new lighting in the town.¹⁷⁰ The wider use of the new source of power led in 1898 to the creation of the Electricity Committee under the continuing chairmanship of Turney. Johnstone, Pyatt, Fitzhugh and McCraith provided links with and experience of the other utility committees for the two parties.

The Tramways Committee, set up in 1898 under the chairmanship of Brownsword, took over the preliminary work that had been supervised by the General Works and Highways Committee.¹⁷¹ Members of the Tramways Committee included Barber, J P Ford, Turney, Johnstone, Loverseed, Radford and McCraith, all prominent contributors for the Liberals and Conservatives on other undertakings. The Finance Committee also had key members from the utilities' committees serving on it. For example, the Liberals Barber, Manning, Sands, Woodward and Pyatt and the Conservatives Baines and Wootton were members of both Finance and at least one utility.¹⁷²

Although the work of the utility committees proceeded with a good measure of consensus, the extension of the powers of the Finance Committee produced sources of conflict. There was tension within the senior Liberal group, on occasions, because of arguments between the Finance and utility chairmen.¹⁷³ Ironically, the two parties

¹⁷⁰ FC Minutes and GWHCR, 1877-1899; Lighting Committee Reports (hereafter LCR), 1882-1895; GCR, 1882-1894; Electric Lighting and Electricity Committee Reports (hereafter ELCR/ECR), 1894-1898.

¹⁷¹ GWHCR, 1877-1897; TRCR, 1898-1900.

¹⁷² FC Minutes 1870-1900; Finance Committee Reports, 1878-1900.

¹⁷³ For example: *NJ*, 3 July 1883; *NDE*, 3 September 1889; *NDE*, 2 December 1890; *NDE*, 7 May 1895.

may have agreed on a course of action within the confines of a committee, but intra-party problems produced non-partisan contention. The determination of the Council's income and expenditure was central to the effective handling of the Corporation's business. The nature and extent of the supervisory powers of the Finance Committee had implications for the operation of the Full Council and its service committees.

A specific Finance Committee was established in 1861 with powers to supervise all accounts, the level of rating and the Borough's byelaws. This all-Liberal Committee was enlarged from the original membership of six chairmen of standing committees to seven in 1868.¹⁷⁴ The Finance Committee of the enlarged Council from 1877 comprised both Liberal aldermen and councillors of both parties, but still included a number of the chairmen of the major committees.¹⁷⁵ The Committee acted, outside meetings of the Full Council, as the financial arbiter for the whole Council until 1887.¹⁷⁶ At that stage it was decided that approval from a meeting of the whole Council was needed for any expenditure over £500 that required a loan. The increased powers of the Finance Committee were viewed by some councillors as an intrusion by a Committee not competent to judge the decisions of the specialised standing committees. Johnson took the same view.

As far as new expenditure is concerned, it is voted by the Council and a committee is appointed to carry it out...It was such a trouble and took so long and brought about results which were so unsatisfactory that we gave it up...The committees would not put up with the interference by the Finance Committee.¹⁷⁷

Redlich claimed that this represented a failed attempt to gain greater central control of committees.¹⁷⁸ However, the Full Council gave further supervisory powers to the Finance Committee for contracting and loans in 1890 and for auditing in 1899.¹⁷⁹ In reality, the Finance Committee used its powers to stop cheques as a last resort only twice between 1870 and 1900. Committee chairmen were rarely questioned on items

¹⁷⁴ *RBN*, IX, p. 200, 7 December 1868.

¹⁷⁵ FC, 19 November 1877.

¹⁷⁶ FC, 29 June 1887.

¹⁷⁷ *RC* (1894), pp. 343-345.

¹⁷⁸ Redlich, *Local Government*, p. 324.

¹⁷⁹ FC, 5 February 1890, 6 February 1899.

of expenditure at meetings of the Full Council.¹⁸⁰ The chairmen regarded the meetings at which they presented their annual reports and their audited accounts as opportunities to justify committee expenditure.

At times, there were political tensions caused by committee spending strategies, between the members of both parties on the utility committees on the one hand and the Full Council on the other. For example, issues arose in 1877, 1882, 1886, 1895 and 1896, when the Council demanded that its consent should be sought for new expenditure.¹⁸¹ In 1889 Goldschmidt, the Chairman of the Finance Committee, took issue in Full Council with the Gas Committee's proposal for its Sinking Fund.¹⁸² He took what members of the Gas Committee felt was a high-handed approach, refusing to explain the reasons for his opposition. Specific issues about officials' salaries, the sale of land and appointments brought committees and Full Council into conflict. Indeed, in October 1893, Gripper resigned from the Water Committee over the action taken by the Full Council against the Water Engineer.¹⁸³ Between 1897 and 1899 there were a number of complaints made in Full Council about the inadequate level of discussion on important matters concerning the tramways.¹⁸⁴

However, the Corporation developed some more inclusive ways of involving committees in the overall process of decision-taking. From 1880 the General Purposes Committee, whose membership consisted of the whole Council, had the power to decide matters of strategic importance.¹⁸⁵ Five years later this body became the 'Committee of the Whole Council'.¹⁸⁶ In 1900 the process was further refined to include the involvement of an additional General Purposes Committee, this time made up of the chairmen of all the standing committees, thereby including no Conservative spokesmen.¹⁸⁷ It was clear that whatever structures and conditions were introduced, the powerful chairmen of committees continued to present policy priorities and associated expenditure forcefully. The disagreements between chairmen and the Full

¹⁸⁰ NAO CA.TC.10/3/5, 13 January 1879.

¹⁸¹ *NDE*, 25 September 1877; *NDE*, 10 January 1882; *NDE*, 2 February 1886; *NDE*, 7 May 1895; *NDE*, 8 September 1896.

¹⁸² *NDE*, 3 September 1889.

¹⁸³ FC, 2 October 1893.

¹⁸⁴ For example: *NDE*, 3 May 1898; *NDE*, 3 January 1899.

¹⁸⁵ FC, 1 September 1879.

¹⁸⁶ FC, 16 February 1885.

¹⁸⁷ FC, 9 November 1899.

Council were non-partisan, intra-party matters. They had little negative impact on the largely collaborative arrangements in committees. The Liberal and Conservative representatives continued to reach a consensus on matters of civic interest. Although the basic committee structures were founded on partisan leadership and control, committee activity in practice was generally trusted, pragmatic and built upon shared values and understandings.

One area of debate that could so easily have been a source of partisan activity was the consideration of the reports of the Borough Auditors. Instead, the Conservative councillors chose not to take the opportunities presented to score effective party points about the auditors' criticisms of the annual municipal accounts. The manner in which the reports were received by both committees and the Full Council highlighted the collaborative and pragmatic way in which committee work was undertaken. Two Borough Auditors were appointed annually to ensure that the Corporation's financial accounts met legal requirements and financial regulations. In practice, one was supportive of the Liberal leadership, and one elected by the ratepayers and hostile to the ruling elite. Between 1870 and 1900 four auditors undertook the duties of independent scrutiny and each auditor prepared an independent report for the Council. Samuel Hancock, Samuel Derbyshire and Walter Gath produced apparently non-partisan reports and delivered them with at least the appearance of deference to the Corporation. In fact, Gath was nominated by the mayor, on behalf of the ruling elite. Gath was a well-known Liberal in the town and indeed a member of the Executive of the Nottingham Liberal Association.¹⁸⁸ He clearly did not regard his role as a political opponent of the Council, but he presented his main findings with very little personal commentary.

However, Mark Mellers, the ratepayers' representative, became a persistent political irritant to the committee chairmen and provoked angry responses from senior Liberal politicians. He was, throughout the period, challenging in his analysis and often stinging in his criticism. Mark Mellers, who served as an auditor from 1877 and into the next century, included in his commentary personal opinions about the fundamental

¹⁸⁸ Potter Briscoe, *Contemporary*, p. 166.

policies of the committees and their implementation, as well as the expected accountant's evaluation of the financial year.

The response of the Conservatives to these politicised reports highlighted the tension that existed in the work of the Borough Council between the pursuit of partisanship or collaboration. On the one hand the Conservatives welcomed Mellers' observations and the discomfort they brought to the Liberal hierarchy, but on the other they chose not to exploit the situation and press home the political advantage, either in committee or in the Full Council. Strategically, the presence and behaviour of Mellers speaking on behalf of the ratepayers, apparently independent of party political matters, allowed the Tories to remain above the fray, in what they could expediently present as an impartial position. For them, Mellers' invective served a useful political purpose; the electorate heard the criticisms of municipal expenditure without the Conservatives needing to abandon their collaborative approach. The fact that they did not criticise Mellers themselves, but remained silent, made a political point. Having agreed to the proposed expenditure as members of the utility committees, they remained largely non-partisan when Mellers attacked the outcomes of those decisions. They maintained the stance that municipal trading was not essentially a party matter. The Conservatives could be seen to uphold the civic interest, even where weaknesses in the municipal processes were exposed. The normally partisan press also opposed Mellers and upheld what they perceived to be a sense of Nottingham's civic pride.¹⁸⁹

Mellers pursued a number of criticisms of the financial policies of the Gas Committee. He complained repeatedly about the amounts taken from the profits of the gas undertaking to subsidise the Borough's rates. For example, in 1889, 1890 and 1891 he judged that too much of the profits was being used by the Liberal Council to relieve the size of the General District Rate.¹⁹⁰ He argued that too little was left to extinguish the annuities held by local investors and insufficient monies were set aside for the Sinking Fund. Annuity payments were said to be under-resourced in 1889, 1890, 1894, 1895, 1896 and 1899 and the Sinking Fund was identified as a particular

¹⁸⁹ For example: *NJ*, 3 July 1883; *NDE*, 11 September 1894.

¹⁹⁰ Auditor's Report/Gas Committee (hereafter AR/G), FC, 7 Oct 1889, 10 November 1890, 9 November 1891.

problem in 1890.¹⁹¹ In several reports Mellers declared that insufficient provision had been made for depreciation by means of the Reserve Fund.¹⁹² This was true of his reports in 1884, 1885, 1886 and 1893.

In the early years of the gas undertaking Mellers was dissatisfied with the Committee's use of their revenue and capital accounts. In 1883 he decided that the accounts he was offered were unapproved and incomplete and should, therefore, be referred back to the Committee for correction.¹⁹³ Barber's response was to claim that the auditors 'had ransacked heaven and earth to twist the accounts about and make them anything but straightforward'.¹⁹⁴ A year later Mellers felt that the actual losses incurred by the undertaking were not properly recorded and in 1889 he noted that two elements of the account were deliberately understated to give a higher figure for profits than the actual trading justified.¹⁹⁵ He continued to pursue this theme in his reports in 1893 and 1894.¹⁹⁶ In essence he was charging the Chairman of the Gas Committee, John Barber, with financial inaccuracies for political gain. Barber's responses to such allegations were terse and uncompromising.¹⁹⁷ When technical aspects of accounting were acknowledged by the Committee, they were quietly amended. When complaints about political implications were aired, Barber maintained variously that the Committee's figures were accurate, Committee members were satisfied with current arrangements or that competent practice had now been assured. Mellers had personal clashes with Barber during the course of a number of audits. In 1886 he hardly disguised his criticisms by focusing on a distinction between the approach of the current chairman and the shortcomings of the systems of departmental audit that were in place for those who might follow him. Barber had 'the knowledge, firmness and decision of character', but arrangements were required for a successor who 'might deal imprudently to attain a temporary meretricious fame'.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ AR/G, FC, 7 October 1889, 10 November 1890, 10 September 1894, 7 October 1895, 9 November 1896, 11 September 1899.

¹⁹² AR/G, FC, 17 November 1884, 7 December 1885, 4 October 1886, 4 September 1893.

¹⁹³ AR/G, FC, 4 June 1883, 2 July 1883.

¹⁹⁴ *NJ*, 3 July 1883.

¹⁹⁵ AR/G, FC, 3 October 1887.

¹⁹⁶ AR/G, FC, 4 September 1893, 10 September 1894.

¹⁹⁷ For example: *NDE*, 11 September 1894; FC, 7 September 1896.

¹⁹⁸ AR/G, FC, 4 October 1886.

Little was heard from the Conservative Party. The nearest to partisan activity came in 1883 in the debate on the Gas Accounts when the deliberations became 'a tug of war, when councillor met councillor in animated struggle'.¹⁹⁹ Despite the protestations, the report was received and adopted in the normal manner. In 1884 when the auditors raised their familiar complaint about the injudicious use of the capital and revenue accounts, just one Conservative, Brewster, was 'inclined to take the view of the auditors'.²⁰⁰

The Water Committee came under a similar attack to the Gas Committee. There was a palpable tension between Mellers and the Water Committee. He charged them with using capital and revenue accounts creatively to disguise unresolved revenue issues. Mellers claimed that the true level of indebtedness remained hidden from the ratepayers through the 1880s and 1890s. In addition, in 1885, he went so far as to report that,

the condition of the accounts seems scarcely consonant with the decision to declare a large amount of profit to the relief of the rates.²⁰¹

He noted that the rental of land at Trent Bridge was unjustifiably presented as profit after 1889 and that meter charges were inappropriately accounted for after 1893.²⁰² He also declared that insufficient funds were allocated for reserves and contingencies. Mellers argued that prior to 1896 the apparently higher profits helped the Liberals to relieve the rates unduly.²⁰³ However, in his reports between 1896 and 1900 he used the data to argue the opposite case. Too little of the water profits was at that stage being contributed to the Borough Fund to help control the rates, despite, for example, favourable results in 1899.²⁰⁴ He also complained of the high cost of 'unprofitable litigation and costly deputations', particularly following the Newark Enquiry and the negotiations for the Derwent Valley Scheme.²⁰⁵ The Liberals felt these judgements

¹⁹⁹ *NJ*, 3 July 1883.

²⁰⁰ *NDE*, 7 October 1884.

²⁰¹ Auditor's Report/ Water Committee (hereafter AR/W), FC, 7 December 1885.

²⁰² AR/W, FC, 2 September 1889, 9 November 1893.

²⁰³ For example: AR/W, FC, 7 December 1885, 6 December 1886.

²⁰⁴ For example: AR/W, FC, 9 November 1896, 5 December 1898.

²⁰⁵ AR/W, FC, 2 October 1899.

keenly as a partisan attack and they refuted the accusations robustly. Once more, Conservative voices were quiet.

Mellers' most vitriolic opinions were reserved for key Liberal decision-takers. For example, in 1889 he made a very pointed attack on Edward Gripper, Chairman of the Water Committee. Mellers claimed that Gripper's actions showed 'an apparent disrespect for his office' and 'unbecoming on the part of an Alderman who was never elected to the Council by the popular vote'.²⁰⁶ However, for the Gladstonian Liberals, Mellers' accusations that aspects of committee finances lacked the basis of 'sound finance' and were not business-like, were particularly irritating. The auditor reported in 1881 that the Water Accounts were 'inaccurate and misleading' and in 1897 Mellers referred to the 'supposed balance' in the Gas Accounts.²⁰⁷ He concluded that the Committee's withdrawal of £10,000 from the Gas Reserves in 1887 was an 'unsound policy'. He predicted that 'if this system is continued, the credit of the town will suffer and its power to borrow money will be seriously affected'.²⁰⁸ In October 1889 Mellers claimed that the auditors had revealed matters 'which some members would rather not have exposed'.²⁰⁹ Occasionally Mellers accused the ruling party of taking decisions for narrow political advantage. In October 1883, on the eve of the annual elections, he contended that the Liberals were keeping back his report until the electoral process was completed, despite him having produced the report in late March.²¹⁰ Even on an occasion such as this, the Conservatives did not take up a partisan position.

It was the Liberal Party's supporters in the local daily press that often took Mellers to task personally. Their editorials certainly came to the defence of the actions of the Liberal leaders, but they also attempted to reach out to broader civic considerations beyond the strictly partisan interest. For example, in 1880 the editor of the *Nottingham Journal* appealed for ratepayers to see through the Auditor's tactic of

²⁰⁶ AR/W, FC, 2 September 1889.

²⁰⁷ AR/W, FC, 11 July 1881; AR/G, FC, 13 September 1897.

²⁰⁸ AR/G, FC, 21 November 1887.

²⁰⁹ NDE, 24 October 1889.

²¹⁰ AR/W, FC, 1 October 1883.

'artfully treating the figures'.²¹¹ In 1894 the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express* advised the electorate to beware of Mellers' judgements.

We confess a suspicion of any statement of a controversial character that Mr Mark Mellers makes... What wonder that the public has grown suspicious and looks out for traps when Mr Mellers is most pleased with himself.²¹²

The substance of some aspects of Mellers' criticisms was not without foundation. Stripped of the political rhetoric in which his rebukes were clothed, the essence of his reports reflected some of the issues raised by the Report of the Joint Select Committee on Municipal Trading, published in 1903. Representatives of the Lords and Commons were concerned about the quality of municipal account keeping amongst municipal traders generally and recommended a higher and more uniform standard of accounting, with a uniform system of audit. The procedures adopted in Nottingham were probably more effective than in many boroughs, because the Borough Council met not only the statutory requirements for the Sinking Funds for its municipal utilities, but also made reasonable provision for the depreciation of plant. However, members of the Committee of Both Houses were keen that 'a continuous, vigilant and thoroughly efficient system of audit and inspection' should be established, on behalf of ratepayers, to expose publicly any suggestions of undue extravagance.²¹³ Nottingham experienced from 1877 a highly individual form of such a public airing of municipal expenditure.

Civic development, Westminster and Whitehall

Policy-making in Nottingham, as in other municipalities, involved important relationships with Parliament and central government departments. Negotiations in London were crucial to obtaining both essential powers and funds. The proposals for civic developments that emerged from the corporate efforts of both parties and their officials in Nottingham, required approval from the Houses of Parliament and/or Whitehall if they were to be implemented. The civic spirit evident in the

²¹¹ *NJ*, 1 November 1880.

²¹² *NDE*, 11 September 1894.

²¹³ HC (1903) VII, pp. v-viii.

Corporation's policy-making processes had to be transported into the negotiations with the state. Nottingham Corporation presented a consistently united front in London. The Council's negotiators were able to speak with one voice, to take a 'civic' approach. Their policy proposals had been based on a shared vision of Liberals, Conservatives and permanent officials. This sense of unity of purpose and commitment enhanced the Corporation's standing with central government.

In the period from 1870 to 1900 local-central relations operated essentially on a 'partnership' model.²¹⁴ In the absence of central strategic leadership for local government, municipal corporations decided on their own local priorities and applied, as appropriate, for financial loans to implement their policies. Considerable discretion was left to each borough to design and implement those policies, with the result that wide variations in services prevailed. Local bids to central government were ad hoc, pragmatic and negotiable.²¹⁵ The Local Government Board developed a mass of procedural checks for local activity, including inspectorates and audits, but their primary duty was to guarantee and arbitrate on private interests and individual rights, to protect ratepayers and the owners of real property. A system of 'local possessive pluralism' was the outcome.²¹⁶ However, as local authority action became more complex and more expensive, power was increasingly shared with central government.²¹⁷

Waller has argued that the outcome of these complicated and developing relationships, between the municipalities and Whitehall, had a dampening effect on enterprising authorities.²¹⁸ For Nottingham Corporation, this was not the outcome. It was persistently active in piloting municipal bills through Parliament and negotiating loans and permissive powers with Whitehall departments. It pressurised central

²¹⁴ Bellamy, *Administering*, pp. 1-5; R.A.W. Rhodes, *Control and Power in Central-Local Government Relations* (Gower, 1981), pp. 14-21; J. Anderson, 'The Relation of Central to Local Government', *Public Administration*, (1925), pp. 36-37; W. Hampton, *Local Government and Urban Politics* (Longman, 1987), pp. 164-171.

²¹⁵ Rhodes, *Control*, pp. 97-102.

²¹⁶ Bellamy, *Administering*, pp. 10-16.

²¹⁷ E.P. Hennock, 'Central-Local Government Relations in England: an Outline 1800-1950', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1982), pp. 38, 40-44, 47-48.

²¹⁸ Waller, *Town*, pp. 278-280.

government with the knowledge at its disposal.²¹⁹ Activity was particularly intense between 1877 and 1884 and from 1894 to 1900. Corporation Bills for some twelve improvement schemes were enacted between 1864 and 1900, including the creation of four municipal utilities.²²⁰ Legislation was successfully promoted to extend the Borough's boundaries and acquire new financial powers, and five Local Government Board Orders were adopted to enable new municipal trading rights to be undertaken. Each action contributed to the range of responsibilities that Nottingham Borough Council chose to take on, each impacted directly on the Council's efforts to modernize the town and indirectly on perceptions of Nottingham's civic identity.

Prior to the establishment of the municipal gas and water concerns, the Borough Council had been involved in strenuous opposition to private legislation proposed by the local utility companies that they judged not to be in the interests of 'the consumers and the public'.²²¹ Political and legal opposition was often expensive, as in 1863-1864, 1868, 1871 and 1873-74. In 1868, for example, the Corporation met costs of £1,600 when it challenged a Waterworks Bill, which it saw as a 'public burden'.²²² In 1873 and 1874, £1,047 of ratepayers' money was spent challenging both Gas and Water Bills.²²³ Although the need to oppose private company legislation declined as the Council extended its own responsibilities, it remained willing to meet expensive legal costs if required. In 1898 Nottingham Corporation was at the forefront of a number of local authorities fighting the General Power Distribution Company's Bill.²²⁴

Whilst the Borough Council was willing to take the initiative when permissive powers were offered, it was reticent to accept what it regarded as interference by central government. Between 1835 and 1877 especially, Nottingham Corporation valued its right and ability to take an independent stance from central government. Members were wary of any attempts at central intervention in municipal government. For

²¹⁹ J. Davis, 'Central Government and the Towns', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 264-268; Hennock, 'Central-Local', pp. 42-43.

²²⁰ NAO CA.A1/2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 13, 32, 33, 44, 50, 51, 59.

²²¹ For example: FC, 28 January 1873, 3 August 1874, 21 January 1878.

²²² NAO CA.CM.MISC/3, Waterworks Bill Committee, 26 April 1869, 20 October 1869.

²²³ NAO CA.CM.MISC/4, Gas and Water Committee, 31 July 1874.

²²⁴ NAO CA.A1.1898/42-47,51-53,58.

example, the Council did not take up the powers that were offered by the Public Health Act 1858.²²⁵ A Special Committee recommended that a post of Medical Officer of Health for Nottingham be created, but the Full Council decided not to proceed. When obliged by statute in 1872 to appoint a Medical Officer of Health and an Inspector of Nuisances, the Council had to comply.²²⁶ But, in 1875, it asserted its independence once more by refusing a central grant towards the salaries of the two officers.²²⁷ The Council preferred to forgo the financial help, even in such an economy-minded authority, rather than lose its autonomy, given the conditions that accompanied the grant. Like most members of the Council, Samuel Johnson was by instinct and conviction anti-centralist. He brought with him to the post of Town Clerk a predisposition to resist the increasing centralisation of power. But he and the municipal politicians had to adjust their stance to take account of the changing financial relationship with central government that accompanied the Council's decisions to significantly expand its municipal responsibilities. They maintained their corporate view that it should be for each authority to determine what level of service was appropriate to be provided for their own community but, by the 1890s, they had to acknowledge that the Local Government Board had a proper role to play in setting minimum standards for all councils.²²⁸

The departments in Whitehall generally perceived Nottingham Borough Council to be a municipal authority that handled its affairs with competence and on a sound financial basis. The Corporation established a favourable track record as the result of its financial performance, government inspections and submissions of data. Whitehall's overview was based on many effective transactions between the Corporation and civil servants at the Treasury, the Local Government Board and the Board of Trade.²²⁹ Municipal government in Nottingham was regarded as being essentially in safe and reliable hands. Whitehall had observed with satisfaction the manner in which the extension of the town's boundaries and the consequent restructuring of the Council had been achieved in 1877. A large and complex process

²²⁵ FC, 15 August 1859; Wilson, L.F., 'Housing', p. 126.

²²⁶ FC, 29 August 1872; Wilson, L.F., 'Housing', p. 149.

²²⁷ Church, *Midland Town*, pp. 367-368.

²²⁸ RC (1894), p. 342.

²²⁹ PRO HLG 2/48-52 (Treasury Papers); HLG 1/601/9825 (Local Government Board Papers). The routine correspondence of the Local Government Board, relating to Nottingham's Abstracts of Accounts, was destroyed for the period before 1894. See C. Bellamy, *Administering*, p. 276.

had been managed almost without contest.²³⁰ Civil servants developed the view that Nottingham was not in need of particularly close scrutiny from Whitehall. Its perception as a 'civic' authority was recognised with the granting of city status without application in 1897, as part of the celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.²³¹

The Treasury approved almost all of Nottingham Corporation's submissions for permission to proceed with a variety of matters relating to the Borough's estates, sanctions for leases, the sale of land to help with civic developments and investments. Any delays were normally the result of merely routine checks being completed in Whitehall. A civil servant's comment in 1873 that 'the Corporation of Nottingham is financially in a very flourishing condition' and that he was 'fully satisfied with the information supplied' was reasonably typical of Whitehall's response to Nottingham's enquiries.²³² A similar confirmation of the Council's positive reputation in Whitehall came from a Local Government Board inspector, who reported in 1888 that 'nothing will be wanting', in the Corporation's handling of its submission.²³³ On the rare occasions when the Treasury felt initially that data or plans were insufficient, the Corporation was nevertheless able to resolve its case successfully.²³⁴ Throughout the period from 1870 to 1900, the Lords Commissioners at Her Majesty's Treasury in Whitehall handled Nottingham's applications with thoroughness, care and courtesy. The treatment contrasted sharply with the approach taken to the Corporation's finances by the Borough Auditor, Mark Mellers. When the Treasury required checks by the Local Government Board or the Charity Commissioners, the applications were supported by the relevant departments. The Corporation's financial arrangements with central government were judged to be well-administered. Indeed, in the period between 1904 and 1910, the Local Government Board noted each year that Nottingham was 'in excess' with its annual payments.²³⁵ Nottingham's submissions to Whitehall were felt to be appropriately detailed, thorough and suitably presented to meet the demands of central government scrutiny.

²³⁰ Oldfield, 'Boundary Extension', pp. 85-90.

²³¹ *NDG*, 22 June 1897. The editor perceived that the new status brought with it an opportunity for equality with the other large Midland and Northern municipalities.

²³² *PRO HLG* 2/48, 28 August 1873.

²³³ *PRO HLG* 2/52, 5 March 1888.

²³⁴ For example: *PRO HLG* 2/51, 10 March 1885.

²³⁵ *PRO HLG* 1/601/9825.

Board of Trade inspectors visited Nottingham to examine a number of civic proposals, mainly electricity supply and tramways matters.²³⁶ In almost all cases the Borough Council was successful in its applications. However, in 1896 the authority was unsuccessful at a Local Government Board enquiry.²³⁷ The Council wanted permission to extend its supply of water to meet requests for services from a number of villages around the town, but the Board upheld the appeal of Newark Council. Negotiations with civil servants at both the Local Government Board and the Board of Trade were generally constructive, supportive and fruitful. Rhodes has argued that local authorities had no single pattern of relationships with central government because the central departments differed in their style.²³⁸ Nottingham Corporation had the ability to adapt to the particular demands of the departments in the pursuit of its civic projects. It had professional officials who were confident in handling the specific linkages that were required with the technical specialists in Whitehall.²³⁹ On occasion, the atmosphere between the Council and the Board was more contentious, such as the application for a Provisional Order for an electric lighting scheme in 1882.²⁴⁰ Between 1873 and 1900 the Borough Council was in discussion with the Local Government Board very regularly about such matters as loans, repayments, bye-laws, improvement measures and the public utilities. The pace of those negotiations quickened from the mid-1880s with the scale and range of the Council's civic projects. One matter of structural significance to local governance in Nottingham became the subject of prolonged conflict. During 1893 and 1894 the possibility of the Nottingham and Basford Poor Law Unions being unified to create one union co-terminus with the boundaries of the Borough Council was high on the Corporation's agenda.²⁴¹ Opposition to the Corporation's proposals by the Basford Union delayed a successful outcome until 1899.²⁴²

²³⁶ For example: NAO CA.TC.10/86/12; FC, 13 November 1882, 22 December 1900.

²³⁷ NDG, 4 April 1896; NDE, 10 and 11 June 1896; FC, 1 February 1897, 13 September 1897.

²³⁸ Rhodes, *Control*, pp. 30-31, 33, 100-102.

²³⁹ C. Martlew, 'The State and Local Government Finance', *Public Administration*, 61 (1963), pp. 129, 131.

²⁴⁰ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 28 September 1882, 4 December 1882; NMCDE, 3 October 1882.

²⁴¹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/7, 11 July 1893-1 August 1894.

²⁴² FC, 10 April 1899.

Nottingham Corporation's general experience in Whitehall did not conform to Waller's view that enterprising authorities were suffocated by red tape.²⁴³ As an authority recognised by central government departments to be competent and efficient, Nottingham's relationships with Whitehall were, for the most part, professional and productive. The civic ethos and shared vision that enabled the Council's policy proposals to be formulated with the agreement of both parties and their municipal officials, gave strength to the Corporation's negotiators and signalled to central government that the policies would hold once implemented. Rhodes has argued that local-central relations were subject to the 'mutual power dependency' of the various tiers of government.²⁴⁴ One crucial aspect of the power available to Nottingham Borough Council was its civic spirit.

Civicness in Nottingham

The 'civicness' of policy-making in Nottingham was idiosyncratic during the last three decades of the century. It was distinctive, in part, because the structure of the municipal system in which debate was conducted was exclusive and partisan, and yet the processes of policy-making were felt to be sufficiently inclusive and non-partisan. The leadership of policy formation and decision-taking was monopolised by the Liberal elite and partisan elections were never more than a few months away. Members entered the Council by means of the two party organisations and they achieved higher office by courtesy of the Liberal ruling elite. In permanent opposition and excluded from key posts, the Conservatives faced the political realities of the Chamber with pragmatism. The Tories found that working by consensus in the policy-making processes, both in committee and the Full Council, offered them, as a party, an expedient way forward. At a purely organisational level, this approach provided a political device for maintaining a meaningful presence in crucial deliberations.

But, more significantly, Liberals and Conservatives shared some common values and understandings. Unusually, the small and medium-sized business leaders, together with the professionals, tradesmen and retailers, in both parties acquired their social

²⁴³ Waller, *Town*, pp. 278, 280.

²⁴⁴ Rhodes, *Control*, pp. 98-99.

status in the town by means of membership of the Corporation. The politicians perceived their social standing to be enhanced by taking a pragmatic, less-ideological approach, with a statesmanlike attitude and a preparedness to put civic need before party. Committees had both long-serving chairmen and core membership, who formed trusting relationships. The acceptance of the principles of municipal capitalism by Liberal and Conservative politicians allowed them to pursue shared strategic objectives. Members of both parties, all occupational groups and those of different status levels in the Chamber, helped to create a civic ethos in which to decide policy. Their understanding of the priority needs of civic development was shared with the permanent officials who provided the knowledge base for those decisions. The trust placed in the officers and their judgements, by Liberals and Conservatives alike, was fundamental to the operation of the policy-making processes. It provided a further strengthening of the consensus. Indeed, civicness in Nottingham was characterised by a shared vision of members and their paid officials.

Chapter 4

Unity, professionalism and rational knowledge: municipal officers and civic development

The unity of administration

The municipal officers in Nottingham had, in the period between 1870 and 1890, a shared understanding with senior political figures of both parties about the priorities for the modernization in the town. Samuel Johnson led the administration of the Corporation throughout the whole period, with a conviction that a more unified officer group offered the best way forward for the achievement of the most effective outcomes to policy initiatives. Johnson was concerned both to provide greater coherence in the infrastructure of the Corporation and to strengthen the integration of the various districts of the town after the Borough's enlargement in 1877. His aspirations were bolstered by the presence of a political consensus amongst members and their willingness to pursue commonly accepted policies. It was in the context of this politico-administrative environment that Johnson took opportunities to develop aspects of the role of town clerk. The range and calibre of the officials who were appointed to the Corporation's key posts enabled him to operate with confidence more coherent approaches to municipal management. The professionalism of the senior officers and the quality of their specialist technical knowledge furnished the politicians with secure foundations for their policy decisions. The competence and commitment of the staff and their mastery of complex matters were fundamental to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Council's policy-making.

The calibre of the Town Clerk and the senior professional officers in Nottingham was, overall, rather higher than in municipal corporations generally. Official sources, in the late Victorian period, tend to eulogise the performance of those officers by focusing on their strengths and successes. The local political press also often dwelt on civic achievements rather than disappointments. Doubtless, Nottingham's officials were as prone to miscalculations, mistakes and misjudgement as municipal professionals have been in any period. Insufficient reliable data, unpredictable external pressures and political whim, in addition to any personal shortcomings, were

just some of the factors that made for imperfect advice and management. Yet, on balance, members of Nottingham Borough Council were served by some particularly able and skilful professionals between 1870 and 1900.

Samuel Johnson was the Town Clerk of Nottingham Corporation for thirty-eight years. After his death on 11 December 1909, the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express* crafted a eulogy that included the following words.

It is given to few by their own merits to enhance the dignity of the office they hold. Mr Chamberlain made the Colonial Office one of the most important posts in the Cabinet; Mr Lloyd-George did the same with the Board of Trade; Sir Samuel Johnson made the Town Clerkship from being a mere formal position a reality in our civic life.¹

These were very grand comparisons for the local press to make with celebrated national figures, as was the suggestion that Johnson transformed his office from legal servant to a force to be reckoned with in Council business. This accolade was written as a tribute rather than a more balanced evaluation of Johnson's contribution to town clerkship, but its recognition of his innovation was appropriate. Many municipal officials gave long, faithful and even distinguished service to their councils and Johnson was no exception. But, in addition to the commitment and professionalism he gave to the post, he brought a methodology to his role that anticipated a style of leadership more in keeping with the inter-war period than the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

Relatively little systematic analysis has been undertaken of the role of town clerks in the late Victorian period. Whilst Johnson was Town Clerk of Nottingham, Josef Redlich produced his analysis of municipal government, stressing both the importance of a town clerk's comprehensive knowledge and his role as a 'conduit pipe', in evaluating the scale of his influence on his council.² Headrick has argued that it was the strength of the personality of the postholder that really determined the standing

¹ *NDE*, 13 December 1909.

² J. Redlich and F.W. Hirst, *Local Government in England, Vol. 1* (Macmillan, 1903), p. 341.

and influence of a town clerk in this period.³ Maver for Glasgow and Garrard for Bolton, Rochdale and Salford, have both underlined the importance of the individual assets that different town clerks brought to their task.⁴ Generally, it has been claimed that almost all town clerks continued to pursue their role as lone individuals rather than as heads of bureaucracies. Most kept their heads down and undertook the duties that were expected of them, without making waves.⁵ Overall, it has been contended that expert knowledge, personality, the use of professional networks and the strength of a town's party politics could all have contributed in differing proportions to the amount of authority that the town clerk wielded.

Most historians agree that very few town clerks created innovative styles of operation. Only four appear to be representative of this approach. They were Joseph Heron in Manchester, Harcourt Clare in Liverpool, James Marwick in Glasgow and Samuel Johnson in Nottingham.⁶ The first three worked in some of the largest corporations in the country. Johnson joined Nottingham Corporation when the Borough had the thirteenth largest provincial population.⁷ It was respectively the sixth, seventh and ninth largest municipality in the censuses that followed.⁸ Heron's work was mainly undertaken in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, before Johnson's appointment, but Marwick and Clare were contemporaries of the Nottingham Town Clerk.

Johnson, like Heron in Manchester, brought a breadth of local government experience to the post in Nottingham when he was appointed as the Corporation's first full-time

³ T.E. Headrick, *The Town Clerk in English Local Government* (George Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 23.

⁴ I. Maver, 'The Role and Influence of Glasgow's Municipal Managers, 1890s-1930s', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 72; I. Maver, 'Glasgow's Civic Government', in F.W. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), pp. 462-465; I.E. Sweeney, 'The Municipal Administration of Glasgow, 1833-1912: Public Service and Scottish Civic Identity', (University of Strathclyde, Ph D thesis, 1990), pp. 526-529; J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1830-1880* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983), pp. 75-76; J. Garrard, 'Bureaucrats Rather Than Bureaucracies: the Power of Municipal Professionals, 1835-1914', *Occasional Paper in Politics and Contemporary History*, 33 (1992), pp. 8-11, 13, 22-26.

⁵ P.J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991), p. 285.

⁶ Redlich, *Local Government*, pp. 339-340; Headrick, *Town Clerk*, pp. 22-24; Waller, *Town*, pp. 282-283, 285; Sweeney, 'Municipal Administration', pp. 526-529; Maver, 'Civic Government', pp. 462-463; Maver, 'Role', p. 72.

⁷ *Census Report, 1871* (Vol. IV, pp. 40-45).

⁸ *Census Reports, 1881* (Vol. I, pp. xiii-xvi), *1891* (Vol. I, pp. vi-vii), *1901* (Digest, pp. 28-62).

Town Clerk on 25 July 1870.⁹ Unusually, he had valuable experience as a politician, as well as a solicitor and administrator, all gained in Faversham, Kent. He had been mayor in 1859 and again in 1861, an alderman from 1862, Town Clerk two years later and Clerk of the Peace in 1866.¹⁰ Nottingham Borough Council secured his services for a salary of £1,000 for his initial duties, a high income by national standards and a mark of the Corporation's determination to appoint a candidate of outstanding ability. By 1884 Johnson's salary had reached £1,800, a figure more typical of the 1890s in the larger boroughs.¹¹ Indeed, one indicator of Johnson's individual stature, and the politicians' desire to employ a high-calibre Town Clerk in this period, was the fact that his next but one successor was paid a salary of just £1,250 in 1912.¹²

Johnson's predecessors as Town Clerk, Henry and William Enfield, had been part-time officials who focused their energies almost entirely on the strictly legal advisory aspects of the post.¹³ A number of Nottingham's other municipal officers were also part-time, allowing them to pursue private practice. The size of the administrative establishment was relatively small, reflecting the limited range of responsibilities undertaken by the Corporation. Between 1835 and 1870 the Enfields, father and son, supervised the passage of some seven pieces of local legislation and arranged some eleven bids to central government for loan sanctions that totalled £120,000.¹⁴ During the following thirty years, the scale of municipal responsibility had grown to such an extent that Johnson piloted through Parliament almost twice as many items of legislation as the Enfields and submitted more than eight times as many financial bids to Whitehall departments, worth over £1.5 million.¹⁵ Johnson's work rate was well-known. 'He was a glutton for work and never spared himself or his staff.'¹⁶

⁹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/3, 21 June 1870-9 January 1871 (Committee on the Duties and Salaries of the Town Clerk and Clerk to the Local Board); FC, 25 July 1870.

¹⁰ J. Potter Briscoe and W.T. Pike, *Contemporary Biographies: Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire at the Opening of the Twentieth Century* (W.T. Pike, Brighton, 1901), p. 139; R. Mellors, *Men of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire* (J. and H. Bell, Nottingham, 1924), pp. 258-260.

¹¹ Redlich, *Local Government*, p. 347; WCR, FC, 2 February 1880.

¹² NAO CA.CM.MISC/9, 15 February 1912 (Office of Town Clerk Special Committee).

¹³ FC, 17 October 1870; Mellors, *Men*, pp. 306-307; R.A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900* (Frank Cass, 1966), p. 267.

¹⁴ NAO CA.TR.20/1/1 (Treasury: Sanctions for Loans), 8 December 1860-30 December 1869; (Municipal Legislation) 1836, 1839, 1845, 1848, 1850, 1862, 1867.

¹⁵ NAO CA.TR.20/1/1 (Treasury: Sanctions for Loans), 28 November 1870-19 July 1900.

¹⁶ *NJ*, 18 April 1929.

Samuel Johnson's predisposition was to resist the increasing centralisation of power in the Local Government Board and encourage the Corporation to pursue vigorously its ambitions for civic development. For him the balance of duties of locality and centre was clear.

I am not a great advocate of the Local Government Board. I am afraid I have rather written against it; but I think the Local Government Board can do excellent work; it can do excellent work by compelling a minimum, allowing us to do what we like as a maximum...do what we think for the good of our own community ourselves.¹⁷

Within a context of jealously-guarded, expanding municipal powers, Johnson operated in what was perceived to be a non-partisan way, making himself accessible to all politicians. He claimed to ally himself 'with no party whatever'.¹⁸ His apparent neutrality was underlined by his holding staunch Anglican beliefs in a Liberal-dominated Corporation.¹⁹ Members of both the Liberal and Conservative parties were trusting and supportive of him. Their respect for him was strengthened during his early years in post. Members were impressed by his skilful and successful handling of the municipalization of the local gas company in 1874 and the extension of the Borough's boundaries in 1877. Whilst Johnson prided himself on being 'civil to everybody', he valued his right to be heard by members in the Full Council on any issue of importance. In personal style he was modest, tactful and courteous. Though reserved by nature, he was forceful when the need arose. Unlike almost all other town clerks, Johnson was prepared to intervene in debates of the Full Council, albeit perhaps only once a year. 'If I find someone grievously misleading the Council, it is my duty not to let the Council come to a conclusion on a false statement of facts.'²⁰

Indeed, Wilson has argued, in his analysis of housing policy, that Johnson's 'influence on the Council was so great that his judgement was rarely ignored'.²¹ Only

¹⁷ HC (1894) XVII *Royal Commission to Consider the Amalgamation of the City and County of London* (hereafter *RC* (1894)), p. 342.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹⁹ Mellors, *Men*, p. 262; *NDE*, 13 December 1909.

²⁰ *RC* (1894), p.357.

²¹ L.F. Wilson, 'The State and the Housing of the English Working Class, with Special Reference to Nottingham, 1815-1914' (University of California, Berkley, Ph D thesis, 1970), p. 156.

Heron in Manchester was known to intervene personally in debates in a similar manner.²² Both Heron and Marwick in Glasgow, though having great personal presence, relied more for their influence on the party political views that they shared with their ruling parties.²³ Each was a visible administrative leader, but Johnson operated with the greatest independence from partisan politics.

Johnson brought to town clerkship in Nottingham a more strategic view of policy formation and implementation. He chose to give priority in his workload to the major projects of Council policy development and his regional and national networks of contacts with other town clerks. His beliefs and instincts fitted comfortably with both the Gladstonian Liberal values of the dominant party and the business-like, economic approach of the Conservatives. Johnson was concerned to support the more general ambitions of the Council to create a suitable environment for economic success in the Borough.

It is the duty of the Corporation to see that the prosperity of the Town is secured by lessening as far as possible the expenses by which manufacturers and trades can be carried on in this town.²⁴

His view was that the Corporation he served had 'always been a corporation of enterprise and have taken a leading part in municipal work'.²⁵

To enable the ever-increasing workload of the administration to be carried out effectively, Johnson developed significantly his role as 'head of the staff of officials'.²⁶ He reorganised the administrative structures and developed new strategies to manage his key staff. As in all municipal corporations, Nottingham's Town Clerk was at the centre of the flow of paper to and from the Council and its committees, and the correspondence in and out of the town hall. That role gave every postholder a position of power and potential influence. Samuel Johnson chose to develop his position as 'chief of staff'. This approach was in evidence from soon

²² Headrick, *Town Clerk*, pp. 110-111; Waller, *Town*, pp. 282-283.

²³ Maver, 'Role', p. 72; Waller, *Town*, p. 285.

²⁴ NAO CA.A1/74, Draft of Johnson's statement to Parliament, 1898.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *RC* (1894), p. 347.

after his appointment, but it was introduced gradually. By the 1880s the arrangements were fully operational. He sought not only to provide personal leadership to the administration, but to bring greater coordination to policy development. Johnson modestly described his role in directing staff on the basis of committee decisions as being ‘merely the conduit pipe through which they go’.²⁷ He chose the same simile as Redlich. In reality, he led a developing bureaucracy that was more effectively coordinated, more corporate and more systematic in administrative processes than most other late Victorian local authorities. He helped to develop arrangements for the conduct of policy planning, decision-taking and implementation that anticipated aspects of the approaches used by the more generalist chief executives appointed to many large authorities from the 1920s. Garrard has argued that town clerkship between 1870 and 1900 remained essentially a very personal administration.²⁸ Leaders were bureaucrats rather than heads of bureaucracies. Johnson ventured beyond the personal, even if he did not create the kind of complex bureaucracy that emerged at least a generation later.

Johnson initially restructured the Town Clerk’s Office in 1871, soon after his arrival.²⁹ He subsequently undertook further reorganisations to help meet the growing administrative demands of the Corporation’s vastly increased responsibilities. By 1894 he was supported by three other professional lawyers, his Deputy and two assistant solicitors. Johnson’s very long period in office enabled him to maintain a sense of continuity, consistency and tradition in the Borough’s processes where that was advantageous, but also to introduce changes in methodology within the respected system. It was he who formally called meetings of the Full Council and the committees, set agendas, framed resolutions, wrote minutes and, critically, supervised the implementation of the Council’s decisions. Johnson and his legal team attended the meetings of all the committees, each having responsibility for various departments. Johnson personally influenced the strategic work of all the senior professional staff employed by the Council and their departments. ‘Every major

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

²⁸ Garrard, ‘Bureaucrats’, p. 27.

²⁹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/3, 9 January 1871.

direction comes through me.' He noted that, 'the Engineer and the Medical Officer of Health come to consult with me'.³⁰

Johnson encouraged heads of department to discuss with him key issues on their respective committee agendas. Senior officers should,

go through the business of any importance with him first of all, so that he should be prepared to advise the committee of the questions that might arise; but matters of routine should not come before me.³¹

Waller has claimed that excessive departmentalism, and its associated waste of resources, was commonplace in municipal government in this period.³² Like other large authorities, Nottingham Corporation was not exempt from these criticisms. The four utility committees in particular had devolved powers that required them to operate as separate boards of directors. But, the worst excesses of the departmental system were offset, to some extent at least, by Johnson's determination to manage his officials closely and bring a sense of unity to administration in the Borough.

The nature of his supervision and influence was exemplified in his relationship with the Borough Engineer, the technical expert at the heart of all the civic improvements and utility projects. He 'comes to me in all cases of difficulty and confers with me'. Until the committee's decisions 'are reduced to a form of a minute, and is sent to him as a minute, he has no authority to act. He gets authority from me'. The Engineer attended meetings of the relevant committee and those Full Council meetings that had 'interesting items and heard what the politicians' views were'.³³ Otherwise, he depended on his Town Clerk for instructions. Within the general remit established for him by Johnson, the Borough Engineer was then expected to manage his surveyors of estates, buildings and roads in the implementation of the details of the committee's policy.

³⁰ *RC* (1894), p. 357.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Waller, *Town*, p. 286.

³³ *RC* (1894), p. 347.

The Town Clerk claimed that there was no political interference after a committee had resolved a course of action. 'We do not allow Chairmen of Committees to give orders. We do not admit that he has any authority outside the committee room.'³⁴ This personal view overstated his role in the practical relationships of officers and chairmen. The key politicians were eager to be involved in the day to day development of policy. Officers met the chairmen regularly, both socially and professionally. Outside the Chamber they met as equals in the social context of the town. Professionally, both had personal enthusiasms for policies that they wished to pursue. Informal contacts between meetings were an important part of the consideration of possible ways forward, paving the way for more formal policy development.

A slightly different set of arrangements was operative for the Medical Officer of Health, but they were no less firmly managed by Johnson. He was 'a corporate officer with certain statutory powers'. He attended every meeting of his committee, but normally attended only one Full Council meeting each year to ask for a grant or comment on special work that was being undertaken. In the case of the Borough Treasurer, Johnson had fewer direct links. Fellowes survived from the Enfield era as a part-time appointment because the Council 'have not liked to replace the old firm'. Members of his family practice continued in office throughout the period from 1835 to 1900. When the post next came up for renewal, Johnson was anxious to appoint 'an officer of our own', who would be required to work within the prevailing corporate system to which other senior officers had to conform.³⁵

Johnson's determination to bring greater coherence to the Borough's administration necessarily included an influential role for the Town Clerk in the appointment and dismissal of senior staff. He was consulted by the relevant committee when a vacancy became available. Generally, the members took his advice. The same was true of requests for salary increases. 'If I were to give an expression of opinion against a man's rise in salary, I do not think he would have much hope of getting it.'³⁶ In practice heads of department often consulted him even about the dismissal of 'an

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

inferior clerk'. After all, he was the chief legal officer of the authority as well as the head of staff.

By the time of his retirement on the grounds of ill-health in 1908, aged seventy-seven, Johnson had helped to establish and develop a politico-administrative environment in which officers and members worked closely in tandem within the Corporation.³⁷ Policy decisions were, in the final analysis, matters of political choice. But respected officials played a crucial role in providing members with an understanding of the implications of alternative courses of action, both technically and financially. To that end the appointments Johnson recommended to the politicians were crucial. He looked for proven relevant experience, sufficient expertise and standing within their chosen specialist profession, the necessary skills of 'communicative rationality' and the capacity to win the trust of members.³⁸ In almost all cases the key officials were of high calibre and proved themselves to be effective advisors and managers of civic projects.

Johnson also needed to be respected as the head of staff by such appointees, for his personal contribution to municipal policy. This was largely the case. Indeed, Samuel Johnson had the advantage of national standing, as well as local recognition and professional acceptance of his municipal work. He was, for example, the editor of the standard work on municipal law from 1875.³⁹ Johnson chaired the prestigious Law Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations, advised the Government on the preparation of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1882, appeared before the Royal Commission on the City and County of London in 1894 and subsequently became a Commissioner of the new London County Council.⁴⁰ He was well-known and well-respected as a distinguished lawyer amongst the national fraternity of town clerks. His credibility as Town Clerk enhanced his standing with the Liberal leadership of the Council, including the influential chairmen of the major committees. Generally,

³⁷ *NDE*, 13 December 1909.

³⁸ R.J. Morris, 'Governance: Two Centuries of Urban Growth', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 7. For example: FC, 2 July 1883 (Lewis Wright), 8 January 1894 (Donald Gaskin).

³⁹ Samuel Johnson (ed.), *Arnold's Law Relating to Municipal Corporations in England and Wales* (Shaw and Sons, London, Second and Third Editions). Johnson was the Joint Editor of the Fourth Edition with W.W. Mackenzie.

⁴⁰ *NDE*, 13 December 1909.

members and officers were committed to a shared understanding of the civic policies that were required.

Johnson brought to his post high intellectual ability, legal astuteness, political awareness, a strategic vision of civic development and a clear personal perception of the nature and importance of local self-government. The legal skills that he deployed in his town clerkship would have been expected of any leading administrator of a large provincial authority. However, the range of his contacts and networks helped to provide policy-makers in Nottingham with an unusually well-informed knowledge base. Rational planning was made more effective by the quality of the professional expertise and data available. To that extent Johnson brought a smoothness of operation and a crispness of process that won the respect of fellow town clerks and civil servants in Whitehall. He was recognised nationally for his services to local self-government with a knighthood in 1893, and locally with the freedom of the City of Nottingham in the year of his retirement.⁴¹ His reputation was such that a TUC spokesman called him 'the doyen of the Town Clerks of England', when the unions gathered for their annual conference in the city in 1908.⁴²

Although Johnson undertook many of his duties in a manner not dissimilar to the town clerks of other major corporations, he also created a method of working in Nottingham that was innovative. Most other town clerks of his generation were content to 'occupy themselves with routine work and refrain from active generalship'.⁴³ Very few took on an overall supervisory role. Clare did in Liverpool, but he delegated most of his legal work to his Deputy Town Clerk, so that he could focus on advice to and the overall supervision of his senior officials. Johnson, on the other hand, attempted to combine the roles of legal advisor and head of staff. It was not only a matter of personality, his character and his personal professional conviction that allowed him to operate in the manner he chose. Unlike Marwick and Heron, his management style was made possible by the general consensus in policy-making amongst the senior figures of both the Liberal and Conservative parties. Given that few professional staff were involved in the upper reaches of policy formation in

⁴¹ *NDG*, 13 December 1909; *NDE*, 13 December 1909.

⁴² TUC Souvenir pamphlet, 1908.

⁴³ Waller, *Town*, p. 285.

Nottingham, Johnson's arrangements still retained the feel of an essentially personalised approach. However, the civic processes in the Borough were more coherent and systematic than in most other corporations. Johnson's methodology was much closer to that of the head of a bureaucracy, a relationship unusual in most large authorities before the inter-war period. Johnson offered more than the usual lone leadership that typified late Victorian administration.

The professionalism of the senior officers

Senior officers were appointed to advise the Corporation on specialist matters and to supervise the implementation of Council policy. As the responsibilities of municipal corporations grew significantly during the last three decades of the century, the roles undertaken by those officials changed considerably. They became municipal managers with larger teams of staff, bigger budgets and more technologically complex duties.⁴⁴ Senior officers were fundamental to the negotiations that were required with central government to gain additional permissive powers and the loans that made civic development possible. They masterminded the effective preparation and delivery of large projects integral to the modernization of municipal provision.⁴⁵ Ultimately, capital projects were adopted on the advice of the key officers. In Nottingham, the heads of department created and maintained the municipal utilities, at the heart of the Borough's policy-making.

Many of the engineers and technical managers, who took on these greater responsibilities in Nottingham, were themselves influential in the processes by which their skill areas became professionalized. They were the local representatives of national professions.⁴⁶ From the 1860s the professional institutes helped to give greater identity and legitimacy to the specialist claims of various branches of engineering and to determine the standards that could be expected of their membership.⁴⁷ The institutes sought to formalise training, systematize specialist

⁴⁴ Maver, 'Role', pp. 69, 72-73.

⁴⁵ Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', p. 15; Morris, 'Governance', p. 9.

⁴⁶ E.P. Hennock, 'Central-Local Government Relations in England: an Outline 1800-1950', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1982), p. 43.

⁴⁷ M. Laffin and K. Young, *Professionalism in Local Government* (Longman, 1990), pp. 13-15; T.R. Gourvash, 'The Rise of the Professions', in T.R. Gourvash and A. O'Day (eds.), *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900* (Macmillan, 1990), pp. 24, 30-31; B.M. Doyle, 'The Changing Functions of Urban

knowledge and control entry to their organisations.⁴⁸ Slowly those assurances of professional competence and commitment to public service enabled appointments and promotions to be more securely negotiated. Highly qualified and experienced professionals were in great demand to lead the many municipal projects that were planned in authorities across the country. Nottingham's politicians looked to their applicants' standing within their professional bodies as one measure of their capability. Indeed, some of Nottingham's officers provided leadership to the institutes and helped to develop networks of professional staff. Their contributions encouraged the development of communities of interests across local authorities, supported by the dissemination of research knowledge.⁴⁹ They helped to prevent authorities such as Nottingham from taking decisions on outmoded assumptions and data. Policy-makers depended heavily on the steady flow of policy intelligence to alert them to new developments.⁵⁰ Nottingham Corporation's acknowledged leadership in municipal trading rested on the appointment of appropriate officers and their retention in the face of promotional opportunities in other municipalities.

Nottingham Borough Council was distinctive during the period from 1870 to 1900 in having high-calibre officials in all the key posts to help ensure that major projects were managed efficiently and effectively. The size of the workforce grew steadily after 1870, with full-time appointments becoming the norm. That sustained growth in staff was reflected in the planning for the new Council offices in 1882.⁵¹ By that date the Public Offices Committee was planning to build more coordinated accommodation for the departments of the Town Clerk, Surveyor, Accountant, Health, Rents and Rates, Gas, Water, Lighting, Police Courts and Police Establishment. In 1888 the six most costly departments, in terms of salaries and wages, were those of the Town Clerk, Borough Engineer, Health, Accountant, Water

Government: Councillors, Officials and Pressure Groups', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), p. 296.

⁴⁸ J. Garrard and V. Parrott, 'Craft, Professional and Middle-Class Identity: Solicitors and Gas Engineers c. 1850-1914', in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle-Class?* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1998), pp. 148-162.

⁴⁹ G. Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1976), pp. 113-114; Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 18-19; Waller, *Town*, p. 288.

⁵⁰ K.G. Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy* (Macmillan, 1979), p. 5.

⁵¹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/5, 22 February 1881; NAO CA.CM.MISC/6, 2 February and 13 June 1882.

and Gas.⁵² By 1903 the four municipal utilities employed the largest elements of the City's workforce.⁵³ At that stage, the Water Department had 34 professional and clerical staff and 173 other workers, the Gas Department 83 and 1,018 such employees, the Electricity Department 17 and 56 and the Tramways Department 4 and 290. Clerical staff accounted for most of the white collar jobs. The number of senior professional staff remained small and influential.

The heads of department generally had good, relevant experience in other authorities and were well qualified. The Corporation's advertisements attracted large fields of applicants. The Council researched their experience and suitability thoroughly and included in their assessments, on occasion, visits to the applicant's current place of employment. Almost all officers proved their competence and technical expertise and a number were promoted to more senior posts in larger authorities. Nottingham Corporation played a significant part in the development of an unofficial national promotional network of senior officers, both in terms of its appointments and in the promotion to other authorities of their experienced officials.

Just two long-serving Borough Engineers managed the vast array of improvement works in the town between the mid-1860s and the end of the century. Their renowned professionalism gave a sense of credibility to Nottingham's undertakings, as was the case with their professional colleagues in Glasgow.⁵⁴ Marriott Ogle Tarbotton and Arthur Brown were central figures in Nottingham's civic development programme. Tarbotton was appointed in 1859 when only twenty-seven years old. He had four years experience as the Borough Engineer in Wakefield and until 1880 combined his responsibilities for Nottingham Corporation with a private engineering consultancy. The part-time nature of his duties attracted criticism from time to time, especially when he claimed for additional expenses, although the quality of his service was

⁵² NAO CA.CM.MISC/6 (Salaries Committee), 30 August 1887, 14 December 1887, 20 February 1888, 9 March 1888; *NDE*, 6 March 1888.

⁵³ HC (1909) XC *Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons on Municipal Trading*, Part 3, pp. 34-50; MRC MSS 20/NAL/1/1/1, pp. 52, 77. The growing number of professional and clerical staff was reflected in union membership. Within two years of the formation of NALGO, the City Council Branch, the 'Nottingham Guild', had the fourth largest group in the country, with 451 members. It was, in 1907, amongst the earlier authorities to be represented on the union's Executive.

⁵⁴ Maver, 'Role', pp. 71-74.

undoubted.⁵⁵ In 1880, given the rapid growth of the Corporation's responsibilities, the Council restructured his various duties, including those of Gas Engineer, Water Engineer and Consulting Engineer.⁵⁶ Tarbotton was required to commit himself full-time to the Council and 'not entitled to any other fees or emoluments'. His salary of £1,350 was 'divided in such a manner as shall be agreed between the Gas, Water, Stoke Farm and Finance Committees'.⁵⁷ He died in service seven years later.⁵⁸ Tarbotton's erstwhile Assistant Borough Engineer of some seven years, Arthur Brown, was appointed Borough Engineer.

Tarbotton had been elected in April 1862 as a Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, the oldest of the professional bodies, with Thomas Hawksley as his proposer. This was of no mean significance because Hawksley had a much-respected international reputation as a civil engineer and had, between 1830 and 1852, been instrumental in developing water supplies in Nottingham. Hawksley was eventually President of the Institutes of Civil Engineers and Gas Engineers and the British Association of Gas Managers. He held consultancies for water with, amongst other authorities, Liverpool, Leicester, Leeds and Sheffield, and for gas with Derby, Chesterfield and Newark.⁵⁹

Tarbotton's professional contributions to Nottingham's modernization were wide-ranging, including improvement schemes for drainage, streets and a new Trent Bridge, and building regulations for the development of the town.⁶⁰ He was also Engineer to the Nottingham and Leen District Sewerage Board from 1872 to 1877, before the districts involved were incorporated into the enlarged Borough. Tarbotton played a major role in the establishment of the municipal gas and water utilities. The members relied 'largely on his advice and assistance'. The projects that he managed for a new pumping station, reservoir and gasometer were said to be, 'works of considerable magnitude and difficulty'.⁶¹ Such was Tarbotton's reputation for the

⁵⁵ *NDE*, 3 March 1865.

⁵⁶ *FC*, 2 February 1880.

⁵⁷ Water Committee Report (hereafter *WCR*), *FC*, 5 July 1880.

⁵⁸ *NDE*, 8 March 1887.

⁵⁹ D.E. Roberts, 'The Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company, 1818-1874' (University of Loughborough, MA thesis, 1976), pp. 287-292; D.E. Roberts, *The Nottingham Gas Undertaking, 1818-1949* (East Midlands Gas, Leicester, 1980), pp. 16-17, 22-24.

⁶⁰ Church, *Midland Town*, pp. 200-204.

⁶¹ *NDG*, 8 March 1887.

municipal works in Nottingham that his advice was much sought after in other authorities on issues related to gas, water supplies and sewage disposal. He appeared as a witness at the Parliamentary Commission on the Conservancy of Rivers. He was appointed an Examiner of the Sanitary Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, a Fellow of the Geological Society and a Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society.

Like his Town Clerk, Samuel Johnson, Tarbotton's contribution to Nottingham Corporation provided him with a platform for national recognition. Liberal and Conservative politicians alike spoke warmly of his achievements. John Barber, a long time associate of Tarbotton's as Chairman of the Gas Committee, member of the Water Committee and Chairman of the District Sewerage Board, said that 'he was universally acknowledged, in the profession to which he belonged, to be a man of the highest attainments as a civil engineer'. A fellow Liberal, Alderman Lambert, described him as 'one of the most faithful and able officials that ever served the town of Nottingham'. Thomas Bentley, a Conservative councillor, likewise judged him to have been 'assiduous in his work for the Corporation'.⁶² Such eulogies did at least reflect much of the reality of Tarbotton's work in the Borough. He had devised pragmatic responses to the technical difficulties and setbacks that he encountered, as he attempted to expand the supply of gas and water and maintain profitability in the two utilities. Tarbotton brought credibility to Nottingham's negotiations with Whitehall and was influential in establishing the good track record that the Corporation had amongst civil servants in the Board of Trade and the Local Government Board.

His successor, Arthur Brown, was unusual amongst the senior officials appointed after 1870. Brown was born in Nottingham, educated at Nottingham High School and articulated to Tarbotton. He was appointed as Assistant Engineer to the Nottingham and Leen District Sewerage Board in 1872 and as Deputy Borough Engineer in 1874.⁶³ He spent his entire career in the Corporation's service. Brown was a Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers and the Association of Municipal and County Engineers. His municipal projects included flooding measures, new boulevards, the Eastcroft

⁶² *NDE*, 8 March 1887.

⁶³ Potter Briscoe, *Contemporary*, p. 209; Anon, *Men of the Period* (The Biographical Publishing Company, 1898), p. 165.

Depot, the Cattle Market, a Hospital, the Stoke Farm sewerage facility and the creation of the electricity and tramway utilities. Like Tarbotton and Johnson, Brown was perceived by members to be an officer of sound judgement, natural business aptitude and an unlimited capacity for absorbing the pressures that accompanied municipal developments. But, like Tarbotton, he died in post. His death at the age of fifty-three was met with a genuine sense of loss by the politicians who worked with him most closely.

The Borough Council appointed chief officers to the four municipal utility undertakings who had both expert engineering skills and business management acumen. All but one of these officers demonstrated the high quality of their professional expertise. The exception was Godfrey Evans, the Water Engineer from 1888 to 1894.⁶⁴ The Gas Managers John Wilson, Lewis Wright and William Chester each contributed to the continuity of good leadership in their Department.⁶⁵ Stephen Moore achieved equal success as Manager of the Water Department from the creation of the water undertaking until the early years of the twentieth century.⁶⁶

The gas undertaking was operative from August 1874. Matthew Hill Loam was appointed as Tarbotton's Assistant Engineer and like his Head of Department was respected beyond Nottingham for his professional expertise. For example, in March 1876 the Town Clerk of Southampton asked him to act as an expert witness in a case relating to the Southampton Gas Company.⁶⁷ John Wilson, who had served the Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company for some nineteen years, was retained together with most of the Company's other staff. The Gas Committee felt that it had assembled a team of 'experienced and trustworthy officials' who had the necessary 'ability and energy'.⁶⁸ On the death of Loam, the duties of the Assistant Engineer were reallocated. The growth of the business resulted in 'the cost of the office staff' accounting for a 'less proportion of turnover than in 1874'.⁶⁹ Garton, Wilson and Whitelocke took on additional responsibilities. The culture of the Gas Department was one in which regular professional updating was expected. The *Gas Journal*, for

⁶⁴ WCR, FC, 4 June 1888, 3 February 1890, 8 January 1894, 5 March 1894.

⁶⁵ FC, 6 February 1882, 2 July 1883, 2 July 1888; Roberts, *Gas*, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁶ For example: AR/W, FC, 11 July 1881, 9 November 1893, 9 November 1896.

⁶⁷ NAO CA.TC.10/33/1, 15 March 1876.

⁶⁸ GCR, FC, 16 November 1874.

⁶⁹ GCR, FC, 9 January 1882, 6 February 1882.

example, was circulated amongst the Chairman, the Town Clerk, the General Manager and the Accountant.⁷⁰

The effectiveness of the management of the Department and the usefulness of the officers' professional networks were exemplified by the handling of the case brought by a Mr Forth in 1886, concerning a nuisance caused by the Gas Works in Basford. Samuel Johnson and his officers in the Gas Department settled the matter, avoiding an appearance in court that would have been 'prolonged and costly'.⁷¹ Officers arranged for appropriate expert witnesses, as well as gathering data from contacts in Leeds, Manchester and London that highlighted helpful case studies of even greater nuisances. The Gas Committee recorded its appreciation of the quality of its professional staff on a number of occasions, in a manner that was designed to bring further public attention to the successes of the Liberal Council. In August 1878 Thackeray, the Chairman, said that he thought that the members,

were exceedingly well served. Mr Wilson was a most painstaking manager, and the various managers of the different sections were all working with each other with the object of conducting the concern as favourably and profitably as possible.⁷²

The Committee was unanimous in support of this assessment. In 1885 Woodward complimented the managers on their professionalism, stressing the achievements of Nottingham's municipal government.

He was sure that the undertaking had been managed as well as it could be managed... In the hands of a limited company they could not have better management.⁷³

Such was the success of the gas undertaking that on the death of Wilson in April 1883, 'an efficient and zealous officer', his role was divided into two posts, General

⁷⁰ AR/G, FC, 7 December 1885.

⁷¹ NAO CA.TC.10/36/1-2, 29 March 1886-14 October 1887.

⁷² NDE, 13 August 1878.

⁷³ NDE, 8 December 1885.

Manager and Gas Accountant.⁷⁴ Lewis Thomas Wright secured the General Manager's position from a field of forty-five applicants. In 1886 he assumed the role previously played by Tarbotton in the Department. Wright was recruited from the Assistant Manager's post at Beckton Gas Works in Woolwich. The Chairman, John Barber, and members of the Gas Committee were pleased with the quality of advice that Wright was able to bring to policy-making. It was with sincerity that they expressed their gratitude for his professionalism in July 1888, on his resignation. Committee members recorded their 'great regret at the loss of Mr Wright's services and their high estimation of his character and skill'.⁷⁵

The Council appointed William Chester to succeed Wright on a similar salary of £600 per annum, an income in the mid-range for such senior officers nationally. At thirty-four, Chester was another of the Corporation's young, well-qualified appointees with good industrial experience. Having been articled in London, he was a gas engineer in Manchester for eight years. Chester was an extremely capable engineer and well regarded within his specialism. He was a Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, became President of the Manchester District Incorporated Institution of Gas Engineers and was appointed President of the Incorporated Gas Institution of Civil Engineers in 1891. Within a few weeks of his arrival in Nottingham, the Committee praised the general manager and 'the vigorous efforts of his staff' for the increasing sales figures.⁷⁶ In 1894 Samuel Johnson told a Royal Commission that 'we have never had any difficulty arising out of our gas management'.⁷⁷ During Chester's leadership of the Gas Department, the politicians used a significant proportion of the gas profits to help control rises in the General District Rate rather than reinvest in plant. Following Chester's death in 1902, the City Council had to initiate a programme of substantial investment in improvements to the Department's gas works.⁷⁸

The professional leadership of the Water Department was generally good, but not one of such uninterrupted success as the gas undertaking. When the water utility was established in March 1880, Tarbotton, as the Engineer in Chief of both the gas and

⁷⁴ GCR, FC, 2 July 1883.

⁷⁵ GCR, FC, 2 July 1888; Roberts, *Gas*, pp. 26-28.

⁷⁶ GCR, FC, 2 July 1888; Redlich, *Local Government*, p. 347.

⁷⁷ *RC* (1894), p. 352.

⁷⁸ Roberts, *Gas*, p. 28.

water concerns, was said to be managing undertakings ‘the magnitude and importance of which rank them amongst the first works of the kind in England’.⁷⁹ He was assisted by Stephen Moore, previously General Manager of the Nottingham Water Works Company and their Accountant since 1866. The new municipal team was a blend of local experience and new blood. Wharton arrived as the Principal Assistant Engineer and soon received a significant salary increase for the success he had in managing the construction of a new waterworks at Papplewick.⁸⁰

The death of Tarbotton in 1887 led the Water Committee to look for an ‘engineer of great experience’ to act as a Consulting Engineer to the Corporation, whilst a resident engineer took charge of the management of the water undertaking.⁸¹ Both Liberal and Conservative councillors raised objections to the cost implications of the proposed management structure and the matter was referred back to Committee for further consideration. One round of advertising resulted in eighty-five applications, nine shortlisted candidates and an interest by the interviewers in William de Pape, who had relevant experience in Manchester and Tottenham. However, there were accusations of ‘damaging’ reports circulating amongst members about de Pape. The matter was investigated by Samuel Johnson who found that the allegations were ‘without foundation’.⁸² However, no appointment was made and Wharton became temporary Acting Engineer for a few months. He resigned as the result of ill-health. Godfrey Evans was appointed on the second round of interviews in 1888 and, at first, appeared to perform his duties satisfactorily. He reorganised the Department, blaming the problems he found to be the result of a ‘disorganized’ interregnum.⁸³ His salary was raised from £300 to £400 in 1890, within the salary scale already agreed by the Council in May 1888.

But problems within the professional management of the Water Department were such that by January 1894 Evans had resigned and Donald Gaskin had been appointed. The salary was increased to £500 per annum and attracted seventy-three applications. The five shortlisted candidates were ‘all connected with municipalities,

⁷⁹ WCR, FC, 2 February 1880.

⁸⁰ WCR, FC, 12 February 1883.

⁸¹ WCR, FC, 2 May 1887.

⁸² WCR, FC, 9 November 1887; NAO CA.TC.10/94/48, 6 March 1888.

⁸³ WCR, FC, 3 February 1890.

and were persons of considerable standing'.⁸⁴ The legacy of Evans' shortcomings meant that the Committee took additional measures to assure itself that the appointee was of sufficiently proven quality. A deputation from the Water Committee visited St Helen's, where Gaskin had been Engineer to the water undertaking for some seventeen years. He, like his professional colleagues in the Gas Department, was a Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, his testimonials were 'thoroughly trustworthy' and his experience was in a setting 'similar in all respects to that of Nottingham'. Gaskin was the interviewing committee's unanimous choice and he was presented to the Full Council as an officer 'who could be relied upon to guide your Committee safely through the many difficulties which surround the Water Undertaking'.⁸⁵

A special committee was set up by the Council to fully investigate the allegations made against Evans, with full powers to call witnesses and take such steps as might be necessary.⁸⁶ In the event, Evans' resignation was accepted, but the issue remained a source of contention. Two Conservative councillors objected to the relatively light treatment that Evans received. McCraith referred to his leadership of the Water Department as 'very chaotic', whilst Bentley questioned why Evans had been allowed to resign and keep his salary until he left.⁸⁷ They were also anxious that the Water Committee had increased the salary of his successor without bringing the matter before the Full Council for approval. Even in 1898 Mark Mellers, the Borough Auditor, was still raising issues about the consequences of Evans' period of leadership.

There is a payment of £200 to the late Engineer to terminate his engagement with the Department, which seems to indicate strained relations with the Water Committee.⁸⁸

Gaskin fulfilled the Committee's hopes of much more effective professional leadership of the water utility. He moved swiftly in 1894 to assess the quality of his

⁸⁴ WCR, FC, 8 January 1894.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ WCR, FC, 5 March 1894.

⁸⁷ *NDE*, 9 January 1894.

⁸⁸ AR/W, FC, 5 December 1898.

Department and unsurprisingly reported that the situation ‘required the closest attention in the organization and consolidation of the staff and their work’.⁸⁹ His solution was to centralise the management of the Department from the head office. By April 1895 he felt able to report to the Committee that ‘the staff are working well together in the interests of the Department’.⁹⁰ Gaskin’s competence and commitment contributed to considerable improvements in the undertaking’s efficiency over the next five years, including the negotiations for the major inter-authority scheme in the Derwent Valley.

The Corporation’s first resident Electrical Engineer, Henry Talbot, was appointed in May 1892 from 147 applicants.⁹¹ He had relevant experience in this fledgling specialism with the Chelsea Electricity Company. Generally, qualified staff were scarce because few private companies had become established as viable businesses by the time Nottingham decided to municipalize electrical power. Indeed, the Institute of Electrical Engineers had only been in existence for four years.⁹² Talbot proved himself to be an effective manager and engineer from the outset. By November 1892 his recommendations for electrical generation and supply were accepted by the new Electric Lighting Committee.⁹³ From 1895 the initial lighting scheme in the central part of the Borough was under construction. Talbot used his extensive professional network of engineers around the provinces and in London to gather information in support of his plans for Nottingham. He worked closely with his Borough Engineer, Brown, on the location and construction of the power stations for both town lighting and then the electrification of the newly municipalized tramways. The two senior officials undertook a joint visit to the United States to examine installations in a number of cities and to help make recommendations to the Tramways and Electricity Committees for an Overhead Traction System.⁹⁴

The Corporation’s Tramways Department had two managers within the first three years of its operation. Both were successful. Alfred Baker moved to a promoted post

⁸⁹ Water Committee’s Annual Report and Accounts/Engineer’s Report (hereafter WCAR/EN), FC, 2 July 1894.

⁹⁰ WCAR/EN, FC, 2 September 1895.

⁹¹ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 16 May 1892.

⁹² Gourvash, ‘Rise’, pp. 24, 30.

⁹³ ELCR/EN, FC, 5 December 1892.

⁹⁴ NAO CA.CM.85/1, 11 April 1899; FC, 2 October 1899.

with London County Council after three years service in Nottingham.⁹⁵ He contributed to a major review of the tramway network inherited from the private company, including the planning of the renewed tramway infrastructure and tramline extensions. His successor, John Aldworth, had proven experience as Manager of the Isle of Man Tramways.⁹⁶ Within a year of his arrival, Alderman Abraham Pyatt spoke for all the members of the Tramways Committee when he said that 'they all agreed that the present service was good and admirably managed'. The Committee's Chairman, Anderson Brownsword, praised the Manager for an effective first year in post. 'The fact that not a single accident of a serious nature has occurred spoke volumes for the way in which Mr Aldworth has managed the traffic.'⁹⁷ Aldworth proved his professional competence during the twelve years he served the City Council.

The Town Clerk helped to enhance the effectiveness of the utility managers. He coordinated their efforts within the policy-making structures and supplemented the professional support they gained from their networks with his own contacts. Johnson encouraged his officials to update their skills and undertake research for policy planning wherever possible. He ensured that Nottingham was represented at the meetings of the Association of Municipal Corporations, as a matter of priority, even if he was personally unavailable to attend. His Deputy, for example, was a member of the Special Committee on Telephones in 1893 and in 1900 represented Nottingham on the Electric Powers Special Committee.⁹⁸ The AMC contacts were important for Nottingham's engineers. They provided early notice of impending national developments and information about activities in municipal trading undertakings in other corporations.

Johnson's individual contacts with town clerks around the country were also helpful to his senior staff. As well as being a source of information, they provided a way of gaining recognition for some of the leading work being undertaken by Nottingham's officials. For example, Johnson corresponded with the town clerks of Blackpool, Brighton, Hull and Swansea about the provision of electricity and with

⁹⁵ NAO CA.TC.10/86/12, 15 December 1898; NAO CA.CM.85/1, 19 December 1898.

⁹⁶ NA CA.TC.10/86/12, 4 January 1899; FC, 10 September 1900.

⁹⁷ *NDE*, 3 September 1901.

⁹⁸ PRO 30/72/14, 18 May 1893, 1 February 1900.

Wolverhampton on the use of independent experts.⁹⁹ On occasion, those contacts led to joint working on policy development. For example, in March 1883, Nottingham's politicians had to decide whether to accept municipal responsibility for the supply of electricity. The issue was surrounded by great uncertainties about both complex technology and long-term costs. Nottingham joined forces with Glasgow, Manchester, Norwich and Wigan and they agreed to simultaneously withdraw their applications for Provisional Orders from the Board of Trade to supply the new source of power.¹⁰⁰

A test of political support

In general, Nottingham Borough Council was able to recruit heads of department and other senior officers who were professionally well-qualified and had good and relevant experience, despite the lack of a nationally recognised appointments system.¹⁰¹ Part of the success of its recruitment and retention of high-calibre, professional staff was the Corporation's preparedness to pay competitive salaries. However, the size of those payments remained a contentious issue from 1865 onwards. Garrard has argued that political resentment surfaced in the south Lancashire towns from the 1860s too.¹⁰² In Bolton, Rochdale and Salford the battles over salaries arose as the influence of the officials in policy-making increased. The number of officials was small and, as such, the personal details of salary claims came before open meetings of the councils and were publicly aired.¹⁰³ An administration that remained personal in style had to deal with each individual rather than categories of employees. The senior officials often had a high profile in the municipal projects that they led and they were just as noticeable when matters of pay were considered. They were accountable to members professionally in terms of their competence and to a wider audience for their income.

⁹⁹ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 9 September 1882, 11 October 1886, 1 October 1889, 11 October 1889, 9 December 1891.

¹⁰⁰ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 24 March 1883.

¹⁰¹ Doyle, 'Changing Functions', p. 295; Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 19-21; Garrard, 'Craft', pp. 152, 164-165.

¹⁰² Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 11-13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

In Nottingham, officers' salaries became a test of the politicians' support for their senior staff, especially when pressure for lower expenditure was exerted on the Council by ratepayers and businessmen. Unlike south Lancashire, contention in Nottingham did not reflect political antagonism to greater officer influence. It was the response of individual councillors who championed the feelings of elements of the local electorate when economic conditions were particularly adverse. The greatest hostility was expressed between 1880 and 1888, in the years when sections of the local economy experienced acute trading difficulties.¹⁰⁴ Businessmen in Nottingham, as elsewhere, were anxious about the sense of economic crisis they experienced and the prospects for their own companies, during this period. By the mid-1890s that underlying concern had passed.

The most vociferous opponents of salary increases tended to be the more junior members of the Borough Council. On only two occasions did aldermen vote against such payments. In 1865 Cullen, a lace manufacturer, and in 1887 Renals, a bleacher, registered their antipathy to extra expenditure.¹⁰⁵ Councillors were politically more vulnerable. Aldermen, who led policy development and proposals for expenditure, did not have to face the electorate. Samuel Johnson was well aware of this political reality in Nottingham and the effects it could have across a range of sensitive policy issues.

If a man wishes to keep his seat he does not dare defy public opinion whatever his private view may be about the propriety of that opinion.¹⁰⁶

The opposition was non-partisan on each occasion that salaries became contentious. Opponents came from both parties, with roughly equal numbers of Liberals and Conservatives resisting the proposals. When numbers were uneven, they tended to include more Liberals than Conservatives.¹⁰⁷ The critics came from all the main occupational groups. Lace manufacturers, solicitors, a maltster, a coal merchant and a handful of retailers were amongst those who argued for economy. In only one

¹⁰⁴ HC (1886) XXI *Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade and Industry*, p. 234; FC, 5 January 1885, 7 December 1885; Church, *Midland Town*, pp. 250-252.

¹⁰⁵ *NMCDE*, 3 March 1865; *NDE*, 3 May 1887.

¹⁰⁶ *RC* (1894), p. 336.

¹⁰⁷ For example: FC, 2 February 1880; *NDE*, 3 February 1880; FC, 8 January 1894; *NDG*, 9 January 1894.

instance did the resistance come from lower-middle-class retailers alone, and then it was just two individuals, representing both parties.¹⁰⁸

What was clear was the continuing support offered by the senior figures in both parties, but especially the ruling elite, for the professionals they had appointed and entrusted with policy advice and policy implementation. This reflected the shared understanding that existed between senior members of both parties and their officials about the priority needs for civic development. They were also public and social leaders in the town together, in churches, charities and cultural organisations.¹⁰⁹ On every occasion when salary increases were challenged, major Liberal politicians came to the officers' defence and ultimately carried the vote. They took the view that Nottingham's officials were highly qualified, professional, knowledgeable and committed to the Corporation. Senior members were aware of the need to retain first-rate officers and not to drive them away to promoted posts in other large authorities.

Members raised questions about the appropriateness of salary levels when officers took up their posts, assumed additional responsibilities or undertook extra duties as a temporary expedient. For example, in 1865 Tarbotton submitted a claim for additional expenses of £50, following his work on behalf of the Council in Westminster when he helped with the opposition to a private company Gas Bill. The Liberals Cullen and Hardy and the Conservative Dickinson queried the claim. The Liberal elite rallied to Tarbotton's defence, emphasising his skills and commitment to the authority. Vickers argued that 'Mr Tarbotton was often doing the work of the Corporation while most of them were quietly at rest in their beds'. Parsons contended that the authority was fortunate to have 'the services of a man so talented as a civil engineer' and that an independent consulting engineer would have cost more. Tarbotton received his payment by a very narrow majority and was assured that he was a 'valued servant'.¹¹⁰

In 1874 there was opposition to the proposed salaries for Johnson, Tarbotton and Loam shortly after they assumed their duties with the new municipal gas undertaking.

¹⁰⁸ FC, 4 February 1884; *NDE*, 5 February 1884.

¹⁰⁹ Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 30-31; Gourvash, 'Rise', p. 30.

¹¹⁰ *NJ*, 3 March 1865.

On this occasion the main critics were Gregory, a Liberal who often pursued a personal agenda within the Council, and Bentley, a Conservative who regularly contested increases in expenditure. Bentley claimed that 'in the face of the present state of trade in the town, it would be a mistake to attempt to raise the salaries of the Corporation officials'. The big battalions of the Liberal hierarchy defended their officers and, predictably, praised Johnson in particular. Hardy spoke of the Town Clerk's 'intelligence, talent and integrity', whilst Ward felt that 'this first class man' was 'a bargain at £1,000 a year'.¹¹¹ Gregory withdrew his motion once he had the opportunity to air his grievances publicly.

The salaries of Johnson and Tarbotton were the source of heated debate again in February 1880. There was 'excitement in the town' about proposed increases.¹¹² Thackeray argued that the officers' workload had increased 'some tenfold or twentyfold' since their salaries had been agreed. He claimed that the Council would have had to pay independent consultants £13,600 for work that the pair had recently completed for the gas undertaking. Thackeray did not want to jeopardise their services and feared they 'might go independent'. Robinson, a Conservative councillor, contended that the time was not appropriate for salary increases. He recognised that Johnson and Tarbotton 'had the entire confidence of the whole of the members of the Council', but Sheffield Corporation 'worked more economically' and in Manchester the Surveyor had taken a reduction in salary of twenty-five per cent.¹¹³ Acton claimed that Tarbotton's predecessors, Hawksley and Rofe, had a combined income greater than the current Engineer. The matter was unanimously referred back for further consideration and in July 1880, the increases were agreed.¹¹⁴ But even at that stage, three Liberals still objected. Jacoby argued that Tarbotton was 'already handsomely paid', whilst Browne claimed that the Council 'had got salary upon the brain in Nottingham, and were neglecting the interests of ratepayers'.

The same three Liberals raised their voices against increases in 1882. Jacoby appealed for the introduction of performance pay, as Browne had done two years earlier. He accused the Gas Committee of 'recklessly increasing salaries'. Gripper

¹¹¹ *NMCDE*, 17 November 1874.

¹¹² *FC*, 2 February 1880; *NMCDE*, 3 February 1880.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *WCR, FC*, 8 July 1880.

and Turney used their political weight and seniority to persuade the Council to adopt the recommendations. Gripper warned the Full Council of the dangers of losing key staff.

He hoped the Council would not undertake to enter into criticism of their servants in the difficult undertakings of the town. If they did it would entail considerable loss, no doubt.¹¹⁵

Turney underlined that message and claimed that it was 'not wise to keep bringing the names of the servants before the public in this way'.¹¹⁶ Similar tactics were used by the ruling elite in 1884. Cropper and Barber proposed that the salary increases in the gas undertaking should be awarded because business was expanding. Barber emphasised the Committee's commitment to supporting additional expenditure when it was necessary for the civic projects. 'All the members of the Committee were large ratepayers, and simply sought the good of the town.' The Liberal councillor Sylvester felt, nevertheless, that 'it was wrong in principle to advance salaries when business was declining' more widely in the town.¹¹⁷ Bentley, the Conservative councillor, supported that view, but the Committee's report was adopted.

Further attacks were made on officers' salaries in February and March 1885, essentially on the grounds of difficult local economic circumstances. Opposition was articulated by Bentley and Dowson, Conservatives, and the Liberals Gregory and Ford. Turney once more objected 'to the attacks that were constantly being made on their officials'.¹¹⁸ The hostility was such, however, that Arthur Brown withdrew his request for an increase at that stage. Lewis Wright fared only marginally better with his increase. Gregory forced a recorded vote on the issue. Some election addresses in 1885 and the two succeeding years included calls for economies in officials' salaries.¹¹⁹ Even Frederick Pullman, a long-serving Liberal councillor and future alderman, declared himself in favour of reduced expenditure in this area. The Conservatives Robinson and Farrands, the Independent candidate Peacock and the

¹¹⁵ FC, 2 February 1880; *NMCDE*, 3 February 1880.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ WCR, FC, 4 February 1884; *NDE*, 5 February 1884.

¹¹⁸ GCR, FC, 16 February 1885; *NDE*, 17 February 1885.

¹¹⁹ *NDE*, 30 October 1885; *NDE*, 27 October 1886; *NDG*, 28 October 1886; *NDE*, 26 October 1887; *NDE*, 28 October 1887.

Liberal Mutch reiterated those sentiments. It was the partisan Liberal press that sought to safeguard the officials. The editor called for the esprit de corps of the senior officials to be maintained and not harmed by salary decreases. Those officers showed 'undoubted zeal and ability'.¹²⁰

A major review of salaries was agreed in August 1887 and for the following eight months a special Salaries Committee considered possible reductions in salaries, on a department by department basis.¹²¹ The Conservative councillors McCraith and Robinson had initially proposed a lowering of all salaries by 5% for employees earning between £200 and £500, and by 7 ½% for those with incomes over £500. Barber and Lambert managed to secure sufficient support for the Town Clerk's salary to be held at the current level. The Salaries Committee did not feel able to recommend any general reductions, but it asked each committee 'to avoid any new appointments where not absolutely necessary and as far as possible to economize with respect to salaries'.¹²² Undeterred, Councillor Robinson proposed that the Gas Manager's salary be decreased. He failed to find a seconder. A few days later he called for Nottingham's salaries to be compared with those in other boroughs. Councillor Bentley meanwhile loaned his copy of the Committee's confidential report to local journalists and a rough proof of the salaries appeared three days later, in the 6 March edition of the *Nottingham Daily Express*. The main outcome was a statement of reassurance by Gripper to the senior professionals that 'no general reduction of salaries can take place without grave injustice to many of the employees'.¹²³

The Committee report of 6 March contained a detailed analysis by Samuel Johnson of the six municipal departments, for the period from 1882 to 1887.¹²⁴ He was able to demonstrate vastly increased workloads and improved administrative efficiency. He reported, for example, that the salaries of the Town Clerk's Department had been reduced from 1.45% to 0.90%, as a percentage of the rates. This was achieved despite more tasks being generated by arbitrations, court cases, the issue of bonds and the impact of the extension of the Borough's boundaries. Johnson pointed to decreases in

¹²⁰ *NDE*, 2 November 1887.

¹²¹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/6 (Salaries Committee), 30 August 1887.

¹²² NAO CA.CM.MISC/6, 14 December 1887, 20 February 1888.

¹²³ *NDE*, 6 March 1888; NAO CA.CM.MISC/6, 9 March 1888.

¹²⁴ *NDE*, 6 March 1888.

the overall salaries of the Borough Engineer's and Health Departments. It was noted that increases had been registered as the result of much greater general workloads in the Accountant's, Gas and Water Departments. Across the Corporation's activity as a whole, salaries had only increased by some £674, despite an unprecedented expansion in the Council's responsibilities. The town had grown by a third and yet the Town Clerk's Department was paying less in salaries.

The political response was mixed. On the one hand, the Conservatives McCraith and Brittle were not persuaded and still called for cuts. On the other hand, Barber and the Conservative Elborne praised the staff for their efficiency. The Liberals faced the dilemma of choosing between being seen to govern economically or remaining fair to staff. Edward Fraser summed up the political problem. Around the town there were complaints about 'the supposed excess of salaries paid to officials', and yet 'a general reduction would inflict an injustice'.¹²⁵ Some sceptical voices expressed the view, quite reasonably, that it was not surprising the report did not recommend reductions. It was the officers under threat who had prepared the report.

The pressure to reduce costs went on unabated during the following year, but the relentless objections in the Chamber declined considerably during the 1890s. There was just one further attempt in Full Council to reduce salary costs. McCraith called for a recorded vote in January 1894, when he challenged the proposed salary increase for the new Water Engineer, Gaskin.¹²⁶ His amendment was lost by thirty-four votes to fifteen. The salaries issue had already become more a matter for the hustings than the Full Council. For example, in 1892, Pym Yeatman, the Conservative candidate in Forest Ward, attacked all kinds of 'shameful extravagance', including the Town Clerk's salary.¹²⁷ His opposition was taken up, very unusually, by the *Nottingham Daily Express*. The editor feared that the Council's planned subdivision of offices and the payment of separate salaries for different duties would result in the Town Clerk receiving a higher salary,

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ WCR, FC, 8 January 1894; *NDE*, 9 January 1894.

¹²⁷ *NDE*, 26 October 1892.

than if he was an Under-Secretary of the great Government departments. That Mr Johnson should permanently have a bigger salary for attending to Nottingham's affairs than Mr Thomas Burt or Sir Walter Foster whilst temporarily second in command in a big national department is a question which deserves to be discussed by the ratepayers.¹²⁸

By 1895 politicians were expressing more positive attitudes. For example, Hamilton, the unsuccessful Liberal candidate in Bridge Ward, felt able to propose to the voters that there should be full salaries for the officials.¹²⁹ He articulated the view then shared by most politicians. The town needed managers with professional qualifications and an interest in town development. Johnson, Brown and Talbot exemplified that viewpoint. The senior figures in the Liberal and Conservative parties agreed with their officers' analysis of civic need. They continued to value the professionalism, the competence and, not least, the quality and reliability of the specialist knowledge and advice that their key officials provided for the policy-making processes.

Rational knowledge

Technical and scientific knowledge became the bedrock of decision-taking in Nottingham Borough Council, between 1870 and 1900, as it did generally in other municipal authorities.¹³⁰ The Corporation gave priority to municipal trading policies and, as such, technical expertise of a high order was required in the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities. Nottingham was amongst the first few corporations to municipalize each of the utilities. Its officials, therefore, had to be able to advise the members on complex technologies that were changing rapidly, with competence and confidence. Nottingham Corporation had a group of high-calibre senior officers with the necessary professional knowledge and skills, a commitment to the Council and an ability to influence policy-making. Those officers shared the same goals for civic development as the senior figures in both political parties. The politicians had to make the final choice of policy, with all the implications of expenditure for the town's

¹²⁸ *NDE*, 27 October 1892.

¹²⁹ *NDE*, 23 October 1895.

¹³⁰ Doyle, 'Changing Functions', p. 297; Morris, 'Governance', pp. 8-10; Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 15-17.

ratepayers. But, generally, those decisions were underpinned by the rational knowledge of the professional officials.

In common with the leading municipal corporations, Nottingham's officers came to be seen as objective sources of authority.¹³¹ The up-to-date technical expertise they possessed enabled members to justify the policy decisions they made. Indeed, the rationality of their knowledge helped to create greater confidence in the services that the authority provided.¹³² Policies could be presented to the Full Council, and ultimately to the electorate, as rational and logical. The evidence of rational calculation, research, planning and prediction had the capacity to give policy proposals feasibility, authority and legitimacy.¹³³ Specialist knowledge of gas technology, for example, could be harnessed to political will to provide commercial efficiency, cheaper prices and public safety measures, all popular with ratepayers and consumers. Technical and scientific expertise offered the possibility of reaching workable solutions to some of the more difficult political decisions, such as balancing the relative benefits of an established source of power, gas, with the future potential of electricity. The permanency of the officials enabled rational, cost-effective policies to be sustained.¹³⁴

Mutual trust and respect between officers and members provided the basis for considered debate about possible strategies for the development of the municipal utilities. The longevity in office of both senior politicians and their officials provided an important source of support to their working relationships. The experience of past successful collaborative projects inspired members to have confidence in and to accept new recommendations. But, inevitably, the quality and reliability of the advice offered by the officers for each new project was paramount at every stage of policy development. Officials were continually accountable for their proposals. At times, new rational solutions or remedies were suggested by the officers and taken up by the politicians, with little difficulty. However, on some occasions, the problems were perhaps politically more complex and possible ways forward needed more than the assurance of rationality to commend them. As Zijderveld has argued, policies could

¹³¹ Morris, 'Governance', pp. 6-7.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

¹³³ M. Hill and G. Bramley, *Analysing Social Policy* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986), p. 147.

¹³⁴ Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', p. 22.

be driven 'intuitively and non-rationally', as the result of a shared understanding of the 'values, norms and meanings' that were at stake.¹³⁵ In Nottingham, officials and politicians were mutually supportive because they shared a vision of civic need. Priorities were interpreted within the perspective of municipal capitalism, rather than from the standpoint of the pursuit of more costly policies of social amelioration. Advice could be refined to meet political imperatives. Generally, the scientific and professional knowledge that was proffered found a sympathetic ear, given the officers' empathy for the political interests and priorities of members.

Within broad political parameters, officials had three core tasks to accomplish in the policy formation processes. They were expected to raise political awareness of matters that needed to be addressed, define the issues that were involved and then specify policy alternatives for the politicians to consider.¹³⁶ Politicians looked to their senior staff for a combination of business skills, initiative, creativity and civic vision.¹³⁷ In Glasgow, those skills were used essentially in the interests of the Liberals. 'Ideological compatibility' became the basis of a strong relationship between the Town Clerk and the political leaders of the ruling party.¹³⁸ In Nottingham, the officers were held in respect by both parties and operated on the basis of greater professional independence. The Liberal elite provided the political will, the Conservatives the political consensus and the officials the specialist expertise that enabled political action.

Specialist knowledge and expertise were critically important at each stage of the municipalization processes and in the management of the municipal businesses, particularly in terms of engineering, law and finance. A detailed evaluation of these processes and policies is covered in Chapters 5 and 6. What was clear in all four utilities was the direct influence and guidance that officers brought to bear at various stages in the formation of policy and its implementation. In the period leading up to the political decisions that were taken to municipalize gas, water, electricity and tramways, Johnson, Tarbotton, Brown and Talbot, in particular, played vital roles.

¹³⁵ A.C. Zijderveld, *A Theory of Urbanity: the Economic and Civic Culture of Cities* (Transactions Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1998), pp. 10-11.

¹³⁶ Banting, *Poverty*, pp. 10-11.

¹³⁷ Waller, *Town*, p. 282; Garrard, 'Bureaucrats', pp. 15, 26.

¹³⁸ Maver, 'Role', p. 72.

Their legal know-how and the technical and financial data they could offer, provided the politicians with the clarity and reassurance they needed, if they were to be decisive and opt for municipal ownership of the utilities. The officers were influential and at times persuasive.

For example, between January and October 1879, the Borough Engineer's costing of the technological implications of their intended purchase of the Nottingham Water Works Company and the Town Clerk's detailed analysis of the problems that would be caused for the Council by the Company's proposed private Bill, offered the politicians the insights that only trusted specialists could provide.¹³⁹ The information was sufficient to bolster their political courage to proceed. In December 1892 the Electrical Engineer's technical recommendations for an initial electric lighting scheme in the town centre provided the detailed scientific support members needed to commit themselves to very significant expenditure.¹⁴⁰ In 1882 Johnson clarified the rights and responsibilities of the Corporation and the Nottingham and District Tramways Company for highways repair. The Town Clerk established the liability of the private company for the cost of making good the streets following the Company's work on extensions to the tramlines.¹⁴¹ This saved the Council significant costs and set the tone for the authority's more assertive stance towards the Company in the years before municipal ownership.

Once the politicians had ownership of the utilities, the knowledge and expertise of the officials was even more critical to rational planning. The officers were expected to ensure the efficiency and viability of the trading concerns. As the engineering issues became more complex, the engineers were able to guide policy development more closely. A small number of committed politicians gained sufficient expertise to handle the general management of the gas and water utilities, but they were never in a position to take the technical decisions. With the arrival of electricity more difficult technical issues were raised about generation, distribution and supply, with enormous cost implications. Political will continued to determine the objectives and priorities of the utilities, the size of expenditure and the use of profits. It was the members who

¹³⁹ Town Clerk's Report (hereafter TCR), FC, 6 January 1879, 6 October 1879.

¹⁴⁰ ELCR/EN, FC, 7 December 1891; *NDE*, 8 December 1891.

¹⁴¹ GWHCR/TCR, FC, 6 March 1882.

had to be willing to commit time and funds to acquire the necessary data and then to invest in new technology and maintenance programmes. But within these political parameters, the recommendations of the specialists were decisive. The public 'servants' concerned had the credibility and the respect of their 'masters'.

For example, Tarbotton's advice on ways to expand gas supply and raise further income was readily accepted by the Gas Committee. Capital projects at the Radford, Eastcroft, Basford and Eastwood Gas Works between April 1876 and April 1879 were masterminded by the Borough Engineer, as was the expansion of the Giltbrook Chemical Works to take advantage of improved trade in residual products.¹⁴² Tarbotton and Brown guided developments in the water utility to enable members to extend supplies and improve the efficiency of the waterworks. The Water Committee accepted in full Tarbotton's recommendations for a new waterworks at Papplewick and an extension at Mapperley in January 1882.¹⁴³ Members also welcomed Brown's policy recommendations, between January and June 1899, for the major cooperative project in the Derwent Valley.¹⁴⁴

The technical advice of Brown and Talbot was decisive in initiating a massive investment in electrical generation in March 1896.¹⁴⁵ The threat of private competition to electrical supply in the town had proved problematic to the politicians for some fourteen years. The timing and scale of their foray into electric lighting was subject to external political considerations, but ultimately had to rest on the technical recommendations of their engineers. Once the tramways had been municipalized in 1897 the politicians had to make swift decisions about the significant renewal of the existing infrastructure and the form of electrical power to be used.¹⁴⁶ The expertise of Brown and Talbot was again trusted and their proposals were conclusive.

Johnson's role in making effective use of the officers' knowledge was critical. He coordinated the use of high quality professional knowledge and expertise that was available from both the Council's own staff and external independent experts.

¹⁴² GCR, FC, 6 April 1876, 7 April 1879.

¹⁴³ WCR, FC, 2 January 1882.

¹⁴⁴ TCR, FC, 2 January 1899; WCR, FC, 5 June 1896.

¹⁴⁵ ELCR, FC, 2 March 1896.

¹⁴⁶ TRCR, FC, 4 April 1898, 16 May 1898; *NDE*, 5 April 1898.

Johnson's development of the head of staff role helped to ensure appropriate appointments were made and that heads of department remained professionally updated. Indeed, his unifying approach to municipal administration strengthened rational planning in the municipal utilities.

The officers' contribution to civic development

The development of the roles played by the Corporation's officials, during the last three decades of the century, formed an important element of Nottingham's distinctive political culture. Officers and the senior political figures of both the Liberal and Conservative parties had a shared appreciation of what was required to meet the town's civic needs. Socially, senior staff and members shared experiences within the town. Together they were public and social leaders in, for example, churches, charities and cultural organisations. In terms of policy-making, their roles were separate and officers did not cross the line between advice and decision-taking. Each had their own policy preferences, derived from their knowledge and enthusiasms. The advice of the individual officers reflected their subjective view of particular policy alternatives. The commonality of view of members and officers was based not on a closeness of political ideology, but on a joint recognition that the Corporation had the knowledge and expertise available to deliver pragmatic solutions to the town's problems. Members demonstrated the political will to invest in services, whilst officers had the skill to enable political aspirations to be translated into action. Each broadly accepted and respected the way things would be done, often in unspoken ways. Maver has argued that Glasgow's administrators 'represented a solid symbol of continuity'.¹⁴⁷ The officers in Nottingham certainly provided a public face of continuity, but behind the scenes they were the architects of modern municipal services.

Samuel Johnson brought greater coherence to the work of the Corporation's departments and especially to that of the senior officials. His approach to administrative organisation was more systematic and consistent than those pursued by his counterparts in most other municipalities. In many ways he anticipated the style

¹⁴⁷ Maver, 'Role', p. 69.

of municipal bureaucracy that was common in the inter-war period. Convinced that greater unity in administration was required as the Corporation took on more responsibilities, he managed his professional staff more closely than most town clerks. He helped the members to make good senior appointments, in all but one case. The Council had, unusually, a consistently good calibre of professional staff, a number of whom had national recognition and standing. Generally, the heads of department were high quality managers, credible and respected by both local members and their specialist colleagues in other authorities. The permanency of their posts and their professional networks helped them to maintain influence in policy-making. Their skill, initiative and civic vision were fundamental to the successful design and delivery of major municipal projects.

Johnson, Tarbotton, Brown and Talbot in particular were able to influence, and at times guide, policy formation because of their knowledge of technically complex issues, especially in the area of municipal trading. Their professional information and ideas enabled members to take decisive action. The Council appeared to have greater authority in its policy decisions when armed with high quality technical expertise. The rationality of the specialist knowledge helped to convince politicians generally of the rightness of particular courses of action, but the members still had to make political choices and accept responsibility for the financial implications of their decisions. The strength of the officers lay in their command of the law, finance and engineering especially. The Town Clerk, the Borough Engineer and the Electrical Engineer defined the technical issues that required political decisions and offered alternative ways forward, within the parameters of what they knew would be politically acceptable to members. Often only they were in a position to know what was required technically. The consensus that members achieved about policy decisions was strengthened by the independent, rational voices of the experts.

Chapter 5

Municipalization: the motivation and timing of municipal decision-taking

The municipalization process

Nottingham Borough Council was involved in decision-taking about the municipalization of public utilities from 1854. By 1897 the Corporation had acquired ownership of the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities in the town. Whilst some common fundamental principles underpinned the desire to own all four businesses, each utility required a separate strategy for gaining ownership, because different issues were at stake in each industry. The timing of each take over depended upon the changing nature of the Council's municipal agenda for civic development and a variety of external considerations. In the event, gas and water municipalization were handled by the Corporation between 1870 and 1880, and during the 1890s electricity and tramways both became active municipal businesses within three years of each other. The apparent commonality of timing masks a number of political and financial matters that were particular to each utility.

The Council operated within a national legislative framework that was itself subject to change. Municipal ownership of the two 'natural monopolies' of gas and water necessitated the purchase by local authorities of the undertakings from existing private companies. However, the Government responded to difficulties encountered with these two utilities and amended the ground rules by which the municipal acquisition of electricity and tramways monopolies could be achieved.¹ This change of legal requirements from the need for costly municipal legislation to a more straightforward application for Provisional Orders from the Board of Trade, encapsulated the modification of the central government's perception of the appropriateness of municipalization.

¹ J.F. Sleeman, 'The British Tramway Industry: the Growth and Decline of a Public Utility', *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, X (1939), p. 159; L. Hannah, *Electricity Before Nationalisation* (Macmillan, 1979), pp. 5-8.

All four utilities became the responsibility of Nottingham Corporation on the basis of political unanimity. The four decisions were achieved by political consensus within policy-making processes that gave priority to meeting specific civic needs. Members perceived that their policies for municipal trading were generally popular and were strengthened in the eyes of the electorate by being free of partisan restrictions. Their proposals were financially sound and offered opportunities to raise the level of civic consciousness in the town, with the prospect for the ratepayers of the modernization and integration of services. Although the public debate about municipalization included a good deal of political rhetoric from all concerned, the policies were presented as the logical outcome of rational planning. The Council demonstrated its commitment to municipal trading and the pursuit of profitability in each undertaking, by deciding that all four utilities were owned and run by the Corporation from the outset, rather than supervised by the Council and managed by lessees.

The decisions about municipalization in Nottingham resulted more from the internal agenda of the Borough Council than external pressures and influences, although the timing of them was affected by the attitudes of ratepayers, employers, Whitehall and Westminster.² The longevity in post of the chairmen of committees, committee members and permanent officials enhanced the detailed understanding that was brought to bear on planning and decision-taking. The policy-makers were able to contribute more to the salience and definition phases of policy-making once they had gained experience from gas municipalization.³ Policy formation and decision-taking rarely proceed, in any era, in a logical, comprehensive and purposive manner, but the decisions the Council took appeared rational and conducive to the achievement of the goals that the members had set.⁴

The style of decision-taking within Nottingham Borough Council, between 1870 and 1897, was a form of 'disjointed incrementalism'.⁵ Nationally, municipal trading in each of the different utilities was at an early stage of development when the Corporation decided on municipal ownership for Nottingham. In each case,

² W. Parsons, *Public Policy: an Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis* (Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1995), p. 223.

³ K.G. Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy* (Macmillan, 1979), p. 10.

⁴ C. Ham and M. Hill, *The Policy Process in the Modern Capitalist State* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, 1993, Second Edition), p. 82.

⁵ Parsons, *Public Policy*, p. 287.

Nottingham was a leading authority in the field. As such, only limited comparisons could be made with the experiences of other authorities. The politicians had to proceed incrementally, adapting and refining policy on the basis of their own experience and the technical data that officers were able to make available. The influence of the professional officers was considerable in a situation where the problems were relatively new and undefined.⁶ The officials had their own policy preferences and these were generally adopted by the representatives of both the Liberal and Conservative parties on the relevant committees, subject to the general political parameters laid down by members.

It was that uniformity of view that helped to characterise Nottingham's approach to municipalization. The policy was not treated as party political, even on the hustings at municipal elections. Neither party acted ideologically to the detriment of the other. The Conservative Party candidates made more general accusations about the financial extravagance and wastefulness of the Liberals, though not with specific reference to municipalization. The rhetoric of the two parties was focused on improved financial management and not on the fundamental principle of municipalization. The existence of a significantly growing population, greatly enlarged by the boundary changes of 1877, added further pressure on members to find workable solutions to civic problems. With greater experience of and confidence in municipal trading, both parties advocated the benefits of municipal capitalism as a way to generate funds and a means to integrate the enlarged Borough. The political discourse about municipal utilities underlined the presence of shared strategic goals. Liberals and Conservatives together encouraged the fostering of a greater sense of civic consciousness by the introduction of municipal utilities, and subsequently a feeling of civic pride in the outcomes of those policies, the iconography of municipalization. The period after 1870 marked a move from providing the civic necessities of life, such as clean water, to the 'luxuries' of lighting, heating and cheap travel.⁷ The priorities on the municipal

⁶ Banting, *Poverty*, p. 142.

⁷ W.A. Robson, 'The Public Utility Services', in H.J. Laski, W.I. Jennings and W.A. Robson (eds.), *A Century of Municipal Progress* (George Allen and Unwin, 1935), pp. 300, 319, 324-325, 331; M.J. Bouman, 'Luxury and Control: the Urbanity of Street Lighting in Nineteenth-Century Cities', *Journal of Urban History*, 14, 1 (1987), pp. 17-19,30; J.N. Peters, 'Anti-Socialism in British Politics c. 1900-1922: the Emergence of a Counter-Ideology' (University of Oxford, D Phil thesis, 1992), pp. 162, 165, 191.

agenda had to change as the luxuries of one generation became the necessities of the next.⁸

The debates in meetings of the Full Council were essentially non-partisan for each of the utilities. When criticisms were made of policy proposals, members of both parties articulated the objections and they came from all occupational groups. In the 1850s and 1860s aldermen argued both for and against proposals of municipal ownership. After 1870 individual members of the Liberal elite did not oppose the recommended policies. The number of councillors speaking against policy proposals declined generally, as the political consensus became more firmly established. Indeed, the most contentious decision resulted from the proposal, in 1877, to consent to a franchise for the Nottingham and District Tramways Company to operate in the town.⁹ From 1854 lace manufacturers, solicitors and retailers were to be found on both sides of the arguments when they arose. Neither party nor occupation determined the nature of the opposition. It was individual councillors who argued against the Council's proposals. The four separate decisions to municipalize in 1874, 1879, 1890 and 1897 were, however, all carried unanimously. The overwhelming feeling in every case was an antipathy to private monopolies and shareholder profits, and support for the community having the benefit of that utility income. Whilst some of the motives for municipalization were different in each case, the political commitment to municipal services and the modernization of aspects of civic life in Nottingham were evident in all four.

More generally across the country, the general pace of development was uneven, ad hoc and incremental.¹⁰ Liberals and Conservatives in different authorities focused on their own local agenda, their particular requisites. Before 1900 there was no national agenda for municipalization. The motives of authorities that chose to engage in municipal trading were varied, but they included a number of common elements. Corporations tended generally to be pragmatic rather than ideological or partisan in

⁸ Robson, 'Public Utility', p. 300.

⁹ Full Council Minutes and Reports (hereafter FC), 8 January 1877.

¹⁰ M. Falkus, 'The Development of Municipal Trading in the Nineteenth Century', *Business History*, 19 (1977), pp. 137-138; Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', p. 170.

their motivation, as was the case in Nottingham.¹¹ Overall, municipalization was not predominantly an electoral issue for one party.¹² In some boroughs, the existence of 'natural' monopolies, in the case of water and gas in particular, highlighted the unsatisfactory nature of local competition. Unnecessary expenditure was committed to wasteful duplication of works and mains.¹³ In some cases, the threat of competition, far from encouraging lower prices and better services, could actually impede investment and consequently produce higher costs, lower dividends and poor quality services.¹⁴

Millward and Ward have argued that when population growth and population density were rising rapidly and local authority revenue not especially strong, corporations were more likely to turn to municipal trading as a solution.¹⁵ This was true of Nottingham. A number of associated motives were at work in many authorities, including Nottingham. Policies of 'economy' were a natural response for most municipalities that were faced with insufficient revenue from the local rates, with which to fund vital civic projects.¹⁶ Authorities looked to maximise the profits that local utilities might bring to help keep in check a rapid rise in rates.¹⁷ The profits of flourishing private companies, in particular, were obvious targets for councils that wanted to extend their search for municipal economies.¹⁸ Councils found the notion of saving the cost of the middleman, the shareholders' dividends, a very persuasive

¹¹ R. Millward and R. Ward, 'From Private to Public Ownership of Gas Undertakings in England and Wales, 1851-1947: Chronology, Incidence and Causes', *Business History*, 35, 3 (1993), pp. 9, 18-19; R. Millward, 'The Political Economy of Urban Utilities', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III: 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 328-329; L.W. Jones, 'The Municipalization of the Electricity Supply Industry in Birmingham', *West Midlands Studies*, 13 (1980), pp. 22-24.

¹² J.R. Kellett, 'Municipal Socialism, Enterprise and Trading in the Victorian City', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1978), pp. 40-41, 44; P.J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991), pp. 298-299.

¹³ Falkus, 'Development', pp. 142-143; Robson, 'Public Utility', pp. 305-306.

¹⁴ R. Millward, 'Emergence of Gas and Water Monopolies in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Contested Markets and Public Control', in J. Foreman-Peck (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Late Victorian Economy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 98 (incorporating the arguments of H. Demsetz, 'Why Regulate Utilities?', *Journal of Law and Economics*, 11 (1968), pp. 55-65).

¹⁵ Millward, 'Private to Public', pp. 13-18.

¹⁶ Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', pp. 163-164; J.F. Wilson, *Lighting the Town: a Study of Management in the North West Gas Industry, 1805-1880* (Paul Chapman Publishing, 1991), p. 197.

¹⁷ E.P. Hennock, 'Finance and Politics in Urban Local Government in England, 1835-1900', *The Historical Journal*, VI, 2 (1963), pp. 213-218; Falkus, 'Development', p. 152; Kellett, 'Municipal Socialism', pp. 43-44; H. Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism and Social Policy', in R.J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds.), *The Victorian City* (Longman, 1993), pp. 266-267; R. Millward and S. Sheard, 'The Urban Fiscal Problem, 1870-1914: Government Expenditure and Finance in England and Wales', *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 3 (1995), pp. 526-527; Millward, 'Political Economy', pp. 321, 329.

¹⁸ Wilson, *Lighting*, pp. 185, 212; Millward, 'Private to Public', p. 9.

argument for creating municipal utilities.¹⁹ The availability of relatively cheap capital, with the positive support of the Board of Trade, encouraged them to take municipal action.²⁰ Between 1870 and 1913 councils had the advantage of achieving better returns on investment, on average, than those obtained by the private utilities.²¹

Once Parliament had granted monopoly rights to local government for electricity and tramways, the processes of municipalization were eased significantly. At that stage, the fundamental decision each authority had to make was whether simply to opt to control the utility, by using private franchises, or to own and manage the undertaking.²² The level of a council's determination to raise civic consciousness in their district might well be a significant factor in making that choice. Falkus has argued that the impact of such civic considerations was greater in the Midlands and the North of England.²³ Whilst the encouragement of civic pride in many boroughs was an important element amongst the motives to municipalize, it was a less important factor than the profits which might bring vital finance into the municipal treasury.²⁴ An authority's willingness to invest in municipal undertakings, heavily if need be, was clearly a key determinant to triggering the process.²⁵ Public concern about the disruption caused in the streets by work on the utilities, also enabled local politicians to rouse public support against private utilities. One visible measure of the quality of civic life for many local residents was the frequency with which utility companies broke up the streets to lay pipes and mains. The prospect of a more integrated approach to the provision of services by the local authority was, for many, an attractive alternative.²⁶

¹⁹ D. Knoop, *Principles and Methods of Municipal Trading* (Macmillan, 1912), p. 41; D.N. Chester, *British Public Utility Services* (Longman, 1948), p. 23.

²⁰ C. Bellamy, *Administering Central-Local Relations, 1871-1919* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), pp. 81-82, 85-87; Millward, 'Fiscal Problem', pp. 502-505; Falkus, 'Development', p. 153; Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', p. 171.

²¹ Millward, 'Emergence', pp. 102-103. However, as Millward has estimated, the rate of return in the utilities was less than those to be obtained in manufacturing, commerce and the railways.

²² Millward, 'Political Economy', p. 325.

²³ Falkus, 'Development', p. 141; Millward, 'Private to Public', pp. 4-5, 9-11; Wilson, *Lighting*, p. 184.

²⁴ D. Matthews, 'Laissez-faire and the London Gas Industry in the Nineteenth Century: Another Look', *Economic History Review*, XXXIX, 2 (1986), pp. 261-262; R. Millward and R. Ward, 'The Costs of Public and Private Gas Enterprises in Late Nineteenth Century Britain', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 39 (1987), p. 126; Millward, 'Private to Public', p. 8.

²⁵ A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Vol. 2: Borough and City, 1865-1938* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952), pp. 70-74; Millward, 'Fiscal Problem', pp. 503-505; Millward, 'Political Economy', pp. 317-319.

²⁶ J.L. Mackenzie, 'Municipal Trading', *Public Administration*, (1927), p. 248; Knoop, *Principles*, p. 382; Falkus, 'Development', p. 141.

Two private ‘natural monopolies’

Nottingham Borough Council took a keen interest in the activities of the town’s private utility companies from the late 1840s. Unusually, Nottingham had two private gas companies and two private water companies before that time. The Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company (NGLCC) had been formed in 1818, with the Mayor and the burgesses of the town amongst its shareholders, representing their municipal interest in lighting the Borough.²⁷ The NGLCC amalgamated with the Nottingham New Gas Company in 1842, just four years after its competitor had been formed. The Corporation was the NGLCC’s largest customer. The Nottingham Water Works Company (NWWC) had been formed by statute in 1845 from the amalgamation of the Leen Water Works Company and the Mansfield Road Water Company.²⁸ By mid-century, NWWC supplied directly between 35% and 45% of all houses in Nottingham, Lenton, Radford, Basford, Sneinton and The Park, essentially the area that came within the extended Borough boundaries from 1877. Nearly all houses received their supply either directly or by cocks in the courts. However, some 800 houses had to ‘beg or steal water’.²⁹ As such, both the NGLCC and the NWWC played major roles in the lives of municipal ratepayers and were naturally the subject of significant interest to the Corporation. Both private companies and their shareholders benefited from the absence of local competition in their control of the two ‘natural monopolies’. It helped to prevent duplication and undue wastage.

The Corporation gained Royal Assent for the municipal ownership of the gas utility in July 1874 and for water in August 1879.³⁰ The period between the early 1850s and the creation of the municipal undertakings included a number of Council debates about the rightful ownership of the ‘natural monopolies’. The Council had to consider, if they decided the services were unsatisfactory, whether they should remain in private hands or become the Corporation’s property.³¹ If they wished to proceed,

²⁷ D.E. Roberts, ‘The Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company, 1818-1874’ (University of Loughborough, MA thesis, 1976), p. 53 (Chapter 3, Table 1).

²⁸ R. Smith, ‘The Social Structure of Nottingham and Adjacent Districts in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: an Essay in Quantitative Social History’ (University of Nottingham, Ph D thesis, 1968), p. 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

³⁰ Gas and Water Committee Report (hereafter GWCR), FC, 3 August 1874; Water Committee Report (hereafter WCR), FC, 6 October 1879.

³¹ Falkus, ‘Development’, p. 152.

they would need to purchase the existing private companies by legislation. Prior to 1870 two such debates concerned the future of water and one the control of gas lighting. The Council had to consider any changes proposed by the two companies to their commercial practice and take, in its view, the necessary policy decisions in the interests of the consumers and the ratepayers. Until 1870 the great majority of members believed that they should closely monitor the gas and water companies, but that municipal ownership was not the best way forward. However, in the case of gas lighting in the town, Council members were more evenly divided about the possibility of extending their control into one area of the Gas Company's operation.

By the early 1870s some of the critical local factors that helped to determine policy priorities had begun to change significantly. The rapid growth of the town's population, the members' growing concerns about health and sanitation problems in the Borough and the incremental growth in the politicians' anxieties about the policies of the private utility companies, all contributed to a greater political determination to pursue the municipalization of gas and water. The political consensus about the priority needs of the community, shared by both Liberals and Conservatives, provided the basis for a joint commitment to take ownership of the natural monopolies. So too did the willingness of the Council to seek statutory backing for such responsibilities. The politicians' preparedness to act was strengthened by the arrival of Samuel Johnson, with his enthusiasm for local self-government and his more vigorous leadership of the Council's administration.

The NGLCC and the NWWC, for their part, each had to take steps to ensure the viability and profitability of their businesses. Those included obtaining parliamentary approval to increase the limits on their borrowing capacity and to extend the supply of gas and water to the additional number of potential customers, as the population grew very considerably. The Borough Council opposed strenuously the Parliamentary Bills promoted by the companies and challenged any proposals that they perceived would result in increased charges to Nottingham's consumers. Such municipal intervention was particularly in evidence in 1849, 1854, 1863, 1869, 1870, 1871, 1873, 1874, 1878

and 1879.³² The Corporation expressed its opposition in terms of both the quality and quantity of supply and the desirability of the Council controlling the gasworks and the waterworks. In the case of the water undertaking, arguments in favour of the need for improvements to sanitation in the town were articulated regularly and supported by professional opinion.

Nottingham Corporation was one of the pioneers of municipalization. Amongst the large corporations, it was the fourth authority in the country to take the local gas company into municipal ownership, following Manchester, Leeds and Bradford.³³ Nottingham was the eleventh borough to municipalize water. The three councils that had earlier taken ownership of their gas undertakings took responsibility for water in the 1850s. Birmingham and Leicester became both gas and water authorities by 1876 and 1878 respectively. Therefore, Nottingham was the fifth major corporation to establish ownership of the two 'natural monopolies'.

Municipal politicians in corporations across the country had a limited range of justifications for their decisions to take ownership of gas and water utilities. They shared broadly similar motives overall, articulating reasons of finance, sanitation and market forces. There were differences too in the mechanisms for triggering the municipalization processes. Birmingham's motives were baldly characterised by Joseph Chamberlain as largely a question of profits in the case of gas and health for water.³⁴ Birmingham Corporation saw the gas profits as a means of reducing the rates and supporting improvement work, but water was never regarded as a potential source of profit. In Leeds, the politicians placed emphasis for gas municipalization on utility profits too, but they emphasised their need to have control of the streets as well.³⁵ In the case of water, members perceived that a profit motive was less appropriate. They argued that public ownership would enable them to give a greater focus to meeting the real needs of the consumer, rather than those of the shareholder. Unlike Nottingham,

³² *NJ*, 11 May 1849; *NJ*, 10 February 1854; *NJ*, 10 July 1863; *FC*, 2 May 1870; *FC*, 13 November 1871; Parliamentary Committee Report (hereafter PCR), *FC*, 3 February 1873; *GWCR*, *FC*, 3 August 1874; Water Bill Committee Report (hereafter WBCR), *FC*, 21 January 1878; Town Clerk's Report (hereafter TCR), *FC*, 6 January 1879.

³³ Appendix C, Table 14.

³⁴ Briggs, *Birmingham*, pp. 72-73; Waller, *Town*, p. 304.

³⁵ B. Barber, 'Municipal Government in Leeds, 1835-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1982), p. 89.

the early efforts in Leeds to municipalize water, in 1835, had been politically controversial.³⁶ Only the Liberals supported a municipal utility. However, the Corporation's creation of further municipal undertakings was not partisan. In Liverpool, political divisions arose as late as the 1880s, over the cost of the Vyrnwy reservoir project.³⁷

In Leicester, members articulated both sanitary and financial arguments in support of municipal ownership of the water undertaking.³⁸ In the case of gas, they justified municipalization on the grounds of finance alone. The essential arguments of the debate in the Leicester Borough Council shared much in common with those aired in Nottingham. However, the ways in which negotiations for utility ownership were initiated in Leicester were different. There, it was Conservative councillors who brought forward proposals for the gas utility, whilst the private water company approached the Corporation, in an attempt to stimulate talks on the transfer of ownership to the Council.³⁹ In Sheffield, the ruling Conservatives were interested only in ownership of the water utility, which they regarded as a business enterprise.⁴⁰ They never municipalized gas. Sheffield's partisan press was deeply divided over municipalization, although the Conservative and Liberal parties had within their ranks both supporters and opponents of municipal ownership. In Glasgow the politicians were primarily concerned about the vagaries of free market forces and the potential for a negative impact on the supply of vital public services.⁴¹ The profit motive was strong in Glasgow only in terms of gaining ownership of the utility companies. Thereafter, unlike Nottingham, members did not wish to use the profits as a means to reduce the rates or subsidise other civic projects.

³⁶ D. Fraser, 'Areas of Urban Politics: Leeds, 1830-1880', in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City, Vol. 2* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 771-772.

³⁷ D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979), p. 46.

³⁸ M. Elliott, *Victorian Leicester* (Phillimore, 1979), p. 127.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126, 130.

⁴⁰ B. Barber, 'Sheffield Borough Council, 1843-1893', in C. Binfield et al (eds.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993, Vol. 1* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), pp. 47-49.

⁴¹ W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, 'Tackling the Problems', in W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), pp. 428; I. Maver, 'Glasgow's Civic Government', in W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), pp. 454-457.

Gas municipalization

In Nottingham, the first test of the Council's attitude to the new private gas monopoly arose in February 1849. The NGLCC wished to submit a Bill to Parliament to expand its operations. The Conservative Hannay expressed the feelings of the Bill's supporters on the Council. 'The matter was a purely business one. The Company simply wanted to pay its debts and to increase its works.' The critics wanted an economic solution to their concerns. The Liberals Heard, Parsons and Felkin proposed a deputation to meet the directors 'to save the expense of an opposition'.⁴² Birkin, although a Company shareholder, felt strongly that the Council should pursue the matter legally and not allow the costs to deter them. However, by May 1849 negotiations were completed and the Council voted unanimously to adopt the Bill.⁴³

The initial opportunity for members to consider a changed role for the Council in the management of the gas utility occurred in 1857. On this occasion the debate provoked more positive enthusiasm for municipal intervention. Edwin Patchitt, a Conservative solicitor, proposed that the powers of the independent Highways Board over street lighting in the town should be moved to the Council. The outcome was as close as it could be, with sixteen votes in favour and sixteen against. The Liberal Mayor, John Bradley, used his casting vote to maintain the status quo. Patchitt was supported by the Liberals John Barber, Smith Fowler and Richard Birkin, and the Conservatives John Bowley and William Hannay. They reasoned that since the Council already dominated the Lighting Committee with their own representatives from the Watch Committee, it made sense to concentrate those responsibilities and to reduce administrative costs. Their opponents expressed fears of increasing centralisation and even questioned Patchitt's personal motives. Alderman Felkin noted that even London did not have its lighting controlled by the councils and Luke Hardy supposed that 'Mr Patchitt wished to get every public body in the town under his own finger'.⁴⁴

⁴² *NJ*, 16 February 1849.

⁴³ *NJ*, 11 May 1849.

⁴⁴ *NJ*, 16 October 1857.

By February 1864 the scale of municipal opposition to the expansion of the private monopoly was much greater than fifteen years earlier. All but six members of Nottingham Borough Council objected to the NGLCC's proposals to strengthen the Company's finances and extend the supply of gas to the villages around Nottingham.⁴⁵ A special Gas Bill Committee met nine times between December 1863 and April 1864. Liberals and Conservatives spoke out against the likely rise in the cost of gas to consumers and the Company's increasing monopoly.⁴⁶ In February 1864, Alderman Lewis Heymann argued that it 'would be injurious to the price of gas in the existing district'.⁴⁷ The independent works in Beeston and Eastwood were better placed to supply the outlying districts. The Conservative Edwin Patchitt claimed he had twenty-four grounds for opposition to the Bill. However, Alderman William Felkin continued to defend the private company. He claimed, with some justification, that there was 'no company in the Kingdom at the present time which supplied gas at so cheap a rate'. With their usual economic approach to policy in mind, the Council agreed to pursue the Company with 'the strongest opposition at the least practicable cost'. They were 'opposed on grounds of monopoly' and had 'moral objections in the details of this Bill'. Members contended that it was their duty to look after 'the best interests of the consumers and the public'.⁴⁸ However, the Company won their parliamentary battle, thanks largely to the skill of the Company's consulting engineer, Thomas Hawksley, in his presentation of their evidence. The Corporation regarded the £402 of legal costs as a price worth paying for the opportunity to register their opposition publicly to the Company's policies.⁴⁹

The municipal debate about the gas monopoly was muted for some six years. Then in May 1870 a major change of policy was agreed. The Council unanimously supported a proposal to take the NWWC under municipal ownership.⁵⁰ A Gas and Water Committee was formed to oppose private legislation. In March 1873 the proposal of David Heath, the Chairman of the Committee, that the Council should municipalize

⁴⁵ *NJ*, 19 February 1864.

⁴⁶ NAO CA.CM.MISC/3, 7 December 1863-9 April 1864.

⁴⁷ *NJ*, 19 February 1864.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Roberts, 'Nottingham Gas-Light', pp. 247-251.

⁵⁰ *NJ*, 27 May 1870.

both the water and gas companies was 'carried unanimously'.⁵¹ In November 1873 the motion to proceed with both utilities was again carried unanimously.⁵² The new determination to seek gas municipalization had been triggered by the NGLCC's proposal to increase the firm's capital base and to pay higher dividends. The Council's Parliamentary Committee judged that the Company's expansion would come 'out of the pockets of the consumers'.⁵³ This mood of defiance followed hard on the heels of the Council's decision to oppose the Government's Bill that sought to amend the Gas Works Clauses Acts of 1847 and 1871 and thereby allow companies to levy higher maximum charges and to raise dividends. John Barber declared it 'highly prejudicial to consumers' and forecast that the legislation 'would nearly double the price of gas'.⁵⁴

Negotiations with the NGLCC opened in April 1873. The Corporation offered an increase of 0.5% on annuities, giving £3 per annum for each £50 share. By October a purchase price of £75 was offered for each share. But in November 1873 the NGLCC asked for an additional 1% on the annuity payments, which would have cost the Council an additional £100,000.⁵⁵ Nottinghamshire County Council also registered concerns with some aspects of the Corporation's proposed Bill. Samuel Johnson skilfully negotiated the necessary compromises with the County Council and ensured that the level of gas prices would produce the profits needed by the Borough to meet its financial commitments.⁵⁶ The final agreement with the directors secured payments that lay between the proposals of the two sides. Each annuity was to receive a dividend of £3 2s 6d per share for the first seven years and then £3 5s 0d in perpetuity.⁵⁷

As a result, what the Corporation regarded as a 'very generous' offer was made to the NGLCC in October 1873 to purchase the Company.⁵⁸ Members stressed that it was offered in the interests of the town and to avoid all disputes in the future. It was

⁵¹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/4, Gas and Water Bills Opposition Committee (hereafter GWBOC), 4 and 11 March 1873; *NMCDE*, 11 March 1873.

⁵² NAO CA.CM.MISC/4, GWBOC, 17 November 1873; *NMCDE*, 13 November 1873.

⁵³ PCR, FC, 3 February 1873.

⁵⁴ *NMCDE*, 4 February 1873.

⁵⁵ GWBOC Report, FC, 7 April 1873.

⁵⁶ NAO CA.CM.MISC/4, GWCR 16 April 1874, 29 April 1874, 4 May 1874.

⁵⁷ GWCR, FC, 3 August 1874.

⁵⁸ GWCR, FC, 16 October 1873.

presented to the shareholders as 'a liberal offer'. Terms were agreed with the directors in March and the legislation reached the statute book four months later. The Council believed that their negotiators had secured suitable safeguards for the public. 'It seems impossible that any burden can fall upon the Borough under the provisions of the Act for the repayment of borrowed money.'⁵⁹

Roberts has argued that the NGLCC only survived for as long as it did because of the Council's lack of cohesion in its policy towards the ownership of the gas utility.⁶⁰ Whilst the Council did lack a sense of urgency about gas municipalization until 1873, there were at that time only three large municipalities with municipal gas utilities in operation. Even Birmingham Corporation had not yet made decisions about the ownership of its gas utility. Nottingham Corporation committed itself to municipal ownership only at the point when it believed that the political and economic circumstances were appropriate for such a bid. The NGLCC was at that time an attractive proposition. It had monopoly power and served the largest gas district in the country. Although the Company charged lower prices and paid out lower dividends than many contemporary gas companies, the Council believed that it could provide the ratepayers with a better deal overall.⁶¹ Hawksley claimed, with some hyperbole, that 'this has been the most liberal company in England'. He also argued, with some justification, that, 'we supply the public at the very lowest rate and upon the best possible terms and with gas of a very superior quality'.⁶² Edwin Patchitt, a keen observer and critic of the NGLCC, supported the view that the management of the Company was 'most admirable'. He doubted 'there was a company in England that surpasses it', although he had only local knowledge and anecdote on which to base his judgement.⁶³

The Corporation paid heavily for its first municipal utility, but it acquired a flourishing company that was sound, well-run and efficient. Heath claimed that although the pursuit of the gas undertaking had been 'extremely arduous and had given them much anxiety...the acquisition of the Gas Company will prove a lasting

⁵⁹ GWCR, FC, 3 August 1874.

⁶⁰ Roberts, 'Nottingham Gas-Light', p. 275.

⁶¹ FC, 3 August 1874.

⁶² Roberts, 'Nottingham Gas-Light', p. 277.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

benefit to the town'.⁶⁴ That proved to be the case. Johnson, Tarbotton and the Liberal elite had demonstrated their astuteness in securing a company that was to be of critical importance to the income of the Council over the subsequent thirty years. Nottingham Corporation's experience corresponded with the more general claims of both Falkus and Millward and Ward. In Nottingham, as elsewhere, the purchase terms of gas companies were favourable to the private businesses, but the large corporations stood to make larger profits from their municipal gas utilities.⁶⁵ Nottingham Borough Council demonstrated its dissatisfaction with dividends remaining in private hands and its determination to secure shareholder profits for the community. Nottingham's municipal politicians pursued this natural monopoly in a non-partisan manner, for its potential profits and the contribution they might make in support of the Council's economy-minded civic policies. The action was supported and strengthened by enterprising professional officers. Members of both parties knew that the decision had a genuine appeal to ratepayers and consumers, for whom the levels of gas prices and municipal rates were tangible measures of the Corporation's policies. The intervention of the Council on this matter helped to heighten civic consciousness and, as a by-product of the success of the utility, enhanced civic pride over the subsequent three decades.

Water municipalization

Although the Borough Council was convinced in May 1870 that it should press for ownership of the water utility as its first municipal trading venture, water municipalization took five years longer to achieve than that of the gas utility. A few members had registered their interest in purchasing the NWWC in February 1854, but it was not until August 1869 that a special committee argued the case for municipal ownership. In the following May the proposition gained the full backing of the Council. The twin arguments used consistently to justify the acquisition of the water utility were the need to improve sanitation in the town and the use of the Company's profits for the good of the residents rather than the shareholders.

⁶⁴ GWCR, FC, 3 August 1874.

⁶⁵ Millward, 'Private to Public', pp. 12-13; Falkus, 'Development', pp. 152-153; Millward, 'Political Economy', p. 321.

Those justifications underpinned the debate in 1854 that attracted just five supporters for the creation of a public utility, one Conservative and four Liberals. Edwin Patchitt strongly argued the case for intervention, on the grounds that sanitation had to be improved to ameliorate the condition of the working classes and that the finance currently paid to shareholders should be used by the Council for that purpose.

This afforded the best possible reason why the Council should take on itself the supply of this great element, which might, under proper management, be distributed at little more than the cost of collection instead of it, as was now the case, being a source of emolument to private individuals.⁶⁶

Alderman Hart seconded the motion and asked members to consider the scheme in Manchester, where the Council had purchased the private company for £540,000 and spent a further £600,000 on vast water engineering projects. The Manchester utility had created an annual interest of £60,000, or an average of £1 per household. Hart believed that if Nottingham purchased the NWWC, the equivalent of 7s per house could be achieved. In Hart's view, companies 'took the most narrow focus until the public weal was completely lost sight of in their own selfish individuality'. He hoped that Nottingham Borough Council would 'promote all measures in accordance with the spirit and requirement of the times, irrespective of pecuniary advantage'.⁶⁷ Hart called for the Corporation to be willing to invest in modernization. Alderman Judd and Councillors Hardy and Hill also supported Patchitt's proposal in the recorded vote.

However, the notion of municipal ownership was challenged by the rest of the Council. Their reasoning included concerns about the Council's ability to take on the role effectively, fears related to the financial consequences of such intervention and a general sense of satisfaction with the sound management of the directors of the NWWC. For example, Alderman John Heard, very experienced in business as a hosiery manufacturer, believed that municipalization would 'prove a loss to the town'. Alderman Richard Birkin, a leading lace manufacturer, took the view that 'the Corporation had more business on their hands than they could manage satisfactorily'.

⁶⁶ *NJ*, 10 February 1854.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Thomas Smith, a Conservative maltster, was pessimistic about the Council's likelihood of making any more of a success of this venture than the control of the town's washhouses. William Page, a Liberal lace manufacturer, went so far as to say that he was anxious lest a municipal water utility become internally corrupt and result in a 'system of jobbing'. Heard, Herbert and Felkin thought that the directors were variously diligent, excellent managers and honest. William Parsons, a Conservative solicitor, argued that only Manchester and Bath had cheaper supplies, and in the case of Manchester their rates were higher than Nottingham's. Parsons was satisfied that the town could already meet its sanitary requirements because it had an 'abundant and cheap supply' of water. Most members agreed with Knight's parochial and unproven judgement that there was 'not a better glass of water drunk anywhere'.⁶⁸ Felkin pointed out that Bolton's undertaking had not been a success and that the question of municipalization should be postponed for several years until the town was larger. That wariness of assuming the ownership of the water utility persisted for fifteen years.

Indeed, in July 1863 members voted to allow a massive 33% annual increase in the water rate imposed by the NWWC.⁶⁹ Council members remained divided on their expectations of the NWWC's contribution to improving sanitary provision in the town. On the one hand, Vickers objected to the Company ceasing the supply of water to some properties and argued that the Company should take a more constructive approach generally to improving sanitation. On the other hand, his fellow Liberal, Cullen, caught the mood of the many members who wished to resist interference in the operation of a private company. As far as he was concerned, the Company should not be expected to supply customers if it was not paid. The editor of the *Nottingham Journal* supported the wider perspective articulated by Vickers. He felt that members had based their decision 'on an imperfect view of the whole question' and predicted that the working classes would ultimately pay the high price of this approach. He warned that the landlords would recoup their losses on the increased rates for their properties 'by laying it on the occupiers at higher rentals'.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *NJ*, 10 July 1873.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

However, in 1868 the municipal politicians began to take a more challenging approach towards the NWWC. A special committee of eight members, under the chairmanship of John Barber, met twenty-two times in just eleven months to consider and then vigorously oppose the Company's proposed Waterworks Bill.⁷¹ Committee members objected to the Company's plan to acquire new capital and to extend its sources of water supply to include Dover Beck. The Borough Engineer, Tarbotton, was despatched to prepare a report on the current quantity and quality of the water supply in the town, whilst a water analyst, water engineers and a geologist were engaged to provide members with independent expert advice. For the first time, the Council made it clear, in its petition to Parliament, that it was prepared in principle to purchase the existing undertaking. The directors refused two offers from the Council, in March and April 1869, before the special committee presented its detailed arguments in favour of municipal ownership in August 1869. The Committee contended that the private company should be purchased on 'sanitary and economical grounds'. They claimed that such a course of action would be in line with the mood of national political opinion. 'The tendency of legislation is to place the water supply in the hands of Local Boards of Health.'⁷² Nottingham Borough Council had been the Local Board of Health for the town for a decade. The Committee reported that permissive powers were available to it.

The Public Health Act and the Local Government Act impose on Local Boards of Health certain duties as to the supply of water for domestic public and sanitary purposes and give them power by Agreement to purchase their Waterworks Company.⁷³

One symbolic action had been taken by the Council in March. It asked the Town Clerk to insert a clause in the Bill that would enable the Corporation, as the Local Board of Health, to take periodic water samples. This was the first step on a path of physical intervention in the operation of the water supply that concluded ten years later with complete responsibility for that supply.

⁷¹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/3, 29 December 1868-13 August 1869.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 24 March 1869, 2 April 1869, 13 August 1869.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13 August 1869.

A sub-committee of the newly constituted Waterworks Committee of the Council was given the task of framing the details of a bid for the NWWC. In May 1870 the formal proposal to purchase the Company was 'carried with cheers unanimously'. David Heath, the Chairman of the Waterworks Committee, argued that the Corporation's responsibility for extinguishing fires necessitated 'complete control over the waterworks'. He regretted that costly litigation would be needed to secure ownership, but hoped, with a rhetorical flourish, that 'the day they adopted it would be looked back upon as one of the happiest days of the town'. Alderman Thackeray acknowledged that 'the subject was surrounded by difficulties'. He was concerned that the deal with the private company would be seen by some in the town to have 'more liberality than was necessary or just'.⁷⁴ High costs always troubled an economy-minded Council. Alderman Vickers supported the motion, but requested that the feelings of the Company's shareholders be handled with delicacy. He claimed that they had invested their funds without a dividend for some years and deserved the thanks of the Council. A month later, the strength of the political support for municipal ownership was underlined by one of its shareholders.⁷⁵ Councillor William Brewill, a Conservative, complained publicly that the directors of the NWWC had not brought the proposals of the Council to the attention of his fellow shareholders.

During the following eighteen months, the Waterworks Committee established the basis of the Council's legal case and the financial details of an improved offer to the Company. The Committee was unanimous in its desire to municipalize the water utility but, in November 1871, the directors declined the offer yet again. Two days after the rebuttal, the Committee recommended that the Full Council formally oppose the NWWC's Bill to increase the dividend and the size of the Company's shareholding. Alderman Thackeray's motion was carried without dissent. The obduracy of the directors was met with fierce resistance by members. Thackeray felt sure that the directors had failed again to put the Council's bid formally before the shareholders for their proper consideration. 'The directors were wrong and acting cruelly to their shareholders.' The Council maintained pressure on the Company, emphasising the sanitary arguments in support of municipal ownership. It was

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-27 May 1870; *NJ*, 27 May 1870.

⁷⁵ *NJ*, 27 May 1870.

reported that the Council's water analyst, Dr Trueman, had judged that the water supply from the Old Trent Waterworks and the Scotholme Works as 'unfit for use without previous boiling', despite the quality of water generally attracting local approbation.⁷⁶

During 1873 and 1874 the rhetoric of the municipal politicians emphasised the generosity of the Council's offer and the benefits that would be gained from a public utility. For example, in March 1873, Heath's language became much more aggressive and condemnatory. He complained that the directors were,

blinded by self-interest. They seek to burden the town with enormous capital, at an exorbitant rate of interest, and on such terms as to put an extortionate premium into the pockets of shareholders.⁷⁷

Heath claimed that the Council's efforts to municipalize water were not only of benefit to the town, but 'for the good of the entire district'. Given that the Nottingham and Leen District Sewerage Board now supervised sanitation arrangements across an area well beyond the town's current boundaries, he felt able to argue that the improvement to sanitary conditions would benefit all. 'The town and its suburbs are so closely allied, that for the obtaining of a common water supply they may be regarded as one district.'⁷⁸

The knowledge available to the Council about insanitary conditions in the town, and the implications for the health of its inhabitants, was substantially increased in 1873, by the Council's receipt of a very detailed joint report from the new Medical Officer of Health and the Borough Engineer.⁷⁹ Dr Seaton and Tarbotton combined their researches to draw to the attention of members the housing and sewerage problems of the Meadows area. The quality of the town's water supply was perceived as integral to any solution. The arguments in favour of water municipalization gathered pace during 1874, not least because the negotiations with the Nottingham Gas-Light and

⁷⁶ *NJ*, 21 June 1870.

⁷⁷ *NMCDE*, 11 March 1873.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ E. Seaton, *A Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Borough of Nottingham* (Richard Allen, Nottingham, 1873).

Coke Company were completed by August. In contrast, the talks between the Council and the NWWC were floundering. In August 1874 the Borough Council again declared its unanimous support for the transfer of the private company to public ownership. Heath continued to be exasperated by the tactics of the directors. They had 'all along entertained a most extravagant notion of the value of the undertaking'. This frustration led the Consulting Engineer, Thomas Hawksley, to suggest that the Council should have its own waterworks producing 'a good supply of water at a fair rate'. Thackeray, who had acted as a mediator for the Council's offers to the Company, stressed the health aspects of the Corporation's interest. Water should not 'simply be made a matter of commercial speculation'.⁸⁰ Walter Gregory, a Liberal councillor, believed that the Council had done all it could and that the shareholders should look closely at the actions of the directors.

The Council felt able to justify its actions and make a further offer, 'in deference to the very strong feeling that there is generally in the Council and in the town, that the water should be in the hands of the public authorities'. Many members never wavered in their support for municipal utilities. For example, in November 1876 James Jacoby, a Liberal lace manufacturer, spoke for many when he declared his continuing belief in the appropriateness of public ownership of the water undertaking.

They could as human beings, enjoy nothing more than pure water. It was one of the very elements of health and comfort, and a good sanitary condition.⁸¹

He was convinced that the success that had been achieved during the first two years of gas municipalization could be replicated by the ownership of the water utility. Jacoby was sure that a second municipal business would not be a 'folly'.⁸²

The extension of the Borough's boundaries in 1877 enlarged the area served by the Borough Council by more than five times and produced a population almost double the size of the old Nottingham. There were clearly political and financial implications for the responsibilities which the Corporation now had for the enlarged Borough. The

⁸⁰ GWCR, FC, 3 August 1874.

⁸¹ *NJ*, 2 November 1876.

⁸² *Ibid.*

reorganisation of the wards and the Council's representative structure resulted in the initial elections for the new Corporation in November 1877. The Liberal aldermen and the councillors of both parties soon reiterated their commitment to the municipalization of water. Within a few weeks they were engaged once more in the struggle to gain ownership of the utility. The attitude of the directors towards municipalization remained unchanged. In December 1877 Samuel Maples, the Clerk to the NWWC, restated the directors' position.

They have no wish to part with their undertaking which after many years of trouble and careful management has now attained its present prosperous condition.⁸³

In January 1878 the NWWC petitioned Parliament once more, this time to extend its supply of water to a number of villages, mainly to the north and west of the town. The Company also sought powers to increase its capital. The Bill would have granted their borrowing rights to be increased from £65,000 to £102,500. The Full Council, chaired by Thackeray, decided to petition against the Bill in Parliament and to renew negotiations for the purchase of the Company 'upon fair and equitable terms'.⁸⁴ Thomas Simpson, a Liberal architect, expressed the members' mounting hostility to the business culture of the NWWC. The members generally saw the acquisition as important for both the health of the inhabitants and the wasted finances of the Corporation. Municipal ownership would be welcomed for,

the town gaining the advantages in a sanitary point of view of the administration of the water supply and to avoid the continual parliamentary contests between the Corporation and the Water Company.⁸⁵

Samuel Johnson ensured that the legal and professional engineering support was well coordinated. The Town Clerk briefed the counsel for the Corporation, Mr Venables QC, and established the costs of the litigation. Johnson arranged for Dr Seaton, the Corporation's Medical Officer of Health, and Mr Richards, the Inspector of

⁸³ NAO CA.TC.10/3/1, 8 December 1877.

⁸⁴ FC, 21 January 1878; *NMCDE*, 22 January 1878.

⁸⁵ NAO CA.CM.92/1, WBCR, 13 February 1878.

Nuisances, 'to give evidence on the insufficiency of the water supply and the propriety of it being in the hands of the Town Council'.⁸⁶ Johnson and the Borough Engineer, Tarbotton, reported on 'the advantages the Town would derive from the franchise of the Water Company's undertaking'. Tarbotton estimated that the whole process of municipalization would cost some £700,000. Johnson took the view that the members should be prepared to pay a significant amount of money if need be.

Although we have an abundance of good water, of good quality, at a cheap rate, and have very little therefore to complain of, yet the conveniences are such that we are willing to pay a very large premium to obtain possession of the works.⁸⁷

The Council's trust in Johnson's legal judgement and negotiating skills and in Tarbotton's knowledge of engineering, provided members with the confidence they needed to overcome their more usual instincts for economy. Council members believed in the propriety of their decision to municipalize and, as with the cost of acquiring the gas utility, were prepared to pursue their proposals to a conclusion.

However, the Council was still in dispute with the Company in January 1879. Johnson had provided members with all the objections, in the smallest detail, that they could raise in their battle with the NWWC over the proposed Bill. For example, they questioned the appropriateness of the Company being allowed to supply water to Hucknall Torkard, when that community's Local Board of Health was able to provide a sufficient supply themselves. The Corporation queried the economics of supplying water to 'extremely scattered' communities and the price implications for the Borough's consumers if the Company was allowed to increase greatly its borrowing powers. The Council proposed that the 'public benefit' would be better served by the transfer of the undertaking.⁸⁸ Given the continuing difficulties being experienced in the negotiations, Hugh Browne, a Liberal solicitor, raised again the possibility of the Council constructing its own waterworks in competition to the NWWC, a notion

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 February 1878.

⁸⁷ NAO CA.TC.10/3/5, correspondence with the Town Clerk of Southport, 4 April 1878.

⁸⁸ TCR, FC, 6 January 1879.

similar to that considered in 1874.⁸⁹ Samuel Johnson's legal advice was that Parliament would not grant them such powers. He advised that such were the effects of the financial shortcomings of competition in the 'natural monopolies' of water and gas, that there was now a concern nationally about the economic implications of unfettered competition. Indeed, the Tramways Act of 1870 had been structured to offer compulsory purchase rights to local authorities for private tramway companies, within a defined period.⁹⁰

The Council appointed a committee to negotiate with the directors, 'subject to confirmation of the Council'. This condition suited those junior members, like the Liberal Nicholls, who wanted to ensure that the Full Council continued to control the process. Thackeray, the chairman of the negotiating group, sought to break the log jam by having discussions with the directors on 'an official to official' basis, 'without prejudice'.⁹¹ His negotiations with Samuel Maples ended in disappointment in early February, by which time two offers had been declined. The Committee, angry and frustrated, declared its willingness to instruct the Town Clerk to 'insert the correspondence in the newspapers', if Maples failed to put the latest offer before the Company's directors.⁹² On 3 March the Council refused to increase its offer 'until the Council shall see fit to rescind it'. Samuel Maples continued to assert the Company's strong commercial position.

The undertaking of the Company is not a speculative undertaking. It has been brought to its present prosperous condition and assured position by fifty years of good and liberal management.⁹³

Two months later, having 'become aware of certain facts affecting their estimate of the value of the Company', the Council made 'a further and final offer'.⁹⁴ This step proved to be conclusive. By 16 April terms had been agreed in principle and by 14 May the details had been concluded. The parliamentary process was completed on 11

⁸⁹ *NMCDE*, 4 March 1879.

⁹⁰ Sleeman, 'Tramway Industry', p. 159.

⁹¹ WBCR, FC, 3 March 1879 (correspondence of 1 February 1879).

⁹² NAO CA.CM.92/1, 8 February 1879.

⁹³ NAO CA.TC.10/3/2, 26 March 1879.

⁹⁴ WBCR, FC, 7 April 1879.

August 1879.⁹⁵ Then on 14 May 1880 'the Deed of Transfer duly sealed was handed to the Town Council and the Company gave formal possession of the undertaking to the Committee'.⁹⁶

The Council was relieved to bury 'for ever the source of an expensive and painful legislation'. The outcome was assessed by the Corporation to be 'very excellent terms' for the directors, but they were terms that the Council 'can well afford to pay'. As the utility came into the Council's hands, the motivation for its acquisition was clearly stated in terms of both health and finance. The Corporation's aspiration was that the new water undertaking 'will not only prove a boon to the Town in a sanitary sense, but will become a successful commercial undertaking'. The high cost of the purchase of the NWWC was clear at this point. The Mayor, Sir James Oldknow, reflected that,

the time may come when an enlightened public may demand from Parliament the transfer of water undertakings to Local Authorities on more reasonable terms; but your Committee are afraid that such a time is too far distant to enter with any practical effect into the operations of today.⁹⁷

Oldknow expressed the optimistic view that 'they have taken a wise step in a provident spirit' and that 'in the years to come the undertaking of the Company will prove highly remunerative'.⁹⁸ That perspective of municipal capitalism proved to be well founded. The Nottingham municipal water utility was one of very few water undertakings nationally that was able to operate at a profit.

The financial agreement reached in October 1879 was significantly higher than the figures being considered by the NWWC in 1873 and 1874. In 1873 the prices being offered for each water share were similar to those for gas shares.⁹⁹ By July 1874 a higher bid was placed on the table. The Council offered a graduated dividend from £3

⁹⁵ NAO CA.CM.92/1, 16 April 1879; NAO CA.TC.10/3/2, 14 May 1879.

⁹⁶ NAO CA.CM.92/1, 14 May 1880.

⁹⁷ WCR, FC, 6 October 1879.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ NAO CA.CM.MISC/4, 17 June 1873, 17 September 1873.

2s 6d to £3 5s 0d and then to £3 7s 6d over a seven year period.¹⁰⁰ The Company sought a sum of £7,000 as compensation for its officers. In March 1879 the Council's offer was improved further with an initial payment of £3 5s 0d for each annuity and one month later the final bid was accepted. Each annuity would pay £3 5s 0d in 1881, £3 7s 6d in 1882 and £4 0s 0d from 1883 in perpetuity.¹⁰¹ The formal agreement signed in October 1879 included a purchase payment of £20,000, with which the directors could pay compensation and the winding up costs, and a further £10,000 in lieu of cash balances.¹⁰²

The negotiations had been clearly much more prolonged than those for the gas undertaking. The greater overall cost of the water undertaking to the Council reflected both the Company's determination to hold out for the best possible terms and the Corporation's commitment to securing the utility, even at a relatively high cost. The level of priority which the Council gave to this acquisition was evident, given that the annual product of Nottingham's General District Rate was just £36,224 in the year of municipalization.¹⁰³ By 1880 the Borough had loan sanctions worth £550,000 for improvement projects, a considerable number of which related to sanitary matters. During the course of the 1870s the size of the authority's borrowing had increased by some 80%.¹⁰⁴

Nottingham's pursuit of the water undertaking was long and persistent. The authority became the eleventh municipality to own its water utility. Like many other authorities, Nottingham responded to the health issues that had been exacerbated by a greatly expanding population, over a number of decades.¹⁰⁵ The Council wished to eliminate the avoidable costs of the private companies and take a more integrated approach to the related issues of water quality, pressurised supply, drainage and sewerage.¹⁰⁶ But, Nottingham Corporation's experience differed in a number of

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4 July 1874.

¹⁰¹ NAO CA.CM.92/1, 18 March 1879.

¹⁰² WCR, FC, 6 October 1879.

¹⁰³ NUMD Nottingham Borough Accounts, March 1878- March 1879.

¹⁰⁴ NAO CA.TR.20/1/1, Treasury Loan Sanctions, 1860-1880.

¹⁰⁵ R. Millward, 'Urban Government, Finance and Public Health in Victorian Britain', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁶ J.A. Hassan, 'The Growth and Impact of the British Water Industry in the Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, XXXVII, 4 (1985), p. 538; Millward, 'Urban Government', pp. 56, 58.

important respects to those of other corporations generally. For example, Falkus has argued that financial considerations were never a very important motive for water municipalization.¹⁰⁷ In Nottingham, the municipal politicians repeatedly expressed the view that they wished to create a commercially successful undertaking. The Liberal and Conservative members were anxious to be seen to manage municipal finances in an economic manner and, whenever possible, produce profits for the benefit of the ratepayers. Many private companies were unwilling to extend supplies.¹⁰⁸ This was not the case for the NWWC. Council members were keen that such developments should be carefully monitored and not be allowed to affect their electorate unfairly. In many authorities there was widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of the water supplies.¹⁰⁹ Overall, Nottingham was fortunate in the quantity and quality available, though supplies were by no means perfect.

Nottingham's municipal politicians wanted ownership of the water business both to improve supplies yet further and to take for the ratepayers those profits which had been paid to the shareholders as dividends. The success of the gas utility between 1874 and 1879 gave members greater confidence in their ability to manage public utilities competently. The politicians were unanimous in support of a non-partisan policy. They were emboldened by their knowledge that their senior officers provided them with state-of-the-art ideas and data for their rational planning, together with high quality professional expertise for the operation of their undertakings. The civic ethos that provided the context for policy-making and decision-taking in the Chamber had enabled members to create a second civic business by consensus. For many of the residents of Nottingham, the supply of municipal gas and water into their homes gave them a greater consciousness of the Corporation as a modernizer of municipal services and a practical supporter of greater economic integration.

¹⁰⁷ Falkus, 'Development', p. 157.

¹⁰⁸ Millward, 'Emergence', pp. 101, 108-109.

¹⁰⁹ Falkus, 'Development', pp.152-153.

Two publicly protected monopolies

Nottingham Borough Council was taking decisions about tramways in the town from 1877, whilst the negotiations were being conducted with the NWWC. The Chairman of the Gas Committee and the Town Clerk were involved in debates about impending Government legislation for the electricity industry, at meetings of the Association of Municipal Corporations, in the same month that the final financial agreements were made with the NWWC. But the approaches that the Corporation took to the management of the tramways and electricity were significantly different to each other, and both were handled in dissimilar ways to the gas and water utilities. Although the Council ultimately municipalized the generation and supply of electricity and the operation of the town's tramways, the timing of its decisions was dependent not just on its own overall commitment to municipal capitalism, but on the national debate about electricity and Government legislation for both electricity and tramways. The Government had recognised the difficulties that surrounded the municipalization of the natural monopolies of water and gas and decided to guide the overall development of electricity and tramways.¹¹⁰ Its legislation for the tramways in 1870 and electricity in 1882 and 1888, gave local authorities a favoured position in terms of control and ownership of these utilities.

The long timelines that were involved in Nottingham did not indicate an unwillingness of the Corporation to proceed, but rather reflected a number of difficult political, financial and technological issues faced by authorities across the country. In the event, the creation of electrical power enabled employees to be transported more quickly to their workplaces. The provision of cheap and reliable transport around the town needed the presence of a new source of power. The motivation for the ownership of electricity and tramways was essentially financial, with the 'streets issue' generating support amongst the electorate.

In the case of both utilities, Nottingham was a leading authority. The Corporation was one of the earliest of municipalities to obtain the right to manage electricity, in 1890, and the sixth of the large authorities to have an operational scheme in 1894.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155; Millward, 'Political Economy', pp. 323-324.

The Nottingham Corporation Tramways utility, established in 1897, was the fourth such major municipal business in England and Wales, following Leeds, Sheffield and Plymouth. With the exception of Glasgow, only Nottingham City Council had the four utilities of gas, water, electricity and tramways trading in 1897.¹¹¹

The processes of the municipalization of electricity and tramways in Nottingham were subject to specific external pressures not experienced during the establishment of the gas and water undertakings. Issues of technology, cost and law weighed heavily in the minds of the municipal politicians, who were responsible for taking decisions for these two utilities. They affected the motives of councillors in deciding whether to municipalize and the timing of their bids. Members in Nottingham had learned the lessons of the high cost of gas, and particularly water, as they approached the difficulties surrounding electricity. The technology was in its infancy in the 1880s, with all the implied costs for experimentation and installation. It was a complex technology that could not remain, at least in the longer term, as localised as gas and water supplies. Larger consumption areas were needed to meet the high costs of generation.¹¹² National and local policies for the organisation and management of power generation on a large scale, stretching far beyond the boundaries of any one municipal authority, still remained to be agreed and implemented in 1900.

Nottingham Borough Council proceeded with caution, defensiveness and, at times, negativity. The legislation that regulated electricity supply gave local authorities public protection against private monopolies.¹¹³ As with earlier utilities, the municipalities were able to obtain loans at more advantageous rates than private companies.¹¹⁴ It was only slowly that members of Nottingham Corporation reached the decision that they should determine how the process of supply should be managed in the town. They welcomed, at that stage, the opportunity to prevent a private company gaining a monopoly, given their experiences with gas and water.¹¹⁵ In effect, the Corporation staked its claim for primacy over any future decisions.¹¹⁶ After a further four years of caution, the Council decided to deliver the supply of

¹¹¹ Appendix C, Table 14.

¹¹² Hannah, *Electricity*, pp. 24-25; Robson, 'Public Utility', p. 325.

¹¹³ Hannah, *Electricity*, pp. 5, 8.

¹¹⁴ C.R. Westlake, 'Electricity in Relation to Municipal Trading', *Public Administration*, (1939), p. 295.

¹¹⁵ H.R. Meyer, *Municipal Ownership in Great Britain* (Macmillan, 1906), p. 258.

¹¹⁶ Falkus, 'Development', p.156.

electricity through its own trading company. The political consensus achieved by the Liberal and Conservative parties, which had been developed for policy-making generally, held secure during the prolonged debate on electricity municipalization. Members regarded electricity as the very epitome of modernity.

In Nottingham, the complex nature of this new technology necessitated a much greater role for the senior officers than for gas or water. There was a very high premium on their professional knowledge and expertise in the Council's decision-taking process. This involved both the engineering skills of the specialist engineers and the legal acumen and negotiating abilities of the Town Clerk. Nottingham was well placed in securing the services of a high calibre Electrical Engineer. Nationally, there were far fewer engineers available for electricity utilities, than had been the case with gas and water utilities. Most authorities were in competition to appoint engineers within a very short time-span to help with municipalization.¹¹⁷ Even in the early Edwardian period, many aspects of electricity supply and generation remained speculative and experimental and, as such, too risky for public funds.¹¹⁸

The political arguments in Nottingham focused principally on the huge potential costs of early experimentation, the uncertainties of the technology and the likely economic effects of electricity on the established gas utility. Gas was the Borough Council's most successful business venture. Indeed, Nottingham was a lead authority nationally in the performance of its gas undertaking. Corporations across the country experienced acute problems in both limiting the damage to their gas profits, and assessing with accuracy how much more to invest in their gas utilities, once electricity had arrived as a genuine competitor.¹¹⁹ Political disagreements in Nottingham were raised frankly within the general context of consensus. The concerns that individual members had about the Council's policy proposals for electricity and tramways were made clear in debates in the Chamber and, at times, in the municipal elections. But when the final decision had to be taken, it was with unanimity. Politicians often assured their electorate that the Borough Council was very capable of taking on responsibilities, which very few authorities had so far attempted. Their political

¹¹⁷ Meyer, *Municipal Ownership*, pp. 224-226.

¹¹⁸ Hannah, *Electricity*, pp. 27-28; Westlake, *Electricity in Relation*, p. 294; Waller, *Town*, p. 305.

¹¹⁹ Meyer, *Municipal Ownership*, pp. 247-249; R.H. Morgan, 'The Development of the Electricity Supply Industry in Wales to 1919', *The Welsh History Review*, 11, (1983), pp. 318-321.

rhetoric was generally couched in terms of the well-established call for due economy, but with a commitment to meet the civic needs of the ratepayers.

The national legislation that governed the ownership of tramways gave local authorities an effective veto over private companies in their area.¹²⁰ Firstly, local authority consent was required before a private operator could gain a Provisional Order from the Board of Trade. Secondly, a time limit of twenty-one years was placed on the initial franchise from 1870. Once the franchise reached its time limit, the council had the right to purchase the company, with costs considerably less than those experienced with private gas and water companies.¹²¹ These conditions inevitably played a significant role in determining when authorities felt the need to take decisions about either the control or ownership of private tramway businesses. However, in Nottingham, as in a number of other boroughs, the timing of the municipalization of the tramways was also closely linked to the generation and supply of electricity in the town.¹²² Once electricity had become the responsibility of the Corporation, the tramways provided a logical customer for that power and the two utilities came to be viewed as a dual development. An increasing number of businesses and their employees were looking for reliable and cheap transport, as firms and housing became more widespread around the town. Municipal electrified tramways supplied a solution for rapid transit and also gave all the social advantages of easier personal contact.¹²³ The Liberal and Conservative consensus achieved unanimity on the decisions for the tramways utility, as it had for electricity. Both municipal utilities were perceived in the Chamber as important modern, civic projects that added much to the town's sense of civic identity.

¹²⁰ Falkus, 'Development', pp. 153-154.

¹²¹ V. Knox, 'The Economic Effect of the Tramways Act of 1870', *Economic Journal*, 11 (1901), pp. 503, 507-509.

¹²² Sleeman, 'Tramway Industry', p. 173.

¹²³ Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', p. 162.

Electricity municipalization

The experience of almost all other municipal authorities reflected the essential strategy of Nottingham Corporation's approach to decision-taking for electricity supply. Despite the highly favourable statutory circumstances from 1882 for municipal control, authorities delayed decisions and took a reactive, rather than a proactive, stance to the perceived threats of private monopolies. For example, in Leeds and Glasgow the corporations hesitated for a considerable time. In the case of Leeds, the Council eventually decided to appoint a private electricity provider in 1891.¹²⁴ Problems arose in the development of the system and members soon regretted their decision. The Corporation took the utility into municipal ownership in 1897, but at greater cost than six years earlier, with the payment of compensation to the franchisee. Glasgow had been anxious to safeguard its gas utility. The Corporation obtained a Provisional Order in the same year as Nottingham and then delayed the decision to undertake municipal supply for a further three years.¹²⁵ As in Nottingham, the decisions to agree to municipal ownership in Glasgow and Birmingham were non-controversial.¹²⁶ Both the Liberal and Conservative members supported the Council's strategy. The motivation was pragmatic rather than ideological.¹²⁷ Whilst most of the large authorities decided to municipalize electricity, Reading was one of a number of medium-sized boroughs that preferred to regulate electricity and have the supply provided by a private company.¹²⁸ As Jones and Falkus have argued, most authorities were reluctant to invest in large-scale developments and yet jealous of private enterprise.¹²⁹ This was certainly true of Nottingham.

The strength of the political opposition to a private electricity monopoly in Nottingham was in evidence at each stage of the debate about ownership, until the undertaking was finally established in December 1892. Those many supporters of

¹²⁴ B. Barber, 'Aspects of Municipal Government, 1835-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1980), pp. 322-323.

¹²⁵ I.E. Sweeney, 'The Municipal Administration of Glasgow, 1833-1912: Public Service and Scottish Civic Identity' (University of Strathclyde, Ph D thesis, 1990), pp. 416-423.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 421; Maver, 'Civic Government', p. 468; Jones, 'Electricity Supply', p. 23.

¹²⁷ Morgan, 'Wales', p. 321.

¹²⁸ A. Alexander, *Borough Government and Politics: Reading, 1835-1985* (George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 85.

¹²⁹ Jones, 'Electricity Supply', p. 19; Falkus, 'Development', p. 156.

public ownership believed that municipal capitalism provided the key to further civic projects. Their convictions were underpinned by the continuing success of the gas and water undertakings. However, the voices of those who believed that a private company was preferable were also heard, albeit in smaller numbers. Their objections rested more on the unacceptable risks of investment in an uncertain technology, than the support of private enterprise for its own sake. Even when the Corporation had obtained a Provisional Order from the Board of Trade in 1890, the views of members, within both parties and across all occupational groups, were still polarised about how best to proceed. As late as 1891, Samuel Johnson observed the presence of both views in the Chamber.

Of course, there is a great divergence of opinion in the Town Council. One section of the Council inclines to the belief that we ought at all risk to undertake to be Purveyors of Electricity, as we are of Gas. The other section are of the contrary opinion and assert the loss will be so great that we ought to hand the undertaking over to any company who will contract with us.¹³⁰

In December 1891 an 'animated discussion' was held in the Full Council meeting that debated the recommendations of a report from the Electric Lighting Committee. It was proposed, with the unanimous support of the Committee, that the Corporation should undertake the supply itself. However, Charles Lucas, a Conservative councillor, urged that consideration should be given to a 'private monopoly'. He was supported by only one other member, Edward Elborne, another Conservative. Fellow Conservative Party councillor Thomas Bentley opposed them. He argued in favour of the proposal on the dual grounds that Nottingham should have electricity like other large boroughs and control its own streets. The Liberal Thomas Hardy took the view that the Corporation should run the utility, but not at a profit. Members had an opportunity to 'put their feet down and do something for their own constituents'. Others also 'spoke strongly against the Corporation relinquishing their rights' and the

¹³⁰ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 3 June 1891, Town Clerk's correspondence with the Engineer's Department at the General Post Office in London.

Committee's recommendation was eventually adopted.¹³¹ The first rather tentative step towards avoiding a private monopoly had been taken.

Full political agreement on a detailed policy was not achieved for a further twelve months. Johnson and Brown used their professional networks to gather data from 'various towns in the Provinces and in London and its suburbs'. The advice of independent experts, obtained by the senior officers, proved conclusive. It was reported that Henry Talbot, the newly appointed Electrical Engineer, 'was making himself acquainted with the central portion of the Town', the area designated for the initial electric lighting system.¹³² His technical recommendations were accepted in full. It was at this meeting that a sense of urgency at last prevailed. Standing orders were suspended so that the Full Council could move on directly to the next stage of decision-taking at that meeting and approve the report. Only a few days before this meeting, an exasperated Samuel Sands, who as Mayor was chairing the Council debates, protested that the Corporation should make a firm decision, whatever that might be. Although his preference was for municipalization, he urged members to 'get on with it and provide electric lighting or let others have it'.¹³³ There could have been no clearer statement of the political pragmatism that drove the discussions. By February 1894 Johnson was in a better position to take a more measured view. He admitted that 'it took us the best part of two or three years to enquire into the question'. Ultimately, the members of both parties were unanimous in their desire to be 'doing it ourselves'.¹³⁴ They felt that the professional advice was sufficiently compelling to support their instinctive belief in the economic wisdom of a third municipal utility.

The period between 1879 and 1894 had revealed attitudes of defensiveness and caution by those charged with taking the decisions. Until 1883 members of the Gas Committee had responsibility for electric lighting matters. From that time a special Electric Lighting Committee supervised developments. Finally, in 1894, that

¹³¹ Electric Lighting Committee Report (hereafter ELCR), FC, 7 December 1891; *NDE*, 8 December 1891.

¹³² FC, 7 December 1891, 5 December 1892; NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 17 September 1891, 28 January 1892.

¹³³ *NDE*, 5 September 1893.

¹³⁴ HC (1894) XVII *Royal Commission to Consider the Amalgamation of the City and County of London*, p. 352.

Committee was upgraded to the status of a standing committee with fully delegated powers to manage the electricity undertaking. Delays were commonplace as the Corporation very slowly formulated its policy. At the heart of the continuing debate remained the divergent opinions about the question of public or private monopoly powers. The rhetoric of both Liberal and Conservative members reflected their view of themselves as guardians of the ratepayers and protectors of the public purse.

The Town Clerk and the Chairman of the Gas Committee were involved in discussions about impending Government legislation, at the Executive Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations, as early as October 1879. Johnson and Barber concurred with the general view of the large municipalities. They were concerned about the likely implications of the intervention of private electric companies in the area. 'They did not think that the time had arrived to give general powers to private electric companies to break up the streets, unless with the consent of the local authorities.'¹³⁵

By 1882 the debate in both Westminster and Nottingham was more widespread and intense, prompted by the passage of the Electric Lighting Act. Nottingham Corporation was especially concerned about the scale of expenditure that might be required on experimentation in the new technology. Private companies were keen to get a foothold in the major authorities. In January 1882 the Council decided to oppose Bills from six companies, each wishing to gain access to lighting projects in Nottingham.¹³⁶ Six weeks later, the Full Council considered the Gas Committee's approach from one of those firms, the Anglo-American Brush Electric Light Company, to light the Great Market Place.¹³⁷ The Company pointed to its successes in Sheffield, Liverpool, Bristol and London. The Council decided to defer approval of experiments in central Nottingham until the results of the trials in other towns were known. In June 1882 the Council agreed to a small-scale project 'to test the suitability of lighting and the cost thereof'. The partial lighting of the Reading Room

¹³⁵ PRO 30/72/9, 15 October 1879.

¹³⁶ Lighting Committee Report (hereafter LCR), FC, 23 January 1882.

¹³⁷ LCR, FC, 6 March 1882.

in University College was agreed in principle, subject to 'accurate observations to be made of the costs'.¹³⁸

In August 1882 the Full Council referred to the Gas Committee two more applications from companies 'to run the wires', if the Corporation agreed to establish an electrical distribution station. They were not sufficiently tempted by the offer of a 'very moderate price for town lighting'.¹³⁹ Two months later, the Council learned that those two companies and four others had formally applied to the Board of Trade for Provisional Orders. The Gas Committee was given powers to 'take such steps as they may deem expedient'.¹⁴⁰ Under the increasing external pressure from a range of private companies, the Council decided to apply for its own Provisional Order to enable the Corporation to supply electricity within the Borough. In November 1882 the Gas Committee was given fully delegated powers to make any modifications to the Order 'in the interests of the ratepayers of the Council'.¹⁴¹ This approach echoed the language used when negotiations were ongoing for the gas and water utilities.

The Gas Committee, following considerable discussion, felt unable to accept the conditions that were placed on its application by the President of the Board of Trade. Samuel Johnson advised Whitehall that 'it will be impossible for us to comply literally with the rules of the Board of Trade', but that the Council would do its best. The Town Clerk observed that 'the rules seem to me obscure'.¹⁴² Johnson organised a deputation of members to put their particular circumstances to Joseph Chamberlain personally in London, but they failed to change the Board's list of conditions.¹⁴³ The Board continued to insist that the time-scale of implementation of the project and the area of the town to be illuminated had to fit their model Order. The Gas Committee believed that, in the final analysis, the cost to the ratepayers throughout the Borough for such a small area of lighting in central Nottingham was not in the Council's interests. Johnson arranged with the town clerks of Glasgow, Manchester, Norwich and Wigan for all their applications to be withdrawn simultaneously from the Board

¹³⁸ ELCR, FC, 26 June 1882.

¹³⁹ ELCR, FC, 13 August 1882.

¹⁴⁰ ELCR, FC, 2 October 1882.

¹⁴¹ ELCR, FC, 13 November 1882.

¹⁴² NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 28 September 1882.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4 December 1882.

of Trade.¹⁴⁴ The network of professional officers, who served on the committees of the Association of Municipal Corporations, provided their councils with the opportunity to speak to Whitehall with a strong, combined voice about the parameters within which the corporations were prepared to work.

The Gas Committee recommended the appointment of an independent committee to deal with the question of electric lighting. A group of ten members were nominated, including three Conservatives.¹⁴⁵ Their report was received and adopted in June 1884.¹⁴⁶ An attempt by two Conservative councillors, Bentley and Cockayne, to refer the report back from the Full Council to the Committee was defeated. It was agreed that the Corporation would provide £500 for the purchase of electrical apparatus to enable the limited experiment in University College to proceed. There was no political will at this stage to recommend a strategic plan for a municipal undertaking. Johnson told one applicant for the right to undertake a scheme in the town that the Corporation would be prepared to consider the proposition 'provided you bear the whole of the risk'.¹⁴⁷ In May 1886 the Council declared its opposition to three Government Bills that sought to amend the Electric Lighting Act 1882. Members viewed the proposals as 'contrary to the interests of local authorities' and the Town Clerk feared the measures would take 'the plum out of the pudding'.¹⁴⁸

During 1888 and 1889 the Council opposed yet further applications from private companies for Provisional Orders to supply electricity in Nottingham. The most serious challenge to the Council came from the Nottingham Electric Light and Power Company Limited. The Company had been formed early in 1889 with the intention of laying underground wires in The Park, the Lace Market and adjoining streets. The Company declared itself prepared to take on the lighting of the Castle Museum, which it 'considered a public benefit'.¹⁴⁹ Johnson learned that the plan for a lighting scheme in Birmingham had fallen through. As such, he advised the Nottingham bidder that 'I think my Town Council will be guided by what has been done in Birmingham'. He

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 March 1883.

¹⁴⁵ GCR, FC, 13 August 1883.

¹⁴⁶ ELCR, FC, 26 June 1884.

¹⁴⁷ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 26 June 1884.

¹⁴⁸ General Works and Highways Committee Report (hereafter GWHCR), FC, 3 May 1886; NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 21 April 1886.

¹⁴⁹ TCR, FC, 4 March 1889.

also anticipated that the politicians would require an open competition amongst the private companies that were bidding, not least because a number had already incurred 'considerable expense' in presenting their applications to the Corporation.¹⁵⁰ Johnson advised the Council to make a second attempt at securing its own Provisional Order to protect their municipal interests. He was 'quite clear that if we allow a company to come in, the Board of Trade will give them nearly all they want'.¹⁵¹

A special committee of eleven members, including three Conservatives, was asked to advise the Council on the best course of action.¹⁵² The Full Council endorsed the Committee's findings in November 1889. The Corporation decided 'to take the necessary steps to obtain control of the electric lighting of the Borough'.¹⁵³ Samuel Johnson gathered details of the terms obtained by the councils in Bradford, Brighton, Norwich, Swansea and parts of London, together with the applications submitted by Leicester, Leeds and Derby. At this stage the Council opted for control, rather than ownership of the utility. It opposed the Nottingham Company's current application, but made it possible for the Corporation to contract with any private company should it wish to do so. Whilst the Council was waiting for a response from the Board of Trade, it received yet another private bid. This company, with capital of only £100,000, was applying simultaneously for Orders for projects in Bedford, Cheltenham, Coventry, Leicester and Worcester, as well as Nottingham.¹⁵⁴ Once the Council received confirmation of its own Provisional Order, it invited electric lighting companies to express an interest in contracting to supply electricity in the central part of the town. However, having advertised for tenders, the Electric Lighting Committee decided in May 1891 that it had come 'to the unanimous conclusion that the whole of such tenders were unsatisfactory'.¹⁵⁵

In December 1891 the Electric Lighting Committee proposed that Nottingham should have a municipal undertaking, albeit 'in a tentative way, and in a form which will entail the least possible expenditure'.¹⁵⁶ Johnson believed that there would be 'a fair

¹⁵⁰ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 18 February 1889.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11 October 1889.

¹⁵² TCR, FC, 4 March 1889.

¹⁵³ ELCR, FC, 11 November 1889.

¹⁵⁴ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 15 January 1890.

¹⁵⁵ ELCR, FC, 4 May 1891.

¹⁵⁶ ELCR, FC, 7 December 1891.

return for the outlay'.¹⁵⁷ He underlined the Corporation's essentially financial motivation for municipal ownership. The Council agreed with the proposal, with just a single voice in opposition during the debate.¹⁵⁸ The Corporation was anxious that it should avoid the possibility of having to repossess the undertaking from a private company, which would have been on 'extravagant terms' at a later date. The threat was real. Leeds Corporation, making its decision at the same time, opted for a private company and then faced even heavier expenditure six years later.¹⁵⁹ The editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express* congratulated the town on having such practical men to guide affairs for 'the general good of the community' and not 'the aggrandisement of private individuals'.¹⁶⁰ In December 1892 the Council concluded its plans for the municipal ownership of electricity, having toyed for some years with the possibility of municipal control and a private contractor. Ultimately, the only private contracts available for the new undertaking were for the apparatus required for the installation of the new system's infrastructure.¹⁶¹

The relatively slow pace at which the Borough Council handled the decision-taking about electricity supply in the town was related, in part, to its existing commitments as a municipal trader. Members were afraid of a substantial challenge to their successful gas undertaking by a newer source of supply. The debate about gas and electricity affected policy-making and financial planning in the longer-term and particularly between 1877 and 1885. Within three years of establishing the gas utility, concerns were raised in Full Council about the likely impact of rival sources of energy. In September 1877, during the last weeks of the old Council, Thomas Simpson, a Liberal architect, argued that the future of gas was far from certain. In his professional capacity, he was aware that some twenty authorities had already visited Romford to see the use of petroleum oil for lighting. Simpson believed that petroleum oil would prove to be cheaper and of better quality than gas. 'Members might laugh, but had they thorough confidence that gas itself would not sooner or later be superseded by something else?'¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 17 September 1891.

¹⁵⁸ FC, 7 December 1891; NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 9 December 1891.

¹⁵⁹ Barber, 'Aspects', p. 323.

¹⁶⁰ *NDE*, 8 December 1891.

¹⁶¹ ELCR, FC, 12 December 1892; NAO CA.TC.10/26/16, 13 December 1892.

¹⁶² *NMCDE*, 25 September 1877.

By August 1878 direct comparisons were being made about the costs and benefits of gas and electricity. The deputation from the Corporation who visited Paris, to observe the chemical works and the use of the electric light, were sufficiently impressed to ask the Borough Engineer, Tarbotton, to cost an experiment in Nottingham to light the Market Square and the Castle grounds. The members and the Borough Engineer each concluded that electricity could not at that stage supersede or even compete with gas.¹⁶³ However, in March 1881, Alderman John Thackeray expressed the difficulties which faced members in their efforts to make long-term plans. On the one hand he anticipated 'a considerable profit' if the Council invested in an extension to the gasworks, but on the other he was aware of 'the possibility of the electric light competing with gas'. Overall, Thackeray was 'doubtful' about the inroads that electricity would make.¹⁶⁴

By July 1882 the political debate had reached the stage where more reliable estimates for an electric scheme were available. John Barber, the Chairman of the Gas Committee, announced that £100,000 would be needed to light an area of just one quarter of a square mile in the centre of the town. An investment of £1.6 million would be needed if the whole town was to have electric lighting. Edward Fraser, a fellow Liberal, challenged Barber's figures, pointing out that Chesterfield had managed to introduce electric lighting with a consequent saving on gas costs. However, Jacoby reminded the Council that it had a legal duty to provide gas to those customers who wanted it, and therefore questioned the basis of any savings. Jacoby anticipated significant financial problems if the Council opted to invest in electric lighting. John Barber noted the continuing success of the income derived from the gas undertaking. There had been a 12% rise in demand for gas during the previous year. If that level of demand was to continue, the Corporation would have to double its production of gas over the subsequent seven years. Hugh Browne urged caution until more was known about the new lighting source, whilst Henry Cropper predicted that 'sooner or later it [electricity] would be seen in a more favourable position'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Gas Committee Report/Engineer's Report, FC, 12 August 1878.

¹⁶⁴ *NMCDE*, 8 March 1881.

¹⁶⁵ GCR, FC, 3 July 1882; *NMCDE*, 4 July 1882.

A number of key politicians of both parties decided, for pragmatic reasons, that the Corporation needed to control the supply of electricity in the town to protect their investment in gas. By October 1882 Alderman Gripper was convinced that the Council should intervene lest 'it would interfere with gas'.¹⁶⁶ Samuel Robinson, a Conservative councillor, agreed that the Council should protect their own interests. Nationally, Samuel Johnson and senior members of the Corporation played a significant role in opposing the Government's Electric Lighting Bill during the course of 1882, in an effort to protect gas supplies within and beyond the Borough's boundaries.¹⁶⁷

From 1885 the perceived threat of electricity supply eased for a number of practical reasons. In January 1885 Hugh Browne raised once more the spectre of other competing energy sources. 'The opposition they had to fear was not so much electricity now as petroleum in one or other of its many forms.'¹⁶⁸ Some of the anxieties of Council members were reduced by the continuing success of the gas undertaking. The municipal undertaking expanded the supply of gas into more homes, in more districts and increased the application of gas by encouraging gas heating and cooking, in addition to its established use for lighting. Samuel Johnson was able to report in June 1898 that repayment schemes and the hire and sale of apparatus by the Corporation had helped to ensure that 'everything possible is done to encourage the use of gas'.¹⁶⁹ By March 1896 there were also signs of greater confidence in the complementary role that electricity might play. When a bid for a second major loan for electricity development was sought, the Chairman of the Electric Lighting Committee, Alderman John Turney, spoke optimistically of the future. 'Your Committee confidently anticipate that as the original outlay is now yielding considerable profit, the proposed new outlay will be equally remunerative.'¹⁷⁰ By the mid-1890s politicians in both parties felt more assured in voting for investment in both sources of power. They had redoubled their efforts to promote the use of gas and proceeded cautiously with the installation of electrical supply.

¹⁶⁶ *NMCDE*, 3 October 1882.

¹⁶⁷ *GCR, FC*, 3 July 1882.

¹⁶⁸ *NDE*, 6 January 1885.

¹⁶⁹ *NAO CA.A1/51*, 10 June 1898.

¹⁷⁰ *ELCR, FC*, 2 March 1896.

Whilst the Council wrestled with its decision-taking for the gas and electricity undertakings, it was simultaneously making strenuous efforts to obtain and then retain unitary regulatory powers over its streets. The 'streets issue' was a significant motive in the Corporation's decisions to take on responsibility for the municipal utilities. Nottingham Borough Council viewed the control of the streets as a fundamental requirement to enable members to exercise their authority over all of its municipal trading activities. The regulation of the thoroughfares was an outward symbol of their municipal authority. The quality of the streets impinged directly on the electorate's consciousness of civic development and, ultimately, on their sense of Nottingham's civic identity. The Corporation's experience of the problems created by the private gas and water companies made members particularly sensitive to the installation and maintenance issues that private electricity and tramways developments might well bring. The Council believed that only they could assure the ratepayers of a planned and coordinated approach to breaking up the streets.

During the long and drawn out debate about control of the electricity utility, the important political issue of the unitary control of the streets was raised in a number of major debates. For example, the Council unanimously opposed Lord Rayleigh's Electric Lighting Bill in May 1886 because of its potential 'to interfere with the streets in the Borough'. John Turney reflected the general feelings of both Liberal and Conservative members of the Corporation. He feared that the proposed legislation would,

re-establish dual control which has been so mischievous in the past, and caused so many difficulties and so much friction, that the Council found it necessary to put an end thereto by the purchase of the gas and water undertakings at a large premium and at great cost.¹⁷¹

In 1889 it was argued that the regulation of the streets was one of the fundamental advantages of securing a municipal Provisional Order to supply electricity. 'The companies would have to come to them, and the Council would then have full power

¹⁷¹ GWHCR, FC, 3 May 1886.

over their own streets.’¹⁷² The Council’s long-term ambition was embedded in the Nottingham Electric Lighting Provisional Order 1890.¹⁷³ In December 1891 the Council once again stressed its need to ‘have control over its own streets’.¹⁷⁴ In that ambition, the Corporation had the support of the leading business pressure group in the district. The Nottinghamshire and Midlands Merchants and Traders Association approved of the Council’s decisions for electric lighting as ‘conducive to the commercial interests of the town’.¹⁷⁵

Nottingham shared much in common with other large corporations in its approach to ownership of the electricity utility. The Borough Council was faced with the problems of an industry that remained experimental and speculative until the turn of the century.¹⁷⁶ The Corporation did all it could to stifle the private sector and applied for its Provisional Order to avoid the presence of a private monopoly in the town.¹⁷⁷ Whilst Nottingham, like a number of authorities, was concerned about the potential effects of electricity development on gas investment and gas profits, it had more reason than most to be anxious, because the success of its gas utility was central to its overall financial strategy.¹⁷⁸ Nottingham also differed from most corporations in its relatively early decision to take ownership of electricity. Johnson and Barber had been party to discussions locally and nationally throughout the debate from 1879. The ownership of electricity, in turn, enabled the Corporation to take an early decision to municipalize the town’s tramways, with the prospect of electric power. The two utilities, thereafter, operated as a dual development.

Tramways municipalization

As the first installations for the new electricity utility were becoming operational, the Borough Council was considering whether to municipalize the tramways. In September 1896 the proposal to create a fourth municipal company was unanimously

¹⁷² *NDG*, 8 October 1889.

¹⁷³ NAO CA.A1/44 (Board of Trade, Session 1890).

¹⁷⁴ *NDE*, 8 December 1891.

¹⁷⁵ TCR, FC, 4 January 1892 (letter dated 5 December 1891).

¹⁷⁶ Hannah, *Electricity*, p. 24.

¹⁷⁷ Morgan, ‘Wales’, p. 317.

¹⁷⁸ Meyer, *Municipal Ownership*, p. 325.

supported by both political parties.¹⁷⁹ The Council, with some pressure from employers, wanted to establish a cheap and efficient mode of travel to work. The main motivation was, as with the other three businesses, financial and economic. Members were determined to establish a profitable utility that provided both additional civic facilities for local residents and extra income for the Council. The tramways, like gas, water and electricity, were to be fully owned by the Corporation and not simply controlled by it. The essential difference between the purchase of the gas and water utilities from private companies and the acquisition of the tramways from the Nottingham and District Tramways Company (NDTC) lay in the conditions under which that Company had been formed. The Borough Council had been party to the granting of a Provisional Order in 1877 to operate a tramway in the town, had invested municipal funds in the Company and had been engaged in legal wrangles with the NDTC for twenty years.¹⁸⁰ With the political will to own the utility assured, the Corporation accepted the technocratic, rational advice of its officers to redesign, rebuild and extend the existing system to provide a more integrated service for the whole community. It did so when the generation of electricity offered dramatic new possibilities for transport improvements. The physical joining up of the tramlines was symbolic of the Council's political determination to more systematically unite the town. The tramways were part of the iconography of the civic identity of Nottingham.

Nottingham's experience contrasted sharply with two of the pioneers of municipal tramway development. When Glasgow Corporation municipalized its tramways in 1891, it sought to demonstrate the wider benefits of civic interventionism.¹⁸¹ Glasgow's motivation was more doctrinaire and ideological than that in Nottingham, where the values of municipal capitalism were always present. However, Leeds Corporation initially showed less commitment to municipal trading in this utility than Nottingham.¹⁸² Leeds only assumed responsibility for their tramways in 1894, when it proved impossible to find a suitable private lessee.

¹⁷⁹ PCR, FC, 7 September 1896.

¹⁸⁰ GWHCR, FC, 8 January 1877.

¹⁸¹ H. Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism and Social Policy', in R.J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds.), *The Victorian City* (Longman, 1993), pp. 266-269; Fraser, 'Tackling', pp. 430; Maver, 'Civic Government', p. 468; Sweeney, 'Municipal Administration', p. 365; J. Dalrymple, 'Municipal Tramways Administration', *Public Administration*, (1924), pp. 408-409.

¹⁸² Barber, 'Aspects', p. 321.

Nottingham Borough Council had a statutory right to purchase the NDTC in 1898, at the end of the twenty-one year lease.¹⁸³ That prospect affected the relationship of Council and Company throughout the NDTC's operation. The private Company could afford the relatively small capital investment required for the original horse-drawn system. Even the subsequent investment in a steam powered tramway did not need heavy capital expenditure. But electrification demanded a very considerable outlay from a Company in the final stage of a time-limited franchise. The relations between members and directors were always difficult and strained, but particularly so from 1877 to 1884.

The Council made an initial purchase of £5,000 worth of NDTC shares in 1877, followed by further investment of £1,000 in October 1888.¹⁸⁴ The purchases were politically contentious, although non-partisan. In January 1877 the Council's consent to the NDTC's application for a Provisional Order was adopted by an unusually narrow majority of twenty-one votes to sixteen, in a recorded vote. Alderman John Gilpin was the Managing Director of the Company. Unsurprisingly, he spoke in favour of the creation of tramways and the advantages to be gained by the town if the Council voted 'to encourage individual and company enterprise'. He was supported by the Conservative Thomas Bentley and the Liberal Alderman John Howitt. However, the Conservatives Baines and Robinson and the Liberals Nicholls and Clarke, together with the Mayor William Ward, registered objections to details of the Company's application and recommended that the Council give the matter further consideration. Overall, the Corporation took the view that the construction of the five tramways that were planned would be 'very beneficial to the Town and Neighbourhood'.¹⁸⁵ But members sought additionally to lay down conditions that would regulate the speed of carriages, the distance between services on the carriageway and the location of stopping places, to protect other traffic in the town's thoroughfares.

¹⁸³ Sleeman, 'Tramway Industry', p. 159.

¹⁸⁴ FC, 8 October 1888; *NDE*, 9 October 1888.

¹⁸⁵ *NMCDE*, 9 January 1877.

In January 1879 the Council felt it necessary to add further special conditions, including aspects of roadway maintenance and priority for the Corporation's own building needs in the streets, where there was often a clash of interests between the private company and the public authority. Thomas Worth, a Liberal councillor, expressed his anxieties about the NDTC having 'the whole monopoly of the streets...for the commercial advantage of a few shareholders'. Alderman Gripper was anxious about the cost of the problems in the streets and 'how far the convenience of the Tramway Company could best be reconciled with the convenience of the public'.¹⁸⁶ Members applauded the ruling of the Town Clerk, when he announced that the shareholders and not the ratepayers would be liable for the cost of the damage done to the town's streets.

A special committee, consisting of eleven Liberals and just one Conservative, examined in detail the proposals of the Company to extend its system. They declared their opposition to the plans.¹⁸⁷ In December 1879 matters came to a head over the issue of widening the carriageway in Arkwright Street, an important thoroughfare. Eighty-four residents opposed the impending reduction in the width of the causeways in 'one of the finest promenades and business streets south of the station'.¹⁸⁸ In January 1880 the Council agreed to contribute £7,366 towards the cost of reinstating the road out of a total cost of £36,079.¹⁸⁹ The residents of Forest Road also petitioned the Council to take action against Sunday traffic on the tramways in their part of the town, appealing to the Corporation to control this nuisance.¹⁹⁰

Between 1879 and 1883 the Council continued to contest the control of the streets with the NDTC on the grounds of public safety, disturbance and inconvenience to the ratepayers and cost to the Corporation. As Falkus has argued more generally, Nottingham Corporation found the effects of divided control very unsatisfactory.¹⁹¹ The Council opposed the Tramways Company's plans for a small-scale extension to their network in December 1881, because other street improvements were required by

¹⁸⁶ Town Clerk and Borough Engineer's Report, FC, 6 January 1879; *NMCDE*, 7 January 1879.

¹⁸⁷ GWHCR, FC, 3 February 1879; *NMCDE*, 4 February 1879.

¹⁸⁸ FC, 9 December 1879; *NMCDE*, 10 December 1879.

¹⁸⁹ Borough Accountant's Report, FC, 5 January 1880.

¹⁹⁰ FC, 1 December 1879; *NMCDE*, 2 December 1879.

¹⁹¹ Falkus, 'Development', p. 154.

the authority.¹⁹² The Corporation estimated that the laying of new sewers would take two years to complete and that the narrowness of two streets necessitated remedial action. In January 1882 the Council agreed to the NDTC's request to use steam power for a period of two years, but only on the explicit understanding that a number of conditions were met in the licence granted by the Board of Trade. The Corporation also requested the Board to determine the limits of 'nuisance or annoyance', as set out in the earlier conditions, and to revoke the Company's licence if necessary. During the Full Council debate, five Liberal and two Conservative members raised concerns about the Council's proposals and the discussion became heated. However, the recommendations were eventually 'carried unanimously'.¹⁹³

Between January 1882 and January 1883 the Council gave high priority in its negotiations with the Company to the issue of the NDTC's liability for the maintenance and repair of certain highways. During March and April 1882 the Corporation expressly stipulated that it should keep control of the maintenance and repair of the streets and that the Tramways Company should pay the costs once Council staff had completed the work.¹⁹⁴ The two bodies struggled vigorously over levels of expenditure and threatened legal action. The Company argued that it had to balance public need with private reward. The directors claimed that the cost of repairs was more expensive in Nottingham than was the case for similar work in other towns. In January 1883 relationships were almost at breaking point and the Council threatened that it would seek to purchase the Company if the directors did not meet their obligations. Whilst the consent of the NDTC was required before 1898 for any such municipal take over, the Company was in a vulnerable financial state. Johnson declared that the Company was wrong both legally and morally in making 'an unfair attempt to get rid of your legitimate obligations'.¹⁹⁵

John Turney proposed that the Corporation should purchase the tramway lines from the Company, extend the system and then lease the tracks to a private company. Turney felt that 'they would never have their roads in a satisfactory condition until

¹⁹² GWHCR, FC, 5 December 1881.

¹⁹³ GWHCR, FC, 9 January 1882; *NMCDE*, 10 January 1882.

¹⁹⁴ GWHCR, FC, 6 March 1882, 3 April 1882.

¹⁹⁵ GWHCR, FC, 6 March 1882 (correspondence dated 14 January 1882); FC, 4 December 1882, 8 January 1883.

they owned the permanent way of the Company just as they owned the roads'. He was anxious not to waste any more than the £4,000 they had already spent on associated road repairs. Thomas Bentley, a Conservative councillor, agreed in principle, but believed that the Council would get a better bargain at a later stage. Brewster and Robinson for the Conservatives and Sylvester for the Liberals urged action. Brewster led the argument for buying the existing tramways and becoming 'masters of our own highways', whilst Sylvester felt that the Corporation had made 'a vast mistake in allowing the highways to get into the hands of any company'.¹⁹⁶ Robinson compared the Nottingham tramways network unfavourably with other authorities and registered his concern about the cost to the ratepayers. The directors of the Company backed down and declared their intention to 'work harmoniously with them in the general interests of the public'.¹⁹⁷ As such, no formal offer to purchase resulted from this strategy. Indeed, when the licence for the use of steam power was due for renewal in February 1884, the Corporation supported the application without a voice of dissent. Confirmation was given by the Board of Trade in July 1884 for an initial period of seven years, at the discretion of the Board. However, the Corporation applied a familiar tactic and once more insisted that the 'absolute control of steam or other mechanical power' should be left 'in the discretion of the Town Council'.¹⁹⁸

During the period from 1884 to 1895 the arrangements between the Council and the Company remained largely stable and unchanged. It was pressures from external sources that highlighted for members the growing needs in the community of further developments in the tramway system. For example, in December 1889 the directors of the Nottinghamshire and Midland Merchants and Traders Association wrote to the Council outlining their concerns about the quality of the existing service. 'The tram service is not equal to the requirements of the town.' They argued that horse-drawn trams were 'exceedingly slow and expensive' and that 'the various parts of the town which ought to be supplied have no tram facilities'. The employers wanted quicker and cheaper transit for their employees. The Council should 'intervene for the welfare and prosperity of the town and district'. The Association's preferred solution

¹⁹⁶ *NMCDE*, 14 November 1882, 9 January 1883.

¹⁹⁷ *GWHCR*, FC, 6 March 1882.

¹⁹⁸ *GWHCR*, FC, 4 February 1884; *NDE*, 5 February 1884.

was that 'the lines of the roads ought to belong to the Corporation' and they should let the lines out for others to run.¹⁹⁹ This had been Turney's proposal some seven years earlier. Further resolutions were submitted by the Association in November 1891. They called for a reconsideration of the tramway facilities and urged the Corporation not to wait until the present concession to the NDTC expired in July 1898. 'Rapid transit would be helpful towards promoting the prosperity of the town, and would considerably increase the value of house property in certain localities.' Increased rateable values would necessarily result in increased rate income for the Council. Traders argued that the existing system was greatly inconvenient to both businessmen and the working classes. The Association believed that some tram routes were not serviced because they were 'scarcely remunerative to the shareholders'.²⁰⁰

However, four more years elapsed before members took any initiative to investigate the practical possibilities of municipal ownership. The arguments for both private and public ownership were rehearsed by municipal candidates in their election addresses in 1894 and 1895, but especially in 1896 when the future of the tramways became as near to a 'burning issue' as was experienced in Nottingham's municipal elections between 1870 and 1900. Richard Sutton, the Liberal architect, declared his support for municipalization in October 1894, whilst John McCraith, the Conservative yarn merchant, argued that the tramways could never be as economic or efficient in the Corporation's hands.²⁰¹ During the election of 1895 Dr Mackenzie, a successful Liberal candidate, claimed that the Corporation could run the system on 'better principles' and reach other parts of the town.²⁰² In 1896 Edwin Loveseed announced that 'he believed in the municipalization of all monopolies'. He would not 'be frightened by any expense', because he felt that so far the Corporation 'had done pretty well as a rule' with its expenditure.²⁰³ Alderman Edward Fraser contended that given the Council's achievements with the gas, water and electricity utilities, the tramways could also be made to work in the ratepayers' interests.²⁰⁴ The utilities

¹⁹⁹ FC, 6 January 1890 (correspondence dated 24 December 1889).

²⁰⁰ FC, 7 December 1891 (correspondence dated 7 November 1891).

²⁰¹ NDG, 24 October 1894, 30 October 1894.

²⁰² NDE, 25 October 1895.

²⁰³ NDE, 24 October 1896.

²⁰⁴ NDE, 29 October 1896.

were 'steadily profitable'. Charles Smith took the view that cheaper travel would also enable people to keep in touch more effectively.²⁰⁵

In December 1895 the Council asked the Parliamentary Committee to examine the possibility of municipal ownership of the tramways. Its report to the Full Council in September 1896 was unanimously supported by all Liberals and Conservatives.²⁰⁶ Unlike Birmingham, where both parties were split on the issue, Nottingham's politicians maintained a consensus in handling their fourth utility.²⁰⁷ The *Nottingham Daily Express* asked that, as a matter of public interest, the Council should 'grip the question in its entirety'. The experiences of Glasgow, Leeds, Huddersfield and Sheffield were encouraging. The editor pointed to benefits for the Corporation's finances, the local economy and the social advantages. 'The chief merit lies not so much in the profit as in the numerous other advantages of such a successful monopoly.'²⁰⁸ Billyeald, a Conservative member, supported the proposal and claimed that Nottingham was already falling thirty years behind the facilities of American towns of similar size. The recent availability of electricity supply in central Nottingham acted as an additional stimulus to the purchase of the Company.

Informal negotiations began with the NDTC in December 1896 and the Company quickly agreed to the Corporation's offer in January 1897.²⁰⁹ The Council unanimously backed the authorisation of formal negotiations in February. By June the detailed agreement was finalised and the Parliamentary Committee was empowered to advise on the future management of the tramways undertaking and 'the propriety of extensions in the interest of the whole Borough'.²¹⁰ The Nottingham Improvement Act reached the statute book in October 1897 and the new Tramways Committee, with delegated powers, was appointed three weeks later.²¹¹ Unlike the protracted negotiations with the local gas and water companies, discussions with the NDTC were swift and relatively painless. The statutory conditions for purchasing

²⁰⁵ *NDE*, 30 October 1896.

²⁰⁶ PCR, FC, 7 September 1896.

²⁰⁷ L.J. Jones, 'Public Pursuit of Private Profit? Liberal Businessmen and Municipal Politics in Birmingham, 1865-1900', *Business History*, 25 (1983), p. 246.

²⁰⁸ *NDE*, 8 September 1896.

²⁰⁹ PCR, FC, 8 February 1897.

²¹⁰ PCR, FC, 14 June 1897.

²¹¹ FC, 9 November 1897, 4 April 1898.

tramway companies ensured that the costs were much less than the Council's previous experience. Local authorities simply had to pay for the physical structure they inherited, taking account of depreciation, and not for additional matters such as goodwill payments. The directors came to an amicable arrangement over relatively modest compensation payments and the outstanding debts amounted to only £6,000.²¹² The process was greatly helped by the professionalism and knowledge of Johnson and Brown. They approached the authorities in Sheffield, Dublin, Leicester and Bristol for advice about traction systems, regulations and orders.²¹³ The quality of the professional support bolstered members' confidence in pursuing a fourth municipal utility.

As with the municipalization of electricity, Nottingham Corporation shared much in common with other large municipalities in its motives for taking ownership of the tramways. For example, the NDTC, like other private undertakings, was sluggish in its approach to innovation, leaving the Council with little confidence in the likelihood of improved tram services.²¹⁴ The Corporation was faced with regular disagreements with the Company over issues related to the breaking up of the Borough's main thoroughfares.²¹⁵ Yet, as in many other corporations, the relatively low cost of purchasing the local company, compared to the sums paid for the gas and water undertakings, encouraged municipal politicians to fund the acquisition.²¹⁶ The creation of a municipal tramway utility in Nottingham was, like Birmingham, prompted more by business motives than politics.²¹⁷

Two factors, however, reflected Nottingham Corporation's particular approach to municipalization. Firstly, the Council was prepared to make an early decision to own the tramway business, rather than simply control it, just as the Corporation had been for gas, water and electricity. Members took their decision with the support of employers and in the knowledge that they had the availability of electricity to provide the motive power for the new utility. Secondly, the Corporation reinforced its well-

²¹² PCR, FC, 14 June 1897.

²¹³ NAO CA.TC.10/86/12, 13 November 1897, 1 December 1897, 6 December 1897, 21 December 1897.

²¹⁴ For example: FC, 7 December 1891, 7 September 1896; *NDE*, 8 September 1896.

²¹⁵ Falkus, 'Development', p. 155.

²¹⁶ Sleeman, 'Tramway Industry', pp. 159-160.

²¹⁷ Jones, 'Public Pursuit', pp. 246-247.

established commitment to municipal trading. Once more, it perceived the profits of municipal ownership as a means to provide economies in overall municipal expenditure and to hold in check increases in the General District Rate. In the case of tramways, as with the other three utilities, the Council was willing to make a considerable investment in the system's infrastructure, to help the physical integration of the Borough with modernized services. Nottingham Corporation viewed the prospect of its fourth trading concern as another opportunity to raise the profile of the municipal authority and to encourage a sense of civic pride.

A changing civic agenda: particularities and commonalities

Nottingham Borough Council created four municipal utilities in twenty-three years. The Corporation demonstrated a political commitment to taking ownership of all the natural monopolies in the town. However, the acquisition of each of the four municipal businesses resulted from particular circumstances and specific political calculations. Each required separate political initiatives. On occasions, different approaches needed to be used simultaneously to handle either the take over or monitoring of two or more of the commercial undertakings. Between 1870 and 1900 the Corporation had to take account of a vastly increasing population, concerns about health and sanitation, anxieties about the policies of the private monopolies and a changing local economic structure.

The Council purchased three companies and established a new power source. A number of political motives were involved. The gas company was attractive because of the profits that might be harnessed for wider municipal use. The water company also had financial potential, but principally offered a means by which the Corporation might take a more integrated approach to assuring the quality and quantity of water supply, and effective sanitation and drainage in the town. The opportunity to initially control and then own the new electricity industry eventually presented the prospect of further financial benefits, despite all the uncertainties of start up costs and the likely competition with the Corporation's most successful utility, gas. The ownership of the electricity utility represented the highest profile of municipal modernization and the absence of an unwanted private monopoly. The tramways company provided the Council with an opportunity to enable more reliable and cheap transport to work,

thereby supporting the local economy, as well as extending social contact around the Borough. The gas and water utilities were both expensive to purchase, but for specific reasons, whereas the cost of the tramways was much less as the result of statutory compulsory purchasing powers. Once the decisions had been taken to municipalize, the purchase of the gas and tramways companies were negotiated relatively speedily. But the pursuit of the water company required dogged persistence and the initial interest in generating and supplying electricity took twelve years before it became a reality.

Although each of the four utilities had particular contexts, they shared a number of features in common. The political will of both the Liberal and Conservative parties was based on their preference for municipal capitalism as a means by which to develop economy-minded policies for the Borough. Pragmatic, financial motives were evident in all four utilities. The politicians decided, therefore, that ownership rather than control of the utilities was required in each case. Municipalization was not perceived as a partisan issue. Neither party nor occupation determined the opposition that was raised against proposals for municipal ownership. The objections came from individual politicians. The consensus that was achieved within the political discourse favoured the modernization of services and greater integration of facilities in the town. The decision-taking in all four cases was built upon a foundation of high quality professional planning and support from the senior officials. Rational planning underpinned the political rhetoric of municipalization in each utility, not least in the preparation for ownership of the electricity concern. Nottingham became recognised as a leading proponent of municipal ownership, both for the early timing of the Corporation's entry into utility management and the contribution of the professional officers.

The presence of a civic ethos in decision-taking strengthened the effectiveness of the management of the processes of municipalization. The debate about the municipal utilities and their subsequent development allowed the politicians to achieve greater civic engagement with the electorate. The Council's determination to control the streets became emblematic of their provision of coordinated, modern facilities. The acquisition of the utilities promoted a greater sense of the relevance of municipal intervention and raised generally the level of civic consciousness in the town. The

services on offer to residents were developed gradually from the necessities of life, such as clean water and basic lighting for safety and security, to relative luxuries such as the availability of heating and cooking appliances, a more sanitary environment and cheap transport.

Chapter 6

Municipal trading: economy, efficiency and enterprise in municipal policy implementation

Municipal trading

The Liberal and Conservative members of Nottingham Borough Council accepted the importance of municipal capitalism as a fundamental building block for the Corporation's finances between 1870 and 1900. Their commitment to the effective management of the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities was underpinned, in each case, by a determination to ensure that the businesses were profitable. The political will of the members was at the heart of the provision of services, but the timing of policy developments depended too on external factors beyond the immediate control of the politicians, such as the price of coal and severe weather conditions. The Corporation was pragmatic in the handling of all four concerns and adapted strategies over time to meet the changing needs of the community and the technical demands of the utilities themselves. The practical experience of managing each business affected the implementation of policies in the others. Nottingham Corporation became, and maintained its status as, a good, efficient utility provider. The four businesses played a very important role in the modernization of amenities in the town and they encouraged the greater integration of the Borough, both physically and in terms of the civic consciousness of its residents. The capital projects that were required for the utilities involved enormous investment over thirty years. The Council's willingness to continue to fund new technology, together with maintenance and repair programmes, albeit with caution and economy, impacted on all residents. Municipal investment helped to ensure that supplies of gas, water and tramways were eventually available in all parts of the town and electricity in the central business district.

Members were faced with very difficult political choices throughout the period. Municipal trading was by no means a single, seamless policy that applied neatly in all circumstances. Policy implementation was essentially undertaken by politicians and officials on the basis of well-researched, rational planning, but it proceeded

incrementally and with the use of significant discretion by those leading utility developments day to day. Implementation moved forward unevenly, at times experimentally, and with the practical setbacks that are so often associated with technological innovation. On many occasions the Council muddled through, but on a number they took new, dynamic courses of action. Decisions were agonised over, in many cases for protracted periods, and members displayed hesitancy, uncertainty and anxiety. However, when the political and financial circumstances were deemed to be acceptable, the policy decisions were taken on a consensual basis. The officers' professional expertise and technical knowledge enabled members to reach workable, civic solutions to most trading issues and to maintain good levels of performance. For example, one of the most difficult problems was to resolve the potential clash of two major municipal interests that was presented by trading in both gas and electricity. In this, as in almost all cases, business considerations provided the ultimate criteria for the political decisions.

The political arguments within committees and the Full Council, involving individuals from both parties and all occupational groups, focused on the use of municipal profits rather than the desirability of their creation. Members argued for economy, efficiency and, at times, enterprise. Recorded votes were relatively rare, but more in evidence between 1880 and 1885 and from 1888 to 1893.¹ Generally the strength of the political consensus increased in the 1890s, even in the years when the Conservatives enjoyed greater success at the municipal elections. Central to many of their debates were the issues surrounding the respective rights and needs of ratepayers and non-rate paying consumers, many of whom lived in supply areas beyond the Borough's boundary. Gladstonian Liberals and economy-minded Conservatives endeavoured to plan for the best of all political worlds for both groups. Ideally they wanted to be able to lower the rates, reduce utility prices and yet continue to invest in the infrastructure of the four businesses. The compromises that members had to negotiate were strengthened by the non-partisan, civic ethos in which they operated within the Council.

¹ Thirteen recorded votes concerning the gas and water undertakings between 1880 and 1885, and a further six recorded votes between 1888 and 1893.

The 'civicness' of the politico-administrative environment allowed them to reach decisions, over the three decades, that tackled complex and, at times, contradictory business problems, within and across the four utilities. For example, the Gas Committee had to successively handle investment in gas lighting, cooking and heating, whilst meeting the challenge of electricity. The Committee also had to invest appropriately in both gas production and residual chemical products, despite each requiring different markets and being subject to different economic cycles. The Tramways Committee had devolved powers to establish a new transport system, but could only develop its policies fully by means of cooperation with the Electricity Committee, another independent business. The pragmatic decisions that the Council made, helped to secure for Nottingham a leading position nationally as a municipal trader. That success contributed to greater feelings of civic pride amongst many residents. The new municipal iconography, the symbols of the four modern utilities, enhanced a growing sense of civic identity in the town.

Most historians share broadly similar views on the essential features of municipal trading. There is general agreement that the theoretical justifications that were used to justify municipal trading were borrowed once municipal businesses had been established, rather than paraded as arguments ahead of their creation. For example, Peters has contended that by 1900 municipal trading had become an 'ideological, economic and political reality'.² It was not based on a sophisticated theory, but was implicitly based on a notion of public goods. This 'reality' had developed a resilience that enabled it to withstand the anti-socialist sentiments so forcibly expressed from 1902, such as those relating to West Ham and Glasgow. Kellett has argued that municipal trading lacked a specific doctrine as such, whilst Waller has claimed that 'if there was a distinct ideology about it, it was rather municipal capitalism than municipal socialism'.³ Nottingham's experience reflected many of the features of municipal trading identified by Waller and Peters.

Municipal trading was essentially concerned with the ownership and operation of productive undertakings which, if they had been carried out by companies or

² J.N. Peters, 'Anti-Socialism in British Politics c. 1900-1922: the Emergence of a Counter-Ideology' (University of Oxford, D Phil thesis, 1992), pp. 161, 209.

³ J.R. Kellett, 'Municipal Socialism, Enterprise and Trading in the Victorian City', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1978), p. 44; P.J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991), p. 300.

individuals, would have been organised as commercial ventures to make a profit.⁴ Indeed, the politicians who carried responsibility for municipal undertakings needed 'a marked flair for business'.⁵ In 1884 W. E. Gladstone underlined the Liberal Party's view that water and gas provision were 'two of the most elementary among the purposes of government'.⁶ Municipal utilities offered a method of organising supplies that aimed to be self-supporting. The cost of those supplies was met by the consumer rather than the whole community, unlike, for example, the cost of elementary education.⁷ Whatever an individual authority's ambitions for trading might be, the outcomes for local consumers varied greatly in practice. Municipal undertakings in a range of authorities differed considerably, in terms of their effectiveness of supply and their capacity to be self-supporting. Nottingham was amongst the most successful municipalities on both counts.

Comparative studies of both the profits made from municipal trading, and their use by local councils, are difficult to evaluate. 'Profit' was calculated in different ways by local authorities in the late nineteenth century. Knoop has pointed out the dangers of perceiving profit simply as the net surplus available for relief of the rates.⁸ Different methods of accounting for expenditure were used within local government. Inconsistencies existed in the way that spending was identified in either the revenue or capital accounts, contributions were or were not made for the use of the authority's central services, and funds were reserved to cover depreciation, maintenance and the repayment of loans.⁹ The confusion was such that many of the critics of municipal trading regarded any profits declared by an authority to be deceptive.¹⁰

Authorities owned varying numbers of municipal undertakings. By 1900 only four corporations in England and Wales had four businesses like Nottingham, and only a

⁴ J.F. Wilson, *Lighting the Town: a Study of Management in the North West Gas Industry, 1805-1880* (Paul Chapman Publishing, 1991), pp. 185, 197, 207, 210; J.L. Mackenzie, 'Municipal Trading', *Public Administration*, (1927), p. 244; Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', pp. 162-165.

⁵ E.P. Hennock, 'Finance and Politics in Urban Local Government in England, 1835-1900', *The Historical Journal*, VI, 2 (1963), pp. 223-224.

⁶ M. Falkus, 'The Development of Municipal Trading in the Nineteenth Century', *Business History*, 19, (1977), pp. 137-138.

⁷ W.A. Robson, 'The Public Utility Services', in H.J. Laski, W.I. Jennings and W.A. Robson (eds.), *A Century of Municipal Progress* (George Allen and Unwin, 1935), p. 299.

⁸ D. Knoop, *Principles and Methods of Municipal Trading* (Macmillan, 1912), pp. 126-170.

⁹ HC (1903) VII, *Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons on Municipal Trading* (hereafter HC (1903)), pp. v-viii.

¹⁰ *TT*, 28 August 1902.

further six authorities owned three municipal undertakings.¹¹ Some traded beyond their municipal boundaries, others did not. Whilst most councils might plan to make profits from the supply of gas or the provision of tramway services, many corporations did not seek to make a net surplus in the case of water, because matters of public health and sanitation were involved. Net surpluses also reflected the outcomes of different selling policies. For example, all gas undertakings were strongly motivated by profits and actual prices seem to have reflected commercial considerations.¹² But in the case of tramways, councils had different intentions in their pricing structures. For example, Glasgow organised its undertaking to provide local residents with fares as cheap as possible, whilst Nottingham, Leicester and Bolton were prepared to charge dearer fares to produce profits that could help relieve the rates.¹³

Municipal corporations differed too in their decisions about how to deploy their profits. Should they give priority to the reduction of prices or rates, or perhaps support the funding of other civic projects? The authorities in Nottingham, Manchester and Bolton, normally transferred more substantial sums from their utility profits to relieve the rates than councils more generally.¹⁴ Most authorities ran their municipal water undertakings at a loss and one third failed to make a profit from their municipal gas concerns.¹⁵ Generally, even when municipal water undertakings made operating surpluses, they were insufficient to cover the cost of loan charges.¹⁶ In 1899-1900 only forty of the one hundred and forty-nine authorities with undertakings actually made an overall profit.¹⁷ Nottingham made by far the largest net profit that

¹¹ Appendix C, Table 14.

¹² R. Millward and S. Sheard, 'The Urban Fiscal Problem, 1870-1914: Government Expenditure and Finance in England and Wales', *Economic History Review*, XLVIII, 3 (1995), pp. 507-509, 512-515; R. Millward and R. Ward, 'The Costs of Public and Private Gas Enterprises in Late Nineteenth Century Britain', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 39 (1987), p. 136; R. Millward and R. Ward, 'From Private to Public Ownership of Gas Undertakings in England and Wales, 1851-1947: Chronology, Incidence and Causes', *Business History*, 35, 3 (1993), pp. 8-9; R. Millward, 'The Market Behaviour of Local Utilities in Pre-World War I Britain: the Case of Gas', *Economic History Review*, XLIV, 1 (1991), pp. 122-123.

¹³ H. Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism and Social Policy', in R.J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds.), *The Victorian City* (Longman, 1993), pp. 266, 277-279.

¹⁴ Millward, 'Market Behaviour', pp. 108-109.

¹⁵ Falkus, 'Development', p. 145.

¹⁶ R. Millward, 'The Political Economy of Urban Utilities', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III: 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), p. 329.

¹⁷ *TT*, 30 September 1902.

year, followed by Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool and Bradford.¹⁸ Many tramway undertakings failed to cover their costs for very long periods and many smaller municipalities ran their tramways at a considerable loss.¹⁹ In 1908-1909 Nottingham was still making substantial profits. The Corporation produced the fourth highest gas profit for transfer to relieve the rates and the third highest electricity profit.²⁰ Birmingham provided the largest transfer of gas profits at that stage. The Town Clerk, Edward Smith, continued to argue that profits were also critical to enable the council to subsidise utility prices and fund civic amenities.²¹ Yet, Birmingham had to subsidise its water undertaking from 1904 to 1930 to help fund the huge investment in the Rhayader water undertaking in Wales.²²

Despite the different levels of profit made by municipalities, and the variety of uses to which those profits were put, it is claimed that public firms generally were just as cost-effective as private companies.²³ Indeed, Hassan has contended that in the case of water, municipal organisation was superior to that of private companies, because it took more account of longer-term planning needs.²⁴ Profits were broadly similar for both private and public companies in the various utilities.²⁵ Nationally, prices were not reduced any faster by municipal traders than those charged by private companies.²⁶ Generally, municipal trading did not change consumer prices significantly. Millward and Ward have argued that costs were more significant than prices in determining the level of efficiency of those municipal utilities.²⁷ Municipal undertakings often had more modern plant and could thereby improve levels of productivity and reduce the average cost of supply. The levels of municipal debt across the country reflected that investment in modern plant. Debt rose from £95

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ J.F. Sleeman, 'The British Tramway Industry: the Growth and Decline of a Public Utility', *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, X (1939), pp. 173-174; J. Dalrymple, 'Municipal Tramways Administration', *Public Administration*, (1924), p. 413; Falkus, 'Development', p. 157.

²⁰ Knoop, *Principles*, p. 330.

²¹ Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', p. 272.

²² A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Vol. 2: Borough and City, 1865-1938* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952), pp. 90-91.

²³ Millward, 'Costs', p. 136; Millward, 'Political Economy', p. 336.

²⁴ J.A. Hassan, 'The Growth and Impact of the British Water Industry in the Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, XXXVIII, 4 (1985), pp. 532, 545.

²⁵ Millward, 'Political Economy', pp. 336-339.

²⁶ Wilson, *Lighting*, pp. 207, 212.

²⁷ Millward, 'Costs', pp. 135-136.

million in 1875 to £262 million in 1898.²⁸ Nottingham, Leeds, Bradford and Leicester, for example, each had well over £1 million invested in their water supplies.²⁹ In many authorities the real cost of services was disguised, to some extent, by the councils' failure to tackle the financial implications of debt redemption and the depreciation of plant.³⁰

Overall, municipal undertakings were efficiently administered, with very few exceptions.³¹ Their efficiency depended, to a significant extent, on the commitment and business acumen of the chairman of committee and one or two active members, together with the ability of the principal officers.³² In Nottingham and Glasgow, for example, the expertise of technical managers was waiting to be tapped and officers were able to handle the changes demanded by the new technology and processes in the utilities.³³ Before 1900 the success of municipal trading ventures, in authorities such as Nottingham, encouraged continuing investment in the utilities. However, concerted parliamentary criticism disputed the basis of municipal trading after that date. Although the critics failed to produce hard evidence of municipal failure, many municipalities were faced, by the early years of the twentieth century, with problems of increasing municipal indebtedness and the challenge presented by the availability of regional economies of scale, especially in the electricity sector.³⁴

Resources and Profits

Nottingham Borough Council's four municipal utilities began trading over a period of twenty-three years. They came into the Corporation's ownership with different resources and capital requirements. The profits they made varied considerably, and so too did their contributions to the Borough Fund. But all four utilities were kept in profitability by a Council committed to the practice of municipal capitalism and sustained in their performance by effective technical managers.

²⁸ Millward, 'Political Economy', p. 317.

²⁹ Falkus, 'Development', p. 137.

³⁰ P.J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991), p. 308.

³¹ H. Finer, *Municipal Trading* (George Allen and Unwin, 1941), pp. 401, 410.

³² Knoop, *Principles*, pp. 107-108.

³³ Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', p. 272; J. Garrard, 'Bureaucrats Rather Than Bureaucracies: the Power of Municipal Professionals, 1835-1914', *Occasional Paper in Politics and Contemporary History*, 33 (1992), pp. 16-17.

³⁴ Peters, 'Anti-Socialism', pp. 171-172, 174.

Nottingham Corporation took possession of the assets of the Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company on 14 August 1874. David Heath, Chairman of the Gas Committee, expressed formally his pleasure with 'the excellent condition in which all the several works of the Company had been left by the late directors'. The gasworks in Eastcroft, Radford and Basford together generated 4 million cubic feet of gas each day for a local community that consumed 3.468 million cubic feet at most. The overall efficiency of the system was rated as satisfactory and losses from leakage and condensation regarded as 'extremely low'. Heath pressed upon the members of the Full Council,

the very serious character of the undertaking, and the extreme importance of its being managed with economy, prudence, and in an enlightened spirit, demanding great exertions on behalf of the Gas Committee and of their officials.³⁵

From the outset the supply district corresponded very approximately to the area of the enlarged Borough from 1877. In 1874 the urban and rural sanitary authorities in Basford, Lenton, Radford and Sneinton had asked to be part of the gas district and represented on the managing body, the Nottingham District Gas Committee. It was believed that the undertaking would 'prove a boon not only to the ratepayers, but to the consumers of gas'.³⁶ As early as November 1874, Heath predicted that the financial 'difficulties' which accompanied the transfer of the business to the Council would be cleared by the end of the first financial year. Indeed, from the beginning, the prospect of a reduction in the price of gas was high on the political agenda.

The capital account of the gas undertaking grew dramatically from £216,526 in 1874-1875 to £575,115 in 1879-1880 and to £851,025 five years later. Thereafter, the rate of growth dropped considerably. The capital account reached £884,319 in 1889-1890 and then £1,049,333 in 1899-1900.³⁷ The revenue account rose much more steadily, but persistently, over the same period. It began at £144,329, reached £199,450 ten

³⁵ Gas Committee report (hereafter GCR), Full Council Minutes and Reports (hereafter FC), 16 November 1874.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Appendix C, Table 10.

years later, before rising to £289,362 at the end of the century. The period of fastest growth was between 1890 and 1895. Unusually, Nottingham Borough Council empowered the Corporation's trading departments to be largely autonomous in terms of their revenue accounts, so that the committees could manage the day to day detail of their businesses more effectively.³⁸ Only a small minority of corporations took this approach. They included Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle.³⁹ Capital expenditure required Full Council approval in each authority.

The profits of the undertaking were only £783 in the first year, compared with a balance of £9,642 inherited from the NGLCC. However, within five years the profit had risen to £23,226, comparable with the profits of the private Company at its most efficient. Over the following two decades, annual profits ranged from £21,855 in 1893-1894 to £33,167 in 1883-1884.⁴⁰ The exceptions were the two years 1885-1887, when residual products were selling poorly. These consistently good profits were used to pay annuities, to replenish the Reserve and Sinking Funds and particularly to enhance the Borough Fund. From 1876 to 1883 the Council took between £5,000 and £12,000 each year from the Gas Account, during the next five years between £12,000 and £20,000 and then at least £20,000 each year until the end of the century.⁴¹ The typical annual contribution to the Borough Fund during the 1890s was £24,000. In 1908-1909 £30,000 was transferred for the relief of the rates, the fourth highest amount in the country after Birmingham, Leicester and Manchester.⁴² Such payments were very significant amounts to the Gas Committee, given that the undertaking's Reserve Fund stood at £103,000 at its height and was more typically less than £80,000 in a number of years. The Sinking Fund, established in 1887, was similarly a relatively small account, holding between £12,000 and £68,000.⁴³

Capital projects were undertaken throughout the period from 1874 to 1900, as the Gas Committee sought to meet increased consumer demand by enlarging the capacity of the gasworks, extending the area of supply and renewing inadequate apparatus. Projects were completed at Eastcroft, Radford, Basford and Eastwood, between 1875

³⁸ J. Redlich and F.W. Hirst, F.W., *Local Government in England, Vol. 1* (Macmillan, 1903), p. 324.

³⁹ Finer, *Trading*, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁰ Appendix C, Table 10.

⁴¹ Gas Committee Annual Reports and Accounts (hereafter GCAR), 1876-1900.

⁴² Knoop, *Principles*, p. 330.

⁴³ Appendix C, Table 10.

and 1879.⁴⁴ Further improvements were constructed at Basford and Radford in 1884, Eastcroft in 1891, Giltbrook in 1896 and Basford in 1897 and 1901.⁴⁵ Major alterations were required in 1901 to mains and services to accommodate the needs of the new tramways undertaking. The cost of individual projects ranged from £3,400 to enlarge the mains for Eastwood in 1876, to £153,000 for a major extension to the Basford Works in 1884.⁴⁶ Consequently the total loans of the undertaking rose from £455,766 in the first year of operation, to £851,025 ten years later and then to £1,049,333 in 1900.⁴⁷ The area of gas distribution had spread to one hundred and thirty-three square miles for a Corporation whose territory comprised just fifteen square miles.⁴⁸ Samuel Johnson noted the success of the sales policy. 'We are constantly applied to by local boards and others at long distance.'⁴⁹ The gas undertaking remained the Council's most productive business.

The water undertaking was also profit making. Whilst the water utilities in most boroughs were operating at a loss, Nottingham's facility made an annual profit every year between 1880 and 1900.⁵⁰ This was despite the fact that Johnson, like the members of the Water Committee, saw water as a special commodity. 'We do not look to make a profit out of water. We think water such a prime requisite of life that we ought to supply it at very nearly prime cost.'⁵¹ The differences in the profits of the gas and water utilities were very considerable. Between 1880 and 1898 water profits were generally between a sixth and a quarter of those for gas.⁵² Typically, the Water Committee reported profits of between £2,500 and £4,500 each year. However, in three particular years they were reduced to about £1,700, in 1899 to £1,273 and finally to just £361 in 1900. A much smaller proportion of the water profits was contributed to the Borough Fund than was the case for gas. From 1883 to 1895 they tended to range between £1,200 and £3,900.⁵³ Thereafter, no water profits were

⁴⁴ GCAR, FC, 1 February 1875, 3 April 1876, 1 May 1876, 24 September 1877, 7 April 1879.

⁴⁵ GCAR, FC, 7 January 1884, 7 December 1891, 21 May 1896, 10 June 1897, 15 August 1901.

⁴⁶ GCAR, FC, October 1876, 7 January 1884.

⁴⁷ Appendix C, Table 10.

⁴⁸ HC (1894) XVII *Royal Commission to Consider the Amalgamation of the City and County of London* (hereafter *RC* (1894)), p. 341.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Water Committee Annual Reports and Accounts (hereafter *WCAR*), 1880-1900.

⁵¹ *RC* (1894), p. 353.

⁵² *WCAR*, 1880-1898. The three years with lower returns were 1888-1889, 1891-1892, 1894-1895.

⁵³ *WCAR*, 1883-1895. For example: £1,213 in 1885-1886 and £3,914 in 1893-1894.

transferred to the Borough Fund. Even during the 1880s, no contribution was made in two years and in a third year only £400.⁵⁴

The formal handover of the Nottingham Water Works Company by the directors to the Borough Council took place on 14 May 1880. The new water undertaking supplied an estimated population of 191,753. The NWWC had five waterworks at the point of transfer, but three of these had limited production value. The Trent Works lay idle, though it was potentially useful as building land. The Scotholme Works was almost completely unused because of the effects of soap and dye pollution in the River Leen. The Park Works was only running at about half capacity in 1880. As such, the Bagthorpe and Bestwood Works provided the bulk of the district's daily supply. The Bagthorpe Works in Basford was 'the very sheet anchor of the water supply in Nottingham', producing over half the town's output, whilst the Bestwood Works was the most recent plant, constructed in 1871.⁵⁵

The Water Committee initiated a number of improvements to water storage, engines and pumping during the first year of municipal ownership. The five reservoirs had a capacity of less than two days supply for the needs of the district. Within a few months, it was evident to the Committee that existing resources would not be viable for much longer. The population of the town continued to grow and there was 'a persistent increase in the manufacturing resources of the neighbourhood'. Overall, there were greater demands for 'more and better water'. However, the Corporation's Water Engineer, Tarbotton, assured the Committee that the value of the water was good and that 'nature has afforded a bountiful and healthy source of water supply'.⁵⁶

The Council authorised a series of capital development projects between 1882 and 1886 to build new waterworks at Papplewick and Mapperley, at an estimated cost of £100,000. The Park Row reservoir was to be enlarged for £11,003.⁵⁷ Between 1896 and 1899 the Committee was again vigorous in its efforts with major projects to help improve water supply, first with bore trials at Woodborough and Oxtun and then with

⁵⁴ WCAR, £400 in 1885-1886; no contribution between 1886 and 1888.

⁵⁵ Water Committee Annual Report and Accounts/Engineer's Report (hereafter WCAR/EN), FC, 11 July 1881.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ WCAR, FC, 2 January 1882, 1 December 1884.

a collaborative project, the Derwent Water Scheme, one of the most ambitious projects in the country. Individual large-scale schemes had been attempted by Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, but the harnessing of the headwaters of the Derwent presented an unusual engineering and financial challenge for a group of East Midland authorities. Samuel Johnson believed that the Water Committee had, by the end of the century, ensured that ratepayers and consumers would have 'water both for domestic and manufacturing purposes of absolute purity and excellent quality'. He judged that 'a fair provision has been made for the wants of this city for many years to come', by a combination of local and more distant projects.⁵⁸

By 1900 the capital account of the Water Committee stood at £941,806. Capital investment had grown persistently since 1881 when the figure had been £503,696.⁵⁹ Expenditure was greatest in 1884-1885 and 1899-1900 when the largest projects were underway. The revenue account grew steadily between 1881 and 1897, from £46,725 to £71,659. In the last three years of the century the rate of increase was greater, revenue reaching £82,645 in 1900.⁶⁰ The Committee's loans totalled £481,516 after its first year of trading, £656,930 after ten years and £727,657 in 1900.⁶¹ The scale of the capital and loan accounts of the water undertaking were considerably less than those handled by the Gas Committee. For example, the water revenue in 1900 was only about one third of the size of the gas revenue. Nevertheless, the trading undertaken by the Water Committee made it an important element of the Borough Council's overall financial strategy.

By comparison with gas and water, the finances of the electricity and tramways undertakings were very small-scale before 1900. The two new municipal utilities were still in their infancy at the end of the century. The electric lighting scheme in the central district of the city was only four years old and the electrified tramway system was still under construction. The first electric tramcar ran on New Year's Day 1901 and the last horse-drawn tram in April 1902.⁶² By 1900 the Electricity Committee had borrowed £85,000 in loans and the Tramways Committee £90,000. Average

⁵⁸ WCAR, FC, 13 September 1897; TCR, FC, 5 June 1899.

⁵⁹ WCAR, 1881-1900.

⁶⁰ WCAR, FC, 10 September 1900.

⁶¹ Appendix C, Table 12.

⁶² Tramways Committee Annual Report and Accounts (hereafter TRCAR), FC, 2 September 1901; 'Nottingham City Transport, 1897-1947' (pamphlet published in Nottingham, 16 October 1947).

profits were estimated to be £3,623 and £3,156 respectively.⁶³ However, the developments in both new undertakings were sufficiently rapid thereafter, that by 1903 loans totalled £302,526 for electricity and £357,207 for the tramways. In 1903 the level of profits in these emergent services remained roughly similar to those in 1900, £3,625 for electricity and £3,532 for the tramways.⁶⁴ By 1908-1909 the tramways undertaking was transferring £11,500 to the Borough Fund, the fifth largest amount in the country behind Liverpool and Manchester.⁶⁵

The Electric Lighting Committee had the opportunity to plan and develop electricity supply in the town from first principles. As such, the Council was not required to negotiate with existing companies and no capital was needed for remedial action, as had been the case with gas and water. The Committee authorised the development of the Talbot Street generating station in 1896, with an initial request for Local Government Board approval for a loan of £40,000.⁶⁶ Its extension two years later cost a further £150,000. The construction of a second generating station at Eastcroft was also agreed in 1898 at an estimated cost of £259,368, for 'generating electricity for all purposes, including power for the working trams'.⁶⁷ In 1901 the Full Council endorsed the Electricity Committee's recommendations for further expansion at a cost of £100,500.⁶⁸

In contrast to the planning arrangements for electricity, the Tramways Committee had to undertake considerable improvements to the existing system and quickly. The tramlines that the Committee inherited on 18 October 1897 were the original tracks laid in 1878-1879. They were 'absolutely worn out'. The Committee was faced with the simultaneous reconstruction of the existing lines, the extension of routes and a change in the method of traction. Anderson Brownsword, together with the members of the Tramways Committee, believed that a heavier construction and new cars were required.

⁶³ HC (1900) VII *Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons on Municipal Trading* (hereafter HC (1900)), Appendix B, pp. 410-411.

⁶⁴ HC (1903) VII, Appendix A, pp. 232-399.

⁶⁵ Knoop, *Principles*, p. 330.

⁶⁶ Electric Lighting Committee Annual Report and Accounts (hereafter ELCAR), FC, 2 March 1896.

⁶⁷ ELCAR, FC, 6 June 1898.

⁶⁸ Electricity Committee Annual Report and Accounts (hereafter ECAR), FC, 7 October 1901.

It is the soundest policy and the cheapest in the end to construct the lines in the most substantial manner, and thus reduce materially and to as low a figure as possible the cost of maintenance and repairs.⁶⁹

Committee members, though prepared to spend very significant sums, were nevertheless cautious in their expenditure, to ensure not just value for money but a working profit. Local residents and ratepayers in Sneinton requested, in July 1898, an omnibus service to the centre of the city. Alfred Baker, the Tramways Manager, advised the Committee that he did not believe that the service ‘would ever run at a profit, or even pay expenses’. The Committee postponed any such development, especially ‘considering the transition of the tramway system’.⁷⁰

Brownsword reported to the Full Council in September 1900 that a period of low expenditure was needed during the transitional arrangements between the use of the horse-drawn trams and the new electric system. The tenets of Gladstonian Liberalism were evident when Brownsword accounted for the interim costs.

Your Committee have simply carried on the undertaking on the lines inaugurated by the old Company, making such improvements and alterations from time to time as they were able to, without incurring any capital outlay.⁷¹

The Committee prided itself on both its economy and efficiency. John Aldworth, recently appointed as the second Tramways Manager, noted in his annual report for 1900 that there had been ‘a great decrease in the number of complaints received from the public’ and ‘a substantial increase in receipts’.⁷² The gross revenue of the undertaking rose from £42,460 in 1899 to £46,126 in the following year, whilst the net revenue increased dramatically under municipal ownership. In 1898 net revenue stood at just £313, in 1899 at £9,015 and then in 1900 at £23,499. The undertaking had carried 656,040 more passengers during 1899-1900 than the previous year and covered 36,173 more car miles. The strategy agreed by the Corporation resulted in more radical and faster developments in the upgrading of the tramways than could

⁶⁹ Tramways Committee Report (hereafter TRCR), FC, 4 April 1898.

⁷⁰ TRCR, FC, 5 September 1898.

⁷¹ Tramways Committee Annual Report and Accounts (hereafter TRCAR), FC, 10 September 1900.

⁷² Tramways Manager’s Report, 31 July 1900.

ever have been envisaged by the NDTC. Unlike the previous owner, the City Council was not faced with the prospect of compulsory purchase. As such, it was prepared to take a much longer-term view, on the condition that services did not run at a loss at any stage. Many authorities made mistakes in their planning for and early management of tramways and incurred losses. Nottingham's experience was closer to that of the most successful undertaking in Glasgow.⁷³

Economy and efficiency

The Borough Council endeavoured to manage its four municipal utilities as cost-effective businesses with economy, efficiency and, at times, enterprise. Nottingham Corporation demonstrated its ability to be a good, efficient utility provider. The work of the four utility committees reflected the support for municipal capitalism by both the Liberal and Conservative members of those bodies. The politicians strove for profitability on the expert advice of their professional officers. By national measures, the profits that they achieved were significant. Much of the profits of the gas undertaking and some of those of the water undertaking were used for short-term benefits that enabled members to declare an annual General District Rate at a lower level than would otherwise have been possible. A smaller part of the profits was deployed in longer-term civic projects, such as support for the University College and the Free Libraries and Museums between 1881 and 1887 and the opening of the Castle Museum in 1878.⁷⁴ The level of the rates was more palatable to the town's ratepayers and helped representatives of the Liberal Party to offer themselves at the annual municipal elections as councillors who could deliver civic development at a reasonable cost. However, members often had to make difficult political calculations with particular policies. In some cases they had to decide which element of the electorate should be the main focus of their political appeal. The ratepayers, the domestic utility consumers and local businesses each looked, on occasions, for different financial solutions from the Corporation.

⁷³ Dalrymple, 'Tramways', pp. 408-409; I. Maver, 'Glasgow's Civic Government', in W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), p. 468; Sleeman, 'Tramway Industry', pp. 173-174.

⁷⁴ B.H. Tolley, 'Technical Education in the East Midlands: a Study in Educational Administration and History' (University of Nottingham, Ph D thesis, 1979), p. 189.

The Corporation attempted, in a pragmatic way, to pursue economies and efficiencies at each stage of policy development and in the day to day management of the utilities. These included plans for its investment in the infrastructure of the four businesses, the reduction of waste in the supply of gas and water and the achievement of an effective balance between the income from an increasing demand for services and the cost of improvements to supply. The politicians took the view that efficiency was achieved not simply by always targeting an alternative at the lowest possible cost, but by choosing solutions that gave all-round value for money, including broader civic benefits. At times the Borough Council went beyond the relatively predictable search for economies and efficiencies in its operations and endeavoured to find new and enterprising methods of increasing its trading income. For example, the Corporation actively encouraged greater gas consumption. It broadened the consumer base, amended its pricing structures and offered pre-payment metering of supply. The Water Committee collaborated with other local authorities in an effort to ensure long-term water supplies of good quality.

Throughout the period, the support for the policies of all four committees was non-partisan and often unanimous. Much of the routine work of the committees and their officers was non-controversial. Even at the strategic policy level, there tended to be little political disagreement about capital development and technological innovation. However, on occasions, the Council faced opposition from individual politicians, business organisations and one of the Borough Auditors. A number of operational policy issues provoked greater political contention, including some decisions about prices, salaries, the use of profits and the sale of premises.

Gas

The gas undertaking, as the Corporation's first business, attracted some political arguments that were later revisited as the three other municipal utilities were organised. On only two occasions were votes recorded following debates of the Full Council on the Gas Committee's reports. In September 1880 the issue of contention was the allocation of the gas profits from the previous year's trading.⁷⁵ The

⁷⁵ GCAR, FC, 6 September 1880.

Committee proposed a reduction of 2d per unit in the price of gas and the transfer of £12,500 to the Borough Fund. Fourteen Liberals and one Conservative voted against the lower prices, and one Liberal and one Conservative abstained. However, the report was approved by twenty-eight votes to fifteen. In February and March 1885 a proposal to increase the salaries of the Gas Manager and two other departmental officials provoked opposition.⁷⁶ During the first of the two debates, ten Conservatives and eight Liberals voted against an increase, and one Liberal abstained. Five Conservatives and three Liberals continued to oppose the proposal at the second meeting, with four Conservatives and one Liberal abstaining.

Otherwise, very few members formally opposed the proposals that the Gas Committee put before the Full Council. Two voices of dissent were raised in each of ten debates in July 1882, June and July 1883, February and October 1884, January 1885, December 1888, July 1890, February 1891 and October 1893.⁷⁷ The opposition focused variously on prices, salaries, the use of profits and meter rents. Issues concerning capital developments raised opposition on just two occasions, and that was small-scale. In July 1882 a member of each of the two parties succeeded in making it a condition that the Gas Committee would have to return to the Full Council for further approval, when the first section of the proposed extension at Basford Gasworks had been completed.⁷⁸ In January 1885 one Liberal and one Conservative member successfully opposed the purchase of land in Talbot Street.⁷⁹ Generally, there was wholehearted support from both parties and all occupation groups for what was perceived to be the efficient development of works and supply lines by the Gas Committee.

As the Committee enlarged the production capacity of the gas undertaking and extended the mileage of mains to meet rising domestic and business demand, members were concerned to reduce the amount of unaccounted losses that occurred from leakage and other technical problems. When the Corporation took gas into municipal ownership such losses amounted to approximately 11.8% of production. In

⁷⁶ GCAR, FC, 16 February, 9 March 1885.

⁷⁷ For example: Sylvester (Liberal) and Robinson (Conservative) in July 1883; Sylvester and Bentley (Conservative) in February 1884; Cropper (Liberal) and McCraith (Conservative) in July 1890.

⁷⁸ Acton (Liberal) and Eyre (Conservative).

⁷⁹ Gregory (Liberal) and Cockayne (Conservative).

1865-1866 the losses of the NGLCC had been 14.16%. By 1900 the Gas Committee's policies, and especially the technical expertise of the gas officials, had enabled the figure to be reduced to 6.0%, with a steady downward trend being sustained throughout the period.⁸⁰ The extension of gas pipes generally, using short lengths of pipes and a multiplicity of joints, increased the risk of greater leakage rates.⁸¹ One particular source of leakage was street lighting, which necessitated the mains being fed throughout the night, thereby placing increased pressure on the infrastructure of the supply network. Nottingham's record was good by national standards. Indeed, the Gas Engineer, Chester, reported in August 1893 that the leakage figure was 'exceptionally low, considering the enormous district of supply'. Chester believed that the Committee's willingness to agree to 'liberal expenditure on renewals, repairs and maintenance of the distributory plant' provided the essential basis for the Gas Department's improvements in performance.⁸² Only in 1883-1884 and 1890-1891 did losses from leakage worsen significantly.

Gas manufacture increased dramatically over the period as a whole, almost trebling from 648.967 million cubic feet in 1873-1874 to 1,853.377 in 1899-1900.⁸³ In 1870 the NGLCC had produced 484.087 million cubic feet. By 1881 Nottingham was the fifth largest municipal manufacturer in England and Wales, behind Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.⁸⁴ The increases in Nottingham were steady but uneven. However, in only two out of the twenty-six years did production fail to grow year on year, and then only marginally. Increased coal prices, severe weather conditions and the depressed state of the market for the sale of coke and residuals, all impacted adversely on the Committee's policies.

⁸⁰ D.E. Roberts, 'The Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company, 1818-1874' (University of Loughborough, MA thesis, 1976), p. 255 (Roberts calculated a rate of 12% for 1873); T.I. Williams, *A History of the British Gas Industry* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981), pp. 19-20 (21 companies in the West of Scotland had leakage rates of some 10-20% in 1875-1876); Appendix C, Table 11.

⁸¹ Williams, *Gas Industry*, p. 19; Millward, 'Market Behaviour', p. 113.

⁸² GCAR/EN, FC, 4 September 1893.

⁸³ GCAR, FC, 16 November 1874, 10 September 1900.

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Lighting*, p. 57.

Millward has argued that the basic costs of the gas industry were the most significant factor in determining the level of efficiency that an undertaking was able to achieve.⁸⁵ On average, coal accounted for about one third of the utility's total costs. Coal stocks were critical to gas production. In a number of years they failed to keep pace with the needs of the undertaking. Difficulties arose in 1882-1883, 1888-1890, 1893-1894 and 1895-1897.⁸⁶ Generally, the Committee acted with efficiency and secured relatively favourable coal contracts. The professional skill of the senior officers was crucial in such negotiations. For example, in 1889 John Barber, the Chairman of the Committee, reported that the Committee's profit would have been reduced to £9,200, instead of the £24,046 they achieved, had they not gained helpful coal contracts.⁸⁷ In 1893, when local collieries were not extracting coal, the gas undertaking continued to meet the demands of its consumers by accumulating stock to 'prevent any serious inconvenience', and by purchasing supplies from Durham towards the end of the local stoppage.⁸⁸

Particularly adverse weather conditions in 1882, 1890 and 1895 also put considerable pressure on the undertaking to anticipate further difficulties and thereby sustain supply. For example, in July 1882 Tarbotton warned the Committee that unless action was taken to enlarge the production capacity, the Department would not be able to cope with another severe winter in 1883.⁸⁹ The Committee agreed swiftly to the enlargement of the Basford Works and the construction was begun. Seven weeks of unusually severe frost in 1895 resulted in a 29% increase in demand for gas during daylight hours, which the Committee was able to meet thanks to earlier investment in the Eastcroft and Basford plants.⁹⁰

By-products from gas production could account for between 15% and 25% of total revenue in many undertakings.⁹¹ In Nottingham, policy-making took account of the potential of the Giltbrook Chemical Works to contribute to the overall efficiency and

⁸⁵ Millward, 'Costs', pp. 127, 135-136; R. Millward, 'Emergence of Gas and Water Monopolies in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Contested Markets and Public Control', in J. Foreman-Peck (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Late Victorian Economy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 109.

⁸⁶ Appendix C, Table 11.

⁸⁷ GCAR, FC, 2 September 1889.

⁸⁸ GCAR, FC, 2 July 1894.

⁸⁹ GCAR, FC, 3 July 1882.

⁹⁰ GCAR, FC, 1 July 1895.

⁹¹ Millward, 'Market Behaviour', p. 112.

economic success of the utility. The plant was expanded in 1883 to take advantage of the increased strength of the value of tar and liquor residuals in the market place.⁹² When the national market for residuals fell in 1886, 1887 and 1897, it was the efficiency of the organisation of production at Giltbrook that enabled the Department to survive the turbulent commercial conditions.⁹³

During the 1880s and 1890s increased efficiencies, repairs and renewals in a range of aspects of the business were reported year on year by the Gas Engineer. The search for optimum production levels went on unabated. In June 1900, for example, the Engineer produced an annual report that was as balanced and frank as usual. On the one hand he was proud to announce that the purchase of new technology at Eastcroft had provided the Committee with 'the most complete installation in existence', whilst on the other he lamented that the Basford Works needed to be extended further to meet rising demand. It 'had been taxed to its utmost limit during the past winter'.⁹⁴ The professional expertise of the engineers helped the Committee to anticipate problems and to take action accordingly. Nottingham's officials, like those in most other municipal undertakings, were committed to public service, the updating of their own skills and the close monitoring of the technology.⁹⁵ Committee members, many of whom were local businessmen, looked after the broader aspects of the business of the utility, whilst relying on their specialist engineers for technical advice. The Committee's decisions and the implementation of policy were always subject to public scrutiny, including commentary on the annual audit.

The claims of the Gas Committee, that it was indeed managing its municipal business economically and efficiently, were challenged regularly by one of the Borough Auditors, Mark Mellers. His criticisms were based, quite properly, on his evaluation of the evidence he received from the Committee and he highlighted technical matters of accountancy that needed to be given further consideration. In many of the issues he raised, he was reflecting concerns identified by auditors about municipal trading in corporations more generally.⁹⁶ But, he went well beyond the normal professional

⁹² GCAR, FC, 2 July 1883.

⁹³ GCAR/General Manager's Reports, FC, 4 October 1886, 3 October 1887; GCAR, FC, 19 July 1897.

⁹⁴ GCAR/EN, FC, 10 September 1900.

⁹⁵ Finer, *Trading*, pp. 398-399.

⁹⁶ HC (1903) VII, pp. v-viii.

courtesies of municipal auditors in his reports. He used the annual audit of accounts as an opportunity to make personal and political attacks on John Barber, his Committee members and the Council. Generally, he targeted the use made of the profits by the Committee. The onslaught on the Gas Committee included complaints about too great a proportion of the profit being used to support the General District Rate, insufficient funds being allocated to the Sinking and Reserve Funds, too few annuities being extinguished and too much being spent on repairs and maintenance. For example, in 1883 Mellers asserted that the Committee's annual accounts were 'inaccurate and misleading', whilst in the following year he claimed that a loss of £12,511 had been incurred, rather than the profit of £12,000 that the Committee had announced.⁹⁷ In 1887 Mellers produced 'unfavourable comparisons with Manchester about Nottingham's gross revenue, interest on debt and contributions to the Sinking Fund. Nottingham had 'nothing but a feeble and compulsory contribution towards the extinction of debt'.⁹⁸ In 1889 the Auditor complained that the Gas Department had both declared 'a larger profit than has really been made if due allowance were made for depreciation' and was being 'too severely taxed by payments to meet the requirements of the Council'.⁹⁹

In 1893 Mellers once more expressed his fears that 'too much pressure is made to declare the largest possible profit'.¹⁰⁰ In the following year's report, he redefined the Department's actual net profit as over twenty per cent less than the figure claimed by the Committee.¹⁰¹ Mellers also warned that the Council's demands for profits to support the Borough Fund should be watched carefully, lest they lead to 'a departure from sound finance'. One Lib-Lab councillor, John Skerritt, was prompted by Mellers' criticisms to ask for greater detail in the gas accounts, in the style of those produced by the Water and Health Committees.¹⁰² However, the editor of the *Nottingham Daily Express* asked his readers to treat with suspicion anything that the 'controversial character', Mellers, had reported.¹⁰³ In 1898 Mellers targeted his criticism at the additional money the Committee had spent on repairs and

⁹⁷ Auditor's Report/Gas Committee (hereafter AR/G), FC, 7 May 1883.

⁹⁸ AR/G, FC, 3 October 1887.

⁹⁹ AR/G, FC, 2 September 1889.

¹⁰⁰ AR/G, FC, 4 September 1893.

¹⁰¹ AR/G, FC, 2 July 1894.

¹⁰² *NDE*, 3 July 1894.

¹⁰³ *NDE*, 11 September 1894.

maintenance.¹⁰⁴ But, in 1900, even Mellers had to acknowledge that the Department had recorded its highest ever increase in sales. His recognition of the achievement was praise indeed. 'Notwithstanding the introduction of the Electric Light, the proceeds of Gas have greatly increased.'¹⁰⁵

Water

The water undertaking built for itself a reputation for economy and efficiency comparable with that of the gas utility. As with the Gas Committee, the Water Committee handled the management of its business in a non-partisan manner. Only four issues arising from recommendations presented by the Water Committee to the Full Council triggered recorded votes between 1880 and 1900. They concerned an Auditor's Report, the appointment of a new Water Engineer, the salary of the Engineer and the sale of the Water Department's offices. None of the issues was generated directly by policy proposals for either capital projects or the maintenance of plant and property.

In July 1884 five Liberals and eight Conservatives were unhappy with the critical comments made by the Auditor about the level of the capital indebtedness of the undertaking.¹⁰⁶ They proposed that his report should be reconsidered by the Water Committee. The rebels were defeated by nineteen votes to thirteen, but the opposition was noteworthy given the inbuilt majority of the ruling party. In November 1887 the size of the opposition was even greater.¹⁰⁷ The vote to support the appointment of a new Water Engineer was very close indeed. Twenty-six voted in favour and twenty-three against, of whom sixteen were Conservatives. In the event, other circumstances led to the re-advertisement of the post. In February 1890 ten Liberals and seven Conservatives opposed a salary increase for the Water Engineer, Godfrey Evans, and in December of the same year seven Conservatives and two Liberals objected to the proposal that the Water Offices in St Peter's Gate should be sold 'in the general interests of the Corporation'.¹⁰⁸ In addition, between 1880 and 1900, some seven

¹⁰⁴ AR/G, FC, 5 September 1898.

¹⁰⁵ AR/G, FC, 9 November 1900.

¹⁰⁶ FC, 7 July 1884.

¹⁰⁷ FC, 21 November 1887.

¹⁰⁸ FC, 3 February 1890.

amendments were proposed to recommendations of the Water Committee by individual members in meetings of the Full Council. Only two amendments were adopted, in April 1882 and June 1888.¹⁰⁹ A consensus in favour of the Committee's proposals was achieved at the conclusion of the other debates.

When the municipal water utility began operation in 1880, it served a customer base of 187,119, whilst at the end of the century the figure had risen dramatically to 300,484 customers, living both within the City and in the surrounding districts.¹¹⁰ These totals included 57,751 domestic and trade premises in 1881 and 104,971 in 1900.¹¹¹ The pressures on the Committee to expand supply and yet maintain a cost-effective system were immense. Between 1880 and 1896 the undertaking increased the supply of water from an average of 17.82 gallons per day per head to 21.41.¹¹² Within those overall figures, domestic supply rose steadily from 11.52 in 1880 to 12.50 in 1892-1893, whilst trade supply expanded from 6.30 to 6.83 in the same period. Production was broadly consistent with demand year on year, rising significantly after 1891-1892. The efficiency of the municipal business was such that it reduced the average cost of a hundred gallons of water from 2.716d in 1874 to 2.388d in 1886. To achieve such reductions, the Water Committee had to control wastage and enlarge the scale of water supply.

The Water Committee attempted to limit water wastage from the point when it became responsible for supplies in the town. They appointed Water Inspectors to examine premises for defective fittings and enrolled authorised plumbers to undertake repairs. In July 1884 the Committee stressed its commitment to provide appropriate fittings and to cut back further on wastage. 'Wilful or careless waste of water is the bete noire of all public bodies.' Members decided to strengthen their monitoring systems. 'Reasonable and temperate, but persistent, espionage' would be carried out into every detail of the distributive department, to help limit wastage further.¹¹³ Two years later they were still concerned that many members of the public showed a

¹⁰⁹ FC, 3 April 1882, 4 June 1888.

¹¹⁰ Appendix C, Table 13.

¹¹¹ WCAR/EN, FC, 11 July 1881, 2 September 1901.

¹¹² Appendix C, Table 13.

¹¹³ WCAR/EN, FC, 21 July 1884.

disregard 'for the value of water and the cost of obtaining it'.¹¹⁴ Their attempts to combat wastage proved to be a perennial struggle.

The Committee was consistent in its efforts to meet increased demand for water by bringing new sources of supply into the distribution network. Expenditure on improvements at the works in Papplewick, Mapperley Plains and Basford were agreed in 1882 to meet the 'even greater demands that the manufacturers of this rapidly enlarging community are constantly making'.¹¹⁵ Additional requests from the Basford Union Sanitary Authority and West Bridgford in 1883 and Carlton and Netherfield in 1884, to be included in the Nottingham supply district, were met on 'satisfactory terms'.¹¹⁶ When West Bridgford eventually acquired Local Board status in 1891, the supply was negotiated to continue at existing rates.¹¹⁷ This reflected a more general position taken by the Water Committee and its officers. Nottingham Corporation responded positively to opportunities to increase business, so that it could take advantage of any economies of scale and remain as competitive as possible for its existing customers. As Hassan has argued more widely, Nottingham, as a municipal utility, sought to secure its future water supply needs more satisfactorily than private companies were achieving, by being prepared to plan for and invest in the longer-term.¹¹⁸ Instead of attempting to take short-term profits, the Corporation could maximise its sales' goals over a number of years. Nottingham's engineers had good access to the latest technical knowledge to incorporate in its designs and the Committee had the ready availability of sufficient capital. During the 1880s, like a number of other municipal corporations, Nottingham achieved much higher per capita outputs than the private water companies.

During the early 1880s the undertaking had to spend more than usual on the basic infrastructure, with extensions to waterworks and new supply lines, and less on general maintenance. The Water Engineer brought professional vigilance to bear on both the costs of longer-term capital projects and maintenance. In 1886 the Committee supported his six-year plan for the utility, which included the sale of two

¹¹⁴ Water Committee Report/Engineer's Report (hereafter WCR/EN), FC, 1 February 1886.

¹¹⁵ WCR/EN, FC, 2 February 1882.

¹¹⁶ WCAR, FC, 2 July 1883; 7 July 1884.

¹¹⁷ WCR, FC, 9 November 1891.

¹¹⁸ Hassan, 'Growth', pp. 545-546.

unwanted plants and the expansion of those works that supplied water of excellent quality. Tarbotton proposed to increase the supply from between 40 and 50 million gallons per week to 70 million. This would enable the Water Committee to meet the Health Committee's target of a 'more liberal delivery of water to the poorer classes'. Water demand also continued to grow across the water district as the result, in part, of the 'increased use of baths and other conveniences'. Tarbotton claimed that the Borough's supplies were 'pure, good and abundant' and not too soft like the supplies in Manchester and Sheffield.¹¹⁹

Unlike any of the Borough Council's other municipal utilities, the Water Department's longer-term efficiency was interrupted by a period of management difficulties. It concerned Godfrey Evans. Under his leadership, between 1888 and 1894, a number of personnel and strategic planning problems accumulated, yet remained largely hidden. He acknowledged in October 1891 that 'considerable strain' was being experienced by the Department, 'as the result of the move of offices and severe weather conditions.'¹²⁰ But, in July 1893, he reported rather optimistically that 'the whole undertaking has never been in a more satisfactory condition, than at the present time, in the efficiency of its machinery and economical working'.¹²¹ Inspection visits had been reduced by almost half during the previous year because water wastage had been detected more effectively.

However, when Gaskin took up his duties as the new Water Engineer in April 1894, the shortcomings of the Department were soon evident. His initial assessment of the plant he inherited was 'with several exceptions...generally in a fairly good condition'.¹²² Within twelve months he was concerned about 'the narrow margin between the present water supply and the demand'.¹²³ His proposed solution was the acquisition of two new sites for pumping stations and the construction of an additional reservoir. Professor Hull was engaged as an independent expert to advise on the sites and the new sources of supply, suitable to meet the demands of the water district for the next twenty-five years or so. By 1897 the trial bores at Woodborough and Oxtan

¹¹⁹ WCR/EN, FC, 1 February 1886.

¹²⁰ WCR/EN, FC, 5 October 1889.

¹²¹ WCAR/EN, FC, 4 September 1893.

¹²² WCAR/EN, FC, 2 July 1894.

¹²³ WCR/EN, FC, 6 May 1895.

were judged to be ‘good ones’.¹²⁴ Opposition from Newark Council and Nottinghamshire County Council necessitated a revision of the supply strategy.¹²⁵ Cooperation with the authorities in Leicester, Sheffield and Derby provided the answer, in the ambitious Derwent Valley Scheme.

The Water Committee also found itself under as equally hard-hitting criticism as the Gas Committee from Mark Mellers, the Borough Auditor. Similar doubts were cast on the reliability of the statistics recorded in the Water Committee’s annual accounts. Between 1880 and 1900 Mellers accused the Committee of variously manufacturing better figures than were justified in the capital and revenue accounts, holding too little water in reserve and massaging the assets of the business to improve the declared profits. The Auditor reported in 1881 that the Statement of Accounts was ‘inaccurate and misleading’ and that the balance of £13,709 ‘had no existence we could discover’.¹²⁶ A year later the Auditor claimed that the undertaking’s efforts to show a profit were ‘detrimental to the true interests of the concern’.¹²⁷ In 1883 he contended that too little had been set aside for the Reserve Account, so that members could avoid a further increase in the General District Rate.¹²⁸

In 1885 Mellers felt that ‘the condition of the Accounts seems scarcely consonant with the decision to declare a large amount of profit to the relief of the rates’.¹²⁹ Two years later the Water Committee was accused of failing to comply with the statutory requirements of the Sinking Fund.¹³⁰ In 1889 the judgement of the Auditor was that the Committee was departing from ‘the principles of sound finance’ over its approach to the Reserve Fund.¹³¹ In 1895 Mellers complained that the water rates were ‘out of proportion with the extension of the business of the Department’.¹³² In St Mary’s parish, the rates almost doubled. From 1896 the criticisms focused on the Department’s inability to generate sufficient profits to contribute to the Borough Fund

¹²⁴ WCR, FC, 13 September 1897.

¹²⁵ Town Clerk’s Report (hereafter TCR), FC, 2 January 1899.

¹²⁶ Auditor’s Report/Water Committee (hereafter AR/W), FC, 11 July 1881.

¹²⁷ AR/W, FC, 13 July 1882.

¹²⁸ AR/W, FC, 1 October 1883.

¹²⁹ AR/W, FC, 7 December 1885.

¹³⁰ AR/W, FC, 21 November 1887.

¹³¹ AR/W, FC, 2 September 1889.

¹³² AR/W, FC, 7 September 1895.

to help relieve the rates.¹³³ In 1899 Mellers deplored the ‘unprofitable litigation and costly deputations’ that had been incurred by the Corporation during its search for new sources of water supply.¹³⁴ However, as with the Gas Committee, Mellers felt able to commend the actions of the Water Committee in 1900. He acknowledged that although the Committee’s capital expenditure had undergone a ‘serious increase’ with the start of the Derwent Valley Scheme, ‘the undertaking will be well able to bear it’.¹³⁵

Whilst the reports of Mark Mellers were a source of political irritation, especially to the ruling Liberal elite, the Chairmen of the Gas and Water Committees usually responded to them with a straightforward denial of the substance of any criticisms.¹³⁶ They claimed, with some justification, the accuracy of their own statistics and pointed to the prejudice of the Auditor. The Chairmen felt sufficiently confident to maintain and develop the policies that the Committees had agreed. On almost all occasions, the politicians were safe in the assurance that they would be well supported by members of both parties in the Committees and at meetings of the Full Council. They continued to be guided by the general tenets of municipal capitalism, in their endeavour to pursue the twin goals of economy and efficiency in the management of the two utilities. The competence and track record of the senior officers encouraged members to keep faith with the policy recommendations of their professionals, rather than to be distracted by the critique of the Auditor.

Electricity and tramways

The economies and efficiencies of the electricity and tramways undertakings were crafted from different circumstances to those of gas and water. Before 1900, both committees were in the early stages of initiating their strategic plans for capital development. Their focus was upon securing sound investments in capital projects that gave value for money in the short term, with the prospect of further economies and efficiencies with the operation of the utilities in the longer term. As the Electric

¹³³ AR/W, FC, 9 November 1896.

¹³⁴ AR/W, FC, 2 October 1899.

¹³⁵ AR/W, FC, 9 November 1900.

¹³⁶ For example: WCR, FC, 7 December 1885, 2 October 1889; GCR, FC, 23 October 1884, 7 October 1889.

Lighting Committee endeavoured to formulate a policy to meet the then known demands for electricity supply, other pressures were brought to bear on it in a complex and fast-changing technology. In May 1898, just as the initial phase of supply was underway in the central business district, the Committee 'was authorised to reduce the price of electricity and to extend to the whole Borough as soon as possible'.¹³⁷ Even twelve months later, it was felt that accurate predictions about future consumption were 'impossible to answer'.¹³⁸ Members and officials were engaged in a style of rational planning that was different in kind to the Corporation's earlier experiences of utility management. More than ever, the knowledge and expertise of the Electrical Engineer and the City Engineer were at a premium to enable members to make secure decisions.

Neither the Electric Lighting Committee nor the Electricity Committee was the subject of a recorded vote between 1892 and 1900 and they were not challenged in Full Council meetings by any significant amendments to the Committees' policy proposals. All the major decisions had the support of both parties. These included the decisions to municipalize the utility, apply for loans from the Local Government Board for capital projects and work jointly with the Tramways Committee to supply electric power for the new tramway system. This consensus was strengthened by the political goodwill that had been built up during the parties' political collaboration on the Gas and Water Committees, the commercial experience that had been gained together as municipal traders and the trust members had in the professional judgement and expertise of their officers.

Strong collaboration was evident too in the Council's opposition to the General Power Distribution Company's Bill in 1898. Liberals and Conservatives were rallied to protect their emergent municipal business by the threat of a private generating company to their monopoly position. The arguments presented by both sides demonstrated that, even after twenty-four years of municipal trading, the Council still had to convince some sections of local industry and commerce of the propriety of municipal intervention. The Company comprised a syndicate of large manufacturers

¹³⁷ *NDG*, 17 May 1898.

¹³⁸ *NDE*, 30 May 1899.

that chose to make Chesterfield a trial town.¹³⁹ Within its general target area, the Company sensed a gap in the market in Nottingham and tried unsuccessfully to obtain powers to light a part of the city not covered by the Corporation's own Orders. At that time, Nottingham had only 479 existing electric light customers and the Bill had the support of all the Chambers of Commerce in an area of 210 square miles around Chesterfield, including Nottingham and Sheffield.¹⁴⁰

The Company claimed that it would be able to supply electricity at lower rates. Nottingham Corporation responded by lowering its own rates in 1898.¹⁴¹ The average price of municipal electricity had been 5.68d per unit in 1896-1897. Nottingham's rates had been the ninth most expensive of the twenty-eight councils with a municipally-owned electricity business. The Corporation charged less than Leicester, Liverpool, Salford and Southampton, but more than Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol, Hull and Portsmouth. The municipal average was 5.32d and that of private suppliers 5.84d. Under the threat of external intervention, Nottingham City Council reduced its price to 5.2d in 1897-1898. The municipal utility had signalled its willingness and ability to compete successfully in the open market place. The politicians had underlined, once again, their business credentials.

From July 1898 the Council attempted to make its electricity even more attractive to consumers with differential rates for both lighting and power.¹⁴² For lighting, the first four hundred hours were offered at 4d per unit and then 2d thereafter. Electrical supply for power was cheaper still, at 2d for the first time band and then just 1d per unit. The initial pricing strategy had produced a dramatic rise in income to the Committee from £1,686 in 1896 to £10,740 in 1898, although compared with gas the income from electricity was very small indeed. Nationally, gas was still cheaper in 1900.¹⁴³ Nottingham had only one third as many customers as Glasgow, the leading electricity utility, in 1898.¹⁴⁴ However, Samuel Johnson claimed that potential consumers would be more secure in the hands of the Corporation than the private

¹³⁹ Hannah, *Electricity*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ Meyer, *Municipal Ownership*, pp. 267-271.

¹⁴¹ NAO CA.A1.1898/42, 44-47, 10 June 1898.

¹⁴² NAO CA.A1.1898-1899/58, 24 June 1898.

¹⁴³ Hannah, *Electricity*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ I.E. Sweeney, 'The Municipal Administration of Glasgow, 1833-1912: Public Service and Scottish Civic Identity' (University of Strathclyde, Ph D thesis, 1990), p. 422.

opposition. Nottingham Corporation could raise money at lower rates of interest, it paid no directors' fees and its profits benefited the whole town. 'The amortization of the capital of the undertaking in the hands of the city is in the end enriching the community.' Johnson claimed that the City Council would 'be able to supply electricity to the fullest extent and give any power that may be required at as low a price as any company'.¹⁴⁵

The Corporation's efforts to provide cheap and readily available supplies of gas and electricity to local industry were met with some critical voices. In May 1898 the Nottinghamshire and Midland Traders Association indicated its support, like other employer groups, for the Company's proposal and the projected construction of a new works at Warsop. The Association resolved that 'it was desirable to encourage the introduction of electrical power into the towns and villages of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and District as it would prove of the utmost practical utility in aiding agriculture, village trades and general manufacturing purposes'.¹⁴⁶ The Nottingham Chamber of Commerce also supported the proposal, opting for a competitive market. 'It was a matter for commercial enterprise, for private speculation, rather than one upon which the Corporation should embark.' The traders feared the cost to the ratepayers and felt that 'a monopoly, even by a Corporation, was not always an unmixed good'. They argued that the costs of Nottingham's gas utility had been disadvantageous to manufacturers. 'They had no guarantee that the Corporation would be any more expeditious in the future than it had been in the past.'¹⁴⁷

The Corporation's representatives argued that its profits would be transferred to the relief of the rates, whereas a second supplier in Nottingham would be looking after the interests of its American shareholders.¹⁴⁸ They contended that gas had provided the equivalent of a seven pence in the pound reduction in the rates during the previous year. The Council intended to reduce prices yet further in 1898 and to provide the sort of competent management of the electrical utility that had already been demonstrated in Liverpool, Sheffield and Birmingham. A compromise was reached. The Chamber of Commerce agreed to oppose the introduction of the private company

¹⁴⁵ NAO CA.A1.1898-1899/74, Draft statement to Parliament, 1898.

¹⁴⁶ *NDG*, 5 May 1898.

¹⁴⁷ *NDG*, 17 May 1898.

¹⁴⁸ *NDG*, 8 June 1898.

into the city, but to support its introduction in the towns and villages. The editor of the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* implored its readers not to let any competing electricity supplier into the city. 'The private company cannot do anything that cannot be done by the Corporation and, in most cases, the Corporation will be better able to supply electricity than a private company.'¹⁴⁹

Having assured its customers of its intentions to be economic and efficient in its provision of electricity, the City Council joined forces with many other local authorities in presenting their case to a Parliamentary Select Committee on Electrical Energy, which was examining the future of electricity generation and supply.¹⁵⁰ Samuel Johnson and key members of the Association of Municipal Corporations collaborated to exert considerable pressure on the Committee. The main recommendation of the enquiry was that local authorities would not continue to hold their initial veto over the determination of who should supply to their local area. Instead, the Board of Trade would decide each case on its merits. Although the immediate threat from the General Power Distribution Company had been averted by the Bill's defeat in Parliament by 164 votes to 132, the outcome of the Select Committee presented the Council, in the longer-term, with yet more potential challenges to its undertaking.¹⁵¹ In March 1899 the Mayor, Edward Fraser, 'congratulated the Council and the people within the District that a dangerous and insidious measure had received its death blow'. However, individual voices continued to be raised in opposition to the Council's policy. For example, McCraith argued that 'the policy of the Corporations of England had been detrimental to the interests of the community'.¹⁵² In reality, he chose to speak for employers within the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce and the Traders Association. However, the two-party consensus had held together, in the face of the most explicit challenge to municipal trading in the town that the Council had witnessed.

The pattern of development of electricity undertakings in many local authorities followed different courses to that experienced in Nottingham. But the challenge of

¹⁴⁹ *NDG*, 9 June 1898.

¹⁵⁰ NAO CA.A1.1898-1899/153, 25 April 1898; NAO CA.CM.MISC/6 (Powers Joint Committee), 14 January, 9 February, 9 May, 28 October 1898.

¹⁵¹ Meyer, *Municipal Ownership*, p. 271.

¹⁵² *NDE*, 7 March 1899.

the power companies more generally affected all corporations. Whilst Nottingham Corporation had decided to take ownership of both the gas and electricity utilities at a relatively early stage, some municipalities opted for the private ownership of one source of supply, at least for a time. For example, in Cardiff the threat of a private power company supplying electricity in the town was viewed by the Corporation with anxiety, as it was in Nottingham.¹⁵³ But the context and response of the authority in South Wales were different. Cardiff Council had never municipalized the local gas utility and the politicians were well aware of the high level of dissatisfaction in the community with the behaviour of the private company, especially the increases in gas prices. Unlike Nottingham, the Council had granted a temporary licence to the Anglo-American Brush Company in 1884 to provide electric street lighting. By 1890 the private company had withdrawn and ratepayers continued to be concerned about further gas increases. The Corporation decided to challenge the gas company's monopoly position in supplying power in the town. By 1893 the Council had established a municipal electricity utility as a competitive source of power, in the belief electricity would ultimately replace gas for lighting and heating. As in Nottingham, the electrification of the tramways provided the Corporation with a strong motive to maintain a monopoly of electricity supply. It had a secure and consistent major customer. Generally, municipal electricity utilities negotiated contracts with their municipal tramways undertakings of only about a third of the price that lighting consumers paid for their supply of electricity.¹⁵⁴

Birmingham Corporation, like Cardiff, initially agreed to a private franchise in the town in 1889. But, unlike Cardiff, the Council had to purchase the private company ten years later to establish municipal ownership.¹⁵⁵ The Birmingham Electric Supply Company enjoyed steady and sustained success during the 1890s and the Council was required to pay £420,000 to take control. Once in municipal hands, the Corporation invested heavily in technical improvements and, like Nottingham, managed to reduce average prices for the consumer. During 1900-1901 electricity was priced at 4.37d per unit.

¹⁵³ Morgan, 'Wales', pp. 321-324.

¹⁵⁴ Hannah, *Electricity*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁵ L.W. Jones, 'The Municipalization of the Electricity Supply Industry in Birmingham', *West Midlands Studies*, 13 (1980), pp. 20-24.

The tramways undertaking in Nottingham was managed with a similar business-like approach to the three established municipal utilities. The utility had the whole-hearted support of members between 1897 and 1900. The purchase of the Nottingham and District Tramways Company had been agreed with unanimity and the decisions that followed municipalization, to extend and develop the tramline network around the city, were endorsed in the same way. However, the Council was split on one separate issue that arose as the consequence of the tramways strategy. Ratepayers in Sneinton asked the Council to provide an omnibus service into the city centre. The outcome was determined strictly on the grounds of economy and efficiency, that was an assessment of the service's likely profitability. The debate provoked a 'considerable discussion', but the politicians were not convinced that the line would make a profit.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the advice of the Tramways Manager was that the service was unlikely to break even. His evaluation was accepted by a majority of members. Twenty voted in favour of the provision, three abstained and twenty-nine were opposed. The decision demonstrated the continuing commitment of the Corporation to trade for profit and not to agree to social provision at any cost, when the two were in conflict.

Within a few months of its creation, the Tramways Committee had to make one particularly crucial commercial decision that would have long-term financial implications. Members had to determine whether to power the new electric trams by means of either overhead traction or underground cables. In July 1899 the Committee recommended 'unhesitatingly' that the overhead option should be adopted, as 'the only system which in this city would be a financial success'.¹⁵⁷ Its choice was made on the grounds of cost-saving and efficiency and on the clear advice of their specialist engineers. The politicians were convinced of the rightness of their preference, as the result of the most detailed investigation of any policy proposal that the Council took in this period. Good practice was observed in other British municipalities in Edinburgh, Bristol and Dover and in several cities in the United States. Consideration was also given to 'the most excellent and exhaustive report issued by the City of Sheffield'.¹⁵⁸ The Sheffield analysis covered projects

¹⁵⁶ TRCR, FC, 5 September 1898; *NDG*, 6 September 1898; *NDE*, 6 September 1898.

¹⁵⁷ TRCR/ Manager's Report, FC, 11 September 1899.

¹⁵⁸ TRCR, FC, 4 April 1898; *NDE*, 5 April 1898; NAO CA.CM.85/1, 11 April 1899.

undertaken in a further eighteen cities, mainly on the Continent and including Rome and Milan.

Nottingham Corporation's officers reported that underground systems had heavy initial costs, brought great disturbance to other utilities during construction and had higher maintenance costs, as Birmingham had discovered. The estimate for an underground system in Nottingham was between £200,000 and £250,000 more than the projected cost of an overhead system. Officers estimated that each mile of track would cost £6,000 for the overhead system and double that if underground cables were used.¹⁵⁹ Other municipal authorities, such as Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford, Hull, Bristol and Glasgow, had chosen overhead systems. In the case of electrified tramways, the Council was less dependent on 'disjointed incrementalism' as its approach to policy-making than had been the case for gas and electricity. Sound evidence was readily available on which to base a major, strategic decision. Officers used their professional networks to provide detailed working plans and comprehensive costings for the politicians. The City Council took the view that only the overhead system would give the Corporation the opportunity to respond to the residents' popular demand for cheap fares in an economic manner.

Although the decision on the choice of a power system was eventually carried without dissent, individual members voiced doubts and concerns about the wisdom of the proposed policy during the debates. For example, in April 1898 John Brown, a Conservative councillor, objected to 'destroying the present system which seemed to be paying exceedingly well', whilst a fellow Conservative, Thomas Bentley, tried to slow down the Council's rush to judgement, as he perceived it.¹⁶⁰ By October 1899 both Conservative and Liberal doubters had been persuaded of the benefits of the new arrangements. John White, a Conservative, took the view that the 'public had been very well served' since municipal ownership, and John Green, a Liberal, was 'impatient to see action in providing electric trams'.¹⁶¹ Receipts from the old horse-drawn system had been modest during the first year of operation. Income had been

¹⁵⁹ TRCR, FC, 4 April 1898; TRCR/City Engineer and Electrical Engineer's Report, FC, 11 September 1899.

¹⁶⁰ *NDE*, 5 April 1898.

¹⁶¹ *NDE*, 3 October 1899.

‘seriously affected by the disorganization of the traffic, owing to the relaying of the lines for Electric Traction, also the opening of the new railway’.¹⁶²

The management of the tramways utility in Nottingham reflected many of the attributes of the leading municipal system in Glasgow. The whole system was electrified, brand new equipment was purchased over a short period, continuous extensions were made to all areas and finances were managed carefully to ensure that the Sinking Fund, depreciation costs and maintenance issues were fully addressed.¹⁶³ Both provided efficient services, under the supervision of effective management.¹⁶⁴ Where the two corporations differed was in the underpinning philosophy of the tram service. In the case of Glasgow, it was the ‘best possible service...at the lowest possible fare’.¹⁶⁵ In Nottingham, fares were as cheap as profitability would allow. Across the country, municipal authorities generally offered fares at slightly less than those charged by private companies and the most profitable undertakings were those in municipal ownership.¹⁶⁶ In Nottingham, as in many other authorities, the availability of electricity enabled greater efficiency to be achieved.¹⁶⁷

The professional leadership of municipal tramway undertakings was often superior to that of private companies. The quality of management in Nottingham was no exception. The statutory arrangements for ownership favoured the municipalities and the private concerns often found it difficult to keep hold of good managers.¹⁶⁸ Although Nottingham had to release its first Tramways Manager quickly to promotion with a larger authority, the Corporation was able to attract a competent replacement. Both Baker and Aldworth supported the City Engineer and the Tramways Committee effectively in the reconstruction of the whole tramway system.

¹⁶² Tramways Committee Annual Report and Accounts/Manager’s Report, FC, 2 September 1901.

¹⁶³ Dalrymple, ‘Tramways’, p. 409.

¹⁶⁴ I. Maver, ‘The Role and Influence of Glasgow’s Municipal Managers, 1890s-1930s’, in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p. 73.

¹⁶⁵ Dalrymple, ‘Tramways’, p. 409.

¹⁶⁶ J.L. Mackenzie, ‘Municipal Trading’, *Public Administration*, (1927), p. 252; Sleeman, ‘Tramway Industry’, p. 161.

¹⁶⁷ Sleeman, ‘Tramway Industry’, pp. 160-161, 163.

¹⁶⁸ V. Knox, ‘The Economic Effect of the Tramways Act of 1870’, *Economic Journal*, 11 (1901), p. 509.

The management of all four utilities involved both the development of long-term strategies and the handling of the short-term realities of running local businesses.

Viewed over a period of twenty-six years, members managed the utilities sufficiently well for Nottingham Corporation to be regarded as a leading trader in all four sectors. In the short run, the strength of members' overarching commitment to municipal trading helped them to take policy decisions about the more immediate political, economic and technical challenges that kept them on course for longer-term profitability. Achievements in municipal trading were hard won and varied from utility to utility in any one year. The Council chose to respond pragmatically, searching for workable solutions to particular market conditions.

Rationality may have broadly underpinned their approach to decision-taking and policy implementation, but more immediate problems intervened that could not be so accurately predicted or resulted from the decisions of external bodies. For example, the senior politicians had to manage the political irritation caused by the criticisms of the Borough Auditor, the shortcomings of the departmental leadership of one Water Engineer, the attacks on municipal trading articulated by local employer associations and, above all, the political consequences of confronting adverse trading conditions in the local economy. Political leaders had the difficult task of striking a balance between meeting growing demands for services and maintaining short-term cost-effectiveness. At times when there were pressures to accelerate capital building programmes, members had less finance available to support the maintenance and replacement of existing plant. The Corporation also had to manage the impact of uneven increases in consumption year on year, falls in consumption, lower profits, leakages and waste. On occasions, severe weather conditions, the shortage of coal stocks and depression in the residual chemicals' market each created difficulties in the commercial environment.

Enterprise

In two particular policy areas, Nottingham Borough Council demonstrated its capacity to be not only economic and efficient in the management of its utilities, but also enterprising. Firstly, the Corporation introduced a range of measures to stimulate gas consumption. For example, it adjusted prices, rented out cookers and promoted

prepayment metered supply to homes to increase its consumer base. Secondly, the Council ensured that the city would continue to have good quality water supplies in the longer-term. It collaborated with other authorities in the region and negotiated a good financial deal for supplies from the Derwent Valley Scheme. Both initiatives reflected a politico-business culture that valued sound finance and business efficiency. In these particular cases, the politicians showed an adeptness in taking new business initiatives that relatively few other corporations were willing to tackle in that manner, at that time. Whilst the decision-taking was based on the Council's accumulated experience in municipal trading, these two political strategies required a more entrepreneurial approach. The decisions were incremental in the sense that they followed logically from existing knowledge of the business, but members needed to take much bolder political steps and they could not rely on muddling through to find solutions. The Council responded to setbacks and difficulties within the gas and water utilities with more ambitious and creative efforts to help assure profitability.

The gas and water utilities in Nottingham performed at least as well as their private company predecessors had done and, in almost all respects, rather better. The politicians had every reason to provide continuing support to their flagship business, gas, because of the importance of this utility's high profits to the Council's overall financial programme. In 1898 Samuel Johnson reiterated the right of the Corporation to use their profits 'in such a way as we think best for the general good of the inhabitants at large'.¹⁶⁹ He affirmed the Council's willingness to invest in municipal utilities and its determination to keep down prices for ratepayers and domestic and commercial consumers. Johnson, like the members he served, believed that Nottingham had prospered by its own initiative and energy. Municipal authorities had been encouraged by central government to invest considerable funds in the utilities. In turn, the Council needed to encourage the financial well-being of local industries.

It is important to have cheap gas, as it very much used in manufactures; it would put our manufacturers in an unfair position compared with other towns unless we could give them cheap gas.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ *RC* (1894), p. 352.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

During the last three years of gas production by the Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company, consumption rose from 625.329 million cubic feet in 1871-1872 to 700.581 at the time of the handover to the Borough Council. Under municipal management, consumption increased to 757.526 after one year and to 1,068.833 after five years. Consumers purchased increasingly larger amounts of gas until in 1890-1891 the figure reached 1,351.302 million cubic feet. By 1899-1900 consumption had reached 1,742.154.¹⁷¹ The general trend continued upwards, though in some years consumption levels were not maintained. Totals dropped, albeit relatively slightly, in 1888-1889 and 1893-1894. The general pattern of growth included significant gains until 1885 and then in three of the six years between 1894 and 1900.

The income gained from sales rose generally in line with consumption figures, although annual increases varied as the result of price adjustments. Total sales from domestic and commercial consumers climbed from £110,623 in 1875-1876, to £129,059 in 1879-1880, to £153,579 in 1889-1890 and to £218,105 in 1899-1900. It was domestic sales that accounted for the vast majority of consumption from 1876-1877. For example, they amounted to just 55.5% in 1875-1876, but 99.1% the following year, 95.9% in 1885-1886, 90.9% ten years later and 91.3% in 1899-1900.¹⁷²

Sales grew persistently until 1884-1885, held relatively steady for a further five years, then rose year on year to the end of the century. The commercial element of sales was affected by the local economic recession, which was particularly acute in 1884 and during 1886 and 1887, and there was a knock-on effect in domestic sales as unemployment rose. However, from the 1880s Nottingham's local economy was becoming more differentiated to include a wider range of industries, each with their own different economic cycles in their own specialist markets.¹⁷³ The increasing breadth in the town's economic structure offered the possibility of continuing employment in one sector, when another was in difficulty. The municipal gas

¹⁷¹ Appendix C, Table 11.

¹⁷² GCR/EN, FC, 20 November 1876, 24 September 1877, 4 October 1886, 7 September 1896, 10 September 1900.

¹⁷³ S.D. Chapman, 'Economy, Industry and Employment', in J. Beckett et al (eds.), *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997), pp. 485-494; R.A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900* (Frank Cass, 1966), pp. 241-247.

undertaking, therefore, had opportunities to maintain reasonable levels of consumption, albeit at lower levels than were normally experienced. For example, the lace trade had been 'exceptionally prosperous' between 1873 and 1883, but then met both reduced home demand and the effects of German protectionism from 1884. In contrast, the hosiery industry was 'not suffering from any especial or very great depression' in the mid-1880s. The hosiery firms had been able to focus their efforts on more successful products, with improved machinery, and thereby compete successfully for orders. However, there were fears amongst the leaders of the local textile firms that protectionism would make trading conditions much worse. Sam Collinson, the Secretary of the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce, wrote in 1886 that 'any interference with the principles of free trade would induce results disastrous to our commerce'.¹⁷⁴

Prices were set at between 3s 4d and 3s 1 1/2d per unit for domestic customers in 1875-1876, dependent upon how much gas was consumed. The prices were the same as those charged by the NGLCC in its last year of operation. The cost of coal had been the biggest single factor in NGLCC's pricing policy. Coal accounted for almost 50% of the production costs of the private Company. Soon after the Council assumed responsibility for the undertaking, Alderman John Howitt made clear that the intention of the Corporation was to reduce prices as soon as practicable. 'Providing there is a fall in the price of coal, the Committee hold hope of a reduction in the charge for gas.'¹⁷⁵ The Council made the political decision to reduce prices on six occasions between 1876 and 1884, in order to stimulate demand and to help the new municipal business to grow. Members showed confidence in their trading capacity and a commitment to consumers that they would share in the profitability of the utility. Average reductions of 2d per unit were agreed in 1876, 1877, 1879, 1881, 1884 and 1885.¹⁷⁶ The boost in consumption and the improvements that the Corporation was able to make to production and distribution justified their commercial initiative. In a decade, the upper price level was reduced from 3s 4d to 2s

¹⁷⁴ HC (1886) XXI *Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade and Industry*, p. 234.

¹⁷⁵ GCAR, FC, 11 September 1876.

¹⁷⁶ GCAR, FC, 11 September 1876, 24 September 1877, 5 August 1879, 3 October 1881, 17 November 1884, 7 December 1885.

4d. Nottingham's record of price reductions was very similar to those attained by Birmingham Corporation.¹⁷⁷

Prices were held steady for a further five years, before charges had to be increased. An additional 2d was agreed in 1890 and a further 4d in 1900.¹⁷⁸ The response of consumers to increased prices in 1890 was swift. Complaints were received from seventeen large consumers in December 1890, whilst forty manufacturers and other ratepayers in the Borough asked, in February 1891, for the increased payment to be delayed by one quarter.¹⁷⁹ A similar request for a delay was received from consumers in the outlying districts. Those sensitivities to price increases were still evident in May 1893, when forty-three consumers showed their continuing displeasure with the management of the municipal utility and objected to the appointment of a Gas Examiner.¹⁸⁰ The popularity of the Corporation's earlier enterprising approach to pricing made increased charges a difficult political option after 1890. However, throughout the period, Nottingham's pricing structure was competitive by national standards. For example, until the 1890s the charges to Nottingham's consumers were significantly less than those charged by the municipal utility in Glasgow.¹⁸¹ By 1899-1900 Nottingham's prices were similar to Birmingham and Leeds and cheaper than Leicester and Bradford.¹⁸²

Pricing policy also had to take account of the different private customers who lived in the gas district, those within the town's boundaries and those beyond. The distinction between the needs and rights of ratepayers and consumers resulted in regular arguments about prices. The issue was non-partisan, with members of both parties on either side of the debate over the years. As Samuel Johnson noted in 1894, 'the ratepayers and the gas consumers are not the same people. We extend so many miles into the country, and the country people all round that consume gas are not ratepayers'.¹⁸³ At the time when the Corporation took ownership of the gas undertaking, issues were raised by members about the inclusion of the outlying areas

¹⁷⁷ Finer, *Trading*, p. 49.

¹⁷⁸ GCAR, FC, 7 July 1890.

¹⁷⁹ FC, 1 February 1890, 2 February 1891.

¹⁸⁰ FC, 15 May 1893.

¹⁸¹ Sweeney, 'Municipal Administration', p. 411.

¹⁸² HC (1900) VII, Appendix B, pp. 378-437.

¹⁸³ RC (1894), p. 352.

in the new gas district.¹⁸⁴ Councillor Gregory, for example, claimed that supply should only be for the benefit of the residents in the town. The debate about the desirability of differential pricing re-surfaced in 1885, 1887, 1890 and 1893.¹⁸⁵ In January 1885 Alderman Goldschmidt referred to the relationship between the town and the outlying areas as ‘a partnership of the most peculiar character’. He believed that ‘the Borough had to take all the risk, and those in the outlying districts took all the benefit’.¹⁸⁶ Despite having the responsibility for laying the mains and undertaking repairs beyond the Borough’s boundaries, the Gas Committee was not in a position to introduce a differential rate, given the statutory requirements established in 1874. In July 1890 John Barber reported that some 12% of gas was consumed outside the Borough.¹⁸⁷ Thomas Bentley, a Conservative, contended that there was a great deal of ill-feeling within the town about the cost of gas in the outlying areas.

A decade later the same arguments about ratepayer injustice were still being aired. The Liberals generally supported the political decision to oppose the option of a reduction in the price of gas in 1900.¹⁸⁸ They claimed that the reductions would benefit the outlying districts, such as Eastwood, Burton Joyce and West Bridgford, whilst city ratepayers would face the bill of £20,000 that was needed to deal with the leakage problems across the whole supply district. Some Conservatives argued in favour of a price reduction rather than the ratepayers having the advantage. Similar arguments had been deployed in September 1895 when the Council had to decide whether to extend the water supply to Burton Joyce and Radcliffe on Trent. On that occasion, three Conservatives and one senior Liberal were prominent in presenting the case of the ratepayers. McCraith, Bentley and Robinson expressed their fears about the size of the expenditure that would be involved for Borough ratepayers and pleaded for caution. McCraith went so far as to argue that they ‘should not send water out of the district beyond which they were morally bound to send’. Alderman John Renals agreed. ‘People went outside the town to avoid the rates and then expected the Council to provide them with all the luxuries they required.’¹⁸⁹ By the end of the century, some more distant villages were charged an additional fee when they became

¹⁸⁴ *NDE*, 17 November 1874.

¹⁸⁵ *NDE*, 6 January 1885; GCAR, FC, 7 July 1890, 4 September 1893; *NDE*, 8 July 1890.

¹⁸⁶ *NDE*, 6 January 1885.

¹⁸⁷ *NDE*, 12 July 1890.

¹⁸⁸ GCAR, FC, 10 September 1900.

¹⁸⁹ *NDE*, 3 September 1895.

attached to the supply network. These included Cotgrave, Linby, Selston, Burton Joyce and Stoke.¹⁹⁰

Some local authorities chose to offer differential rates both within and beyond their boundaries, unlike Nottingham. But such strategies did not necessarily produce fewer complaints. For example, Manchester Corporation was heavily criticised in 1896 for its differential policy.¹⁹¹ In fact, Nottingham's policy resulted in greater financial success than in many municipalities. Nottingham Corporation was one of only seventeen authorities, out of a hundred that supplied gas beyond their own boundaries, which were able to declare a net profit in March 1899.¹⁹² The losses incurred by many of those corporations were affected by the economic status of their customers and their pricing policies. As Millward has argued more generally, many more municipal customers came from lower income bands than was the case in private companies, their consumption tended to be less than average and the prices they were charged were normally lower than those of private concerns.¹⁹³

In November 1876 the Gas Committee acknowledged that from the time of the handover 'demand was fast overtaking the powers of supply'.¹⁹⁴ Thereafter, the Committee endeavoured to balance its need to invest in greater production capacity to meet current demand, with its deliberate stimulation of yet further consumer demand. The external pressures that were exerted on the infrastructure by the weather conditions and the price of local coal, inevitably affected the Committee's calculations and its room for manoeuvre. So too did the continuing expectation of the Full Council that gas profits would be sufficient to enable the General District Rate to be kept as low as possible and other civic projects to be supported financially.

In March 1881 the Committee reported that the rise in consumption had 'exceeded all previous experience'.¹⁹⁵ In the following year they reported an 87% increase during the course of the previous decade.¹⁹⁶ In 1882 the Committee decided to reduce prices

¹⁹⁰ NAO CA.A1. 1898-1899/51, 10 June 1898.

¹⁹¹ Knoop, *Principles*, p. 182.

¹⁹² HC (1900) VII, Appendix A, pp. 342-352.

¹⁹³ Millward, 'Market Behaviour', pp. 120-121.

¹⁹⁴ GCR/EN, FC, 20 November 1876.

¹⁹⁵ GCR, FC, 7 March 1881.

¹⁹⁶ GCR/EN, FC, 3 July 1882.

‘to further stimulate the consumption of gas, for more general use in cooking and as motive power’. Nottingham’s entrepreneurship in this area was unusual. In 1882 gas sales across the country had little influence on cooking or heating.¹⁹⁷ In the following year there was an abnormal increase in sales once the mains had been enlarged.¹⁹⁸ In 1885 the Committee voted for a further reduction in prices because they were ‘of the opinion that this reduction will materially stimulate the domestic consumption both for heating and cooking, as well as encourage the use of gas engines’. It agreed that the larger consumers should be given more advantageous reductions. Members reasoned that although the policy would cost the Committee £10,200 in the first year of operation, consumption would then increase and the Committee would recoup its outlay. To further enhance income, the Committee arranged ‘an exhibition and supply of cooking and gas-heating stoves’ at ‘reasonable prices’.¹⁹⁹ The Committee was building on the experience of an earlier successful gas exhibition at the Mechanics Hall. That had attracted fifteen thousand visitors over a period of six days.

However, the Gas Committee was faced in 1886 by an increase in consumption of only 3.72%, less than the national average. The Gas Manager, Lewis Wright, believed that the situation was ‘explained by the condition of local industries’.²⁰⁰ Indeed, the number of customers actually fell by 6%. In 1887 and 1888 the rate of increase in consumption dropped even further to 3.29% and 1.03%, the lowest figures for a decade.²⁰¹ The effects of poor local trading conditions continued to be blamed, including the increase in the number of empty properties that resulted from unemployment. Yet, in December 1886 during a severe frost, the Gas Department had to deal with one of the largest ever daily demands for gas. The Committee’s resourcefulness in planning well ahead for such an eventuality saved the day. Capital improvements brought efficiencies in their wake that lowered the cost of production. The expenditure in 1888 was little more than in 1882, despite a 26% increase in the sale of gas.

¹⁹⁷ Williams, *Gas Industry*, p. 35.

¹⁹⁸ GCR/EN, FC, 2 July 1883.

¹⁹⁹ GCR, FC, 5 January 1885.

²⁰⁰ GCAR, FC, 7 December 1885.

²⁰¹ GCAR, FC, 3 October 1887, 2 July 1888.

In 1889 the Committee had to manage its first annual decrease in gas consumption, a drop of 1.93%.²⁰² 'The continued depression in trade in the district' was attributed again to the lack of increase in 1890.²⁰³ At this stage the Full Council reluctantly agreed to raise the price of each unit of gas by 2d. However, the Council recognised that some of the additional costs had been incurred for technical reasons. There were, as usual, higher leakage rates in the outer parts of the gas district. As such, the Council decided to offer some compensation to the Borough's ratepayers by using part of the gas profits to reduce the General District Rate. The individuals who opposed the Council's recommendations reflected once more the non-partisan and consensual approach to municipal trading matters. The Liberal Cropper and the Conservative McCraith opposed the motion to increase the cost of gas, but withdrew their amendment to avoid splitting the council on such a fundamental commercial policy.

Consumption levels revived in 1891, when a very large increase was recorded.²⁰⁴ Severe winter weather and increased sales of fires and cookers accounted for the rise in income. By 1893 much greater use of gas heaters for both domestic and trade purposes underpinned rising consumption figures.²⁰⁵ At that stage some 2,500 cooking stoves, 3,500 fires and 186 engines were gas powered. The Department's cooker rental programme enhanced consumption figures. In 1895 the consumption was so great, during a period of seven weeks of unusually severe frost, that customers were complaining about the size of their gas bills.²⁰⁶ The Committee claimed that 'they were always ready to advise on economic use'. Over the following five years consumption continued to grow. The Gas Engineer, Chester, reported in 1897 that there was 'continual growth in the demand for gas for cooking, heating and motive power'.²⁰⁷

Nottingham was one of the earlier municipal gas utilities to pursue the hire and sale of cookers and heaters. This element of sales played a significant part in the Department's financial performance. Leicester Corporation had sold or hired out over

²⁰² GCAR, FC, 2 September 1889.

²⁰³ GCAR, FC, 7 July 1890.

²⁰⁴ GCAR, FC, 31 August 1891.

²⁰⁵ GCAR/EN, FC, 4 September 1893.

²⁰⁶ GCAR, FC, 1 July 1895.

²⁰⁷ GCAR/EN, FC, 19 July 1897.

1,000 cookers in 1882, but generally the main take up was in the 1890s.²⁰⁸ In most authorities, the councils were looking for a market for spare capacity.²⁰⁹ In Nottingham, the Gas Committee had to expand production to meet the demand it stimulated. Nottingham's sales policy was inspired by commercial considerations, but the opportunity to hire broadened the appeal of cookers and heaters to a wider cross-section of customers. In many authorities, politicians considered such sales to be non-essential investment, compared with the need to build new gasworks. Those municipalities might well have been deterred by the total investment required for a hire scheme, including the costs of capital purchase, maintenance, depreciation and replacement.²¹⁰ Nottingham was entrepreneurial in this aspect of its business and perceived the supply of gas for cooking and heating as integral to its overall profitability.

The breakthrough to the wider domestic application of gas supplies came with the advent of prepayment meters in 1889. Nottingham took up the technology in 1893.²¹¹ The consumer base grew significantly, particularly amongst the poorer sections of the community. There were 657 prepayment meters in use in 1893, 3,251 in 1896 and 8,034 in 1900. They grew, as a proportion of all installed meters, from just 1.8% in 1893, to 8.5% in 1896 and to 18.3% in 1900.²¹² The national average for municipal customers was 11% in 1899.²¹³ In June 1894 the Gas Engineer reported that the 'penny-in-the-slot' prepayment meters 'continue to give great satisfaction and enable the poorest consumer to obtain his gas in single pennyworths'.²¹⁴ The number of customers who rented stoves from the Gas Department increased by 41% between 1893 and 1896, by a further 18% from 1896 to 1898 and by another 20% in the last two years of the century.²¹⁵ Nottingham's proactive approach resulted in a greater take up than in the country generally, where just 8% of municipal customers had gas cookers.²¹⁶ The number of gas fires sold by the Department doubled between 1893

²⁰⁸ F. Goodall, 'Appliance Trading Activities of British Gas Utilities, 1875-1935', *Economic History Review*, XLVI, 3 (1993), pp. 546, 548.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

²¹¹ GCAR/EN, FC, 2 July 1894.

²¹² GCAR/EN, FC, 2 July 1894, 7 September 1896, 10 September 1900.

²¹³ Goodall, 'Appliance', p. 550.

²¹⁴ GCAR/EN, FC, 2 July 1894.

²¹⁵ GCAR/EN, FC, 4 September 1893, 7 September 1896, 5 September 1898, 10 September 1900.

²¹⁶ Goodall, 'Appliance', p. 550.

and 1900.²¹⁷ Samuel Johnson underlined the Council's twin objectives of increasing gas consumption in the municipal business and making payment methods easier, in 1898.

The prepayment system has been adopted to enable the working classes to pay for gas as it is being used. Gas cookers are let on hire, fires and other apparatus are sold, and everything possible is done to encourage the use of gas.²¹⁸

The consistently commercial approach taken by the gas undertaking was reflected in Nottingham Corporation's policy for meter rents. By 1897-1898 one third of municipal gas undertakings offered meters rent free. This was not the case in Nottingham, Bradford, Carlisle, Dunfermline and Widnes.²¹⁹ Nottingham's Gas Committee was expected to transfer substantial funds into the Borough Fund each year and meter rents contributed some £6,000 to the Committee's overall income in 1894.²²⁰ However, the issue became contentious, particularly before the prepayment meters were readily available. The essential choice for the politicians was whether to pay the cost of the installation and maintenance of the meters out of general expenditure or to give the benefit to the ratepayers. Nottingham Corporation chose to safeguard the ratepayers' interests. The issue was raised by a number of municipal candidates between 1891 and 1894. For example, in October 1891 Cheetham, a Lib-Lab candidate, argued that the Council should pay from central funds.²²¹ Two years later a fellow Lib-Lab candidate, John Skerritt, argued that rents should be ended because the income that they generated would soon be recovered from increased sales of gas. Also in 1893 Baggaley, a Liberal, contended that charging for meters was 'a vexatious principle' and 'debarred many working-class people from using gas'.²²² Two other Liberal candidates also proposed that all meter rents should be abolished. The counter argument was expressed by McCraith, a Conservative, in 1894.²²³ He

²¹⁷ GCAR/EN, FC, 4 September 1893, 10 September 1900.

²¹⁸ NAO CA.A1.1898-1899/51, 10 June 1898.

²¹⁹ Millward, 'Market Behaviour', p. 112.

²²⁰ *NDG*, 30 October 1894.

²²¹ *NDE*, 30 October 1891.

²²² *NDE*, 27 October 1892; *NDE*, 5 September 1893; *NDE*, 26 October 1893.

²²³ *NDG*, 30 October 1894.

objected to an additional £6,000 being raised through the General District Rate. The Corporation maintained its charging policy.

The overall effect of the Corporation's pricing and sales policies for its gas undertaking was relative financial security. By 1902 Nottingham compared favourably with other large corporations, in terms of loans, reserves and profits. For example, although Birmingham and Manchester had each borrowed considerably more capital than Nottingham for their gas utilities, neither had committed a greater level of profits to their sinking funds.²²⁴ The average annual profit of Nottingham's municipal gas business was greater than all but that of Manchester. The proportion of the gas profits that Nottingham used to relieve the General District Rate was at least as generous as the successful undertakings of other corporations. As Knoop has argued more generally, it was Nottingham's selling policy that distinguished it from many of the other municipalities. In that, the authority was more entrepreneurial.²²⁵

Whilst the pursuit of municipal capitalist policies was most clearly evident over a prolonged period in the gas undertaking, one particular policy demonstrated the enterprise shown by the Water Committee too. The Corporation was, in 1899, part of a multi-authority organisation that sought to establish and manage new, large-scale water supplies for the city. Nottingham collaborated with the municipal authorities of Leicester, Sheffield and Derby in a cooperative initiative in north Derbyshire. The nature and scale of the venture broke new ground nationally. In 1909 it was one of the largest of twenty-five joint water boards.²²⁶ Nottingham City Council was under pressure to increase the availability of water supplies to meet rising demand. Hitherto, the Corporation had sought solutions for new sources in and around the city. On this occasion, the Council looked much further afield and attempted to secure supplies that would meet the demands of residents for the next generation.

In January 1899 the Town Clerk reported to the Full Council that Bills were being promoted by the other three authorities.²²⁷ The Council agreed that the Water Committee should have delegated powers to manage the negotiations 'as they might

²²⁴ HC (1903) VII, Appendix A, pp. 232-399.

²²⁵ Knoop, *Principles*, pp. 180-182, 184, 187.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-120.

²²⁷ TCR, FC, 2 January 1899, 16 January 1899.

find desirable', with the support of Samuel Johnson. In May the proposal to join the Derwent Valley Scheme was carried unanimously.²²⁸ In the following month the City Council's claim to waters from the Derwent was acknowledged by the other authorities and the Council was admitted to representation on the Derwent Valley Water Board. Nottingham secured two of the thirteen seats on that body.

The Full Council expressed its determination to ensure the continuation of an efficient supply of good quality water to the Nottingham water district by means of 'the catchment reservoirs of very large capacity' which were planned to hold the flood waters of the Derwent and its tributaries.²²⁹ Nottingham's agreed entitlement was four million gallons of water from the thirty-three million gallons available daily. The Corporation's share of the maintenance costs was calculated as four twenty-eighths of the whole business. It was anticipated that the project would take ten years to complete, during which time Nottingham would only be required to meet its share of the expenses of the Board of Management. It was estimated that the management costs, the building of a conduit from Ambergate to Greasley and the construction of a new reservoir could be obtained for about £20,000 per annum. The Council expected to receive 'water both for domestic and manufacturing purposes of absolute purity and excellent quality'. Samuel Johnson and the Water Committee succeeded in securing a valuable long-term resource for the Corporation at a reasonable cost. This major municipal business initiative was in the words of Samuel Johnson 'a fair provision...for the wants of this City for many years to come'.²³⁰ Many decisions were made incrementally by the Committee. In this case, an ambitious policy entered new, uncharted territory. However, the decision was taken with confidence, on the basis of the professional advice of the Corporation's trusted, specialist engineers and in the wake of two decades of profitable business by the Water Committee.

Hassan has argued that the large municipalities were able to secure the future needs of their communities more satisfactorily than private water companies.²³¹ They provided a superior method of organising water supplies. The most effective municipal enterprises were prepared to accept longer-term planning horizons and sales-

²²⁸ FC, 1 May 1899.

²²⁹ WCR, FC, 5 June 1899.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Hassan, 'Growth', pp. 540, 544-547.

maximising goals. Nottingham Corporation, together with their East Midland neighbours, satisfied both of these criteria in the Derwent Valley Scheme. This collaborative undertaking provided Nottingham with another cost-effective business venture, in contrast, for example, to the costly projects that were undertaken by the Liverpool and Birmingham municipal water authorities in Wales.²³²

The Council's strategies for Nottingham's water undertaking, both entrepreneurial and more cautious, resulted in finances that were more secure in this period than in almost any of the other large municipalities. For example, by 1902 only Leeds had greater reserves for its water debts.²³³ Even so, Nottingham's funds had greater protection, because a significantly higher proportion of the Council's loans were covered by its reserve funds than was the case in Leeds. None of the large boroughs had average annual profits, in either actual or relative terms, that were greater than those in Nottingham in 1899, and only Leicester did so in 1902.²³⁴

The practice of municipal capitalism in Nottingham

Approaches to municipal trading that might be broadly defined as municipal capitalism had the support of both the Liberals and Conservatives and all occupational groups on the Council. Policies were non-partisan. The municipal politicians in Nottingham managed the gas, water, electricity and tramways utilities as commercial ventures. The pursuit of profitability in all four sectors was not based upon a sophisticated political theory, but was rather a series of pragmatic responses to the trading conditions they faced in each utility. No single policy was designed to fit all circumstances, but a business-driven search for cost-effectiveness was a common feature of all their strategies. Members aimed to manage all the utilities with economy and efficiency, but the particular commercial characteristics of each demanded specific responses. Technical opportunities and demands changed over three decades, as did the needs of the community. The amount of confidence the politicians had in their choice of business solutions varied. At times they were

²³² D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979), p. 46; N. Collins, *Politics and Elections in Nineteenth Century Liverpool* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), p. 219; Briggs, *Birmingham*, pp. 89-91.

²³³ HC (1903) VII, Appendix A, pp. 232-399.

²³⁴ HC (1900) VII, Appendix B, pp. 378-437; HC (1903) VII, Appendix A, pp. 232-399.

hesitant and cautious, moving policy forward incrementally, whilst on a few occasions they were more ambitious and entrepreneurial.

Unusually, Nottingham Borough Council was strongly motivated by profit in all four concerns, including water.²³⁵ The measurable outcomes, such as production, consumption and profits, were good by national standards. Nottingham was a leading trader in gas and water. Profitability remained positive in each of the four utilities. Less quantifiable outcomes such as civic pride, a sense of modernity in the town and a feeling of belonging to a community that was more physically integrated, all aspects of the symbolic infrastructure, were also evident in a more demonstrable way, once the utilities had been established.

Overall, Nottingham Corporation proved to be at least as cost-effective as a municipal trader as private companies were in the management of utilities.²³⁶ In the case of gas and water, the Council purchased two sound businesses and made them even more productive. They transformed the tramways utility into a modernized transport company. As Millward and Ward have argued more generally, the efficiency of Nottingham's utilities was, to a large extent, shaped by the level of commercial costs that their businesses incurred.²³⁷ The Corporation's strategic decisions about the sale of supplies and services were fundamental to the consumption figures and profits that it achieved. Members took account of political principle, technical rationality and short-term political expediency.

Generally, rational planning underpinned political decisions. The Corporation made huge investments in their four businesses, on the basis of sound technical and professional advice from their senior officers. Informed calculations and predictions about the likely effectiveness of alternative policies helped politicians feel more confident in making their choices. But a range of other political considerations had to be evaluated. Matters such as the improvement of gas sales, the timing of investment in electricity generation or the extent to which the Corporation should collaborate with other authorities for water supplies, remained essentially political decisions,

²³⁵ Millward, 'Private to Public', pp. 8-9; Millward, 'Political Economy', p. 333; Falkus, 'Development', p. 152.

²³⁶ Hassan, 'Growth', p. 546; Millward, 'Costs', p. 136; Falkus, 'Development', p. 157.

²³⁷ Millward, 'Costs', pp. 126-129, 135-136.

however sound the advice. The Council's pricing policy also had to respond to short-term, less predictable external factors, such as coal prices and severe weather, as well as the long-term political preferences of members. These matters could limit the flexibility which members had to pursue a preferred course of action, particularly in the short run.

Members were perennially concerned about the effects that municipal expenditure would have on rises in the General District Rate. They tried to ensure that the rates were kept as low as possible. However, politicians were also keen to offer consumers lower utility prices, when they could, and to make sufficient investment in plant to safeguard future production and supply. If these aspirations clashed, normally it was price reductions that were forgone. The Corporation wanted to remain commercially competitive and able to transfer utility profits to relieve the rate demands. Market conditions for the different utilities varied, even in the same year. For example, prices were reduced for electricity in 1898 to help fend off competition from a private electricity power company, whilst fares remained untouched on the tramways, in a more certain monopoly market, to ensure an appropriate annual return for the Tramways Committee. Even when members wished to take the opportunity to improve social conditions with their trading policies, they never lost sight of a utility's annual profit. For example, in the 1890s the Council was keen to extend the use of gas to more working-class homes, and thereby make a contribution to the quality of life in the town, but the Gas Committee also had to secure the continuing profitability of the business.

None of the decisions that members took about municipal trading were in themselves inevitable, but there was a sense of continuity in the way that the members moved from the processes of municipalization to the search for profitability in the devolved committees. An overarching commitment to achieve trading profits in all four utilities, helped to strengthen the work of the committees as they managed their municipal businesses day to day. The decisions continued to be based on a political consensus, both for the operation of the companies within the Borough and in their collaboration with other authorities, in the case of water. Generally, policies were pursued persistently and incrementally, with members looking to find workable solutions to the problems that confronted them at each stage of their particular

utility's development. On many issues, as in most other authorities, committees muddled through the routine aspects of utility management. But occasionally, decisive changes were needed and agreed. For example, the Gas Committee was creative in stimulating greater consumption and the Water Committee showed initiative in its contribution to the Derwent Valley Scheme.

Nottingham Corporation demonstrated that it was a good, efficient utility provider in gas, water, electricity and tramways. The Council's achievements in municipal trading were secured pragmatically. The trading companies were managed as business ventures, with a political steer to find the balance between the demands of the ratepayers and consumers. Municipal capitalism was central to the authority's overall financial strategy and its civic programme.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Nottingham's civic culture, in the period from 1870 to 1900, reflected both the shared social, economic, religious and political values and understandings that the aldermen and councillors brought to their service on the Council, and the traditions and practices that were developed in the structures and processes of the town's municipal government. At the heart of Nottingham's stance to policy-making, as in municipalities generally, lay the Council's particular vision of the role it believed it should play in local self-government.¹ This view of the authority's purpose helped to determine the ambitions and targets of its policy interests and the parameters of civic improvement and social intervention. The continuity of political values was underpinned by the uninterrupted dominance of municipal Liberalism for seventy three years. Nottingham's vision continued to rest on the Gladstonian principles of sound finance and individual responsibility. Those old Liberal values, together with the associated notions of 'progression', persisted much longer in Nottingham than in some other major municipalities. The Gladstonian approach to municipal expenditure lasted well into the Edwardian period, and indeed such political convictions and instincts were still in evidence in the Council's deliberations up to the First World War.² Many of Nottingham's civic leaders in 1914 had gained their formative political experiences and developed their ideas of civic responsibility during the 1880s and 1890s.

Nottingham Corporation's overall vision of its duties to the community produced a relatively narrow focus in policy-making and limited aspirations for more radical social and environmental policies. The caution that was practised in determining municipal expenditure was prompted both by reluctance to add to the rising cost of the rates and a belief in each citizen's personal responsibility for his own well-being. The entrenched

¹ H.E. Meller, *European Cities 1890-1930s: History, Culture and the Built Environment* (Wiley, Chichester, West Sussex, 2001), pp. 70-71. Meller has argued more generally that the ideals and ambitions which inspired people to contemplate civic change were fundamental to the creation of specific civic identities.

² L.F. Wilson, 'The State and the Housing of the English Working Class, with Special Reference to Nottingham, 1815-1914' (University of California, Berkley, Ph D thesis, 1970), p. 286.

nonconformist values of thrift and individual accountability underpinned many of the fundamental beliefs of those taking political decisions. Overall, the Council saw its responsibility to be the modernization of the services of the local authority, whilst protecting the interests of the ratepayer when decisions on expenditure were taken. The Council's decision-takers were committed to the creation of a utilities-based infrastructure for a modern municipality, within a market economy and their own self-defined, restricted financial parameters. Members believed that such provision was attractive to domestic and business users alike. Social improvements would be encouraged by means of efficient services offered at competitive prices. The Liberal elite believed that their decisions were 'progressive', in their own terms, and they chose not to pursue any one policy to extremes. Members did not regard themselves as 'narrow' in outlook. They had their own vision for Nottingham and defended it, believing that their gradualist approach represented a purposeful, positive, economic and, indeed, enterprising way forward.

Members gave priority to municipalization which offered both the prospect of modernized services and profits to help hold in check the pace of increases in the General District Rate. Whilst Nottingham's politicians ultimately gave priority to relief of the rates, they were keen to offer consumers lower prices where possible and also to make sufficient investment in plant, for their municipal businesses, to safeguard future production and supply. For example, the price of gas was reduced six times between 1876 and 1884 and increases were only instituted in 1890 and 1900.³ At a later stage, a system of cheap workmen's fares was introduced.⁴ When the aspirations of the ratepayer and consumer clashed, it was normally price reductions that were forgone. Even when members gave priority to making specific improvements to modernize the quality of living conditions in the town, they never lost sight of the utility's annual profit and the need to remain commercially competitive. For example, whilst the Council was anxious to extend the use of gas to more working-class homes in the 1890s, the Gas Committee would not compromise on the continuing profitability of its business.

³ Gas Committee's Annual Report and Accounts, Full Council Minutes and Reports (hereafter FC), 11 September 1876, 24 September 1877, 5 August 1879, 3 October 1881, 17 November 1884, 7 December 1885, 7 July 1890, 10 September 1900.

⁴ Tramways Committee Report, FC, 3 July 1905.

Municipalization was supported by both major parties and all occupational groups on the Council. The Conservative members favoured a continuing search for economies within municipal expenditure. The notion of municipal capitalism, though never articulated as a theory by Nottingham's politicians, reflected the essence of the Corporation's pragmatic approach and profit making intentions. Members were small businessmen, professionals, tradesmen and retailers who pursued policies in the business-like manner they best understood. The Council developed a distinctive form of a mutually supportive economic and civic culture.

The political structures and processes within which policy was made, were themselves distinctive. Whilst the political parties determined the membership of the Council and those who gained positions of leadership within it, the Liberal and Conservative politicians willingly collaborated in the operation of policy-making procedures within the Chamber. The structures may have had the outward hallmark of a partisan system, but the Tories found that working by means of consensus and collaboration, both in committees and the Full Council, offered them an expedient way forward. That consensual approach contrasted markedly with the acutely partisan style adopted by Nottingham's political parties for Westminster politics. In the case of municipal government the civic perspective stimulated greater consensus and collaboration, rather than contention and division. The Conservative Party remained weak in opposition and the Liberal politicians showed adaptability and tactical awareness in their efforts to maintain municipal control. The construction of a local version of Lib-Labism encouraged the Council's Liberal leadership to take a less ideologically entrenched view of policies than might otherwise have been the case. Labour activists, for their part, were more communitarian in approach than class-focused.

The nature of Nottingham's local economy also contributed indirectly to a more collaborative approach. The town was dominated by mainly small and medium-sized firms, both during the period when the lace and hosiery industries were most influential in providing employment opportunities, and later when the town's industrial and commercial base became more diversified. The owner-managers of local companies did

not acquire social status by their leadership of business alone, but by means of membership of the Corporation. Members of all social and occupational groups and of both Liberal and Conservative parties, including intermediate-middle-class manufacturers, professionals and lower-middle-class tradesmen and retailers, gained social recognition by their election to the Council and their continuation in office. They perceived their social standing to be enhanced by taking a pragmatic, less ideological approach, with an apparently statesman-like attitude and a preparedness to put civic considerations before party in the Chamber. This was a distinctive feature of Nottingham's civic culture. Members found the means to handle policy priorities in a shared civic ethos, at least in part, because their economic and social experiences gave them sufficient commonly-held values and understandings.

It was the nature of the political chemistry of partisanship, non-partisanship and civianness in the political discourse of the Council, together with the professionalism and rational knowledge of the Town Clerk and engineers, which provided the foundations of Nottingham's civic culture. The fact that officers shared the members' view of the policy priorities that were required to meet the town's municipal needs added further strength to the civic ethos. The consensus that politicians achieved about policy decisions was supported by the independent, rational voices of experts and a more coherent approach to municipal administration. The rationality of the specialist knowledge helped to convince politicians generally of the rightness of a course of action, and thereby bind members of both parties together in pursuit of recommended solutions. The Council appeared to have greater authority when armed with high quality technical expertise. Samuel Johnson, convinced that greater unity of administration was required as the Corporation took on wider responsibilities, managed his professional staff more closely than most other town clerks. In many ways Johnson anticipated the style of municipal bureaucracy that was more common in the inter-war period.

Nottingham Corporation maintained an overarching commitment to municipal trading between 1874 and 1900. The authority became an efficient utility provider. Technical and financial performances were generally good, especially in the case of the gas and

water undertakings, where Nottingham was a leading trader nationally. By national standards, the Corporation had good measurable outcomes for production, consumption and profits. The large county boroughs varied significantly in the level of priority they gave to the ownership of the municipal utilities of gas, water, electricity and tramways, and the use they made of the profits generated by those concerns. In the last financial year of the nineteenth century, only Glasgow, Nottingham and Leeds had operational municipal businesses in all four utilities. Manchester, Liverpool and Leicester each had three, Birmingham and Sheffield two and Bristol just one utility.⁵ Only Glasgow and Nottingham municipalized all four utilities from the outset. Birmingham and Leeds, for example, allowed the electricity utility to pass into private hands initially, whilst Liverpool and Sheffield never took ownership of gas.⁶ Bristol, despite its size, was not a major player in municipal trading. Fourteen years passed after the acquisition of Nottingham's first municipal business before Sheffield finally agreed to take over its first utility.⁷ Nottingham was the fifth of the large authorities to own both gas and water and then the first corporation in England and Wales to have four businesses in operation in 1897.⁸

Nottingham's financial status, in terms of the profits and reserves of its trading companies, was more secure than those of other county boroughs. In the financial year 1899-1900 Nottingham made the largest profit for water. In contrast, Birmingham had to subsidise its water undertaking for a long period.⁹ Leicester achieved smaller profits for water than Nottingham, but larger for gas. However, by 1902 Nottingham Corporation's effective gas sales policy resulted in the achievement of a better average profit for that

⁵ Appendix C, Table 14.

⁶ L.W. Jones, 'The Municipalization of the Electricity Supply Industry in Birmingham', *West Midlands Studies*, 13 (1980), pp. 20-24; B. Barber, 'Aspects of Municipal Government, 1835-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1980), pp. 322-323; B. Barber, 'Sheffield Borough Council, 1843-1893', in C. Binfield et al (eds.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993, Vol. 1* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), pp. 46-48, 52; H. Mathers, 'The City of Sheffield, 1893-1926', in C. Binfield et al (eds.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), p.54.

⁷ Barber, 'Sheffield Borough', pp. 51-52.

⁸ Appendix C, Table 14.

⁹ A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Vol. 2: Borough and City, 1865-1938* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952), pp. 90-91.

utility than all other authorities except Manchester.¹⁰ Nottingham was by then at least as generous as other successful trading corporations in the amount of profits that it transferred to borough funds. During the period from 1875 to 1900 the profits earned by Nottingham's municipal businesses provided between 8% and 16% of the total income raised by the General District Rate, saving ratepayers between 3d and 9d in the pound on their rates bill.¹¹ But the Corporation did not focus on profits to the exclusion of improvements in consumer prices. For example, despite ensuring that trading profits were achieved to help reduce the rate burden, Nottingham's electricity prices were about average for large authorities.¹²

Yet, the priority that Nottingham Corporation gave to municipalization also had significant implications for other major policy areas of modernization, such as public health and housing, some of which were negative. The achievements of the Borough Council in municipal trading were recognised both within and beyond Nottingham, but the Corporation, like large authorities across the country, had to handle the complex social and environmental consequences of a rapidly expanding population, periods of industrial distress and the dangers to the health and well-being of its residents. Indeed, it has been argued that the major focus in local self-government generally during this period was investment in an infrastructure which could help to deliver improvements in public health and housing.¹³ As such, if Nottingham's achievements in municipal trading are to be evaluated effectively within the wider context of policy-making, then it is appropriate for consideration to be given to the Corporation's approach to social investment in sanitation, drainage, sewerage, refuse disposal and housing.

The spheres of interest of the four municipal trading concerns were directly connected to these policy issues. For example, the water utility was both a municipal business in its

¹⁰ HC (1903) VII *Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on Municipal Trading*, Appendix A, pp. 232-399.

¹¹ For example: FC, 11 September 1876, 5 August 1879, 5 June 1882, 6 October 1884, 26 May 1887, 6 October 1890, 1 October 1894, 7 October 1895, 10 September 1900.

¹² NAO CA. A1. 1898/42, 44-47, 10 June 1898.

¹³ R. Millward, 'Urban Government, Finance and Public Health in Victorian Britain', in R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), pp. 50-53.

own right and the body that determined the quality and quantity of the commodity that was fundamental to the pursuit of improvements in sanitation and sewerage. The gas and electricity utilities had the potential to play a significant role in the improvement of housing conditions, with the supply of competitively-priced power for lighting, heating and cooking. The availability of an efficient tramway system had a contribution to make to the location of new housing developments.

In a period when central government established enabling legislation in the policy areas of public health and housing, variations were evident in the responses of corporations, both in terms of the level of their motivation to tackle issues of health and housing and the manner in which different authorities chose to configure their policies. In contrast to Nottingham, the corporations in Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow developed larger, more radical programmes of civic improvement, each different to the other, based upon particular visions of civic development. Sheffield's notions of municipal responsibility shared much in common with Nottingham in its attitude to broader social and environmental policies, whilst Exeter, for example, displayed less ambition.¹⁴ None could be simply categorised as pursuing a 'New Liberal' ideal, although Glasgow was clearly the most interventionist authority. New Liberal values tended to be taken up in authorities such as Manchester, where the Liberals needed to change their stance to improve electoral support.¹⁵ In Nottingham, like Leeds and Leicester, the party organisations had little interest in either a new ideology or a refocused election strategy.¹⁶ Indeed, even when electoral control passed to the Conservatives in 1908 and subsequently when the Lib-Lab alliance broke up, the dominant values of the local Liberal Party remained largely unchanged.¹⁷ In a local economy characterised by the predominance of small and medium-sized family firms and in the absence of effective political challenge for a sustained period, Gladstonianism became entrenched and the desire to control increases in the General District Rate remained a cherished objective.

¹⁴ R. Newton, *Victorian Exeter* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1968), pp. 254-265.

¹⁵ J. Moore, 'Progressive Pioneers: Manchester Liberalism, the Independent Labour Party and Local Politics in the 1890s', *The Historical Journal*, 44, 4 (2001), pp. 1003-1004, 1012-1013.

¹⁶ G.L. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies, 1900-1914: Three Case Studies', *The Historical Journal*, 26, 3 (1983), p.625.

¹⁷ N. Hayes, *Consensus and Controversy: City Politics in Nottingham, 1945-1966* (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1996), p. 18.

Birmingham Corporation established an approach to urban improvement in the mid-1870s that, over the following three decades, was perceived by many authorities as a model for development elsewhere. The 'Civic Gospel' was not truly ground-breaking in its policy content, because Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow had all attempted at an earlier stage to address elements of the programme initiated by Joseph Chamberlain. However, the Birmingham programme expressed its ambitions with a clarity and coherence never before achieved.¹⁸ The Birmingham Liberals gave prime importance to commercial and entrepreneurial values, marrying business and philanthropy. They assumed a coincidence of private profit and public gain, but, in the event, the outcomes fell short of their aspirations. Unlike Glasgow, Birmingham used utility profits to help fund improvement schemes.¹⁹ The scale of expenditure was much greater and the link between profit and investment much more closely identified than projects agreed by Nottingham's municipal politicians.

Glasgow was, by 1902, associated with a more civic interventionist vision of development.²⁰ From 1866 the Council responded to what it interpreted to be the inefficiency of private enterprise with the promotion of cheap municipal solutions to urban problems. Glasgow's political leaders saw municipal control as the most practical means of reversing the decline in social problems.²¹ Unlike Birmingham and Nottingham, Glasgow Corporation placed its civic emphasis on cheaper prices rather than higher utility profits, thereby extending services to a greater proportion of the city's population than in other authorities.²² In contrast to Glasgow's non-party approach and

¹⁸ H. Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism and Social Policy', in R.J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds.), *The Victorian City* (Longman, 1993), p. 263; E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government* (Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 116, 125-126; D.P. Leighton, 'Municipal Progress, Democracy and Radical Identity in Birmingham, 1838-1886', *Midland History*, XXV (2000), pp. 116-120, 130-132.

¹⁹ Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', pp. 262, 279; L.J. Jones, 'Public Pursuit of Private Profits? Liberal Businessmen and Municipal Politics in Birmingham, 1865-1900', *Business History*, 25 (1983), pp. 244-245, 249-250, 255; Leighton, 'Radical Identity', pp. 120, 131.

²⁰ *TT*, 30 September 1902; I. Maver, 'Glasgow's Civic Government', in W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, *Glasgow, Vol. 2, 1830-1912* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), p. 474.

²¹ Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', p. 280; Maver, 'Civic Government', p. 461; I. Maver, *Glasgow* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000), p. 170.

²² Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', pp. 278-279.

the consensus established in Nottingham, the programme developed in Leeds from 1893 was pursued in a context of political rivalry.²³ The Liberal and Conservative parties incorporated specific municipal objectives in their appeals to the electorate. No such targeted schemes were the subject of manifestos in Nottingham. However, Leeds drew heavily on the Birmingham experience, rather than producing a new vision designed specifically for its own purposes. The pace of the improvement programme slowed significantly once resources became more scarce and the parties less energised by the aspirations of the 'New Era'.²⁴

The Conservative Party in Sheffield favoured values not dissimilar to the Gladstonian beliefs of Nottingham's Liberal leaders. They too believed that private investment was more productive than public intervention, focusing on policies grounded in 'economy with efficiency'.²⁵ Like Nottingham they used profits from municipal trading to subsidise the rates rather than earmark funds for particular improvement schemes. Policy-making in Sheffield was certainly less expansive than in Birmingham, Glasgow and Leeds and, in some policy areas, tardier than in Nottingham. Both parties in Sheffield advocated a piecemeal approach to public health and housing reform.²⁶

The existence of one dominant party in Nottingham for over seventy years, as in Leicester, clearly had implications for the effective scrutiny of policy and the development of alternative policy strategies. However, that potential weakness was not necessarily overcome in municipalities where power was shared by two parties. For example, the presence of party conflict over policy proposals in Leeds between 1893 and 1907 contributed positively to the pace of civic improvement in that authority, whereas in Sheffield in the 1890s it did not.²⁷ Neither was the fact that an authority had either Liberal or Tory leadership in itself necessarily critical to the outcomes of policy-making. For example, the Conservatives supervised policy-making for lengthy periods in

²³ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 254-255, 284-285, 287-288; Bernstein, 'Liberalism', p. 625.

²⁴ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 288-289, 322; D. Fraser, 'Areas of Urban Politics: Leeds, 1830-1880', in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City, Vol. 2* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 778.

²⁵ Barber, 'Sheffield Borough', pp. 42-43; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', pp. 58-59.

²⁶ Barber, 'Sheffield Borough', pp. 43-44; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', pp. 55, 57, 64.

²⁷ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, p. 284; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', pp. 57-58, 63-64.

Liverpool and Sheffield, the Liberals in Leicester and the Liberals and Liberal Unionists in Birmingham.²⁸ The effectiveness of their policies varied according to commitment rather than party label. Similarly, there was no straightforward correlation between the size of the authority and the scale of successful civic development. Of the very large regional centres, Birmingham and Glasgow pursued persistent programmes, whilst Liverpool and Manchester had a more inconsistent approach to social and environmental reform.²⁹ In general terms, those towns that grew from medium-sized to large after 1870 tended to have less systematic and coherent social and environmental policies. The timing and scale of civic improvement varied amongst them, for example in the cases of Nottingham, Sheffield and Leicester.

Nottingham's commitment to profitable municipal utilities, that was so central to its vision of civic development, was consistently pursued from 1874 into the Edwardian years. The Council's approach to improvements in the public health and housing infrastructure was less unchanging. Indeed, policy-making in these areas was marked by caution, uncertainty and, at times, inactivity. The limitations that Nottingham's municipal politicians placed on expenditure for public health and housing were not a direct corollary of heavy investment in municipalization, but rather another reflection of deeply held principles. The Corporation expended significant funds on social and environmental problems, but this was always second as a priority to investing in the businesses that could both generate income and provide modernized services. The Council secured loans for £1.33 million for improvements to sanitation, sewerage, drainage and street improvements between 1860 and 1900, some 42% of the total funding for its four municipal trading concerns.³⁰ The outcome of such a gradualist approach was judged by a government inspector a generation later to have bequeathed slums that were

²⁸ P.J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: a Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1868-1939* (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1981), pp. 82-83, 163-165; Barber, 'Sheffield Borough', pp. 40-43; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', pp. 56-58; M. Elliott, *Victorian Leicester* (Phillimore, 1979), pp. 161-167; J. Moore, 'Liberalism and the Home Rule Crisis in Leicester, 1885-1892', *Midland History*, XXVI (2001), p. 193; Jones, 'Public Pursuit', pp. 243-244.

²⁹ Waller, *Democracy*, pp. 83-87, 163-164; D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979), p. 44; A.S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (J.M. Dent, 1983), pp. 316-317.

³⁰ NAO CA. TR. 20/1/1-2.

'a most serious disgrace' to the Corporation and sanitation arrangements that were 'much behind other cities'. Mr Stanford went as far as to say that the housing problems had been 'due to most culpable neglect' by the Council in the period up to 1920.³¹ This evaluation of these perceived inadequacies of earlier policy-making came as a blow to Nottingham's civic pride.³² The judgement was made, however, in a national political context which contrasted markedly with that of the period between 1870 and 1900, a time when central government had a quite different view of the appropriate roles that should be played by state and locality in policy-making.³³

Whilst precise comparisons of the effectiveness of public health policies in the large county boroughs are very difficult to draw, in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, rough indicators are available.³⁴ Both infant mortality rates and the timing and pace of the introduction of water closets to replace pail closets, give indicative measures of the efficacy of local authority policies. In 1882 Nottingham and Leicester had two of the worst infant mortality rates in England and until 1911 Nottingham's rate remained above the average for county boroughs.³⁵ Leicester's subsequent rate benefited from the town having less overcrowding than Nottingham. By 1901 Leicester had a population density of just one third of that of its East Midlands' neighbour.³⁶ Sheffield's infant mortality rate stayed higher than the national average until 1933.³⁷

The downward trend in overall death rates in Nottingham was more encouraging for the Council. In the period from 1875 to 1885 the death rate was well below the average for

³¹ PRO HLG 43/618. Mr Stanford's Report, 27 March 1920.

³² J. Beckett, 'Greater Nottingham: the Abortive Boundary Extension Scheme of 1920', *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, CIV (2000), p. 135; C. Griffin, 'The Identity of a Twentieth-Century City', in J. Beckett et al (eds.), *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997), pp. 423-424; J. Beckett, 'Frustrated Ambition: the Nottingham Boundary Extension of 1933', *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, CV (2001), p. 171.

³³ J. Davis, 'Central Government and the Towns', in M. J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. III, 1840-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 275-276.

³⁴ Millward, 'Urban Government', p. 61.

³⁵ For example: the Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Nottingham (hereafter MOHR), 1882, 1885, 1894, 1895, 1897, 1908, 1909, 1911.

³⁶ Elliott, *Leicester*, p. 102.

³⁷ M. Walton, *Sheffield and Its Achievements* (S.R. Publishers and the Corporation of Sheffield, Wakefield, 1948), p. 214.

comparable authorities, whilst in the 1890s it was about average for county boroughs.³⁸ However, particularly poor figures were experienced between 1907 and 1909.³⁹ Nottingham's statistics were comparable with Leeds in the mid-1870s and at the turn of the century. They were slightly better than the rates in Sheffield until the 1880s and then generally similar in the early Edwardian period, and much better than the rates in Liverpool in the 1890s.⁴⁰ By 1920 the Medical Officer of Health for Birmingham judged Nottingham's death rate to be good and the town to be 'relatively healthy'.⁴¹

Sewer technology and knowledge about the treatment of waste were areas of uncertainty for policy-makers until late in the century. The major surge of investment nationally came in the 1890s.⁴² Nottingham Corporation took the decision to introduce water closets more systematically in the Borough in 1895, but at that stage it was to apply only to new properties.⁴³ In timing, Nottingham lagged behind Glasgow and Sheffield in its decision, but was ahead of Leeds.⁴⁴ However, the concerns that underpinned Nottingham Council's natural caution in social and environmental policy-making were evident in the debates which preceded its decision. Councillors expressed fears about the possible loss of profits by the municipal water utility, the capital expenditure that would be involved and the pressure that would be exerted on Nottingham's existing supply of water, its drains and its refuse arrangements. Members emphasised that the scheme would be experimental and would be introduced gradually over two decades.⁴⁵

The gravity of the situation facing the decision takers in Nottingham was underlined by the fact that in 1895 Leicester had less than a fifth of Nottingham's 40,000 pail closets to

³⁸ For example: MOHR, 1885, 1894, 1895, 1897, 1900.

³⁹ MOHR, 1907, 1908, 1909.

⁴⁰ Fraser, *Power*, pp. 44, 76; Walton, *Achievements*, p. 211.

⁴¹ PRO HLG 43/618.

⁴² Millward, 'Urban Government', p. 65.

⁴³ FC, 2 July 1894, 7 January 1895, 4 February 1895, 1 April 1895, 1 July 1895.

⁴⁴ W.H. Fraser and I. Maver, 'Tackling the Problems', in Fraser, *Glasgow, Vol. 2*, p. 423; Barber, 'Sheffield Borough', p. 44; B. Barber, 'Municipal Government in Leeds, 1835-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1982), p. 73.

⁴⁵ NDE, 5 February 1895; NDG, 5 February 1895; NDE, 2 April 1895.

convert.⁴⁶ A municipal subsidy to encourage existing property owners to convert was not introduced in Nottingham until 1912.⁴⁷ Over the following eight years the average number of conversions achieved annually was just 673.⁴⁸ Sheffield, like Nottingham, introduced their scheme very gradually, and although offering a subsidy at a much earlier stage, took until the 1920s to complete their task.⁴⁹ In contrast, Leeds took the decision to convert to water closets later than Nottingham, in 1899, but within five years had succeeded in the conversion of the vast majority of the city's properties.⁵⁰

Nottingham City Council was also cautious in agreeing to the expenditure on new destructors to cope with the night soil and other refuse generated by Nottingham's growing population. As on so many health policy issues, the authority was by no means the slowest to introduce reforms but it was, nevertheless, not eager to increase municipal spending and thereby the size of the General District Rate. In 1900 the Corporation agreed to purchase two new destructors with three times the capacity of the technology they had installed in 1885.⁵¹ Although Birmingham and Glasgow had a much better record of refuse disposal, Nottingham's performance was generally better than Leeds, particularly in the 1880s, and the Corporation was in a more advantageous position than Liverpool, where the problems were so immense that the Health Committee continued to pursue its policies with 'vigorous insufficiency'.⁵² Sheffield took delivery of new destructors in 1896 and 1900, but they were never fully satisfactory in operation.⁵³

The decision takers ensured that the sewerage and drainage systems in Nottingham were generally efficient. The extension of the Borough in 1877 established a single water and sewerage authority. Thereafter, development was focused on the sewage disposal facilities at Stoke Bardolph, with investment in successive extensions to the acreage of

⁴⁶ Health Committee Report (hereafter HCR), FC, 7 January 1895. The report contained the findings of the survey of local authorities conducted by the Medical Officer of Health, beginning on 2 July 1894.

⁴⁷ FC, 17 December 1913.

⁴⁸ PRO HLG 43/618.

⁴⁹ Barber, 'Sheffield Borough', p. 44.

⁵⁰ Barber, 'Municipal Government', p. 73.

⁵¹ FC, 10 September 1900, 1 October 1900; *NDE*, 2 October 1900.

⁵² Waller, *Democracy*, p. 85.

⁵³ Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', p. 55.

the farm in 1880, 1890 and 1900, the last incorporating the introduction of a new bacteriological system.⁵⁴ Between 1877 and 1920 Nottingham Corporation spent some £834,000 on sewerage and drainage schemes.⁵⁵ Leicester and Birmingham introduced major new plants ahead of Nottingham, whilst Leeds Corporation eventually agreed to a new disposal facility in 1908.⁵⁶ Sheffield made rather slow progress, in part as a result of the relatively late municipalization of water.⁵⁷

Nottingham's municipal politicians were advised in matters of public health and housing by their Medical Officer of Health. However, their relationship with this official was different to those they developed with their Town Clerk and specialist engineers. As in many other authorities, the interests of the chief medical adviser, who had security of tenure, often clashed with the political preferences of members. Nottingham's politicians were frequently reluctant to commit particularly large expenditure to improvements in sanitation and housing before 1900. Fifty councils had appointed medical officers before Nottingham responded to the legal requirement of central government.⁵⁸ After five years in post the first occupant, Dr Edward Seaton, became a full-time official in 1878.⁵⁹ He and later Dr Phillip Boobbyer repeatedly raised issues of concern, including housing clearance, common lodging houses and water closets.⁶⁰ They armed the Corporation with detailed evidence in readiness for political decisions on improvements to, amongst other issues, the housing stock. For example, Seaton arranged for his sanitary inspectors to visit every property in the proposed unhealthy area between Long Row and Parliament

⁵⁴ FC, 5 April 1880, 1 September 1890, 1 January 1900; *NDE*, 2 January 1900.

⁵⁵ PRO HLG 43/617. Nottingham Corporation's submission to the Minister of Health for a boundary extension.

⁵⁶ Elliott, *Leicester*, p. 72; Briggs, *Birmingham*, p. 133; Barber, 'Municipal Government', p. 70; Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, p. 281; Barber, 'Aspects', pp. 304-305.

⁵⁷ Barber, 'Sheffield Borough', pp. 51-52; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', p. 55.

⁵⁸ Wilson, 'Housing', p. 149.

⁵⁹ HCR, FC, 4 February 1884.

⁶⁰ For example: MOHR, 1880 (Seaton), 1884, 1893, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1900, 1908, 1909, 1913 (Boobbyer); *NDE*, 4 January 1898; Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, p. 190; R. Smith, P. Whysall and C. Beuvrin, 'Local Authority Inertia in Housing Improvement, 1890-1914', *Town Planning Review*, 57, 4 (1986), p. 407.

Street during 1880 and 1881 and Boobbyer supervised a large quantitative survey, from 1909, that formed the basis of the clearance scheme agreed in 1912.⁶¹

The efforts of the Medical Officers of Health were largely directed at encouraging action to tackle slum clearance. Housing improvement was crucial to any concerted attack on poor sanitation and the death rate. Three modest projects resulted between 1876 and 1882, in the Broad Marsh, St Ann's and Parliament Street areas.⁶² Two small tenement schemes were also approved in 1877 and 1879.⁶³ The rents of replacement properties proved to be too high for the poorer working-class residents in the areas concerned. The Corporation was largely inactive during the 1880s, with little political support for further civic intervention. Members had chosen to invest heavily in the gas and water utilities in 1874 and 1880 and were committed to the further development of those businesses. The arrival of the new railway and the building of Victoria Station enabled the Council to 'get rid of insanitary properties without expense or trouble' between 1893 and the end of the century.⁶⁴ In 1900 Nottingham had a legacy of some 5,400 houses that were inadequate and predominantly back-to-back dwellings, built between 1780 and 1850.⁶⁵ During the period from 1890 until 1908, when they lost the municipal election, the Liberal elite remained very cautious. A further project for the redevelopment of the east side of the city was rejected in 1898 and again in 1903.⁶⁶

The new Conservative administration established a new Housing Committee and a Housing Department, a focus for house inspection, but was initially guarded in its response to the poor housing stock. Committee members were mindful of the powerful forces of inertia, the ratepayers and the property owners.⁶⁷ However, the Council finally agreed to the clearance scheme for the Marshes, the Carter Gate and Manvers Street

⁶¹ MOHR, FC, 4 March 1881; Housing Committee Report (hereafter HOCR), FC, 4 July 1910; R. Smith and P. Whysall, 'The Origins and Development of Local Authority Housing in Nottingham, 1890-1960', in S. Lowe and D. Hughes (eds.), *A New Century of Social Housing* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1991), p. 35.

⁶² FC, 18 October 1875, 12 October 1876, 8 January 1877, 25 October 1881, 12 April 1882.

⁶³ FC, 24 September 1877; *NMCDE*, 25 September 1877; Wilson, 'Housing', p. 162.

⁶⁴ FC, 5 October 1896.

⁶⁵ Smith, 'Origins', p. 33.

⁶⁶ J. Beckett and G. Oldfield, 'Greater Nottingham and the City Charter', in Beckett, *Centenary*, p. 273.

⁶⁷ Smith, 'Inertia', pp. 414-416.

project, in 1912.⁶⁸ When war broke out in 1914 the slum properties in that area had mostly been demolished, but the replacement properties had not been built. Some 13% of Nottingham's residents still occupied slum houses.⁶⁹ Between 1909 and 1914 only 582 new properties had been built in the city by the private sector.⁷⁰

Nottingham's Liberal politicians shared some anxieties in common with members of corporations elsewhere in their approach to housing policy before 1900. Slum clearance put pressure on the remaining housing stock, affecting in particular the poorest residents. A stock of cheap housing had to be maintained.⁷¹ Members were fearful of the responses of both ratepayers and the property owners who had to meet the cost of housing improvements.⁷² Gladstonian members were in principle reluctant to intervene in the free market economy and to impinge on individual rights and the right to self-determination. In principle and in practice, intervention to provide municipal housing was largely uncharted and perceived to be unpromising territory, given the prevailing political and financial culture. Consequently, a cautionary partnership developed in Nottingham between the public and private sectors, resulting in the patchwork demolition of properties where costs proved to be minimal. Nottingham lacked new vision in this policy area.

There was tremendous resistance to municipal competition in house building not only in Nottingham but, for example, in Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester.⁷³ Birmingham's approach, which provided a model for many other corporations, was to look to commercial developers to do their job for them. Generally, local authorities built houses only for those displaced by clearance schemes. Their preference was to remove the worst

⁶⁸ Wilson, 'Housing', p. 274.

⁶⁹ Smith, 'Origins', p. 33.

⁷⁰ PRO HLG 43/618.

⁷¹ Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, pp. 315-316; Barber, 'Municipal Government', p. 98; Smith, 'Inertia', pp. 411-412.

⁷² P.J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991), pp. 311-312; Waller, *Democracy*, p. 87; Smith, 'Origins', p. 34.

⁷³ Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, p. 322; Leighton, 'Radical Identity', p. 132; Barber, 'Municipal Government', p. 100; Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, pp. 316-317.

individual properties and repair the others.⁷⁴ Nottingham regularly condemned insanitary properties using the powers of the 1868 and 1875 legislation.⁷⁵ From 1900 the Medical Officer of Health urged the Corporation to be more ambitious.⁷⁶ Nottingham, in common with Birmingham, did not take up the full range of powers offered by the Housing Act of 1890, including the provision to enable working-class housing to be built beyond the designated unhealthy areas.⁷⁷ Boobbyer complained that members were 'giving a new lease of life to hopelessly bad houses'. He claimed that the Council's proposed projects were 'quite useless', because rents were too high for the poorest and private enterprise had failed to fill the gaps that existed in the housing stock.⁷⁸ Even in 1912 Boobbyer was still appealing for the needs of the very poor to be recognised and met.⁷⁹ The members' concern for economy inhibited the planning of a more expansive housing policy.

Only Glasgow, Liverpool and London had ambitious targets. Glasgow's politicians were prepared to provide cheap municipal housing solutions, on the condition that they involved a minimum of interference with individual rights. Glasgow Council undertook vigorous improvement schemes between 1866 and 1878, including the building of two tenement blocks, followed by larger clearance projects from 1888 to 1900.⁸⁰ But even with this level of political commitment, dwellings for the poorest residents were relatively few. Glasgow Corporation had been able, by 1902, to provide only model lodging houses and a workmen's housing scheme of 257 dwellings. Progress was slow thereafter until 1914.⁸¹ In contrast, Liverpool Corporation did try to deal with the needs of the poorest. By 1900 the Council had cleared 5,000 back-to-back houses and six years later it was second only to London County Council in the scale of its provision of municipal housing.⁸² Progress in Manchester and Birmingham was greater than in Nottingham, but not substantially so. The projects agreed by the councils in Sheffield,

⁷⁴ Briggs, *Birmingham*, p. 86; Barber, 'Municipal Government', pp. 98-99; Barber, 'Aspects', p. 314; Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, pp. 316-317.

⁷⁵ FC, 6 October 1884, 4 October 1897; *NDE*, 5 October 1897; Smith, 'Inertia', p. 409.

⁷⁶ For example: MOHR, 1900, 1908, 1912.

⁷⁷ Smith, 'Origins', p. 33; Briggs, *Birmingham*, p. 85.

⁷⁸ MOHR, 1900.

⁷⁹ HOCHR, FC, 1 July 1912.

⁸⁰ Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', pp. 260-261, 264.

⁸¹ Fraser, 'Tackling', p. 423.

⁸² Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', p. 274.

Leicester and Leeds were not significantly different to those in Nottingham, either in scale or cost, before 1900. Leeds pursued a larger scheme between 1901 and 1909, whilst Sheffield agreed to more ambitious plans in 1912.⁸³ The whole nature of housing improvement in all local authorities changed from 1919, when central government shifted the fiscal burden for such schemes to the national level.⁸⁴

The priority that members gave to investment in municipalization, together with their natural thrift, led to caution in matters of social and environmental policy. They did not ignore the urban social problems around them or display a lack of care, but they were satisfied with relatively low aspirations and expectations. Policies tended to have limited ambitions and to be introduced tentatively. Nottingham Corporation did not take the lead nationally, but neither was it the only authority to be slow to respond to the issues raised by its Medical Officer of Health. In Nottingham, like most other large county boroughs, there was a mixed picture in both the timing and scale of expenditure that councillors were prepared to commit to the various aspects of their social and environmental policies. For example, the Council extended its sewage farm facilities and introduced new destructor technology to improve refuse disposal at about the same time as many other comparable corporations, but members were tardy in their willingness to spend capital on the more systematic introduction of water closets across the town. The Council's approach to the improvement of working-class housing, especially that for the poorest residents, produced little notable success before the end of the century. In Nottingham, as in most authorities, it was to be the direct intervention rather than the prompting of central government that was to produce a more urgent response to house building for the least economically secure.

The Liberal administration left a modest legacy for the incoming Conservative Council in 1908, in terms of the quality of the housing stock and the provision of water closets. The

⁸³ Barber, 'Municipal Government', pp. 98-101; Barber, 'Aspects', pp. 312-314; Mathers, 'City of Sheffield', p. 65.

⁸⁴ M.J. Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: the Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1799-1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), pp. 298-301; M.J. Daunton, 'Payment and Participation: Welfare and State Formation in Britain, 1900-1951', *Past and Present*, 150 (1996), pp. 170-172, 201; R. Millward and S. Sheard, 'The Urban Fiscal Problem, 1870-1914: Government Expenditure and Finance in England and Wales', *Economic History Review*, XLVIII, 3 (1995), p. 528.

Liberal politicians did, however, bequeath four largely successful municipal businesses to their successors that continued to offer subsidies to the rates. The Gladstonian mindset of the political elite guided them to strike the balance in favour of ratepayers, when the interests of the ratepayers conflicted with those of consumers and the community more generally. Given their perception of the purpose of local self-government, the social conscience of members of the Corporation was mediated through the political realities of old Liberal values. The new iconography of the modernized city emphasised the products of municipal trading, such as the gasworks, the water pumping station, the electricity generating plant and the tram shed, rather than the results of radical social and environmental policies, such as new properties to replace slum dwellings or homes installed with water closets.

The major achievements of Nottingham Council lay mainly, but not only, in the policy area of municipalization between 1870 and 1900. The Corporation's vision of civic responsibility was relatively narrow. Nottingham's distinctive municipal culture was based upon the civicness that prevailed in policy-making, in spite of the partisan political structures. The politicians' pursuit of the principles of municipal capitalism and the practice of municipal trading were fundamental to the political and financial strategy of the Council. Measured by national standards, the Council enjoyed considerable success in the outcomes of trading, in terms of production, consumption and profits. Unchallenged Liberalism was able generally to attain favourable results in this policy area with effectiveness and efficiency.

Appendices

Appendix A: Occupational Analysis of the Council

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Table 1

Occupational Analysis: Categories

Manufacturers

Lace

Hosiery

Associated

Yarn and thread, bleaching and dyeing, dressing, cotton doubling, elastic cord, cotton spinning

Other

Coal owner, leather, aerated water, cycles, boxes

Professionals

Solicitor

Doctor

Other

Architect, surveyor, accountant, consulting engineer, newspaper proprietor

Merchants

Coal, tea, iron, timber, yarn, hops

Small tradesmen

Ironfounder, coach builder, auctioneer, printer, cabinet maker, upholsterer, currier, brazier, brickworks, machine maker and holder, boot and shoe, hosiery engineer, watchmaker

Building trades

Agents

Shopkeepers

Grocer, baker, confectioner, chemist, butcher, ironmonger, draper, clothier

Drink trade

Publican, brewer and maltster, wines and spirits

Table 2**Aldermen and Councillors: Occupational Background, 1871-1900**

	71		77		81		86		91		96		00	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Manufacts.														
Lace	16	28.6	10	15.6	9	14.0	9	14.0	7	10.9	6	9.4	7	10.9
Hosiery	3	5.4	5	7.8	3	4.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Associated	3	5.4	6	9.4	6	9.4	7	10.9	5	7.8	5	7.8	5	7.8
Other	2	3.6	5	7.8	4	6.3	3	5.4	3	5.4	4	6.3	4	6.3
Profs.														
Solicitor	5	8.9	3	4.7	4	6.3	5	7.8	6	9.4	4	6.3	6	9.4
Doctor	1	1.8	1	1.6	1	1.6	1	1.6	4	6.3	7	10.8	6	9.4
Other	1	1.8	3	4.7	2	3.1	1	1.6	1	1.6	1	1.6	0	0
Merchants	10	17.9	6	9.4	3	4.7	6	9.4	6	9.4	5	7.8	4	6.3
SmallTrades	3	5.4	8	12.5	9	14.0	10	15.6	9	14.0	9	14.0	7	10.9
Building	0	0	5	7.8	5	7.8	4	6.3	4	6.3	4	6.3	6	9.4
Agents	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	2	3.1	1	1.6
Shops	8	14.2	10	15.6	14	21.8	11	17.1	12	18.7	13	20.3	14	21.8
Drink	4	7.1	2	3.1	4	6.3	7	10.9	6	9.4	4	6.3	4	6.3

Sources for Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9

Nottingham Council Minutes: 1872-1901

Nottingham Red Books: 1872, 1875, 1878, 1881, 1882, 1885, 1891, 1895, 1901

Trade Directories: Wright 1866, Kelly 1876, Morris 1877, Kelly 1881, White 1885,
Wright 1887, Wright 1889, Wright 1891, White 1893, White 1894,
Wright 1895, Wright 1897, Wright 1900, Kelly 1900, Wright 1902

Nottingham and Midland Counties Daily Express: 1861-1883

Nottingham Daily Express: 1883-1901

Nottingham Daily Guardian: 1861-1901

Table 3

Aldermen and Councillors: the Balance of Occupational Groups (%)

	1871	1877	1881	1886	1891	1896	1900
All manufacturers	43.0	40.6	34.4	30.3	24.1	23.5	24.8
Lace manufacturers	28.6	15.6	14.0	14.0	10.9	9.4	10.9
Professionals	12.5	11.0	11.0	11.0	17.3	18.7	18.8
Shopkeepers	14.2	15.6	21.8	17.1	18.7	20.3	21.8
Small tradesmen and building trades	5.4	20.3	21.8	21.9	20.3	20.4	20.3

Table 4**Aldermen: Occupational Background (Numbers)**

	1871	1877	1881	1886	1891	1896	1900
Manufacturers							
Lace	6	2	2	2	0	2	2
Hosiery	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Associated	1	2	3	3	3	2	2
Other	0	2	2	2	3	2	2
Group total	8	6	7	7	6	6	6
Professionals							
Solicitor	1	0	0	1	2	1	2
Doctor	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Other	0	2	1	1	0	0	0
Group total	1	2	2	3	2	2	3
Merchants	2	3	1	1	1	1	1
Small tradesmen	1	2	3	2	3	3	3
Building trades	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Agents	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shopkeepers	2	3	3	2	3	3	2
Drink trade	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Aldermanic Bench 1871 14 members
1877-1900 16 members

Table 5**Mayors: Occupational Background (Numbers)**

	1870-1876	1877-1900	Total
Manufacturers			
Lace	1	4	5
Hosiery	0	0	0
Associated	1	3	4
Other	0	3	3
Group total	2	10	12
Professionals			
Solicitor	0	3	3
Doctor	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Group total	0	3	3
Merchants	0	2	2
Small tradesmen	2	1	3
Building trades	0	0	0
Agents	0	0	0
Shopkeepers	2	2	4
Drink trade	0	0	0
Total politicians	6	18	24

Table 6

Chairmen of Key Committees: Occupational Background (Numbers)

	1873-1900
Manufacturers	
Lace	2
Hosiery	0
Associated	1
Other	4
Group total	7
Professionals	
Solicitor	1
Doctor	0
Other	0
Group total	1
Merchants	2
Small tradesmen	2
Building trades	1
Agents	0
Shopkeepers	2
Drink trade	0

Total politicians 15

Additional Sources

Nottingham Council Committee Reports : Sample Committees (related to municipalization and municipal trading)

Gas, Water, Electricity, Tramways, Finance, Health, General Works and Highways

Table 7**Municipal Election Results, 1870-1901**

	Liberal	Lib-Lab	Conservative	Independent
<u>Old Council</u>				
1870	10		4	
1871	11		3	
1872	9		5	
1873	9		5	
1874	11		3	
1875	9		5	
1876	8		6	
<u>New Council</u>				
1877	39		8	1
1878	13		3	
1879	11		4	1
1880	11		5	
1881	10		5	1
1882	11		5	
1883	8		8	
1884	10		16	
1885	11		5	
1886	8		8	
1887	8		7	1
1888	12		4	
1889	10	(1)	6	
1890	13		3	
1891	11	(1)	5	
1892	10	(1)	6	
1893	11		5	
1894	11	(1)	5	
1895	10	(1)	6	
1896	12		4	
1897	11	(2)	5	
1898	8		8	
1899	10		6	
1900	8	(1)	8	
1901	9		7	

Seats available annually 1835-1876 : 14
 1877-1901 : 16 (1877 all 48 seats)

Table 8

Municipal Election Results by Ward, 1870-1876

Ward	Liberal	Conservative
Byron	12	2
Castle	0	14
Exchange	11	3
Park	11	3
St Ann's	12	2
St Mary's	9	5
Sherwood	12	2
Total seats (number)	67	31
Total seats (%)	68.4	31.6

Table 9**Municipal Election Results by Ward, 1877-1901**

Ward	Liberal	Lib-Lab	Conservative	Independent
Bridge	23		4	
Broxtowe	22		5	
Byron	19		7	1 (C)
Castle	25		2	
Forest	16		11	
Manvers	24	(1)	3	
Mapperley	16		11	
Market	7		20	
Meadows	17		10	
Robin Hood	22		5	
St Alban's	25	(3)	1	1 (L)
St Ann's	12	(4)	15	
St Mary's	2		25	
Sherwood	26		1	
Trent	10		17	
Wollaton	25		0	2 (C)
Total seats (no.)	291		137	4
Total seats (%)	67.4		31.7	0.9

Independent (C) Perceived as Conservative sympathising candidate
(L) Perceived as Liberal sympathising candidate

Table 10**Gas Committee: Finance (£)**

	Loans	Revenue Account	Reserve Fund	Sinking Fund	Net Profit
1874-75	455,766	144,329	24,053		783
1875-76	457,796	143,032	25,927		8,633
1876-77	487,882	138,939	27,363		5,781
1877-78	513,964	144,917	34,368		12,524
1878-79	548,837	152,020	43,487		14,957
1879-80	575,115	162,296	54,344		23,226
1880-81	608,191	170,771	60,179		23,243
1881-82	680,213	182,841	67,100		27,615
1882-83	725,130	135,730	76,460		13,435
1883-84	810,130	246,464	82,679		33,167
1884-85	851,025	199,450	92,733		27,586
1885-86	882,439	183,941	96,247		15,407
1886-87	881,914	184,127	100,000		16,099
1887-88	878,113	190,605	100,000	12,770	23,658
1888-89	884,419	188,442	100,000	15,982	24,046
1889-90	884,319	196,501	100,000	19,303	26,698
1890-91	894,419	223,422	100,000	22,740	25,358
1891-92	904,419	221,783	100,000	26,298	24,472
1892-93	914,419	224,674	103,611	29,980	24,048
1893-94	914,419	232,322	87,352	33,791	21,855
1894-95	929,919	241,566	71,104	38,327	30,341
1895-96	1,011,433	238,136	68,301	42,999	25,137
1896-97	1,018,333	244,920	70,715	47,811	28,817
1897-98	1,026,333	247,397	72,961	52,768	27,152
1898-99	1,033,333	252,122	75,307	57,837	24,839
1899-00	1,049,333	289,362	77,637	63,132	26,038
1900-01	1,084,333	334,487	80,102	68,548	27,123

Sources

Gas Committee Reports: 1874-1901
 Nottingham Council Minutes: 1874-1901

Table 11**Gas Committee: Gas Supply**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1873-74	700	-		11.80			
1874-75	751	-	25,221		72,938	21,104	
1875-76	757	110,623			82,690	17,037	
1876-77	821	107,925			82,073	15,689	
1877-78	913	113,387		11.88	84,740	13,661	
1878-79	980	120,152		10.73	97,085	12,237	
1879-80	1,068	129,059		9.44	107,831	11,756	
1880-81	1,137	134,481		9.01	109,726	14,187	
1881-82	1,040	141,637	34,967	8.47	117,452	15,116	
1882-83	-	-	36,630	7.47	93,734	13,190	
1883-84	1,163	-		9.14	130,110	16,875	
1884-85	1,213	151,086		6.14	142,026	13,626	
1885-86	1,258	149,458		6.41		13,800	
1886-87	1,299	154,292		6.04	138,877	11,925	
1887-88	1,313	156,149		6.55	147,751	10,812	
1888-89	1,287	153,118		6.06	130,274	12,150	
1889-90	1,293	153,579	36,085	5.74	119,939	17,244	
1890-91	1,351	169,822	35,758	7.06	128,763	24,507	
1891-92	1,350	171,585	35,505	5.74	142,924	21,236	
1892-93	1,402	178,254	36,275	6.65	155,342	20,667	657
1893-94	1,391	177,600	36,614	6.21	126,902	24,965	1,321
1894-95	1,474	185,641	37,005	6.37	179,308	25,014	2,193
1895-96	1,486	187,277	38,032	6.32	149,326	21,425	3,251
1896-97	1,573	197,653	39,219	6.04	145,756	19,098	4,273
1897-98	1,588	199,097	40,637	6.42	157,777	19,794	5,369
1898-99	1,617	202,939	42,095	5.75	162,484	24,108	6,547
1899-00	1,742	218,105	43,895	6.00	175,166	32,133	8,034
1900-01	1,742	248,452	45,931	7.44	211,014	51,758	10,563

A Total annual consumption of gas (million cu. ft.)

B Gas sold (£)

C Number of meters in use

D Unaccounted losses of gas (%)

E Coal received (tons)

F Sales of coke (£)

G Number of prepayment meters

Sources

Gas Committee Reports: 1874-1901

Gas Engineer's Reports: 1874-1901

Nottingham Council Minutes: 1873-1901

Roberts, D.E. 'The Nottingham Gas-Light and Coke Company, 1818-1874' (University of Loughborough, MA thesis, 1976)

Table 12**Water Committee: Finance (£)**

	Loans	Revenue Account	Reserve Fund	Sinking Fund	Net Profit
1880-81	481,516	46,752			2,166
1881-82	502,076	46,343	2,697		531
1882-83	545,378	50,882	2,772		3,667
1883-84	555,378	56,578	4,933		4,914
1884-85	621,904	59,523	6,884		4,250
1885-86	644,846	61,706	6,230		2,625
1886-87	654,796	60,927	5,286		4,074
1887-88	654,796	64,791	6,285	12,778	5,013
1888-89	657,530	63,928	7,055	17,428	1,716
1889-90	656,930	65,562	7,515	22,259	3,040
1890-91	656,930	67,630	8,317	27,251	2,512
1891-92	656,930	67,440	10,141	32,391	1,725
1892-93	656,930	66,835	9,319	37,695	4,134
1893-94	656,930	69,891	9,014	43,143	4,414
1894-95	656,930	70,531	9,163	49,195	1,712
1895-96	707,675	70,346	9,380	55,460	3,591
1896-97	707,675	71,659	9,226	61,970	4,631
1897-98	707,675	74,424	9,297	68,640	4,243
1898-99	727,657	78,255	16,319	75,596	8,441
1899-00	727,657	82,645	25,839	82,867	11,346
1900-01	951,209	85,815	27,324	90,307	4,766

Sources

Water Committee Reports: 1880-1901

Nottingham Council Minutes: 1880-1901

Table 13**Water Committee: Water Supply**

	Total supply (million gallons)	Gallons per head per day	Premises supplied	Population served	Cost per 100 gallons (d)
1879-80		16.99	54,504	187,119	2.716 *
1880-81	1,386	17.82	57,751	191,753	2.388
1881-82		17.82	61,783		2.356
1882-83	1,500	18.32	66,070	220,000	2.370
1883-84	1,718	17.94	70,870	240,000	2.353
1884-85	1,850	18.46	74,626	252,217	2.258
1885-86	1,954	18.61	77,802	260,000	2.503
1886-87	1,932	18.23	79,965		2.492
1887-88		18.92	82,263		
1888-89		18.71	83,703		
1889-90	2,037	18.27	84,991		
1890-91	2,027	18.27	86,290		
1891-92	1,972	19.94	87,285	243,899	
1892-93	1,925	19.33	88,233	245,343	
1893-94	2,009	20.01	89,810	247,555	
1894-95	1,920	21.19		248,937	
1895-96	1,990	21.41		250,543	
1896-97					
1897-98					
1898-99					
1899-00			102,752	300,484	
1900-01			104,971		

* Average cost for 1874-80

Sources

Water Committee Reports: 1880-1901

Water Engineer's Reports: 1880-1901

Nottingham Council Minutes: 1880-1901

Table 14**Municipal Undertakings in Operation, 1899-1900**

County Boroughs	Utilities (year est.)	Capital borrowed (£)	Loans paid off (£)	Sinking Fund (£)	Income : average profit (£)
Bradford	W 1854	3,801,900	372,836	22,760	116,654
	G 1871	670,000	142,501	20,875	39,550
	E 1889	162,843	14,050	1,462	8,444
	T 1898	259,150	28,945	7,027	4,222
Birmingham	G 1875	2,594,672	571,382	231,022	137,223
	W 1876	3,335,686	17,715	79,366	126,639
Bristol	E 1893	156,900	16,120	-	6,703
Cardiff	W 1879	1,091,260	3,563	40,950	35,187
	E 1894	31,615	-	2,621	571
Derby	W 1880	405,705	26,574	5,362	18,650
	E 1893	65,984	4,451	1,772	916
Hull	W 1447	431,641	15,413	15,235	24,721
	E 1893	61,739	6,834	-	3,630
	G 1898	-	-	-	-
	T 1899	12,500	-	-	-
Leicester	W 1878	362,628	68,016	22,580	35,711
	G 1878	889,940	21,656	87,047	55,047
	E 1894	42,748	400	3,341	1,857
Leeds	W 1852	1,955,274	124,407	232,239	85,615
	G 1870	1,348,232	130,413	109,868	72,239
	T 1894	379,369	18,151	115	13,145
	E 1898	-	-	-	-
Lincoln	W 1871	105,000	23,777	8	6,000
	G 1885	192,530	20,571	2,494	9,523
Liverpool	W 1848	5,012,156	457,833	52,411	169,353
	E 1896	525,291	-	13,874	35,234
	T 1897	1,003,100	143,130	32,737	83,032
Manchester	G 1843	2,037,966	774,055	14,134	185,512
	W 1851	6,065,359	1,156,869	56,002	203,027
	E 1893	357,617	94,395	1,615	21,332
Nottingham	G 1874	1,957,314	1,026,333	57,726	73,961
	W 1880	707,657	707,657	68,641	42,087
	E 1894	85,000	76,101	2,426	3,623
	T 1897	90,000	80,000	-	3,156
Portsmouth	E 1894	120,414	-	9,352	5,943
Sheffield	W 1888	2,355,719	20,745	47,565	5,560
	T 1896	139,574	14,110	13,383	323
Wolv'ton	W 1868	298,290	3,129	12,652	15,460
	E 1895	-	-	-	-

Utilities

W Water

G Gas

E Electricity

T Tramways

Source

Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons on Municipal Trading, 1900 [HC (1900) VII, Appendix B, pp.378-437]: statistics based on municipal returns for the year ending 31 March 1899

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