PAYING THE PRICE FOR INDUSTRIALISATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF A

BLACK COUNTRY TOWN, OLDBURY, IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND

NINETEENTH CENTURIES

by

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A thesis submitted to the

University of Birmingham for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of History and Cultures

College of Arts and Law

University of Birmingham

January 2014

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the development and effects of industrialisation on the landscape and people of Oldbury, a nineteenth-century Black Country town. During the Industrial Revolution, the Black Country made a significant contribution to the British economy through its extractive, metal-working and chemical industries. Oldbury has received virtually no attention from historians, yet its experience of industrialisation was distinctive since it industrialised rapidly during a thirty-year period, compared to the much longer time span of the region's other towns. The thesis provides an in-depth study of the economic and social experiences of a Black Country town before 1900. In particular, it enables investigation of the experience of public health, Nonconformity, local élites and other themes which have received limited attention, such as pollution and occupational illnesses.

This micro-history is based on extensive archival research in local and national repositories. It applies various methodologies to examine this information, including the creation of databases, GIS analysis of mapping and demographics, and prosopography. The research draws upon a number of disciplinary approaches for the study of archaeology, geology, geography and environmental studies, public health, religion, sociology and mental health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BAH	Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service
BCLM	Black Country Living Museum
CALS	Cheshire Archives and Local Studies Service
CHAS	Sandwell Community History and Archives Services
MALS	Manchester Archives and Local Studies
SALS	Somerset Archives and Local Studies
SGA	Sullivan Genealogical Archive of Family Data
SSTAS	Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service
TBL	The British Library
TNA	The National Archives
TWL	The Wellcome Library
WAAS	Worcester Archives and Archaeology Service

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates the effects of industrialisation on the landscape, economy and lives of the population of a small Black Country town during the nineteenth century. It begins with an overview of the pre-industrial landscape and life of the people in order to provide a background to the changes which took place, and the town's early experience of industrialisation. This is followed by an examination of the way that industrialisation contributed both positively and negatively to the material and social life of the town, and the forces which influenced this development. The town chosen for this study is the southern Black Country town of Oldbury, now part of the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell. The choice of Oldbury as the subject of this thesis was instigated by the author after the discovery during genealogical research that, during the 1790s, her ancestors had migrated from Sheffield to Oldbury to start a steel works in the town. The reasons for this move proved difficult to elucidate since very little has been written about the history of the town to date.[1] This captured the interest of the author, who determined to try to uncover the history of Oldbury's industrial and cultural past and define its place in Black Country history.

1.1 The Black Country context

The Black Country, a conurbation of small towns to the north-west of Birmingham in the West Midlands, came into being during the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century when the spread of industrialisation transformed a number of small farming villages into industrial towns. Swathes of countryside vanished beneath a landscape of slag heaps, mines and industrial waste, changing the landscape and the lives of the people for ever. Although

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[1] McKean, H., *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present* (Oldbury, 1900); Hackwood, F. W., *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country* (Original publication 1915) (Studley, 2002); Thompson, S. 'The Industrial Development of Oldbury' (Unpublished M.Com Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1939); Daniels, T., *Old-time Oldbury: photographs and memories* (Smethwick, 2000).

the area made a significant contribution to the national economy through its extractive and metal-working industries, reports of the time tended to focus more on the appearance of the neighbourhood, describing it in grim contrast to the city of Birmingham, with even its name carrying a negative connotation.[2]

Historians and geographers investigating the industrialisation of the area have tended to treat the Black Country as one unit, and this is understandable as many of the events surrounding industrialisation benefit from being viewed from a regional perspective: the spread of industry, development of the iron trade, Chartism, decline of trades such as nail making and unemployment, for example.[3] The Black Country is, however, a 'country' without physical or political boundaries, which its people never regarded as an entity and where the label 'Black Country' carried with it a sense of shame.[4] The individual townships considered themselves to be organic communities, taking pride in their history, and reflecting the villages from which they developed in their geography and culture.[5] Even though they shared many experiences of the industrialisation process, such as the spread of coal mining and iron manufacture, the majority of the towns remained self-governing during the nineteenth century and developed their own industrial specialisation. Willenhall and Wednesfield became known for lock making, Cradley for chain making and Lye for making anvils and vices, for example, and in the widespread trade of nail making each town became known for producing

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[2] *Illustrated London News,* 'The Town of Wolverhampton', 8 December 1866; Raybould, T. J., *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate* (Newton Abbot, 1973); Trainor, R. H., *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900* (Oxford, 1993), p. 7.
[3] Johnson, B. L. C. and Wise, M. J., 'The Black Country 1800 - 1950', in: *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting : A Scientific Survey* (Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1970); Gale, W. K. V., *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History* (London, 1966); Barnsby, G. J., *Chartism in the Black Country* (Wolverhampton, 1980); Ball, E., 'The Hand-Made Nail Trade', in: *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District* (London, 1866).
[4] Gale, W. K. V., 'Development of Industrial Technology in the Black Country 1700 – 1900', in: Johnson and Wise (eds), *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting a Scientific Survey* (Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1970), p. 193; Wilson-Jones, J., *The History of the Black Country* (Birmingham, 1950), p. 1.
[5] West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, *Conurbation: A Planning Survey of Birmingham and the Black Country* (London, 1948).

specific types of nails.[6] In order to investigate the effect that industrialisation had on these communities, therefore, it is important to take a 'ground upwards' approach by investigating the effects of industrialisation on one particular town. Although a number of towns, such as Dudley, Wednesbury, Bilston and West Bromwich have been the focus of individual study, many of the others have been neglected.[7] One of the towns which has been consistently overlooked by historians is the town of Oldbury.

Although its name indicates a place of antiquity, little is known about Oldbury's growth and development over time and previous research is sparse.[8] One of the reasons for this is the fact that, whilst other Black Country towns were in the county of Staffordshire, Oldbury was an outlying portion of the counties of either Worcestershire or Shropshire for the majority of its recorded history. Historians researching county or regional histories have, therefore, tended to ignore it, partly because records are difficult and time-consuming to locate and, as far as Shropshire and Worcestershire are concerned, Oldbury's position makes it extraneous to published histories about these counties. Pauline Frost's work on livestock in the dual economy in South Staffordshire is illustrative of this point. Oldbury should have been included along with the other Black Country towns to give a full picture of the area, but, due to the fact that it was an island of Shropshire in the middle of South Staffordshire it was omitted.[9] This is also reflected in the county maps. Morden's 1695 map of Worcestershire placed Oldbury in Shropshire, his map of Shropshire for the same period, however, did not

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[6] Timmins, S. (ed) *The Resources, Products, and Industrial History of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District: A Series of Reports, Collected by the Local Industries Committee of the British Association at Birmingham, in 1865* (London, 1866), pp. 77, 100.

[7] Ede, J. F., *History of Wednesbury* (Wednesbury, 1962); Davies, V. L. and Hyde, H., *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley* (Dudley, 1970); Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*; Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900.*

[8] Gelling, M. and Foxall, H. D. G., *The Place-Names of Shropshire* (Nottingham, 1990), p. 226.

[9] Frost, P., 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720', *Agricultural History Review,* 1981, 29**,** 29-41.

mention it, and William Smith's 1713 map of Staffordshire placed it on the border and slightly within the county of Staffordshire, although it was never a part of this county.[10]

Oldbury was one of the later Black Country towns to develop industrially, with its main growth taking place over a period of around thirty years during the early part of the nineteenth century. Its importance at this time was indicated by the establishment of a Court of Requests in the town in 1807, dealing with debtors from the parishes of Halesowen, Rowley Regis, Tipton, West Bromwich, Harborne and the Manor of Bradley, and this became a County Court after the County Court Act of 1846.[11] This was followed later in the century by the opening of the first-ever branch of Lloyds Bank outside Birmingham.[12] Due to the nature of its iron and chemical industries, it is also probable that Oldbury was one of the most polluted of the Black Country towns. It makes, therefore, an ideal subject for an investigation into the way in which industrialisation spread to an area and the effects that this had on the population and the development of a village into an industrial town.

1.2 Previous research

Due to its location in a different county to the remainder of the Black Country and the difficulty of locating relevant information, research into the history of Oldbury as a town has been sparse. Frederick Hackwood, writing in 1915, provides the only general history of the town; it is particularly valuable for information about the late nineteenth century, which

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[10] Morden, R., *Map of Worcestershire* (1695); Morden, R., *Map of Shropshire* (1695); Smith, W., *Staffordiae Comitatus* (London, 1713).
[11] 1807 An Act for the More Easy and Speedy Recovery of Small Debts within the Parishes of Hales Owen, Rowley Regis, Harborne, West Bromwich, Tipton, and the Manor of Bradley, in the Counties of Worcester, Salop, and Stafford. [25th April 1807.]; Judicial Office, *History of the Judiciary* [Online] (2013), http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/about-the-judiciary/introduction-to-justice-system/history-of-the-judiciary, (Accessed: 18/10/2013).
[12] Sayers, R. S., *Lloyds Bank in the History of English Banking* (Oxford, 1957), p. 158.

would have been within living memory of the author and the people interviewed.[13]

Hackwood is an important Black Country historian. Born in the town of Wednesbury in 1851, he became a prolific writer producing, during the course of his life, 28 books about Staffordshire and the Black Country.[14] Much of the known history of the individual towns relies on Hackwood's research, and he is often quoted by other historians.[15] He cites many pertinent documents and primary sources in his writing, but as he does not support them with references, location and further investigation of these sources proves difficult. Verification of such data at source is important in order to avoid perpetuating the spread of speculatory theory as fact, when it may be unproven or incorrect.

Much of the information about the early history of Oldbury, as outlined by Hackwood and other twentieth-century writers such as John Willis-Bund and Arthur Pound, relies on the previous work of Treadway Nash the eighteenth-century Worcester historian.[16] Nash visited the district in the 1780s and comments both from his own observations and from conversations he had with local inhabitants.[17] He also quotes documents such as the Court Rolls to support his findings.[18] Some of his conclusions, such as the inference that the name 'Portway' may have indicated a Roman Road crossing the area, have not, however, been substantiated.[19] Other contemporary writers, such as Walter White (1860) and Elihu Burritt

[13] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*.

[14] Ibid., information about Hackwood in preface to new edition. Author not stated.

[15] For example Barnsby, G. J., *Social Conditions in the Black Country 1800-1900* (Wolverhampton, 1980); Chitham, E., *West Bromwich, A History* (Chichester, 2009); Dilworth, D., *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire* (London, 1976); Ede, *History of Wednesbury*; Hunt, J., *A History of Halesowen* (Chichester, West Sussex, 2004); Philips, D., *Crime and Authority in Victorian England : The Black Country 1835 - 1860* (London, 1977); Threlfall, R. E., *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951* (Oldbury, 1951); Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*.

[16] Page, W. and Willis-Bund, J. W. (eds) *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester, Volume 3* (London, 1913); WAAS, Palfrey Collection 899:31/3762/2/I, History of Halesowen Abbey by Arthur G. Pound of Whiteheath Villa, Rowley Regis (20th century); Nash, T. R., *Collections for the History of Worcestershire, Volume 1* (London 1781).

[17] Nash, *Collections for the History of Worcestershire, Volume 1*, pp. 521, 523.

[18] Ibid., p. 510.

[19] Ibid., p. 509.

(1869) also record their experiences of visiting the town.[20] Although written as anecdotal

surveys, they nevertheless give valuable insights into the appearance of the town and the

trades that were being pursued at the time. Much of this early writing presents the

information without analysis or comparison with the wider picture of regional or national

town growth. It also details particular areas of town development, whilst ignoring others and

has tended to form the basis for subsequent overviews and articles that have been produced on

the history of the town.

Only one thesis relating to Oldbury has been located, written by S. Thompson in 1939, which

deals with the town's industrial development.[21] Following a short overview of the

background of Oldbury, taken chiefly from Hackwood and Nash, its main strength lies in the

detail it gives of the arrival of different firms in the town, concluding that the main impact of

this development took place during the 1860 – 1880 period. Thompson was able to interview

the owners of a number of firms that were still in existence in 1939, and examine archives that

are no longer available, which provide a window of information into Oldbury's industrial

growth.

The way in which industrialisation affected the landscape and the life of the people is studied

in the present thesis through a number of chapters which look at individual areas of town life.

Although connected by the common theme of industrialisation, each chapter also stands alone

in looking at one particular aspect of the research. A review of the primary and secondary

sources relating to the individual chapters, therefore, takes place at the beginning of each

chapter. Consequently, the following two sections, 1.3 and 1.4, evaluate the secondary and

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[20] White, W., *All Round the Wrekin* (London, 1860); Burritt, E., *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* (London, 1869); Burritt, E. A., *Visit to the Brades Steel Works* (Birmingham, undated).
[21] Thompson 'The Industrial Development of Oldbury'.

primary sources which correspond to the work as a whole, and provide information for three areas of research:

1. The development nationally of industrial towns;

2. The development of other Black Country towns so that comparisons can be drawn;

3. The development of Oldbury.

1.3 Secondary sources

The national perspective for the rise of the industrial town in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is given by Mick Aston and James Bond, David Lloyd and Peter Clark, while W. H. B. Court, Basil Johnson and M. J. Wise, and W. K. V. Gale give information about industrial organisation on a national and regional basis.[22] This literature both places Oldbury in context and provides comparisons with the growth of other towns and cities at this time. One important comparison is the way in which areas with a parallel industrial base developed during a similar time period; the growth of the iron and coal industries of South Wales, Lancashire and North and South Yorkshire, for example.[23] Much of this research took place around the middle of the twentieth century, from which time there seems to be a gap until Stephen Hughes *Copperopolis* was published in 2000, providing a detailed investigation into a series of planned villages in the Swansea area.[24] The advance of industry in the Lancashire and North Yorkshire area is dealt with by Stobart who focuses on urban growth during the period from 1700 – 1760 and John Foster, who examines class struggle in the area during the

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[22] Aston, M. and Bond, J., *The Landscape of Towns* (London, 1976); Lloyd, D., *The Making of English Towns: 2000 Years of Evolution* (London, 1992); Clark, P. (ed) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000); Court, W. H. B., *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600-1838* (London, 1938); Johnson and Wise, 'The Black Country 1800 - 1950'; Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*.
[23] Morris, J. H. and Williams, L. J., *The South Wales Coal Industry 1841-1875* (Cardiff, 1958); John, A. H., *The Industrial Development of South Wales, 1750-1850: An Essay* (Cardiff, 1950).
[24] Hughes, S., *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea* (Aberystwyth, 2000).

industrial revolution.[25] The South Yorkshire industrial scene is examined by David Hey, who deals specifically with the rise of the metal industry in Sheffield and its surrounding area, a region which has much in common with the industrial West Midlands.[26]

Regional studies of town growth have been a feature of historical writing in the twentieth century when Court, Eric Hopkins and Della Hooke gave an overview of industrial development against the background of the West Midland area as a whole.[27] In 1950, a collection of essays was produced for the British Association for the Advancement of Science which details the development of Birmingham and its regional setting and presents British industrialisation as a regional phenomenon.[28] This method of presenting research has continued, with Pat Hudson giving the argument a national perspective, and a work edited by Jon Stobart and Neil Raven concentrating on the Midland region.[29] Rather than giving one 'regional perspective' the different contributions deal with various aspects of the ways that regions work. Individual topics relevant to the development of Oldbury such as proto-industrialisation, and de-industrialisation are dealt with within the volumes. The value of these compilations is that they describe the topic from various standpoints and provide a means of identifying and comparing areas of change. One of the main drawbacks to such studies, however, is the problem of defining the region to be examined. If a county is chosen, as has been noted, a number of Black Country towns would be excluded from such a study.

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[25] Stobart, J., *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60* (Manchester, 2004); Foster, J., *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London, 1974).
[26] Hey, D., 'The Rural Metalworkers of the Sheffield Region: A Study of Rural Industry Before the Industrial Revolution', *Department of English Local History Occasional Papers,* University of Leicester, 1972, Second Series**, 5**.
[27] Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600-1838*; Hopkins, E., *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud, 1998); Hooke, D., *England's Landscape* (London, 2006).
[28] British Association for the Advancement of Science., *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey* (original publication 1950) (Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1970).
[29] Hudson, P. (ed) *Regions and Industries: A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989); Stobart, J. and Raven, N. (eds) *Towns, Regions and Industries: Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, c.1700-1840* (Manchester, 2005).

The heavy industrialisation of Oldbury, for example, set it apart from its rural county of Worcestershire for the majority of the nineteenth century, with its main links being the political and criminal justice systems. The area of the West Midlands, chosen by Marie Rowlands for her chapter on continuity and change, would appear to be too large, since generalisations made about the region are difficult to substantiate for specific areas and she recognises that 'the most notable characteristic of the Midlands was diversity'.[30] The tendency is to take one of the larger towns such as Birmingham or Wolverhampton and assume a similar experience for the whole region, which, as far as the Black Country is concerned, was not the case. In order to test the wider theory, or examine in detail what was happening on the ground it is necessary to look at change as it affected an individual town, as Hudson does in her chapter on the West Riding.[31] Jon Stobart and Barrie Trinder also follow this route, taking the Black Country town of West Bromwich and comparing it with Burslem in the Potteries. The fact that West Bromwich and Burslem were, like Oldbury, new industrial towns makes them strategic points for comparison.[32]

Relevant literature relating to the Black Country as a whole falls into two categories. That written before 1980 which usually takes the form of a broad overview of industrial growth and the effects this produced,[33] and that written after 1980 when historians turned their focus towards specific topics, such as Black Country élites or an investigation into the local

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[30] Rowlands, M. B., 'Continuity and Change in an Industrialising Society: The Case of the West Midlands Industries', in: Hudson (ed) *Regions and Industries, A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 103.
[31] Hudson, P., 'Capital and Credit in the West Riding', in: Hudson (ed) ibid.(Cambridge, 1989), p. 74.
[32] Stobart, J. and Trinder, B., 'New Towns of the Industrial Coalfields: Burslem and West Bromwich', in: Stobart and Raven (eds), *Towns, Regions and Industries: Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, c.1700-1840* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 121 – 133.
[33] For example Wilson-Jones, *The History of the Black Country* and Drabble, P., *Black Country* (London, 1952).

dialect.[34] The two categories of literature adopt different styles of writing. The overviews appear to be aimed at a wide audience, written descriptively and containing a mixture of interesting facts, local traditions and stories, and details of famous people and events. All rely heavily for their factual information on the earlier work of writers such as William Hutton, White, Burritt and Nash.[35] They provide a useful synopsis of events that occurred as the region became industrialised, but this is limited by a lack of referenced source material. Much of the later writing, dealing with topics in depth, is well referenced and gives a valuable insight into areas that would be outside the scope of a general history of the town.

George Barnsby, a prolific radical Black Country writer, is illustrative of the second group of writers. Concentrating on the social conditions in the Black Country, his research is based on a wide range of well-referenced primary sources and includes examples from all of the individual towns.[36] Some of his assumptions and conclusions require further investigation, however, and need to be substantiated. His uncorroborated statement, for example, that 'opinion was unanimous that Black Country children stayed at school for only two years or less' and the subsequent use of this as a base line parameter for estimating the percentage of children who attended school, is questionable.[37]

An interesting reflection of the people and culture of the Black Country is given by Jon Raven in his collection of urban and industrial songs from the locality. He illustrates various facets of the history of the area with illustrations from the lyrics which brings a new dimension to

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[34] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*; Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*; Higgs, L. A., *Description of Grammatical Features and their Variation in the Black Country Dialect* (Basel, Switzerland, 2004).
[35] Hutton, W., *A Brief History of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1797); White, *All Round the Wrekin*; Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land*; Nash, *Collections for the History of Worcestershire, Volume 1*.
[36] Barnsby, *Social Conditions in the Black Country 1800-1900*.
[37] Ibid., p. 146.

the historical genre.[38]

Histories written about the individual Black Country towns vary from books of photographs and accompanying text to those based on academic research. All provide information with which the development of Oldbury can be compared. John Ede's *History of Wednesbury* stands out as a well-researched and referenced piece of academic writing, covering a wide time scale.[39] His analytical discussion of the causes and effects of change, such as the impact of various Acts of Parliament on the life of the town, provides points of comparison with the other Black Country towns that were affected by similar sets of circumstances. Raybould's *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country* is similarly researched and referenced. Its title is slightly misleading, however, since it is based on a study of estate documents relating to the Earls of Dudley. This was an important landholding family who gained their main wealth from industry, and his deduction that the family's influence had wide repercussions for the 'political, social and economic development of the area' is pertinent.[40] The estate's influence was primarily in the west of the region, however, where they held land and lordship of a number of towns, with other important landholders operating in eastern Black Country towns such as Wednesbury and West Bromwich.

Apart from Hackwood, photographic records of the town and personal reminiscences, there is very little published literature on the history of Oldbury. Information about selected periods or topics is given in the *Victoria County Histories* of Worcestershire, Shropshire and Staffordshire.[41] For a large part of its history Oldbury was part of the manor and parish of

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[38] Raven, J., *The Urban and Industrial Songs of the Black Country and Birmingham* (Wolverhampton, 1977).
[39] Ede, *History of Wednesbury*.
[40] Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, p. 10.
[41] Page and Willis-Bund (eds) *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester, Volume 3* ; Baugh, G. C. (ed) *Victoria History of the Counties of England, A History of the County of Shropshire, Volume 4* (Oxford, 1989); Greenslade, M. W. (ed) *A History of the County of Stafford, Volume 17* (Oxford, 1976).

Halesowen; Zvi Razi and Julian Hunt provide information for this period.[42] Razi's work focuses on population growth in the Manor of Hales during the fourteenth century from a study of the Court Rolls, giving evidence of the social and economic circumstances of the various strata of society. He identifies Oldbury as one of the two largest settlements in the Manor during this period and, although information is patchy, it is possible to form an impression of the physical makeup and life of the growing vill[43] during a period for which little information is available.[44] Hunt gives a broad overview of the history of Halesowen, but concentrates almost exclusively on the development of the town. It is disappointing that, although Oldbury is mentioned, it is only included as background information, and nothing is written about the strong links with the town that appear to have survived beyond 1557 when Oldbury became a manor in its own right.[45]

Further information about the social life of the town can be found in books charting the growth of nineteenth-century business concerns. Primarily written to provide an insight into the development of the industries themselves, a number of other topics are illustrated, such as the lives of the industrial élite and the provisions they were making for, and their attitude to, their employees. Two of the major manufacturers in Oldbury have produced such books, and are illustrative of this point. Richard Threlfall, in addition to chronicling the history of the firm of Albright and Wilson, describes the Nonconformist attitude to business and the workforce held by Quaker employers, and explains why many industrialists were dissenters.[46] This is important as Oldbury was a strongly Nonconformist town and many of its

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[42] Razi, Z., *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society and Demography in Halesowen, 1270-1400* (Cambridge, 1980); Hunt, *A History of Halesowen*.
[43] A vill is 'a settlement which could be a parish, manor or tithing'. Richardson, J., *The Local Historian's Encyclopedia* (Hertfordshire, 1985), p. 44.
[44] Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society and Demography in Halesowen, 1270-1400*, p. 6.
[45] Hunt, *A History of Halesowen*, p. 14.
[46] Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*, p. 3.

industrialists came from this background. Although emphasis is placed on the philanthropic

nature of the employers and the social action that was put in place to benefit the workforce,

the book also highlights some of the problems the town was facing due to pollution from the

works. Issues such as shortage of work, industrial illnesses and provision for pensioners also

provide an insight into the lives of the working classes, a group for which little written

evidence remains. The history of Chance and Sons, the other large employer in the middle of

the nineteenth century, follows a similar pattern, outlining the provision of education for

children of the workforce and the introduction of sick and burial clubs.[47] In both cases, maps

and sketches are included which provide illustrations of the effects of change on the pattern of

land use as the factories physically expanded into the surrounding area.

A further rapidly evolving secondary source is provided by the local history societies of

Oldbury and Langley. The Oldbury website provides well researched and informative articles

about the life and history of the two towns, which were joined for much of their history and

have close relationships. The site provides an overview of the towns from early times to the

present day with some in-depth articles on chosen topics.[48]

A review of the existing literature and the fact that there are large gaps in the history of

Oldbury produced a number of questions.

Question one: Little has been recorded about Oldbury between the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries, when it was part of the ancient manor of Halesowen, and when it emerged in the

nineteenth century as a developing industrial town. Is it possible to discover how the village

developed industrially during this period, what were the influences which shaped it and how

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[47] Chance, J. F., *A History of the Firm of Chance Brothers and Co.: Glass and Alkali Manufacturers* (London, 1919).
[48] Daniels, T., *A History of Oldbury, Langley and Warley* [Online] (2008), http://www.historyofoldbury.co.uk/, (Accessed: 25/6/2012).

did it fit into the pattern of growth of the Staffordshire Black Country during the nineteenth century? This question aims to discover how the different aspects of land use and influence of the governing élite impacted Oldbury's early industrial development. Although much is known about the expansion of industry in the north of the Black Country, the sources for information for Oldbury are at best fragmentary. Oldbury industrialised over just a thirty year period: in 1816 it was a small rural village, by 1845 it was a busy industrial town. Such growth does not happen by chance. What factors in the history of Oldbury held it back from participating in the industrialisation that was taking place in the north of the region and yet prepared it for such a swift advance in the nineteenth century?

Question two: What was the impact of industrialisation on the landscape of the town and the lives of the people and how did this compare with other industrial towns in the Black Country and elsewhere? Industry has been linked to national progress and achievement. Industrialists made their fortunes and a number of areas vie for the title of 'first industrial region' which carries with it a sense of pride. Eyewitness accounts of the Black Country, however, focus rather upon the devastation and pollution which covered the area, impacting the structure of the towns and the lives of the people. Research into this topic has two objectives, to assess the negative effects of industrialisation on the lives and health of the people, and to evaluate the level of impact of the measures put in place to address the issues.

Question three: Local élites and Nonconformist churches have been highlighted as two of the primary influences in industrial towns. To what extent did the roles of these two groups contribute to the progress of Oldbury from village to industrial town in the nineteenth century? What was their impact on the lives of the people and the growth of the community? This research aims to evaluate the impact and influence of these two important groups on the

town of Oldbury and to assess their relevant contributions. During the last quarter of the

nineteenth century, Oldbury was named by the *British Medical Journal* as one of the five

worst towns in the country as far as the provision of basic amenities was concerned.[49] What

held back the governing élite from making the necessary improvements to the fabric of the

town? What was the involvement of the Nonconformist church congregations, did they

complement the work of the élite or did the two groups have conflicting aims?

These research questions have determined the methodologies used for this study. These have

included: archival research into a number of primary sources to enable a reconstruction of the

growth pattern of the town and a discovery of the effects of industrialisation; the development

of databases to record information; the use of Geographical Information System (GIS) to

combine data, facilitate interrogation of information, and produce a visual representation of

the results; prosopography to trace the spread of influence of important industrialist families

and using archaeological surveys and landscape regression to discover the lifestyle of the

population prior to industrialisation. This information has enabled original research through

the creation of a micro-history of the town's industrial growth and a study of the effects of

industrialisation on the lives of the people, something which has not been undertaken before

for a Black Country town.

1.4 Primary sources and methodology

Micro-history, an intensive investigation of one specific town or area of research, is used

extensively by different fields of study, without necessarily coining the name. Social

historians use it to examine the lives of the people and their experiences, family historians to

research their genealogy, local historians to investigate the development of a town or village,

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[49] Hart, E., 'Waterborne Typhoid: A Historic Summary Of Local Outbreaks In Great Britain And Ireland, 1858-1893', *The British Medical Journal,* 1895, 2**,** 85-90, pp. 87, 88.

military historians to plot the progress of a battle in the field and archaeologists to reconstruct the findings from an excavation. All use intensive research into primary documents to fill a gap or attempt to add more detail to historical knowledge. It is, therefore, an ideal method for investigating the effects of industrialisation on the landscape and people of an emerging town and has been used here to look at the interplay of multiple factors in a defined area.

The absence of secondary sources relating specifically to Oldbury makes it even more necessary to adopt this approach and research has been predominantly furnished by a number of primary sources. These have included: published material such as government acts and papers, statistical compilations such as census returns, maps, newspapers, trade directories, books and pamphlets produced up to the beginning of the twentieth century and unpublished manuscript and archival material such as business and property documents, parish and individual church records, wills, town records and photographs.

The use of these primary sources has a number of benefits but also several drawbacks. Primary sources were produced at the time that the event took place or very soon afterwards and as such they give an insight into the working of organisations and the lives of people living at the time that would otherwise be impossible to know. Many documents such as Parliamentary reports, census returns, parish records and newspapers have been digitised and are available with online search facilities. They provide factual information, in the form of records and reports, but also enable the identification of the general attitude in the country at the time and the way that people looked at issues, for example in newspaper reports. John Tosh makes the point that it is necessary to be aware of the reason for which the document was produced, and the fact that written reports can be selective in what they record either because they are intended for propaganda or because they are what people felt was

noteworthy to report at the time.[50] An example of this is shown in newspaper reports about

the Chartist uprising in the Black Country in 1839 which appear to have been written to alarm

the population of Birmingham. It was reported that men from Oldbury had arrived in

Birmingham threatening to burn down Warwick gaol and liberate one of the Chartist leaders,

or raze Birmingham to the ground.[51] An inhabitant of Oldbury gave a surprised response in a

later edition stating that there was absolutely no truth in the statement that these men

represented Oldbury as not only were there no Chartists in the town, but the men of Oldbury

had little interest in any kind of politics.[52]

As long as one is aware of these problems, local newspapers provide a rich source of

information about the communities that they served. Oldbury did not have its own newspaper

until 7 November 1874, but events in the town were reported in other regional newspapers

such as *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* which was first issued on Monday 16 November 1741,

and national newspapers across the country. These can be accessed online through the British

Library and are excellent sources, reporting on topics such as local board meetings, industrial

accidents, and advertising important events that were taking place.[53] Trade directories,

published throughout the nineteenth century, are a further valuable source for recording the

development of the town over time and details of important tradespeople. One drawback to

these is that they only included some of the important people in the town, especially those

directories which required payment for including the information. A further problem for

small towns such as Oldbury is that, in the earlier directories, they were included with the

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[50] Tosh, J., *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History, Third Edition* (Harlow, 1999), p. 40.
[51] *Worcestershire Chronicle, '*The Chartists', Wednesday 22 May 1839, p. 2.
[52] Lowe, J., *To the Editor of Aris's Gazette, 24th June 1839* (Birmingham, 1839), p. 2.
[53] BCLM, 1975/267.004, Front Page of Oldbury Weekly News Edition No 1 (7th November 1874); *Newsplan West Midlands* [Online] (2008), http://www.newsplan.co.uk/wm_newsplan/modules.php?name=history, (Accessed: 17/09/2012); *The British Newspaper Archive* [Online] (2012), http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/, (Accessed: 17/09/2012).

records for other towns. For example, in *Pigot's 1829 Directory*, Oldbury is recorded under the heading of 'Stourbridge', along with several small towns and villages in the area making it difficult to isolate the relevant records.[54] A number of directories are available as an online source from the Historical Directories project of the University of Leicester.[55]

A number of government reports and statistical surveys have been used to provide background information to events in the town. Many of these are available online from the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP) website, a searchable database which includes local acts and reports from many commissions which were put into place to deal with problems arising in the industrial towns. One example is the report of the Midland Mining Commission which gives information about the lives of specific sections of the community, and individual towns and pits are often mentioned by name.[56] The nineteenth century was a time of data gathering and nationally produced statistics provide a wealth of information. Some of the most important of these for research into the burgeoning town are the census documents produced every ten years from 1801 and giving increasing amounts of detailed information about the population of the town, especially after the 1841 census. They have been used to analyse migration patterns, employment status and town growth. This information, when studied alongside nineteenth-century trade directories also gives an overview of the economic nucleus of the town. Other government papers are available in their unpublished form from The National Archives. The document relating to the setting up of a Board of Health in Oldbury, for example, contains a collection of all the papers and letters sent and received between Oldbury and the Ministry of Health. They are bound

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[54] Pigot, J., *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory for 1828- 1829* (London & Manchester, 1829).
[55] University of Leicester, *Historical Directories* [Online] http://www.historicaldirectories.org/hd/, (Accessed: 2010 - 2013).
[56] 1843 Parliamentary Papers: 1843, Vol. xiii (508), Midland Mining Commission, First Report, South Staffordshire.

together in date order and include questions asked by the new Board of Health as they sought to come to terms with their role, complaints received from townspeople, for example about inequality of the taxation system, official figures, Ministry of Health reports and surveys.[57]

Unpublished manuscript and archival material for Oldbury is widely dispersed. As previously noted, during the course of its history Oldbury, whilst surrounded on all sides by Staffordshire, was an outlying portion of Worcestershire (pre-1174 and post-1839) and Shropshire (1174 to 1839).[58] Shropshire had another town called Oldbury and it is often difficult to decide which town is being referred to in government statistics and primary sources such as wills. In addition to this, for the purposes of Poor Law administration, the town was attached to the nearby Staffordshire town of West Bromwich from 1836.[59] Business links with Birmingham were a strong feature of the region and many of the land and industrial records are located there.[60] Research material is, therefore, difficult and time-consuming to locate as it is deposited in a number of different record offices.

The parish registers for Anglican churches normally give details of the early baptism, marriage and burial records for a community, and are used by historians to investigate the pre-civil registration population history for a town or village. In the case of Oldbury, however, this method cannot be relied upon as records only exist from 1714, and these are incomplete. Before then, people travelled to the mother church in Halesowen and the parish records of this church do not always identify people from the town. Oldbury was a strongly Nonconformist town but the records that remain from these congregations are also not sufficient to build a

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[57] TNA, MH 13/138, General Board of Health and Government Act Office, Correspondence Previous to 18th August 1871 Vol. 140, Oldbury, Openshore, Ormesby, Ormskirk.
[58] Willis-Bund, J. W*., et al., The Victoria History of the County of Worcester* (Westminster, 1901), p. 136.
[59] Greenslade (ed) *A History of the County of Stafford, Volume 17* , p. 46.
[60] For example BAH, Smythe Etches and Co., later Lee Crowder and Co., Solicitors of Birmingham 82/2, Oldbury Land Tenure Documents ;ibid.freehold ownership of land in Oldbury by nail makers .

picture of the nineteenth-century population. This highlights a further problem with the use of original documents: the researcher is often restricted by the little that has survived and the condition that manuscripts might be in. The majority of the records which survive for Nonconformists in Oldbury are those for the Methodist churches, but even these are patchy. The records of other churches are minimal, non-existent or unavailable. The one record which remains for the Baptist Church, for example, is in such a bad condition that it cannot be accessed by the public, and no records from this church exist in the Baptist History and Heritage Centre in Regent's Park College, Oxford.[61] The only facts known about this church, therefore, are where it was located, the number of attendees from the 1851 religious census, and the names of some of its ministers from the annual reports of the Baptist Union.

Maps have played an important part in the research of the town, the most important of which are the tithe map and apportionment of the township of Oldbury and Langley, which identifies the local land owners and tenants, provides information about the historical and nineteenth-century utilisation of land and denotes material and economic growth. The newly discovered hand-drawn map produced over a century earlier in 1733 by Henry Beighton, and held by Special Collections in the University of Birmingham, adds to this information by showing the landscape at this date and detailing whether the plots of land were copy or freehold.[62] Maps provide a key pictorial link to viewing a past landscape. They need to be treated with caution as far as accuracy is concerned, however. Many were commissioned for a specific purpose and the features included in the map will reflect this. Bowen's Map of Stafford, for example, is decorative, being produced in 1794 as a gift for 'Earl Gower Lord Lieutenant of Stafford'.

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[61] Regent's Park College, *The Centre for Baptist History and Heritage* [Online] (2012), http://www.rpc.ox.ac.uk/index.php?pageid=16&tln=ResourceCentres, (Accessed: 08/10/2012).
[62] Houghton, D. S., *Tithe Map of the Townships of Oldbury and Langley in the Parish of Halesowen in the County of Salop* (Birmingham 1845); Beighton, H., *Oldbury in the County of Salop* (1733) held at Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

It marks out the position of the 'hundreds' and includes written information about key locations and facts that were of interest to the Earl, such as a list of the Earls and Lords of Stafford. As far as Oldbury is concerned, however, it is inaccurate. Oldbury is shown to be in Staffordshire, when it was actually in Shropshire, and its position on the map was incorrect in relation to the other villages.

Maps were expensive to produce and many of them were merely copies of previous maps. Smith's *Staffordiae Comitatus* (1713), for example, appears to be an almost identical replica of Kip's map of Staffordshire published in 1610. It would be expected that some changes took place in the landscape over a one-hundred-year period which have not been highlighted in the later of these two maps, thus limiting its usefulness when plotting change over time.

Maps also tended to be selective in the elements they included. This led to a larger-than-normal scale being applied to structures which were felt to be important, such as churches and roads. The way that such maps were drawn makes them interesting in their own right, however, as they show the mentality of past societies and the way that people viewed their landscape at the time.[63]

The approach adopted for uncovering the local landscape and combining the various data types is that of GIS mapping. GIS is a computer-based system designed to capture, manage, analyse and present all types of geographical data. It was developed within the fields of geography and archaeology, and combines cartography with statistical analysis and is able to handle and combine large amounts of attribute and spatial data. Attribute data from the different sources are recorded in a Microsoft Access database and each entry in the database attribute table is linked to its spatial component on a map. The spatial data are stored in

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[63] Whyte, N., *Inhabiting the Landscape: Place, Custom and Memory, 1500-1800* (Bollington, 2009), p. 11.

polygon or point shape files linked to their place in the landscape and contain geographic co-ordinates, which in this case are those of the British National Grid. When the map and the database are joined in this way, they facilitate interrogation of the information that is held in the database, and produce a visual representation of the results which forms a powerful analytical tool. By manipulating and interacting with the data, a range of visual outcomes are produced.[64] There are few examples of GIS being used on a small scale by historians in Britain, where it remains predominantly the domain of geographers and archaeologists. It promises to be a fresh and innovative approach to performing historical analysis and presenting information, however, and is currently being used by historians in North America for individual pieces of research such as urban development in New York, Civil War battles and immigration and ethnicity patterns.[65] It was decided to use GIS in this thesis to combine and display various forms of data, such as changes to the landscape, location of industrial developments, and effects of pollution on different areas of the town. Various maps were imported into GIS and given differing degrees of transparency so that they could be overlaid and compared. Visual changes between any two temporal layers are then identified and major changes in landscape development could be revealed. Individual features, such as the location of industrial concerns and important buildings, and the identification of areas in the town where high death rates occurred were highlighted by producing the information as point files and linking these to the map by their co-ordinates.

Although a large part of the town's historical fabric was lost due to redevelopment in the twentieth century, photographs and descriptions of many of the missing buildings can be found in Henry McKean (1900), and on the Black Country History website's photographic

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[64] Pavlovskaya, M., 'Non-Quantative GIS', in: Cope (ed) *Qualitative GIS A Mixed Methods Approach* (London, 2009), pp. 13-37, 23.
[65] Knowles, A. K., *Past Time, Past Place: GIS for History* (Redlands, Calif., 2002).

archive.[66] These offer the possibility of recreating a picture of the buildings which were being highlighted in GIS, such as housing, shops, public buildings and industrial concerns. Postcards, drawings and prints of the town provide further insight into its physical appearance at different periods of development. The majority of these are held at Sandwell Community History and Archives Services (CHAS) and depict industrial plants and workshops, but others show individual town buildings and street scenes.[67] Additional images are available on the Revolutionary Players website.[68]

Prosopography has been used in this thesis to examine the standing and influence of the industrial élite who worked towards the improvement and advancement of the town. Described by Lawrence Stone as 'the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by a collective study of their lives',[69] prosopography has largely been used to identify the background and history of the upper classes. Information about family background, education, inheritance, economic position, personal wealth, occupation and religion of this stratum is more readily available and has been used to chart the involvement of people of influence in a number of areas. Tosh records L. B. Namier using this method in 1929 in his study of the lives and influence of men who were standing as eighteenth-century MPs.[70] Apart from the industrialists Chance Brothers and Albright and Wilson, for whom bibliographic data are available, the majority of Oldbury's influential élite were from the middle classes.[71] Although educational and other informative data are lacking

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[66] McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*; *Black Country History* [Online] http://blackcountryhistory.org/, (Accessed: 19/09/2012).
[67] *Sandwell Community History and Archives Service(CHAS)* [Online] http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200111/records_and_archives, (Accessed: 17/09/2012).
[68] *Revolutionary Players* [Online] www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk, (Accessed: 17/09/2012).
[69] Stone, L., 'Prosopography', *Daedalus,* 1971, 100**,** 46-79, p. 46.
[70] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History, Third Edition*, p. 77.
[71] Chance, *A History of the Firm of Chance Brothers and Co.: Glass and Alkali Manufacturers*; Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*

for this group, the advent of the census documentation from the middle of the nineteenth century has made it possible to research familial, residential and occupational history for group members. A biographical database has been produced to record information about their lives, business links and social involvement. This has been used to create individual genealogies which, when used alongside a sociographical examination of the class group to which they belonged, has made it possible to chart their influence and involvement in the life of the town.

1.5 Individual chapters

The industrialisation of Oldbury and its effects on the landscape and the lives of the people are explored in six themed chapters:

Chapter 2 investigates the background to the thesis, considering the industrial experience and material growth of Oldbury and the Black Country during three time periods: prior to the eighteenth century, the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, in order to assess how early decisions laid the foundation for what was to come and the type of industry that was attracted to the town. The main focus of the research is pre-nineteenth century, since this is the era about which little is known. Industrialisation in the nineteenth-century Black Country has been covered by a number of historians and this section takes the form of an overview of specific industries which were attracted to Oldbury and had an effect on the landscape and lives of the people.

Chapter 3 is the first of three chapters looking at the effects of industrialisation on the town and its people, in this case pollution. Pollution in the town was a big problem and, in common with other Black Country towns, came initially from local difficulties brought about

by a population explosion; the lack of clean water and sewage and refuse disposal, and that produced by the coal and iron industries.[72] Oldbury also suffered from the type of industry that was attracted to the town with the alkali and phosphorus works contaminating the watercourse and emitting pollutants into the air. In 1874, one of the members of the firm of Chance, the owners of the alkali works, stated that no one wanted to live in the town unless they had to.[73]

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with two aspects of the same subject: the health of the people. Health problems in Oldbury were newsworthy, often appearing in government reports and medical journals where it was cited as one of the worst towns in England. Chapter 4 looks at the health problems, many of which arose as a result of pollution, although industrial illnesses and accidents had a part to play. It was stated that the health bill for the town was 30 to 40% higher than that of any other parish in the Poor Law union.[74] These factors are investigated through a comparison between the Board of Health reports for Oldbury, government documents and newspaper and journal articles. A number of illnesses were silent ones. Mental illness, for example, seems to have been a big problem in Oldbury, an issue which is investigated through an examination of asylum records. Chapter 5 considers the other side of the coin: the strategies put in place to deal with health problems over the course of the century. Different groups provided a means of addressing the situation. The government set up Boards of Health and introduced Acts of Parliament, medical men ensuring that the guidelines were followed, and worked at the local town level, local people gave time to sit on

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[72] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester.
[73] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1, Messrs Chances Glass Works, Report of Proceeding at the interview Between Messrs Chance and the Deputation from Oldbury Local Board of Health (20th July 1874).
[74] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, pp. 22 – 26.

decision making boards, and self-help groups offered provision when the bread-winner was out of work. Hospitals and dispensaries were established, and vaccination programmes introduced, and the health of the population began to improve. Although each group came with a different approach, their combined actions enabled positive changes to be made.

Chapters 6 and 7 consider two major areas of influence in the industrial towns: that of the élite, especially the middle-class élite (Chapter 6), and the Nonconformist churches (Chapter 7). The incumbent of the parish church, when describing the faith of Oldbury's population in 1843, stated that '19 out of 20 are dissenters here.'[75] This statement supported the physical evidence of a high number of Nonconformist churches in the town which has been investigated through a study of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, and records which exist from the various Nonconformist churches to ascertain their influence in the town and why they were so popular.[76] Chapter 8 will draw conclusions from the research and suggest further research possibilities.

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[75] 1843 Parliamentary Papers: 1843, Vol. xiii (508), Midland Mining Commission, First Report, South Staffordshire.
[76] 1851 (HO 129.381) Census of Religious Worship.

CHAPTER 2: BLACK COUNTRY INDUSTRIALISATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF OLDBURY

Oldbury, compared to other Black Country towns, was slow to industrialise. When industrialisation began, in the thirty years after 1816, its advance was rapid. In 1816, it was a small rural village and by 1845 it was a busy manufacturing town. Such rapid change does not happen by chance. It was at odds with the experience of the northern Black Country villages where the coal outcropped and was easily obtainable, leading to early industrialisation from the sixteenth century onwards. The southern Black Country towns did not have the advantage of outcropping coal, but that in itself is no reason for Oldbury's lack of early involvement since nearby West Bromwich, a town in similar circumstances, became engaged in iron manufacture from the sixteenth century.[1]

The topology and geology in the north of the Black Country favoured industrialisation: the presence of outcropping coal gave it an initial advantage, but this was not the only feature that pushed industrialisation forward. Many of the villages were under the influence of forceful landholders who sought to exploit the resources, some of whom, such as members of the Dudley and Foley families, were entrepreneurial and inventive. Important links were established with the manufacturing centres of Birmingham and Wolverhampton which needed local mineral resources. A large number of people were drawn to the area to take advantage of the industrial opportunities that were arising and provided a readymade work force.[2] Settlement, land ownership and economic development became woven together as industrialisation began to take off.

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[1] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, p. 33.
[2] Raybould, T. J., 'Lord Dudley and the Making of the Black Country', *The Blackcountryman,* Spring 1970, **3,** 53- 58; Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*; Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600-1838.*

Early observers saw the Industrial Revolution as a sudden event, making comparisons with the revolution in France for the speed of its progress over a short space of time and the way in which the face of society was changed.[3] Historians writing from a twentieth-century perspective, however, identified it as a gradually evolving process rather than a sudden event, with different economic and social layers combining to influence regional and local development.[4] Jon Stobart and Peter King recognised a mixture of the two. Stobart noted that the experience was not the same in all areas of the country: some were characterised by stability and continuity while others, such as North West England, Yorkshire, the Midlands and South Wales, underwent 'profound transformations'.[5] King emphasised a pattern of gradual growth interspersed with a series of small 'revolutions': spurts of rapid expansion when new technology was introduced, but concluded that the changes in the manufacture and use of iron during the latter part of the eighteenth century constituted an industrial revolution where iron was concerned.[6]

In order to understand Oldbury's economic and social background and to identify factors which shaped industrial developments during the nineteenth century, this chapter examines industrialisation during three major periods of growth: before the eighteenth century, the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. It seeks, in each of these time spans, to delineate urban industrial growth by posing three questions. What were the individual constituents which shaped the process of industrialisation in Oldbury? How does Oldbury's

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[3] Colquhoun, P., 'A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire', 1814, p. 68; Engels, F., *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Original Publication 1892) (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), pp. 52, 53; Twiss, T., *View of the Progress of Political Economy in Europe Since the Sixteenth Century* (London 1847), p. 226.

[4] Crafts, N. F. R. and K, H. C., 'Output Growth and the British Economic Revolution: A Restatement of the Crafts-Harley View', *Economic History Review,* 1992, XLV, 703 – 730, p. 705; Massey, D. B., *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 117, 118.

[5] Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60*, p. 2.

[6] King, P. W. 'The Iron Trade in England and Wales 1500 – 1815: The Charcoal Iron Industry and Its Transition to Coke' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Wolverhampton, 2003), p. 8; Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60*, p. 2.

industrial growth compare with that of the other Black Country towns? Did the

industrialisation of the area follow a gradually evolving or revolutionary pattern?

2.1 Methodology and sources

GIS has been used as a tool to facilitate research into the way that the industrial landscape

developed over time. The methodology for pursuing a landscape study approach follows

Richard Muir, Michael Aston and Stephen Rippon who provide basic techniques for map

regression and incorporating existing written, primary, and secondary sources, archival

documents, field name analysis and maps.[7] Although the writers' primary focus is on the

rural landscape, the techniques illustrated are also applicable to the study of a burgeoning

town, and give guidance to assist the identification of a landscape lost over time. A full

breakdown of the various approaches to historic landscape analysis is provided in Rippon and

Clark's book of that name.[8]

Two very informative maps for researching the history of Oldbury are Houghton's tithe map of

1845 and Beighton's 1733 map of Oldbury. Due to the fact that Oldbury was not part of the

region's early exploitation of the coalfield, the tithe map and its corresponding apportionment

records give a glimpse into the earlier pattern of landholding and the use of land in the area (see

Figure 1). Beighton's map adds to this information showing the village as the enclosures of the

eighteenth century were beginning to be implemented and when a large part of the open field

system was still intact. It also reveals the percentage of land which was free and copy held (see

Figure 2).

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[7] Muir, R., *The New Reading the Landscape: Fieldwork in Landscape History* (Exeter, 2000); Aston, M., *Interpreting the Landscape: Landscape Archaeology in Local Studies* (London, 1985); Rippon, S. and Clark, J., *Historic Landscape Analysis: Deciphering the Countryside* (York, 2004).
[8] Rippon and Clark, *Historic Landscape Analysis: Deciphering the Countryside*, pp. 14 – 19.
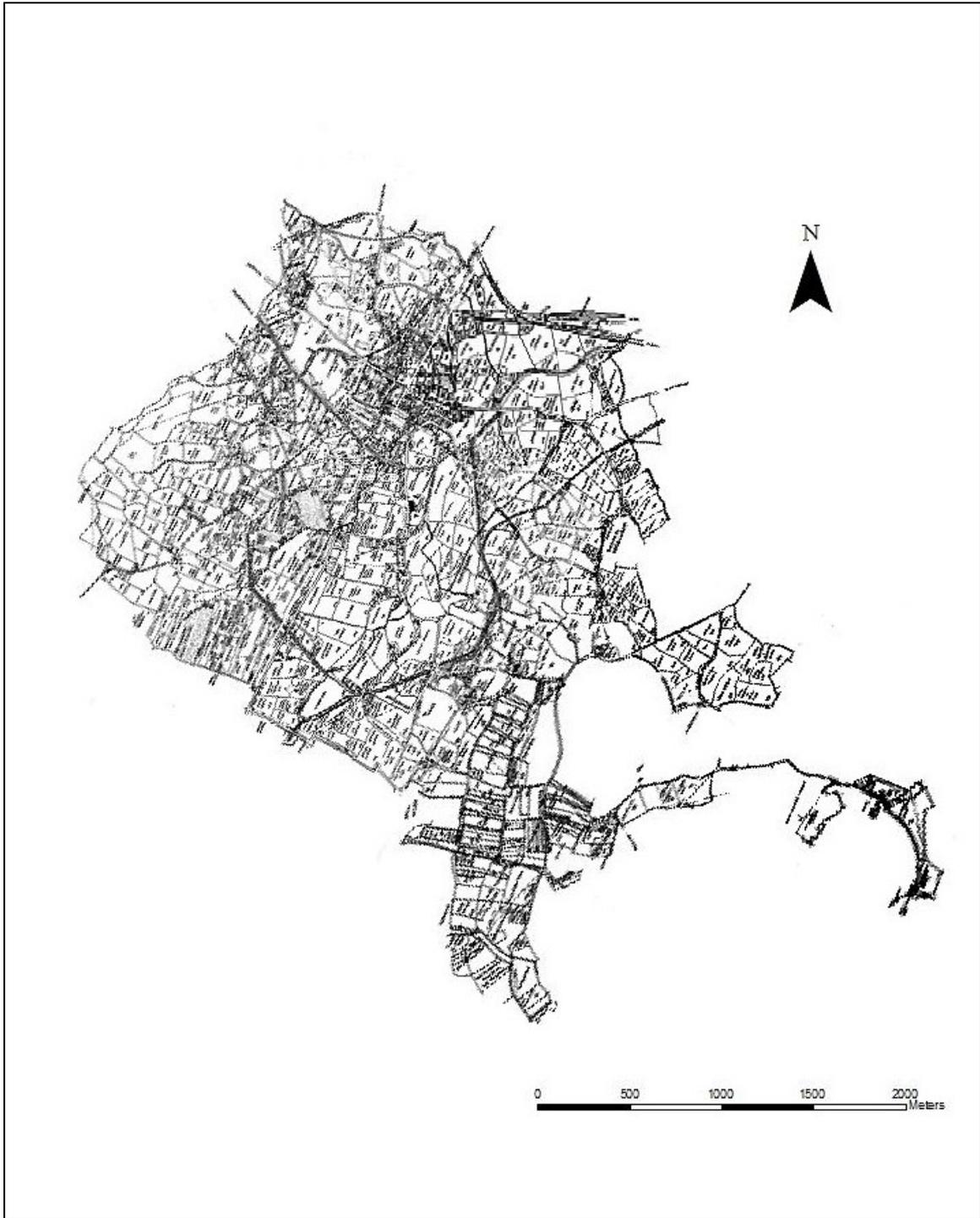
Figure 1 1845 Tithe Map of Oldbury[9]

[9] Houghton, *Tithe Map of the Townships of Oldbury and Langley in the Parish of Halesowen in the County of Salop*, 1845.

Figure 2 1733 Map of Oldbury (Beighton)[10]

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[10] Beighton, *Oldbury in the County of Salop*, 1733.

The landscape provides the focus for a number of historical studies of the West Midlands. *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting*, published in 1950, explores the physical background of the region, including the evolution of settlement before 1700, the industrial revolution and the economic pattern, giving the background to the changes which took place over time in the Birmingham area.[11] Two historians who provide specific information about the West Midlands are Marie Rowlands and Della Hooke who give an overview of the history of the region, including the changing landscape and way of life of the people.[12]

Early evidence for Black Country villages is found in their place names and Margaret Gelling, a leading toponymist, has written a number of informative books on the subject which provide a window into the history and characteristics of the area. Alan Field's parallel research into the meaning of field names has enabled the rural character of the individual villages to be discovered.[13] Archaeological investigations usually provide evidence for key events in the life of a village and a number have been undertaken in the centre of Oldbury. Of these, excavations by Mike Hodder, the borough archaeologist in the 1980s, and a watching brief by Marches Archaeology in 2003 are the most informative.[14] They date the foundation of the town to the early sixteenth century, a period which would prove to be crucial to the development of industrial Oldbury.

A number of these sources were brought together in recent years through the Historic Landscape Characterisation Programme, organised through English Heritage. The

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[11] British Association for the Advancement of Science., *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey*.

[12] Rowlands, M. B., *The West Midlands from AD 1000* (London, 1987); Hooke, *England's Landscape*.

[13] Gelling, M., *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England* (Chichester, 1988); Field, J., *A History of English Field-Names* (London, 1993).

[14] Hodder, M. A., 'Excavations in Oldbury Town Centre, 1967, 1987 and 1988: The Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Settlement', *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society,* 1992, 13**,** 173 - 180; Marches Archaeology Projects, *Watching brief: Civic Square Oldbury, West Midlands.* [Online] (undated), http://www.marches.plus.com/cso.htm, (Accessed: 4/10/2009).

programme came into being as a result of a Government White Paper, produced in 1991, entitled *This Common Inheritance*, which considered environmental issues affecting the UK, and English Heritage was asked to prepare a list of landscapes of historic interest.[15] A historic landscape characterisation was undertaken for the Black Country under this scheme and gives an excellent overview of the industrialisation of the area from the nineteenth century.[16]

A number of historians have written about the individual industries in the Black Country. Particularly important in this respect is the iron industry which, as the major industry in the district, was crucial to the local economy. Thomas Ashton was one of the first to examine its development in a book first published in 1924. In addition to charting the history of the iron industry from the sixteenth century and the move from the use of charcoal to coke in the furnaces, he also includes a chapter on the ironmasters, revealing the importance of the interfamilial links which developed between ironmasters in the Black Country. W. K. V. Gale adds to this information by focusing on the changes that were taking place across the Black Country, and in individual towns and iron works. Peter King presents the statistics behind the growth of iron production in the country, concentrating particularly on bar iron which provided the life blood for the large nail making industry of the area.[17] These provide a basis for a study of the way in which the iron trade developed in the region and how Oldbury fitted into this pattern.

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[15] English Heritage, http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas/characterisation/historic-landscape-character/, (Accessed: 10/08/2012); See Rippon and Clark, *Historic Landscape Analysis: Deciphering the Countryside*, pp. 53 – 55, for a fuller explanation of the research process.
[16] Black Country Archaeology, *The Black Country, A Historic Land Characterisation* [Online] (2008), http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/942826E5-2B5B-4916-99A2-2225FFA48C2B/0/bchlcmainreport.pdf, (Accessed: 7/1/2013).
[17] Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*; Ashton, T. S., *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester, 1951); King, P., 'The Production and Consumption of Bar Iron in Early Modern England and Wales', *The Economic History Review,* 2005, 58**,** 1-33.

2.2 The geology of the area

The defining feature of the landscape of the area, and its primary stimulus for change is found in its geology. The Black Country was located at the southern end of the South Staffordshire Coalfield on the productive 'Thick' or 'Ten Yard Coal' seam and was rich in other mineral deposits; dolerite (Rowley Rag), Etruria Marl, ironstone and limestone were found in a region which largely consisted of mudstone and sandstone. As can be seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, in 1904 about two-thirds of the township of Oldbury lay over the productive coal beds.[18]

The Black Country coal field is crossed by a number of geological faults which defined the limits for a coal field of varying depths. The thick coal outcropped or lay at a shallow depth to the north and east of the area and this led to the early development of mining in this location. The extraction of ironstone and coal was recorded in Dudley as early as 1272, and in Wednesbury in 1315.[19] In the southern Black Country villages, the coal seams ran at a greater depth and they were, therefore, unable to take advantage of their resources until the coal could be safely accessed. This was a major factor in Oldbury's failure to follow the pattern of the other Black Country towns in early industrialisation.

The upper coal measures were covered in a layer of red Etruria or Old Hill Marl from a little south of Wednesbury to Halesowen. This was the source of clay for the manufacture of bricks, especially the Staffordshire blue bricks of Oldbury and Old Hill.   Basalt and dolerite, found in the Rowley Hills to the west of the area, provided the source for road-stone, known locally as Rowley Rag.

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[18] Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*, p.8; Whitehead, T. H. and Gibson, W., *Geological Survey of England and Wales, Second Edition 1904, Staffordshire Sheet LXII NW, Worcestershire Sheet V NW* (Southampton, 1924); Houghton, *Tithe Map of the Townships of Oldbury and Langley in the Parish of Halesowen in the County of Salop*.
[19] Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, p. 27; Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, p. 30.
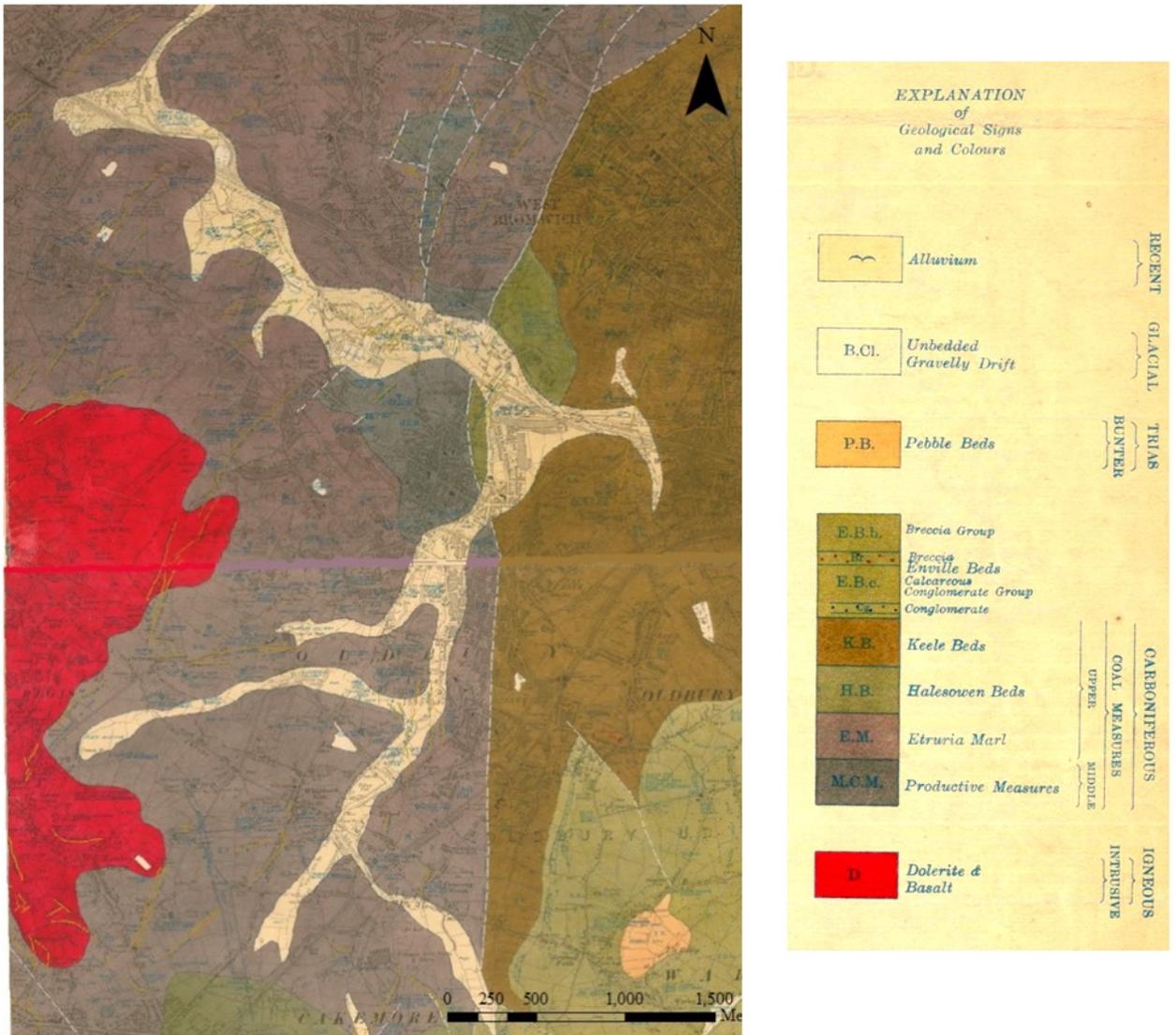
Figure 3 The geology of the Oldbury region (1904)[20]

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[20] Whitehead and Gibson, *Geological Survey of England and Wales, Second Edition 1904, Staffordshire Sheet LXII NW, Worcestershire Sheet V NW*.
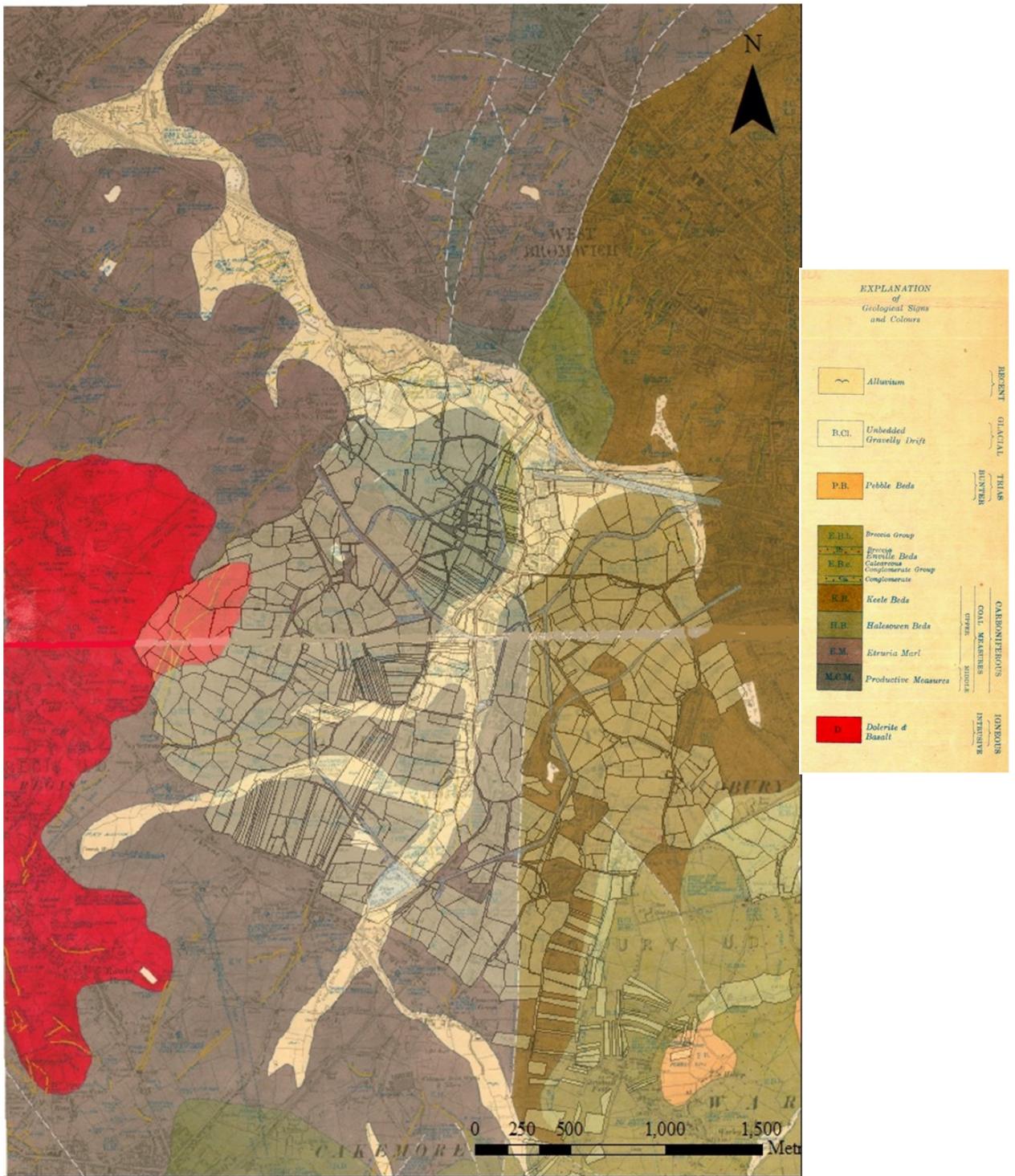
Figure 4 The geology of the Oldbury region superimposed with the Oldbury tithe map[21]

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[21] Ibid.; Houghton, *Tithe Map of the Townships of Oldbury and Langley in the Parish of Halesowen in the County of Salop* constructed by the author using GIS.

Hodder, detailing the geology of the adjoining City of Birmingham, notes that the fault lines make a clear division between different types of landscape, as the underlying geology led to different types of soil (see Figure 5).[22] The area's geology, topography and natural ecological potential had a great effect on how human communities exploited the landscape over the course of its history. Although the mudstone that underlies much of the Black Country provided the clay for brick making, as a soil it was hard to work and led to standing water, whilst the sandstone created sandy soils which, although free draining, did not retain nutrients and were prone to drought. In keeping with similar upland and 'wood-pasture' areas of Britain, this soil led to livestock rather than arable farming. This is confirmed by highlighting the acreage for pasture and meadow on the tithe map which reveals that, in 1845, 61% of land was being used for stock raising and 39% for growing crops (see Figure 6). It is significant that the district was part of a wood pasture region. Wood pasture regions have been linked to proto-industrialisation with recognised features such as an upland community involved in pastoral farming, a history of low seigniorial control and a high level of freehold land ownership with fragmented holdings as a result of partible inheritance customs. While Oldbury fits the majority of these criteria, it is difficult to confirm the pattern of landholding. Information from the 1733 Beighton map indicates that during the early eighteenth century a large amount of land in the village was copyhold. Out of 2,103 acres of land in Oldbury the map records 589 acres as freehold and 927 acres as copyhold. The remaining 587 acres do not record the type of land holding (see Figure 7).

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[22] Hodder, M. A., *Birmingham: The Hidden History* (Stroud, 2004).
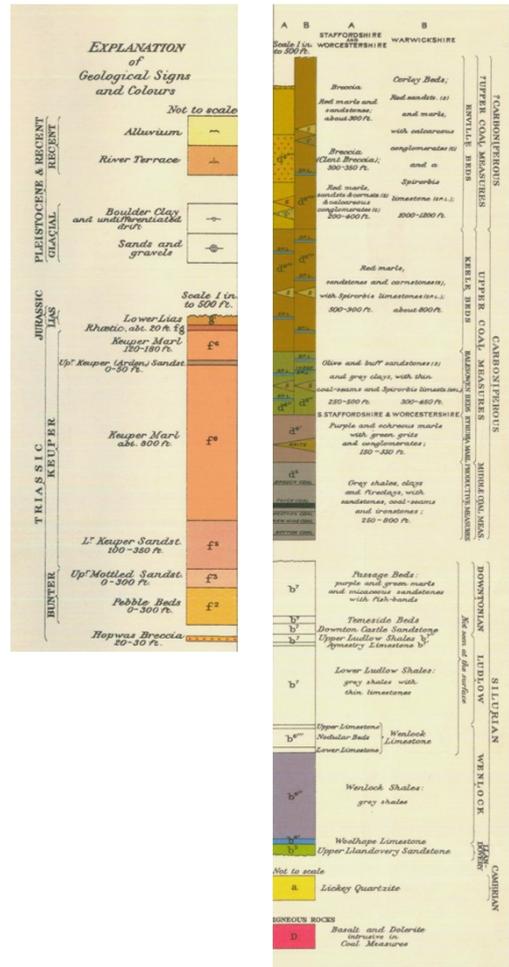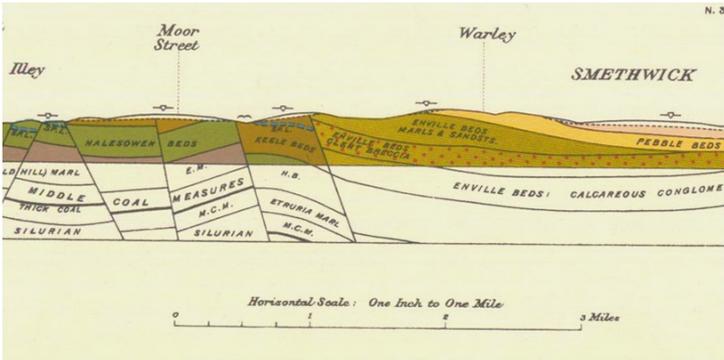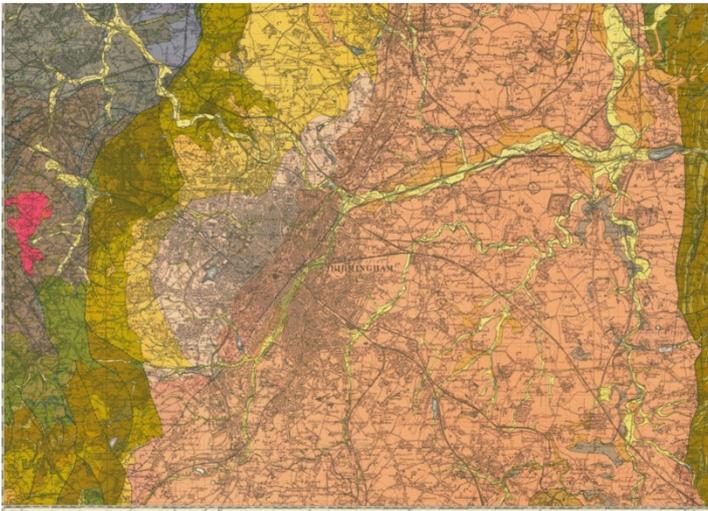
Figure 5 The geology for Birmingham and the Black Country, showing the clear distinction of geological areas caused by the fault lines (1975)[23]

[23] *Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), Solid and Drift. Sheet 167. Dudley* (1975).
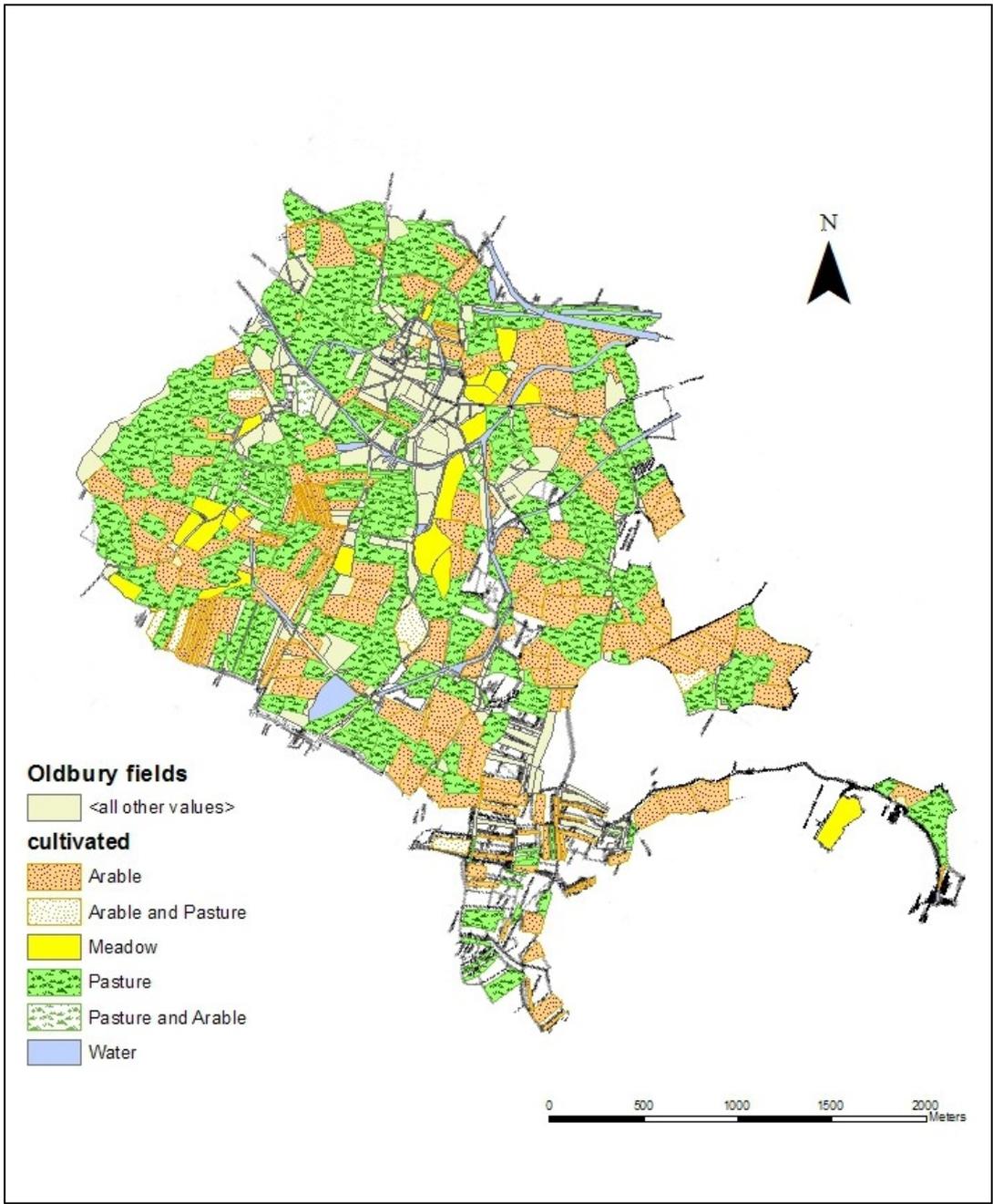
Figure 6 Oldbury tithe map showing land use (1845)[24]

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[24] Houghton, *Tithe Map of the Townships of Oldbury and Langley in the Parish of Halesowen in the County of Salop*, 1845, constructed by the author using GIS.
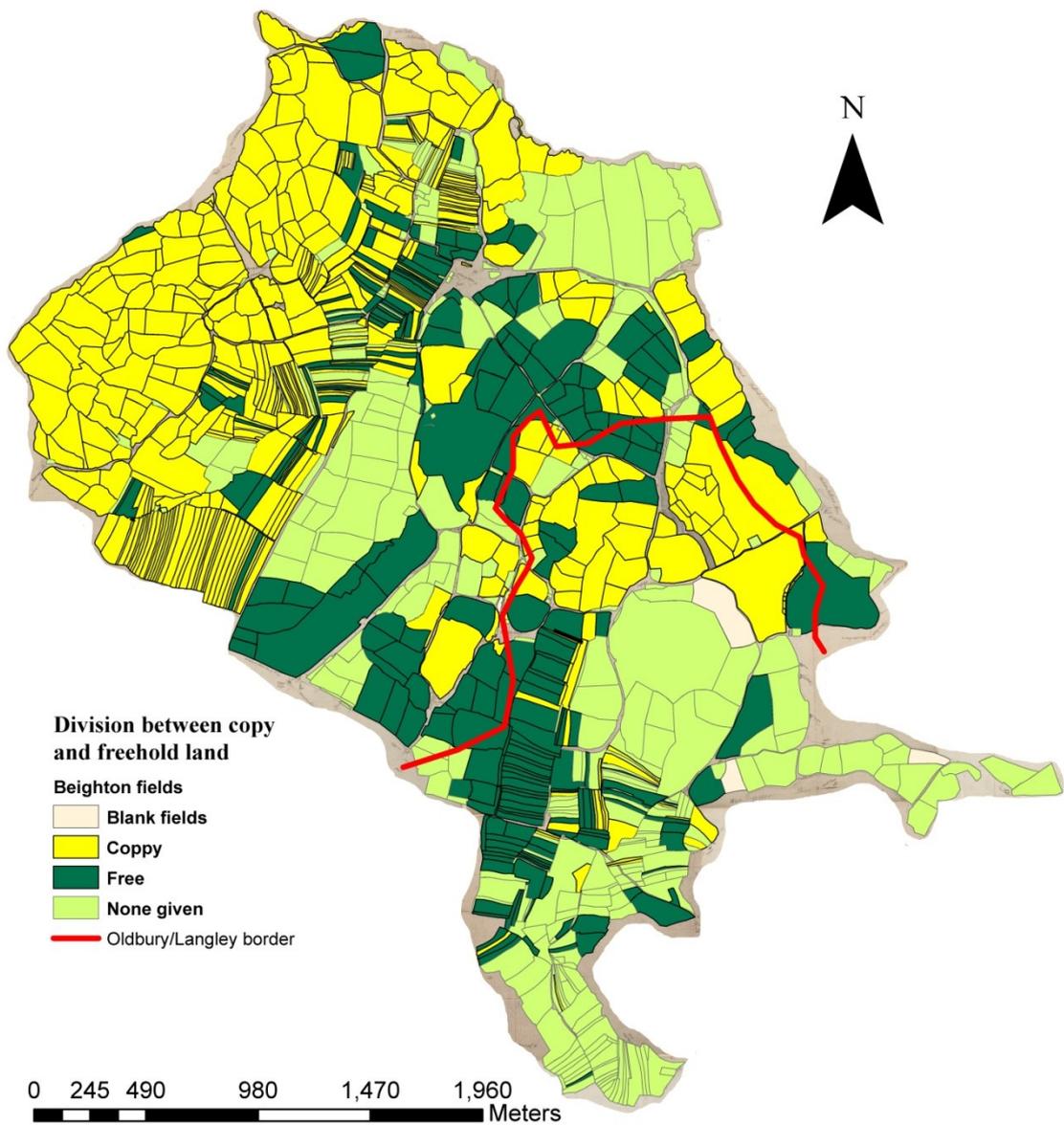
Figure 7 Division between copyhold and freehold land in Oldbury and Langley (1733)[25]

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[25] Beighton, *Oldbury in the County of Salop*, constructed by the author using GIS.

Stobart, Franklin Mendels and Zell all identify the ironworking districts of the West Midlands as following a proto-industrial route.[26]

Franklin Mendels first introduced the concept of proto-industrialisation in 1972. He suggested that the spread of rural domestic manufacturing, organised as a side-line to farming, provided the foundation for the urban industries that followed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[27] Zell investigates the first phase of the process which was the emergence of a network of rural artisans, all engaging in the same trade for a growing market, which was outside that needed by the people in the locality. This was observed to be taking place in a number of areas across the country, for example in the woollen industries of the West Country, the textile industries of Essex and Suffolk, the frame-work knitting industry in Leicestershire and the iron industry of the Weald and the Black Country.[28] Not all of the trades that met the initial criteria went on to experience full industrialisation, and some, like the Weald, actually experienced de-industrialisation.[29] The second phase of proto-industrialisation was the introduction of a level of organisation through a putting-out system, with traders setting up supply lines and marketing for the finished product. This in its turn led to the third phase - a workshop or factory system of production.[30] Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick and Jürgen Schlumbohm identify proto-industrialisation as developing out of a subsistence farming economy where farmers and farm labourers were forced to take up a craft in order to keep above the poverty level and Pauline Frost confirms this in her research for the

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[26] Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60*; Mendels, F. F., 'Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process', *Journal of Economic History,* 1972, 32, 1; Zell, M., *Industry in the Countryside: Wealden Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 2.

[27] Mendels, 'Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process', pp. 241-261, p. 241.

[28] Zell, *Industry in the Countryside: Wealden Society in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 4.

[29] Ibid., p. 2.

[30] Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60,* p. 64.

villages in South Staffordshire.[31] This does not seem necessarily to have been the case,
however, as many of the farmers who were involved in Black Country industry up to the end
of the seventeenth century were from the yeoman classes.[32] The presence of, or access to,
coal has been described as a necessary factor in ensuring that proto-industrialisation could
proceed to full-blown industrialisation over time, a further factor that was met in the Black
Country.[33] David Coleman, while challenging the weight of the proto-industrial theory, also
recognises the importance of natural resources such as coal and iron as key factors in
industrial development in different regions.[34]

2.3 Pre-eighteenth-century industrial experience

Coal was at the heart of industrial growth in Britain; it did not in itself develop as a proto-
industry, changing little in its methods of extraction during the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, but it did provide the power source for the industrialisation process.[35] Coal mining
started in the north of the Black Country from the thirteenth century: in Sedgely from 1273,
Wednesbury from 1315, Wednesfield and Willenhall by 1325 and Bilston by 1401.[36] The
output of these workings would initially have been small and supplied local smiths and, from
the sixteenth century, other small metal-working trades such as nail making and lock
manufacture.[37] There was also evidence of trade as Leland noted the use of 'yren' and 'see

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[31] Kriedte, P*., et al., Industrialization before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 16; Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720', p. 32.
[32] Greenslade, M. W., *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2* (Oxford, 1967), p. 239; BAH, Smythe Etches and Co., later Lee Crowder and Co., Solicitors of Birmingham, 82/2.
[33] Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60*, p. 13.
[34] Coleman, D. C., 'Proto-Industrialization: A Concept Too Many', *Economic History Review, New Series,* August 1983, 36, 435-448, p. 443.
[35] Wrigley, E. A., *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 46.
[36] Greenslade, *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2*, p. 72.
[37] Ibid., p. 73.

coale' from Staffordshire by the smiths of Birmingham around 1543.[38] Ogilby's map of 1675

shows the area around Dudley with several 'cole pitts' and pit mounds (see top of Figure 8

Mining on Ogilby's map (1675)) with one forge being marked on the Smestow brook, just

above Himley (see bottom of Figure 9).[39] This is a marked contrast to the remainder of the

route which is shown passing through unblemished countryside. The Lords of Dudley who,

as Lords of the Manors of Dudley, Himley, Kingswinford, Sedgley and part of Rowley Regis,

had extensive land holdings, were among the first entrepreneurs to exploit the district for its

mineral wealth.[40] They were profit-orientated and had the resources to respond quickly to

innovations. They installed the first blast furnaces at Gornal Wood (1595) and Cradley

(1610), and atmospheric engines to drain water from the mines in 1712.[41] The land around

Dudley contained ironstone, limestone and clay which laid the foundation for the initial

development of the iron industry in the region. The Dudleys were not the only landholders to

be interested in developing their resources; the Lord of the Manor of Wednesbury also used

local minerals. The first coal pits (colepetes) and an iron mine were referred to in the

'Assignment of Dower of Juliana Heronville' in 1315 following the death of her husband.[42]

Whereas the Dudleys controlled and directed the industry from the outset, the inhabitants and

Lord of the Manor of Wednesbury disagreed over who had the rights to the mineral resources

below their land. This led to disputes and riots and legal papers had to be drawn up to protect

the interests of the different parties.[43]

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[38] Smith, L. T. (ed) *The Itinerary of John Leland in or About the Years 1535-1543, Part V* (London, 1964 Edition), p. 97.
[39] Ogilby, J., *Road Maps of England and Wales, Ogilby's Britannia* (Reading, 1675), Map 50.
[40] Raybould, 'Lord Dudley and the Making of the Black Country', p. 53; Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, p. 29; Chitham, E., *Rowley Regis A History* (Chichester, 2006)**,** p. 11.
[41] Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, pp. 28, 30.
[42] William Salt Archaeological Society, 'Inquisitions of John de HeronvilleHarrison and Sons', *Collections of the History of Staffordshire,* 1911, xiv.ns, 8 Edw, 11**,** 319 - 323.
[43] Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, pp. 37, 38.
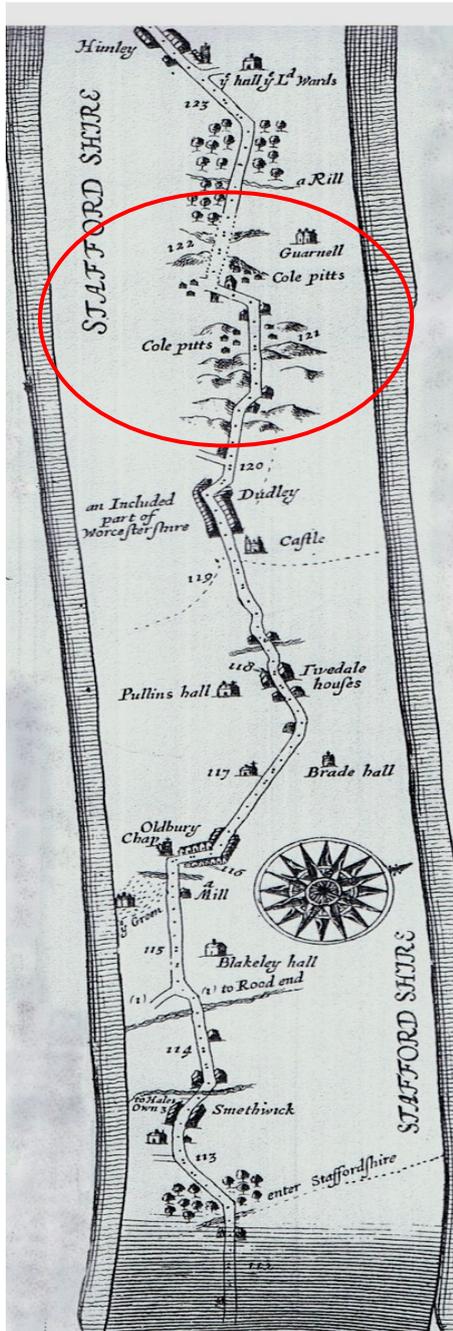
Figure 8 Mining on Ogilby's map (1675)
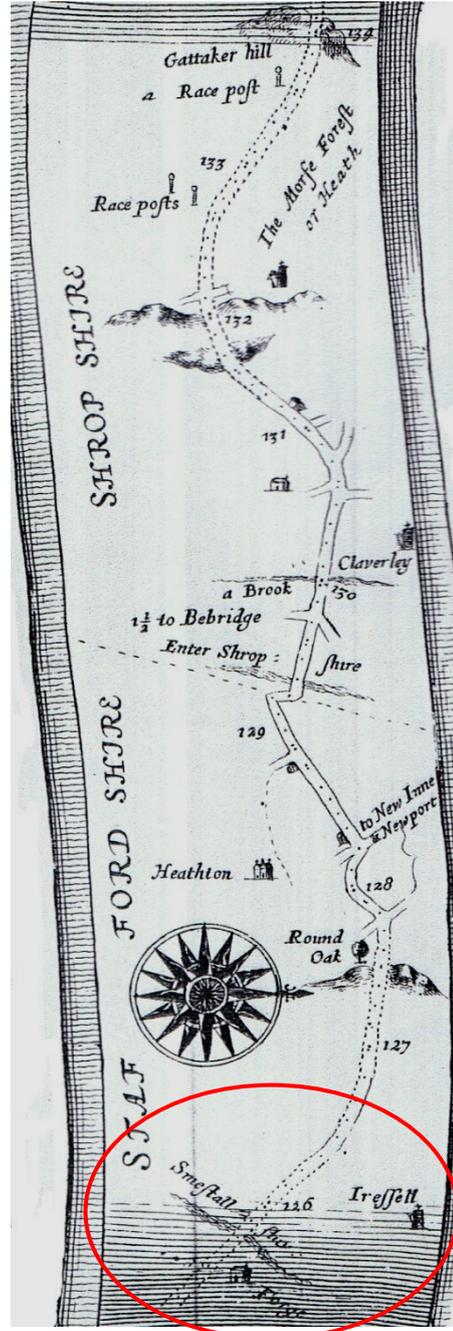
Figure 9 Forge on Ogilby's map (1675) [44]

[44] Ogilby, *Road Maps of England and Wales, Ogilby's Britannia* (1675).

There is also evidence of the influential inhabitants of other towns, such as John Leveson, a leading citizen of Wolverhampton, and one-time Sheriff of Staffordshire, acquiring land in Wednesbury in 1540 to take advantage of the mineral resources.[45]

Land ownership was an important factor in a village's economic development and while the northern Black Country landlords were stabilising their landholdings, in Oldbury a number of changes were taking place. Oldbury was part of Halesowen Manor which had been a royal estate prior to the Norman Conquest when it was granted to Roger Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury. This explains why Oldbury along with Halesowen was removed from Worcester and put under the administration of Shropshire from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries. This decision had important repercussions throughout the history of Oldbury, as it became an isolated part of another county with an absent landlord.

Parish boundaries did not necessarily move with the change of land ownership and Oldbury along with Halesowen continued to be under the diocese of Worcester.[46] This split between parish, manor and county had an effect on Oldbury throughout its history as the divisions involved the population in a number of different communities: their own township, the ecclesiastical community of the parish church in Halesowen, the manor and the county.[47] Whilst Oldbury was undergoing a series of changes of government and was subject to pulls in different directions, the majority of the Black Country towns remained in a more stable situation in one county and with one governing family. This could certainly be a factor in Oldbury's failure to keep pace industrially with the other Black Country villages. When industrialisation began in the area it was on the periphery of, yet answerable to, a number of

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[45] Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, p. 115.
[46] Hunt, *A History of Halesowen*, p. 115.
[47] Johnson, M., *An Archaeology of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1996), p. 30.

different authorities who had separate expectations and requirements of the village and its people.

The change in landholding which would make the most difference to Oldbury occurred in 1215 when the Manor of Hales was granted by King John to Peter Rupibas, Bishop of Winchester, to build a religious house. The Abbot of Halesowen Abbey held the position of Lord of the Manor from 1218 to the Abbey's dissolution in 1538 as an industrious, albeit disliked, landlord.[48] For the first time in its history the manor had resident overlords who would bring their authority and influence to bear on the landscape and the lives of the people. The monks set to work to improve the landscape and extend its farming possibilities by draining the fields, erecting corn mills, setting up granges, and digging pools to raise fish.

Two important events occurred during the time that Oldbury was part of Halesowen Manor which laid the foundation for its industrial future: the Black Death and the move of the village to another location. The effects of the Black Death, which appeared in the manor in May 1349, were devastating with an estimated 40% of tenants dying during a six-month period.[49] Family or other land-deficient villagers took much of the vacant land, but it also opened the opportunity for well-off villagers to increase their holdings.[50] In Oldbury, four wealthy villagers leased the five open fields and holdings were divided to enable children to marry and have their own land.[51]

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[48] Homans, G. C., *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass, 1941).
[49] Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society and Demography in Halesowen, 1270-1400*, pp. 41, 45, 103.
[50] Ibid., p. 122.
[51] Razi, Z. 'The Peasants of Halesowen 1270 – 1400 A Social, Economic and Demographic Study' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1976), pp. 186, 249; Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society and Demography in Halesowen, 1270-1400*, p. 113; Hunt, *A History of Halesowen*, p. 11.

Figure 10

Six families

Legend	
(white)	\<all other values\>
(green)	Houghton
(green)	Houghton, B M and others
(green)	Houghton, B and others
(green)	Houghton, Boydle and others
(green)	Houghton, Dugdale
(green)	Houghton, Dugdale and Corker, Charles
(green)	Houghton, John Trustees
(green)	Houghton, Matthew
(green)	Houghton, Messrs
(green)	Houghton, Voughton
(green)	Houghton, and others
(dark red)	Hunt, Thoms, Yale
(dark red)	Hunt, Samuel
(dark red)	Hunt, Samuel and Thoms
(dark red)	Hunt, Samuel and others
(dark red)	Hunt, William and sons
(blue)	Jones, George
(blue)	Jones, Thomas and others
(blue)	Jones, William
(magenta)	Nicklin, Hannah
(magenta)	Nicklin, Hannah and others
(magenta)	Nicklin, John
(magenta)	Nicklin, Samuel
(yellow)	Willetts Trustee
(yellow)	Willetts, Samuel
(yellow)	Willetts, Thomas Trustee
(yellow)	Willetts, Thomas Trustee, James, William
(red)	Williams, John and Badger, Thomas
(red)	Williams, Walter

0 237.5 475 950 1,425 1,900
Metres

Figure 10 Land held by six families in Oldbury (1845)[52]

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[52] Houghton, *Tithe Map of the Townships of Oldbury and Langley in the Parish of Halesowen in the County of Salop*, 1845 Constructed by the author using GIS.

47

As will be seen later, the spread of industrialisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries placed these landholders in a lucrative position, as they were able to mine the land themselves or gain an income by leasing it out for others to mine. Although many families benefited from this situation, Razi notes that a secondary effect was to widen the gap between the rich and poor.[53]

A further important event for Oldbury was the move of the village from a previous location. Hodder dated the emergence of the village in its present position as late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, from archaeological excavations in the 1960s and 1980s.[54] However, no research has taken place to discover its original location or identify why a move took place. Etymologists identify the name 'Oldbury' as meaning an ancient burh or fortified place and suggest 'Bury Hill' as the most likely location for a burh and in particular a field called 'The Castle'.[55] Christopher Dyer has identified the presence of permanent populations living adjacent to Iron Age hill forts in Shropshire and Gloucestershire[56] and it seems reasonable to assume that the original village of Oldbury was part of this pattern.

Razi, from his study of Halesowen Manor Rolls, identifies Oldbury as one of the two largest settlements in the parish.[57] The historian Treadway Nash visited Oldbury in 1781 and records that there was a strong tradition in the village that the ruins of a town had existed at the foot of Bury Hill in the late seventeenth century.[58] In order to verify this, field name data and historic maps were imported into GIS, the analysis of which appears to support this belief. Many

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[53] Razi 'The Peasants of Halesowen 1270 – 1400 A Social, Economic and Demographic Study', p. 249.
[54] Hodder, 'Excavations in Oldbury Town Centre, 1967, 1987 and 1988: The Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Settlement'.
[55] Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, p. 144.
[56] Dyer, C., 'Woodlands and Wood-Pasture in Western England', in: Thirsk (ed) *The English Rural Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 100, 101.
[57] Nash, *Collections for the History of Worcestershire, Volume 1*;Razi, Z., 'The struggles between the Abbots of Halesowen and their Tenants in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', in: Aston (ed) *Social Relations and Ideas, Essays in Honour of R H Hilton* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 154.
[58] Nash, *Collections for the History of Worcestershire, Volume 1,* p. 521.

unusual and specific field names are grouped in this location: a 'holloway', an ancient road

hollowed into the landscape through continuous use; farms and homesteads spread out in a

dispersed original settlement with vast open fields lying close by; evidence of early village

administration in a field called 'Battle Oak' which would have been the place where public

affairs were conducted for the community; and the location of the Manor fish pools (see

Figure 11 and Figure 12).[59]

Although no exact dating for the move of the village has been discovered, there are a number

of factors which support the archaeological evidence of a move during the late fifteenth and

early sixteenth century, during the time when the village was under the lordship of the monks

of Halesowen Abbey. At some time prior to the move of the village a road was constructed

across the area, leading from London to Holyhead and passing through important towns such

as Shrewsbury on the route. Kip's (1607) and Speed's (1610) maps of Staffordshire show this

as the only road crossing the area at that date and was an important routeway. The 'chappel',

which was built by the people of Oldbury in 1529, is marked on the map (see Figure 13).[60]

Ogilby's road map, published in 1675, shows Oldbury as a nucleated village of around 24

houses bordering this road (see Figure 14).[61] Hodder identified this main road as the current

Church Street and West Bromwich Street and suggested that settlement took place along

Church Street during the late fifteenth, early sixteenth century in keeping with the pattern of

habitation shown on Ogilby's map.[62]

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[59] Muir, *The New Reading the Landscape: Fieldwork in Landscape History*, p. 194; Field, *A History of English Field-Names*, p. 238.
[60] Evans, G. E., *The Registers of The Old Dissenting Chapel Oldbury, 1715 - 1745, 1759 -1813* (1900); Kip, W., *Map of Staffordshire* (1607); Speed, J., *Map of Staffordshire* (1610).
[61] Ogilby, *Road Maps of England and Wales, Ogilby's Britannia*.
[62] Hodder, 'Excavations in Oldbury Town Centre, 1967, 1987 and 1988: The Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Settlement', p. 178.

Figure 11 Early village features in landscape[63]

The map contains the following labels:

- London to Shrewsbury road
- Brades
- Peck Row
- castle hill and upper fallings
- Old pasture
- 'U' flint scraper
- Farm
- The mowing moor
- The Holloway
- The Spring Hill
- Pool Leasow
- Battle Oak
- Hare Croft
- Deer Croft
- The Holloway
- Farm
- Oak woods
- well leasow
- Farm
- Dutch croft
- Cow meadow
- Park
- Milking Leasow
- Neolithic stone axe
- Mucheleasow
- Manor fishpool
- Monmore
- Cat Park
- Horse piece

Pre C19 landscape

- ⊙ spot find
- —— early roads
- —— open fields
- —— early village site

0 90 180 360 540 720
Meters

[63] Constructed by the author using GIS using the tithe map of 1845 layered over Dawson, R., *Ordnance Survey Drawing, Wolverhampton Sheet OSD 212* (1816)

Figure 12 Projection of Oldbury before the dissolution of the monasteries, shown in situ.[64]

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[64] Constructed by the author using GIS.

Figure 13 Kip's 1607 map of Staffordshire
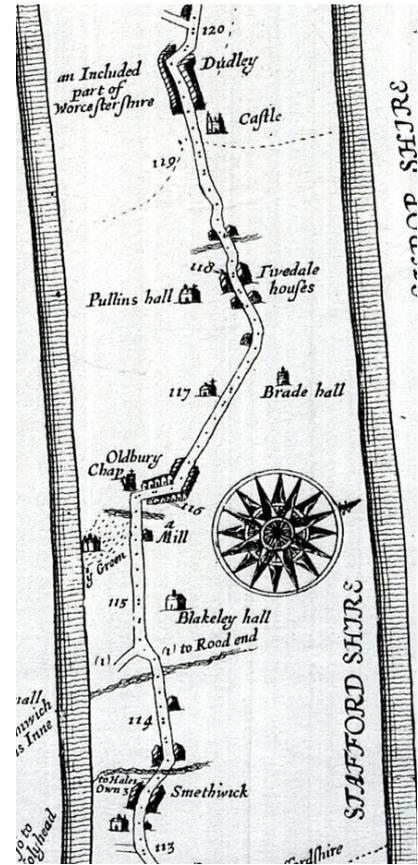
Figure 14 Ogilby's 1675 road map

The layout of the road and the village in the 1733 Beighton map confirms this and indicates that the village was purposefully moved to its current location. The road cuts across the village's open-field system, following the orientation of the open-field boundaries and weaving among the strips, which accounts for the unusual dog-leg bend in the centre of the town on all the maps into the twentieth century (see Figure 15 and Figure 16).[65]

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[65] Dawson, *Ordnance Survey Drawing, Wolverhampton Sheet OSD 212*; Muir, *The New Reading the Landscape: Fieldwork in Landscape History*, p. 91.
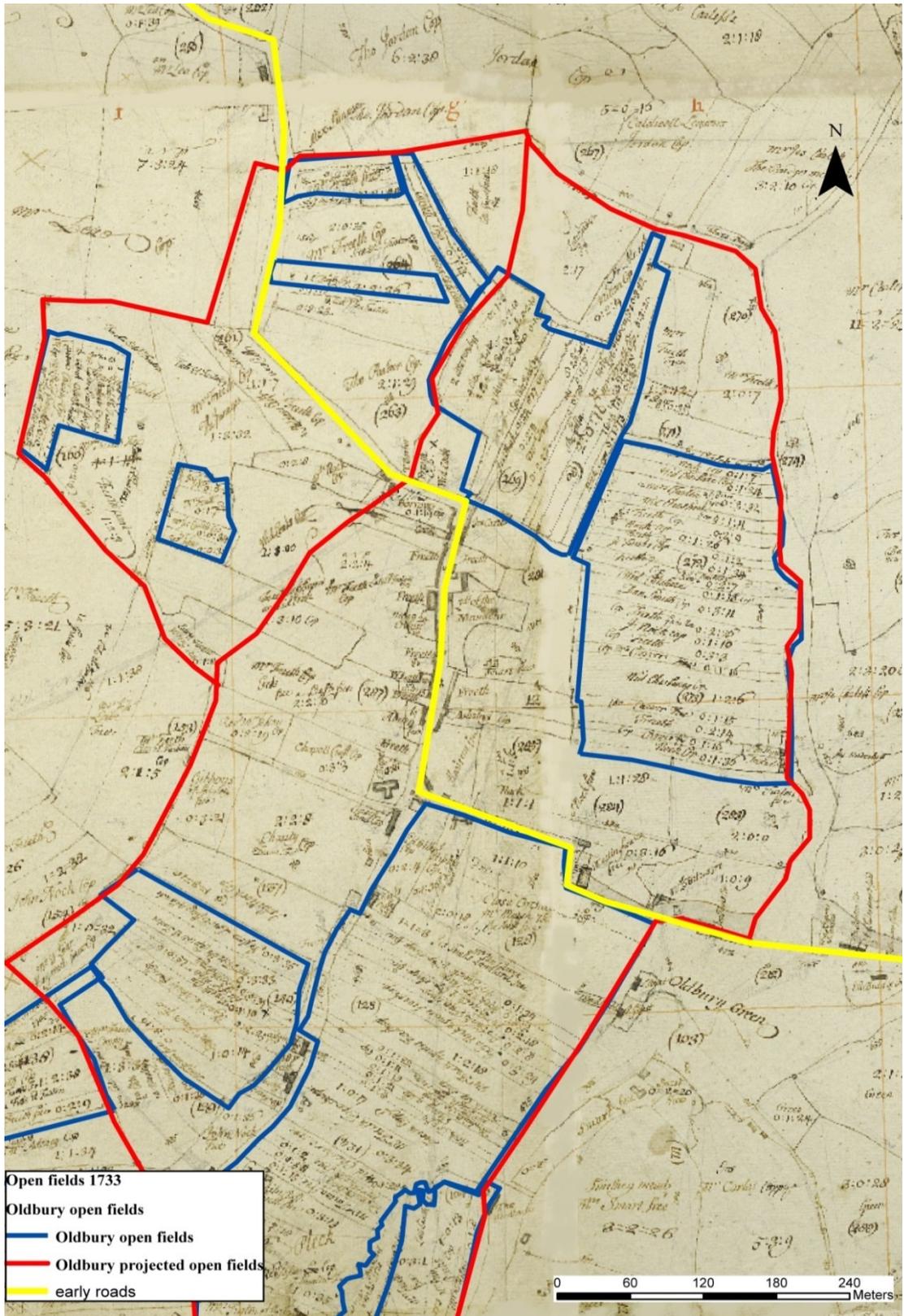
Figure 15 The London to Holyhead road on the Beighton map[66]

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[66] Beighton, *Oldbury in the County of Salop*, constructed by the author using GIS.

Figure 16 Oldbury Green among the open fields from the Beighton Map (1733)[67]

A relocation of the village from an economically unattractive situation on the hillside   a

position alongside the major road in the district would have been very important to the Abbey,

enabling it to take advantage of the commercial possibilities. With a national reliance on the

road network for the movement of people and goods, and with an established trade in coal

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[67] Ibid.

from the north of the Black Country to Birmingham, this situation was an important one.[68]

The new location was near to the Abbey Grange and mill, would also have assisted in the administration of the developing village. The supposition is that the monks of the Abbey were intent upon making the best use of the road, by taking tolls for goods passing through, providing hospitality services to travellers, or joining in the industrial activity themselves. As a result, the potential for industrialisation was great. At the time of the Dissolution Oldbury was, therefore part of a busy pastoral farming manor with a growing population in an advantageous location alongside one of the major roads in the district and on the threshold of developing industrially. However, the next few years would bring a complete change for the village, dissolving many of the ties and traditions linking it with its former manor.

With the dissolution of the monastery in 1538 Oldbury went from a high to a low level of seigniorial control almost overnight. The new landlord was Sir John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, who had his base at Dudley Castle. Oldbury was made a manor in its own right but, apart from the period when the Cornwallis family held the manor, in the first half of the seventeenth century, few of the Lords of the Manor actually resided in the village. The new landlords did not appear to be interested in developing Oldbury. At a time when other landlords in the area were already moving industry forward, they appear to have been a force for retardation. Their main concern with land and property exchanges checked any emerging industrial developments. Joan Thirsk makes the point, however, that the population of any community would respond to changing social, economic and political considerations by changing its farming systems and this is what the people of Oldbury appear to have done.[69] With no seigniorial interest in setting up industrial concerns the local community began to

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[68] Thrift, N., 'Transport and Communication, 1730 - 1914', in: Dodgshon and Butlin (eds), *An Historical Geography of England and Wales* (London, 1978), 453 – 486, p. 454.
[69] Thirsk, J. and Economic History Society, *Agricultural regions and agrarian history in England, 1500-1750* (Basingstoke, 1987), p. 15.

improve their farming techniques to secure an income.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the villages in the north of the Black Country were undergoing a totally different experience. Coal mining proceeded apace and the ground was littered with shallow pits which were dug to extract the coal and abandoned when the limits of the coal had been reached - the first indication of the landscape dereliction that was to follow.[70] As the outcropping coal ran out, shafts were dug in all parts of the area to access the coal located near to the surface.[71] Ironstone was found beneath the coal and was often mined with it, leading to a number of emerging industrialists adapting local mills for iron production from the sixteenth century onwards.[72] The change in the use of mills gives an insight into the way that industrialisation was spreading through the area. Douglas Dilworth identifies forty-nine mills on the Tame in the area north of Birmingham (see Appendix 1), three of which were in Oldbury with a further mill (Bromford/Oldbury Mill) on the border with West Bromwich (see Figure 17).[73]

One of the early indications of Oldbury's industrial future occurred in the change of use of Bromford Mill. It started life as a corn mill in 1272 and became one of seventeen bloomeries operating in South Staffordshire in the sixteenth century.[74] Its change of use continued with its conversion into a blade mill in 1610, an iron forge or flattening mill in 1694, a grinding mill in 1772, and a wire mill in 1780.[75] This was the only one of the Oldbury mills to convert to iron working, perhaps due to the lack of interest in industrial development on the part of the landlords, as the others remained as corn or malt mills.

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[70] Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, p. 113.
[71] Ibid., p. 120.
[72] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 108.
[73] Ibid., p. 174.
[74] King 'The Iron Trade in England and Wales 1500 – 1815: The Charcoal Iron Industry and Its Transition to Coke', pp. 342 -347.
[75] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 174.
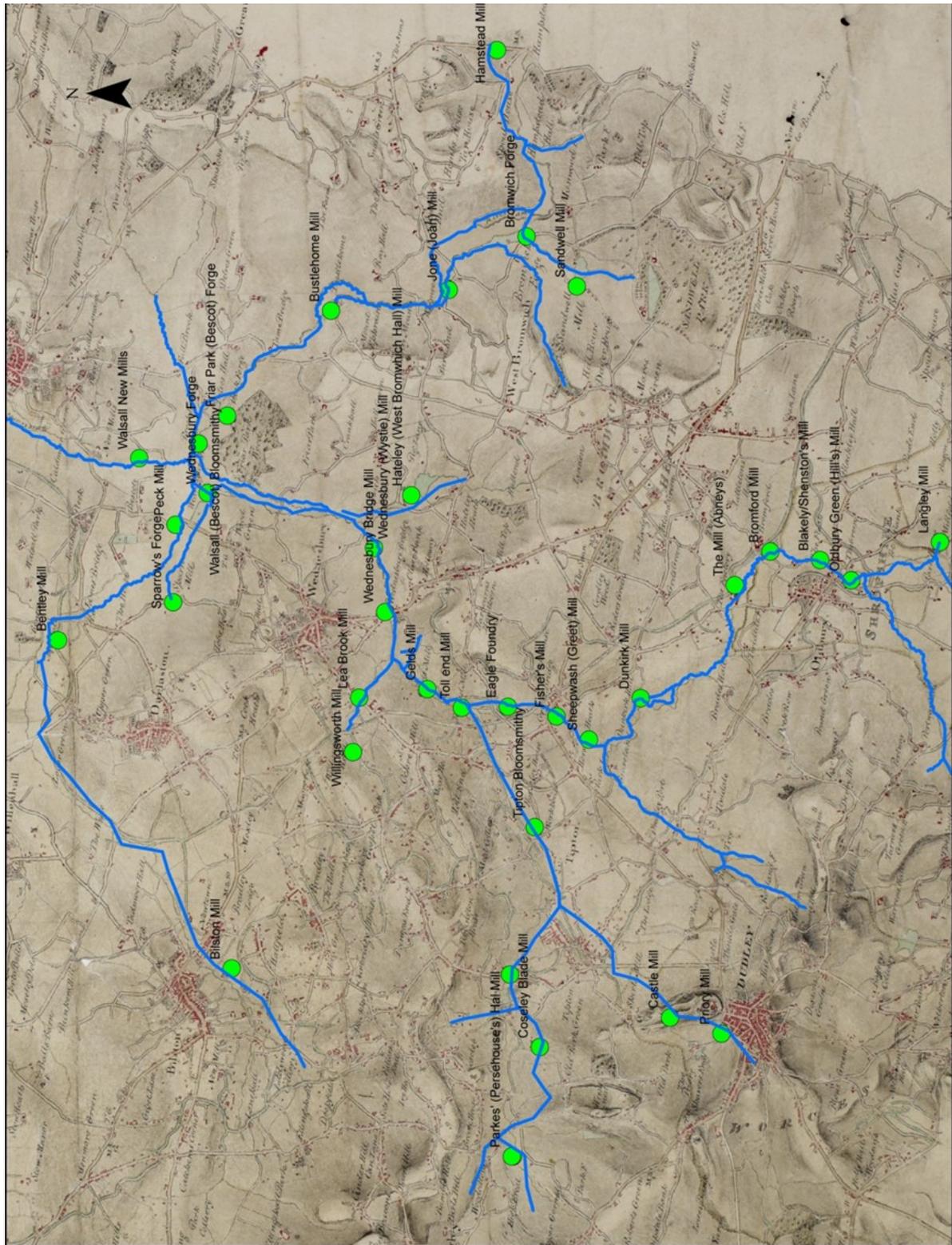
Figure 17 Mills on the Tame as it passes through the Black Country[76]

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[76] The mapping for the course of the tributaries to the River Tame has been plotted from the two oldest maps currently located for the area: the *Ordnance Survey Map of Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Map no 139, 1831 - 1835* (Southampton, 2006), and the unpublished Dawson, *Ordnance Survey Drawing, Wolverhampton Sheet OSD 212* on which the former was based. The map in Dilworth's book has been digitised and superimposed to locate the position of the mills.

The change of use, from grinding corn to iron work, and the erection of mills specifically for the iron trade revealed the development of industrialisation in the district over time (see Figure 18 Industrial uses of mills on the River Tame (1086-1834)). The northern villages of Tipton, Walsall and Wednesbury were the first in the Black Country to have mills built specifically for iron working, in 1279, 1306 and 1315 respectively. Wednesbury and West Bromwich were among the first to convert existing corn mills to iron-working during the seventeenth century where water power was used to drive the furnace bellows (see Appendix 1).[77] The amount of iron produced, however, was small and almost certainly supplied only local demands. The earliest national producer of bar iron in England was the Weald in the sixteenth century. King, using records from 300 forges across England and Wales, records villages in the northern half of the country beginning to produce iron in increasing quantities from the 1560s, including those in the Black Country.[78] The Weald continued to be the main British supplier until the eighteenth century, however, when the switch from charcoal-produced iron to that made with coke took place. Local iron was suitable for making nails, locks, hinges, knives and scythes; other iron-ware was manufactured using imported iron of a better quality. Much of this came from the Weald, but King also records imports from Spain and the Baltic in the fifteenth century, Sweden from the early 1630s and Russia from the 1730s. Little iron or iron-ware was exported from Britain before the sixteenth century.[79] From the seventeenth century, the iron industry began to expand, with iron slitting, lock making and nail making recorded in the area.

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[77] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 185.
[78] King, 'The Production and Consumption of Bar Iron in Early Modern England and Wales', p. 6.
[79] Ibid., pp. 4, 17, 18.
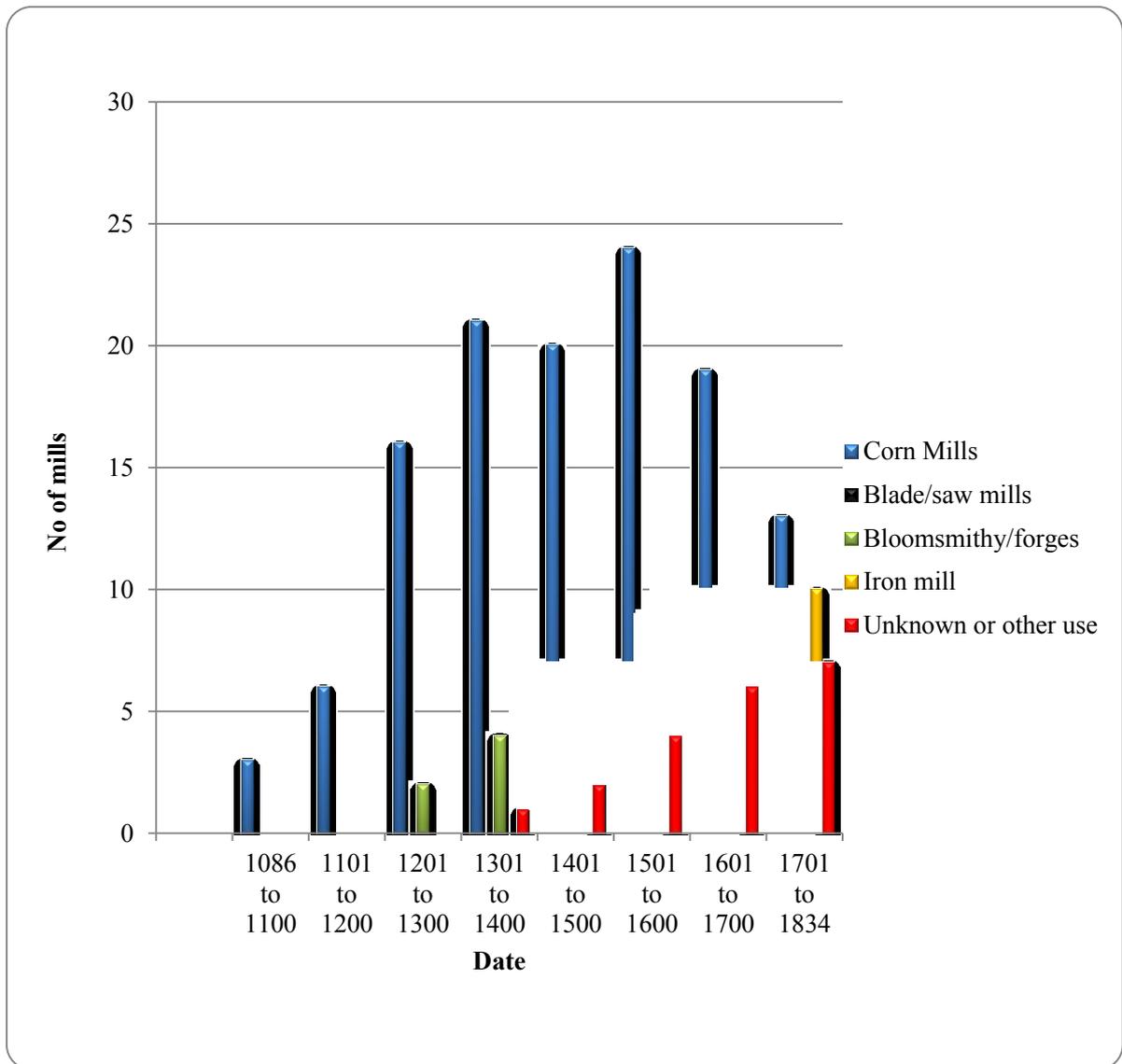
Figure 18 Industrial uses of mills on the River Tame (1086-1834)[80]

Specialisation was already in evidence with lorimers based in Walsall and lockmakers in

Willenhall.[81] In 1780 *Pearson and Rollaston's Directory of Birmingham and District* records

that 159 out of the 206 entries for Willenhall were for people involved in the lock-making

trade.[82] Slitting mills were introduced into the Stourbridge district by Richard Foley in 1628,

and in 1650 when his son took over Bustleholme Mill in West Bromwich it was converted to

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[80] Compiled by the author from data taken from Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire.*
[81] Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600-1838*, p. 26.
[82] Pearson and Rollaston, *Directory of Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley, Bilston and Willenhall* (London, 1780).

this purpose. It was used until the beginning of the nineteenth century and provided much of the rod for nail making in the area, alongside Wednesbury.[83]

Well before the eighteenth century, therefore, several of the northern Black Country villages were involved in both extractive and primary industries, whereas the experience of the southern villages of Oldbury, West Bromwich, Smethwick and Rowley Regis was markedly different. Coal lay at a deeper level in this region and the southern villages on the coalfield were unable to participate in coal and ironstone mining until a means had been found to mine safely at a greater depth (see Figure 19).

All four villages began from a similar pattern of dispersed settlements and individual farmhouses in an agricultural landscape, but only one of the villages, West Bromwich, had landlords who were interested in industrialisation. The Lords of the Manor of West Bromwich, in a similar way to those of Wednesbury, controlled the early industrial development, gave permission for enterprises to be set up, and entered into industrial activity themselves.[84] Though they were unable to access their mineral resources until the eighteenth century, this did not restrict industrial development. The Lords of the Manor and key landowners turned their attention to the processing of iron: new forges were built in 1567 and 1594, and all but two of their existing mills were converted for iron manufacture.[85] Although West Bromwich had the initial disadvantage of not being on a major road, and continued to develop as a dispersed settlement, a number of influential families such as the Turtons and Jessons began to advance their own industrial concerns.[86]

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[83] Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600-1838*, p. 22.
[84] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, p. 33; Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, pp. 40, 41.
[85] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, p. 57; Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 40.
[86] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, pp. 41-42, 54-55; Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, pp. 47, 163.
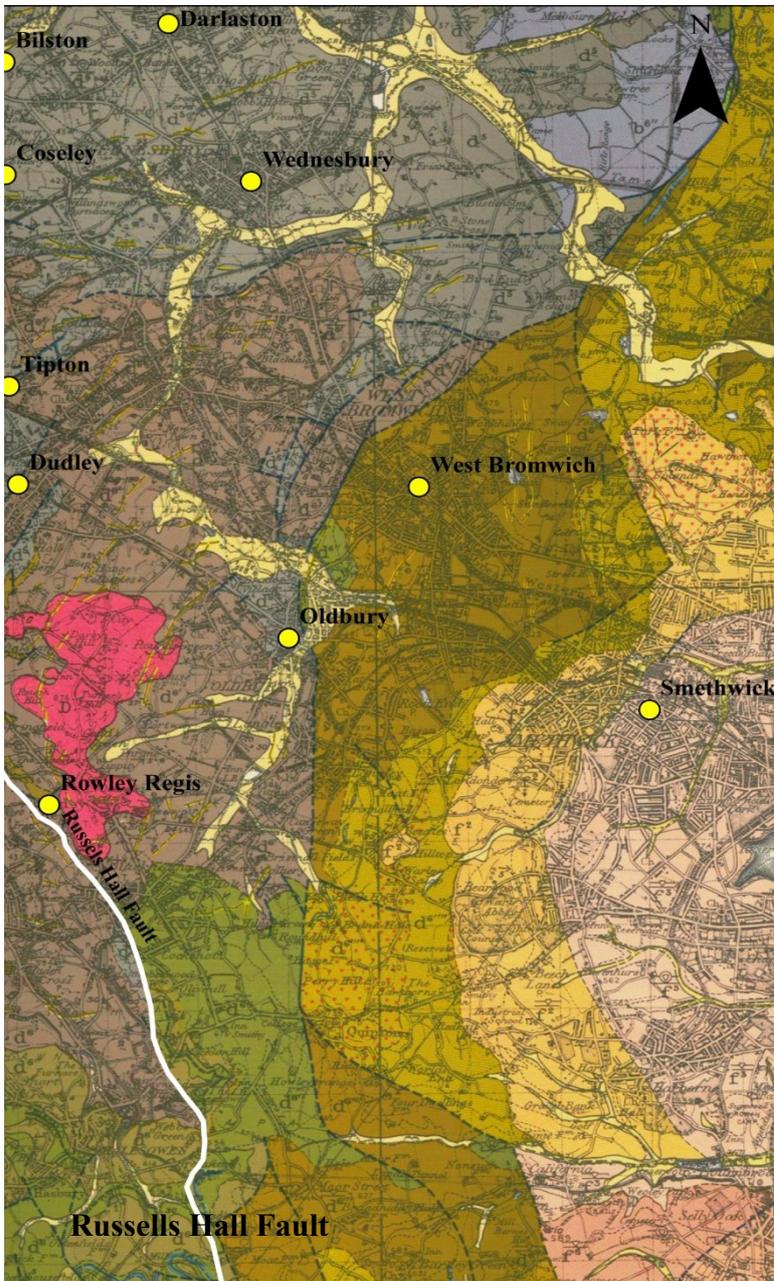
Figure 19 Villages on the coal field (1975)[87]
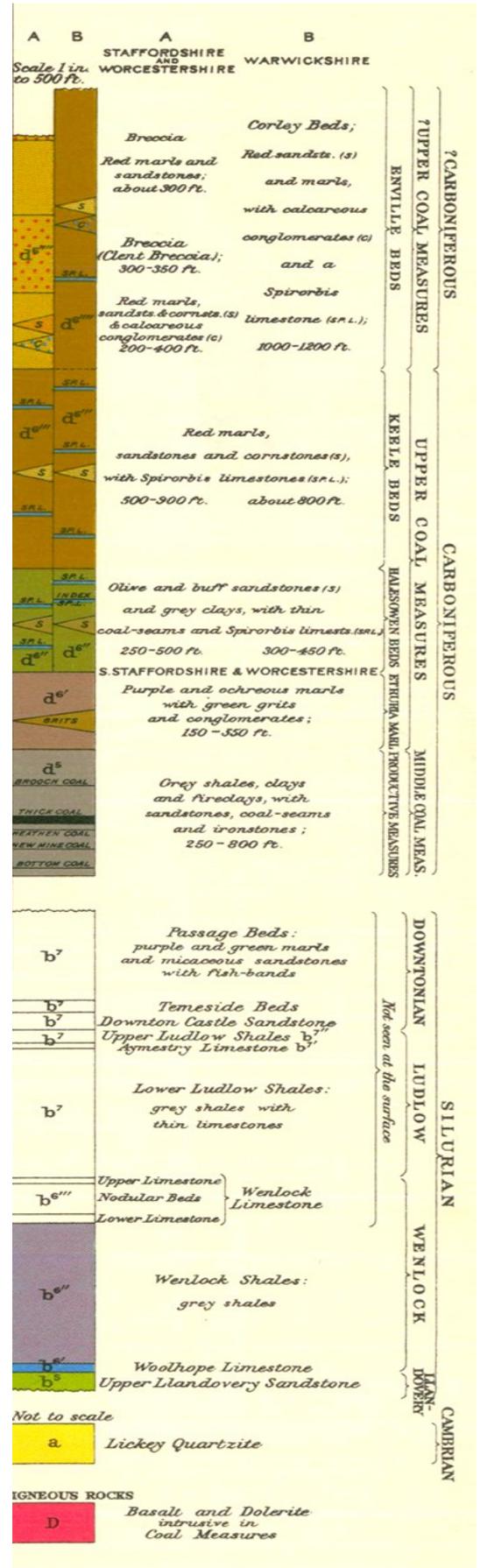
[87] *Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), Solid and Drift. Sheet 167. Dudley* (1975).

The landlords of Oldbury were obviously aware of the industrial possibilities but did not develop them. In 1607, Robert Robsart, son of the Lord of the Manor, asked one of his customary tenants, William Tuncky, to take the draught well he was sinking to a greater depth. He wanted to see if there were any coals there, as other tenants had dug in the same place and found coal. However, nothing further seems to have come from this.[88] In 1610, the manor was in the possession of William Turton, a member of a family of nail masters who dealt in nail rod and owned a number of mills in the area. They were typical of the growing rank of tradesmen who were taking advantage of the early industrialisation of the region to increase their landholdings, profit financially and advance in status by becoming part of the middle classes.[89] Turton sold the manor after seven years but kept Bromford Mill which was converted into a blade mill, and some copyhold land on which he dug for coal.[90] Apart from isolated cases such as this, little use appears to have been made of Oldbury's natural resources during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The other two villages, Smethwick in Harborne and Rowley Regis, divided between Clent and Dudley, were in a similar position to Oldbury with no resident Lord of the Manor.[91] The main industry for these southern villages was nail making which was recorded in the area from the sixteenth century and provided the proto-industry upon which the area's future iron industry was built.[92]

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[88] Page, W. (ed) *The Victoria History of Shropshire* (London, 1908), p. 460.
[89] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 163.
[90] Ibid., p. 174; Page (ed) *The Victoria History of Shropshire* , p. 459.
[91] Greenslade (ed) *A History of the County of Stafford, Volume 17* , p. 98, 99.
[92] Hackwood, F. W., *Some Records of Smethwick* (original publication 1896) (Warwickshire, 2001), pp. 1- 2; Greenslade (ed) *A History of the County of Stafford, Volume 17* ; Chitham, *Rowley Regis A History*, p. 71.

Nail making began as a domestic industry when freeholders and copyholders set up nail shops next to their homes.[93] It was a trade that was relatively unskilled, easy to learn, and could be worked in partnership with agriculture as and when the need arose and was recorded in Oldbury from the fifteenth century.[94] Of the thirty-three men who completed the Lay Subsidy Roll for Oldbury and Langley in 1661, eighteen of them were nailers.[95] This was in line with the experience of other upland stock-rearing areas in Britain, such as Sheffield, where metal-smiths combined metal work with stock rearing.[96] In addition to providing a workshop, the nail maker provided his tools - anvil, hammers, vices and bellows - which Marie Rowlands estimates from probate records cost around £1 in the mid-sixteenth century.[97] This was the equivalent of about 20 days' wages for a craftsman in the building trade.[98] The iron used for nail rod was available locally, while the higher grade ore used in industries like the edge-tool trade was imported from the Forest of Dean via the Stour valley.[99] Ironmongers purchased the nail rod from the mills and forges and set up warehouses in the different villages. Initially, the nail maker was his own master, buying the rod from the ironmonger and delivering the finished nails to him at the end of the week.[100] The nail making industry attracted a large number of people to the area.[101] The extent of this migration was attested in

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[93] Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720', p. 32; BAH, Smythe Etches and Co., later Lee Crowder and Co., Solicitors of Birmingham, 82/2.
[94] Hey, 'The Rural Metalworkers of the Sheffield Region: A Study of Rural Industry Before the Industrial Revolution', p. 32.
[95] Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720', p. 2; TNA, E/179/260/4, Warley Wigorn Hearth Taxes for 1662, 1664 and Later Unspecified Year.
[96] Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720', pp. 30, 296; Hey, 'The Rural Metalworkers of the Sheffield Region: A Study of Rural Industry Before the Industrial Revolution', p. 18.
[97] Rowlands, *The West Midlands from AD 1000*, p. 143.
[98] The National Archives, *Currency Converter* [Online] http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid, (Accessed: 10/09/2012).
[99] Rowlands, M. B., *Masters and Men: in the West Midland Metalware Trades before the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester, 1975), pp. 55, 66.
[100] Rowlands, *The West Midlands from AD 1000*, p. 143.
[101] Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720', p. 32; Wise, M. J., 'The Changing Regional Pattern During the Eighteenth Century', in: Johnson and Wise (eds), *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey* (Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1950), 161 – 192, p. 161.

1620, when it was claimed that there were around 20,000 smiths of all sorts within ten miles of Dudley Castle.[102] This was probably an exaggerated figure since Dilworth estimates a population of 31,000 for the Tame area of the Black Country in 1801, but it does give an indication of an extremely large number of smiths that were operating at that time.[103] Allen identifies a move of Birmingham nailers to the area in the early seventeenth century in order to relocate within easy reach of supplies of iron and coal.[104]

The district began to progress towards the second stage of proto-industrialisation, when men whose families had their roots in nail making began to trade as nail masters.[105] Not everyone was happy with this situation. As early as 1603, the Staffordshire Justices received a complaint from a group of nailers and other makers of hardware that craftsmen brought up in manual trades were now 'growen into wealth', leaving their trades to become middle men. They purchased most of the bar and rod iron and sold them at 'excessive and very great prices' putting the poorer craftsmen, who could not afford such prices, out of work. They also bought up the finished goods and sold them in 'other Cuntreys'. Moreover, there was evidence of the beginnings of the truck system with middle men refusing to purchase the manufactured articles for cash and giving goods of 'Corne malte Leather Tynne brasse and dyvers such like things .... att such excessive deare and unreasonable rates that they [the nail makers] canot anie longer lyve by their trades'.[106] They gave a list of suggestions: first, that no one except blacksmiths, stringers of iron and free and lawful ironmongers should buy or sell iron. Second, iron should be bought by tradesmen to work in their own shops. Third, the

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[102] Dudley, D., *Dud Dudley's Metallum Martis, or Iron Made with Pit-Coale, Sea-Coale, and with the Same Fuell to Melt and Fine Imperfect Metalls, and Refine Perfect Metalls* (London, 1665).
[103] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 190.
[104] Allen, G. C., *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, 1860-1927* (London, 1929), pp. 15, 16.
[105] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, p. 55; Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, pp. 43, 47.
[106] SSTAS, Historical Collections of Staffordshire Quarter Session Rolls, 1603 – 1606, ns vol 41 (1940), 19 – 22, p. 19.

exchange of finished wares for other goods should be stopped. Fourth, no nailer should set

others to work for him, apart from his own family.[107] The chapmen of Walsall sent an

answering petition stating the other side of the coin - the benefits of the merchants' activities,

both in organising the work and in accessing a wider market for their goods.[108] The Justices'

decision was that the hardware men should pay ready money for wares that they buy and that

they should halt the trade in purchasing and 'ingrossing' iron for three months, after which

they would be at liberty to continue with their trade.[109] By this action, they were

acknowledging the concerns of the craftsmen, but also recognising the changes in market

orientation and capitalist activity that were taking place within the trade, and which the old

regulations could not hold back. Toynbee highlights this procedure as the essence of the

Industrial Revolution, the substitution of competition for the medieval regulations which had

previously controlled the production and distribution of wealth.[110]

Lists of customers for Bustleholme Mill in West Bromwich between 1669 and 1674 indicate

the way in which the iron was used.[111] The mill had 80 customers, two thirds of whom were

'petty chapmen' who purchased 70 out of the mill's annual output of 400 tons.[112] The

remainder was purchased by twenty wholesale chapmen, the majority of whom were from the

local area. These were the men who were making a name for themselves as ironmongers and

setting up concerns that would last over several generations. Three of the largest concerns in

West Bromwich belonged to local families: Turton and Co., Richard Jesson and William Brett

who used 450 tons, 350 tons and 260 tons of iron a year in nail making respectively, and

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[107] Ibid., p. 20.
[108] Ibid., p. 21.
[109] Ibid., p. 22.
[110] Toynbee, A. J., *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England: Popular Addresses, Notes and Other Fragments* (London, 1884), p. 64.
[111] Rowlands, *Masters and Men: in the West Midland Metalware Trades before the Industrial Revolution*, p. 66. Since the death of Andrew Foley, the Foley Collection has been closed by the Foley Estate and it has not been possible to access the Foley papers personally to verify information quoted by Rowlands.
[112] A chapman was a travelling merchant.

between them supplied work for around 1,200 to 1,300 nailers.[113] Names such as these along

with Parkes, Jevons, Hopkins, Russell and Gibbons became synonymous with the iron trade

in the district. There was at least one ironmaster active in Oldbury from 1692 to 1710, when

the purchase of iron is recorded at Bustleholme Mill.[114] The Beighton map of 1733 records

only two industrial units: a forge on the border with West Bromwich, and a furnace in the

Park House area of Langley. Both of these sites went on to become ironworks in the

nineteenth century.[115] Coal mining also began to take place in various locations around the

village from the middle of the eighteenth century, indicating that, in line with the other Black

Country villages, Oldbury was beginning to diversify from its agricultural roots.[116]

2.4 Eighteenth-century growth

Many of the studies of economic development in the Industrial Revolution take as their

starting point the later part of the eighteenth century. Yet, as Stobart points out,

industrialisation and urban growth were deeply rooted in the past and there is a need to

explore the processes in the early eighteenth century which had a significant bearing on future

patterns of development.[117] During this century, the foundations for growth came into place:

industrial innovations to deal with problems and improve industrial processes, the emergence

and spread of transport systems and entrepreneurs who would take industry forward and

underpin the setting up of a regional economy. This section will examine these processes and

the place of proto-industrialisation in the changes which occurred.

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[113] *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 17: Offlow Hundred (part)* [Online] (1976), http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=36161&strquery=, (Accessed: 26/4/2013.).
[114] Rowlands, *Masters and Men: in the West Midland Metalware Trades before the Industrial Revolution*, p. 68.
[115] Beighton, *Oldbury in the County of Salop*.
[116] SSTAS, Bourne and Wainwright Dudley, and Harward and Evers Abstracts and Copy Lease of Mines and Property in Newbury Lane, Oldbury, Staffs and Old Meadow, Oldbury (1836); *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* Monday 19 April 1742.
[117] Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60*, p. 4.

In order to develop industrially, Black Country entrepreneurs first had to address the problems

of accessing and exploiting their mineral resources. One of the early innovations to make a

real difference to both coal mining and iron working was the invention of the atmospheric

engine. The first Newcomen engine was erected in Coneygre near Dudley in 1712, and by

1733 twenty were at work in the Staffordshire and Warwickshire area.[118] Initially, they were

used to drain the mines, which had a problem with flooding, and as the century progressed

they replaced the horse gins which operated the pulleys to send men up and down the shafts

and bring up the coal. This enabled the workings to descend to a greater depth: from between

24 to 120 feet at the end of the seventeenth century to depths down to 300 feet by the end of

the eighteenth century.[119] Innovations were also making a difference to the iron trade.

Slitting mills, which were introduced into the region during the seventeenth century, had

mechanised the process of producing nail rods of uniform sizes.[120] Henry Cort, a Lancashire

man, invented the puddling and rolling processes, which were to be widely used in the

manufacture of wrought iron, but perhaps the most important innovation for the Black

Country was the use of coke in furnaces.[121] Dud Dudley, illegitimate son of the Earl of

Dudley, who claimed to have used coal to produce an iron of good quality in 1621, made the

first experiments in this area and his father took out a patent to this effect.[122] However,

doubts are raised as to the viability of this claim since he does not mention coking the coal,

and it was not possible to produce iron with raw fuel. Thomas Ashton expresses the opinion

that if iron was produced it was unlikely to be of a merchantable quality.[123] Abraham Darby

working in nearby Coalbrookdale in Shropshire, whose family also had Black Country roots,

[118] Rowlands, *The West Midlands from AD 1000*, p. 227.
[119] Greenslade, *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2*, pp. 73, 86.
[120] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 15.
[121] Gale, 'Development of Industrial Technology in the Black Country 1700 – 1900', 193 – 210, p. 200.
[122] Webster, T., *Reports and Notes of Cases on Letters Patent for Inventions* (London, 1844), p. 14.
[123] Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 10 – 12.

produced iron by the use of coke, and it is usual to attribute the discovery of this process to him.[124] By 1750, coke was used increasingly in many of the new blast furnaces. These innovations were slow to take hold in the Black Country, but by 1790 there were 21 coke blast furnaces in operation in the area between Wolverhampton, Tipton and Stourbridge. By 1806, there were 42 furnaces in Staffordshire, the majority of which were in the Black Country and the area's production of pig iron amounted to over 49,000 tons annually, out of a total of 250,000 tons for Britain as a whole.[125] Oldbury had four blast furnaces, on a site adjacent to the town run by Captain William Bennitt and operating from the 1780s to the 1860s.[126]

The nail trade continued to prosper during the eighteenth century. The slitting mills assured a continual supply of rod and a healthy export business in nails to other countries increased demand. At the end of the seventeenth century, exports consisted of a few hundred tons a year, but over the period 1749 – 1771 this increased to an average of 1,600 tons per year. The main recipients were North America and the West Indies.[127]

The number of people involved in the industry increased as landless labourers and Birmingham nailers continued to migrate to the area in search of work. Arthur Young, travelling through West Bromwich in 1776, described the road as 'one continued village of nailers for five or six miles'.[128] James Keir, writing his *Mineralogy in the South-West Corner of Staffordshire* in 1798, remarks on the way in which the small nailing shops, attached to the workmen's houses, were scattered around the countryside. He notes that the trade provided

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[124] Ibid., pp. 30, 31.
[125] Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*, p. 24; Scrivenor, H., *History of the Iron Trade : From the Earliest Records to the Present Period* (London, 1954), p. 99.
[126] Daniels, *A History of Oldbury, Langley and Warley* [Online].
[127] King, 'The Production and Consumption of Bar Iron in Early Modern England and Wales', p. 19.
[128] Young, A., *Tours in England and Wales ... Selected from the Annals of Agriculture* (Original Publication 1776) (London, 1932), p. 140.

employment for husband, wife and children, in 'an uncommon multitude of small houses and cottages', independent of industry in the towns.[129]

As the industry gained momentum another group of middlemen, locally called 'foggers', arose who took the iron to the workshops and came at the end of the week to collect the nails, moving the industry up to the next stage of proto-industrialisation, that of 'putting out'.[130] Specialisation, a feature of Black Country industry, began to develop with different districts making different types of nails. Nail making was not unique to the Staffordshire area, it occurred around the coal fields of Durham and South Yorkshire along with the manufacture of 'locks, bolts, chains, tools and agricultural implements'.[131] Nail making developed from the fifteenth century in the outlying districts around Sheffield, for example.[132] This did not happen in the iron industry of South Wales, where the majority of iron was exported as bar iron and rails, although works made their own castings and supplied these to other local concerns. There were some exceptions, such as the small demands made by local chain makers and the tin industry, but the area did not develop the significant iron-consuming industries that were increasing in the iron producing towns and villages of England.[133]

The rise in population and the advances in mining and metal-working techniques led to an expansion of industrial concerns across the Black Country. In order to develop further, however, a better method for moving coal, iron and finished products was required. The ridge of hills stretching from Wolverhampton in the north to Frankley in the south formed a barrier

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[129] Keir, J., 'Mineralogy in the South-West Corner of Staffordshire', in: *Shaw, S., The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire Vol. 1* (London, 1798).
[130] Ball, 'The Hand-Made Nail Trade', 110 – 116, p. 111.
[131] Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 19.
[132] Hey, D., *The Fiery Blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and its Neighbourhood, 1660-1740* (Leicester, 1991), pp. 79, 96.
[133] Atkinson, M. and Baber, C., *The Growth and Decline of the South Wales Iron Industry 1760-1880: An Industrial History* (Cardiff, 1987), pp. 65, 68.

between the Black Country towns and the nearest serviceable river, the Severn, which was described as 'the greatest artery of commerce in England' during the eighteenth century.[134] The rivers and streams which ran through the district were too small to be of use for moving cargo, and coal, iron and finished goods had to be transported by packhorse or wagon to places nearby such as Birmingham and Cannock, and further afield to Coventry, the South Midlands and the Home Counties.[135] Pack horses and wagons were limited in the weight they could carry, however, and had a detrimental effect on the roads themselves, especially in bad weather. The solution was to turnpike the major roads across the district, so that the tolls taken could be used for their repair. Industrialists such as Lord Dudley contributed to the finance, paying an on-going amount for the upkeep of the roads which linked Dudley with the nearby towns of Wolverhampton and Birmingham and the smaller villages along the route.[136] Transport links with Birmingham, and to a lesser extent, Wolverhampton, were especially necessary for the Black Country economy since much of the raw materials and small metal items, such as gun parts, went to the towns for assembly or distribution. Turnpiking began in 1727 and a dense road network was soon in place. Although it improved transport links between towns and villages, the transport of heavy materials such as iron and coal continued to be a problem.[137] Hutton, writing in the early 1780s, described the road to Dudley, which passed through Oldbury, as being 'despicable beyond description', the road to Walsall as 'rather below indifferent' and that to Halesowen as 'like the life of man, chequered with good and evil, chiefly the latter'. He describes seeing trains of carriages laden with coal that stretched for miles 'to the great destruction of the road and the annoyance of travellers'. He

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[134] Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*, p. 7.
[135] Wise, 'The Changing Regional Pattern During the Eighteenth Century', 161 – 192, pp. 165, 166; Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*, p. 1.
[136] Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, pp. 53, 54.
[137] Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*, p. 7; Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, p. 52.

advocated widening the road to 60ft in order to put the innocent traveller out of fear of the

waggoners, 'not the most civilized of the human race'.[138]

Industrialists and trades-people needed an economical means of moving their goods and a

canal system, which had its beginnings in 1759 in Manchester, was seen to be the answer.

The success of the Bridgewater Canal in moving coal from the Duke of Bridgewater's mines

in Worsley, Salford to Manchester and causing a 50% reduction in the price of the transport of

cotton caught the imagination of leading industrialists.[139] Josiah Wedgwood, the

Staffordshire potter, was especially keen to see the introduction of a canal system to the

landlocked midlands in order to transport clay to his factory and finished goods to markets in

major towns and ports without damaging them on the way. James Brindley, the Duke of

Bridgewater's engineer was appointed to design a new canal linking the River Trent in

Derbyshire to the Mersey (The Grand Trunk) which was authorised by Parliament in 1766.[140]

Authorisation was given at the same time for the cutting of the Staffordshire and

Worcestershire Canal to take traffic from the Trent and Mersey in Great Haywood to

Stourport on Severn.[141] Unfortunately, this canal only passed the northern end of the Black

Country, near to Wolverhampton, leaving the majority of the area still landlocked and with no

means of moving its heavy mineral resources. A canal from Birmingham to Wolverhampton

via the coal fields was suggested in 1767, in order to reduce the price and carriage of coal. 'A

Well-Wisher to Trade' writing to *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* during 1766 and 1767 suggested

that a canal be built from Birmingham to Wolverhampton through the mining districts; this

idea was adopted.[142] Brindley was asked to carry out a survey and put forward two routes, the

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[138] Hutton, W., *An History of Birmingham, 2nd edition* (Birmingham, 1783), pp. 263-64, 266.
[139] Kidd, A. J., *Manchester: A history* (Lancaster, 2008), p. 25.
[140] Hadfield, C., *The Canals of the West Midlands* (Newton Abbot, 1966), p. 27.
[141] Ibid., p. 49.
[142] *Aris's Birmingham Gazette,* Monday 14 April 1766; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette,* Monday 19 January 1767.

chosen one being from New-Hall over Birmingham Heath, to or near Smethwick, Oldbury, Tipton Green, and Bilston and from thence to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal with branches to different coal works along the route.[143] Subscriptions of £50,000 were raised to fund the venture with a maximum subscription of £1000 per person.[144] A number of important Birmingham industrialists were among those subscribing to the plan, including Matthew Boulton, Samuel Garbett and Samuel Galton. An Act was obtained on 24 February 1768 and building commenced.[145] The first section, the Wednesbury to Birmingham line opened on 6 November 1769 and the second, to Dudley, by 1782 (see Figure 20).

As anticipated, an immediate drop in coal prices was experienced from 15s – 18s a ton to 4s – 5s.[146] By 1798, the Birmingham Canal was the busiest in the kingdom. It had links to 1500 collieries and iron works in the Black Country with a hundred boats each carrying 20 tons of coal going over the Smethwick summit each day, and a further 300 tons of goods bound for London.[147]

There was both a cause and effect element to the introduction of a canal system. Businesses were attracted to canal-side plots to take advantage of the water supply for use in their manufactories and to transport their raw materials and finished products, and the arrival of businesses led to an expanding area of urban growth in local villages.[148] Oldbury's canal link was built in 1772 and instead of by-passing the village in a straight line, it swung round it in a meandering loop. Loops were a feature of Brindley's canal which followed the contours of

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[143] *Aris's Birmingham Gazette,* Monday 26 January 1767; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette,* Monday 8 June 1767.
[144] *Aris's Birmingham Gazette,* Monday 15 June 1767.
[145] Hadfield, *The Canals of the West Midlands*, p. 64.
[146] Ibid., p. 66.
[147] Rowlands, *The West Midlands from AD 1000*, pp. 23, 233.
[148] Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, 1860-1927*, p. 31; Stobart, J., 'In Search of Causality: A Regional Approach to Urban Growth in Eighteenth-Century England', *Geografiska Annalare, Series B, Human Geography,* 2000, **82,** 149 - 163, p.154.

the land and in many places gave it the appearance of a winding river.[149] The village within

the enclosed area eventually expanded to fill the loop, with housing, shops and churches built

alongside industrial concerns. Town development in close proximity to the canal network

was an asset, and the people of Dudley, who did not have a canal through their town,

considered themselves to be at a disadvantage in this respect.[150]
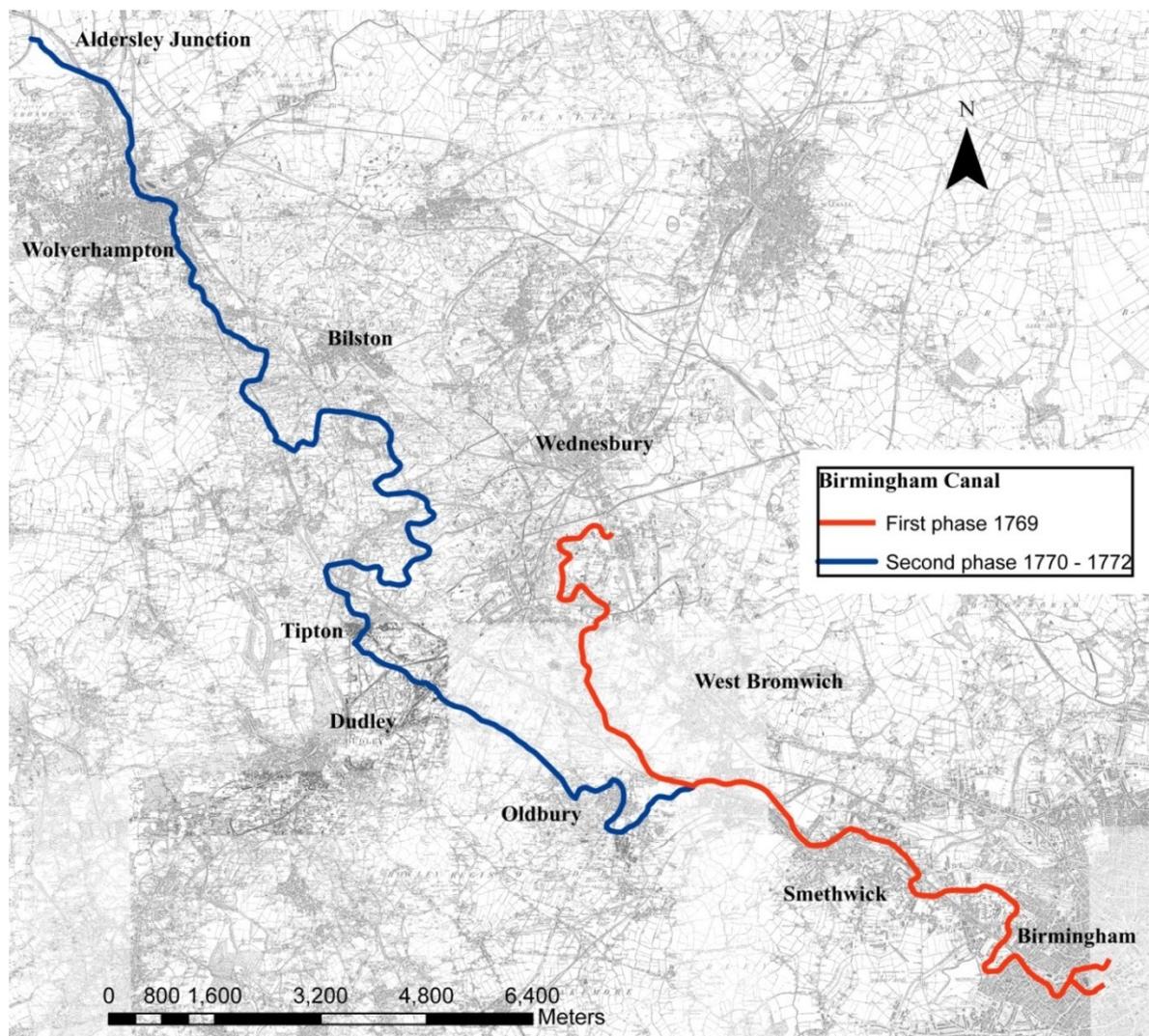
Figure 20 Route of canals across the Black Country[151]

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[149] Hadfield, *The Canals of the West Midlands*, pp. 66, 67.
[150] Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*, p. 15.
[151] Hadfield, *The Canals of the West Midlands*; Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 32so98ne, edition 1, 1888. Worcestershire 39so98ne, edition 1, 1887. Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited 2009. All rights reserved 1887, 1888.© Crown Copyright/database right 2013. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service; constructed by the author using GIS.

This link between industrial Birmingham and the mining districts of South Staffordshire had a dramatic effect on the area, as Birmingham was not only a consumer centre, it was also the main location for distributing both raw and finished products and provided a means of reaching a wider market. Trade grew as foundries and rolling mills were attracted to canal-side plots, and the canal system continued to be extended across the area. In 1792, the ridge was finally breached with a two-mile tunnel which linked the Black Country to the Severn.[152] The canal network stretched across the country, giving access to major towns, ports and overseas trade which in turn boosted the economy of the industrial regions.

The meandering loops of the canal produced a number of problems and in the early 1800s Telford came up with a plan to straighten the canal and feed the system from a new reservoir in Rotten Park fed by a 3.5 mile channel from Titford Pool in Oldbury (see Figure 21).[153] At the same time, a new cut was made to join the two ends of the loop which went round Oldbury. The old town loop remained in place and became home to a number of boat-building firms as well as servicing the industry built alongside it. One negative effect of the manoeuvre was to turn Oldbury into an island in the middle of a canal system, a factor which had repercussions when drainage and sewage disposal became a problem in the middle of the nineteenth century (see Figure 22).

With transport links in place, Black Country industrialisation depended upon a group of men with resources and expertise. John Wilkinson was one of the first of a number of middle-class entrepreneurs who moved into the district from other areas. In 1757, he set up iron works in Bradley near Bilston.[154]

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[152] Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*, pp. 11, 15.
[153] BAH, MS 2076/2, Edgbaston Reservoir – Historical Background
[154] Palliser, D. M., *The Staffordshire Landscape* (London, 1976), p. 181.

Feeder leaving main canal (right)   **Feeder goes underground**
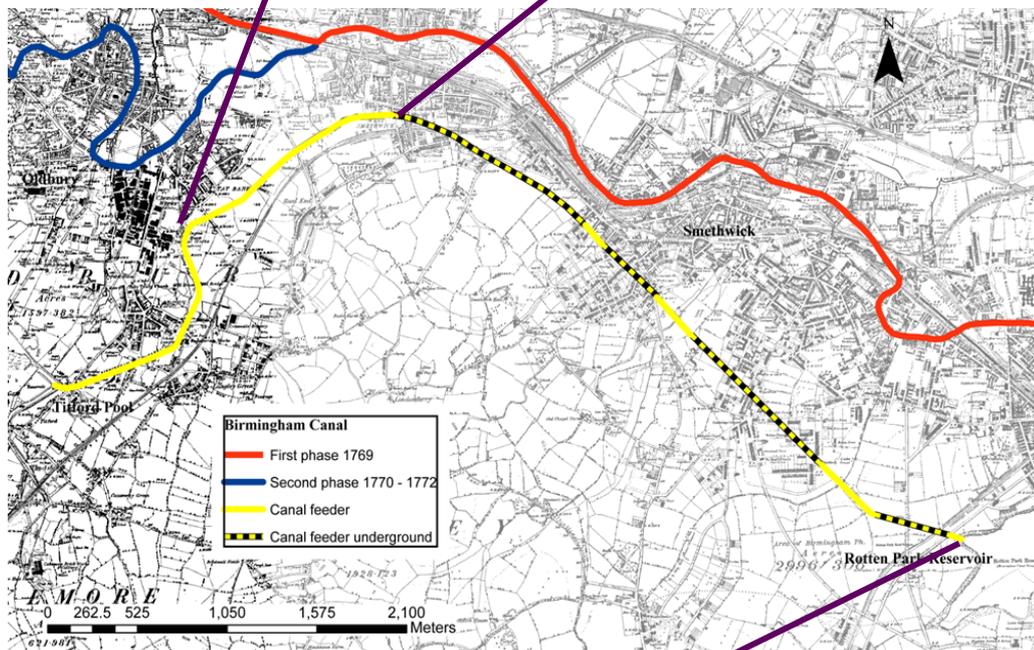
Feeder arrives at Rotten Park Reservoir

Figure 21 Feeder canal linking Titford Pool with Rotten Park Reservoir [155]

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[155] Author's photographs. Map *Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 32so98ne, Edition 1, 1888; Worcestershire 39so98ne, Edition 1, 1887* (UK, 1887, 1888) **,** © Crown Copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA Map; created by the author using GIS.
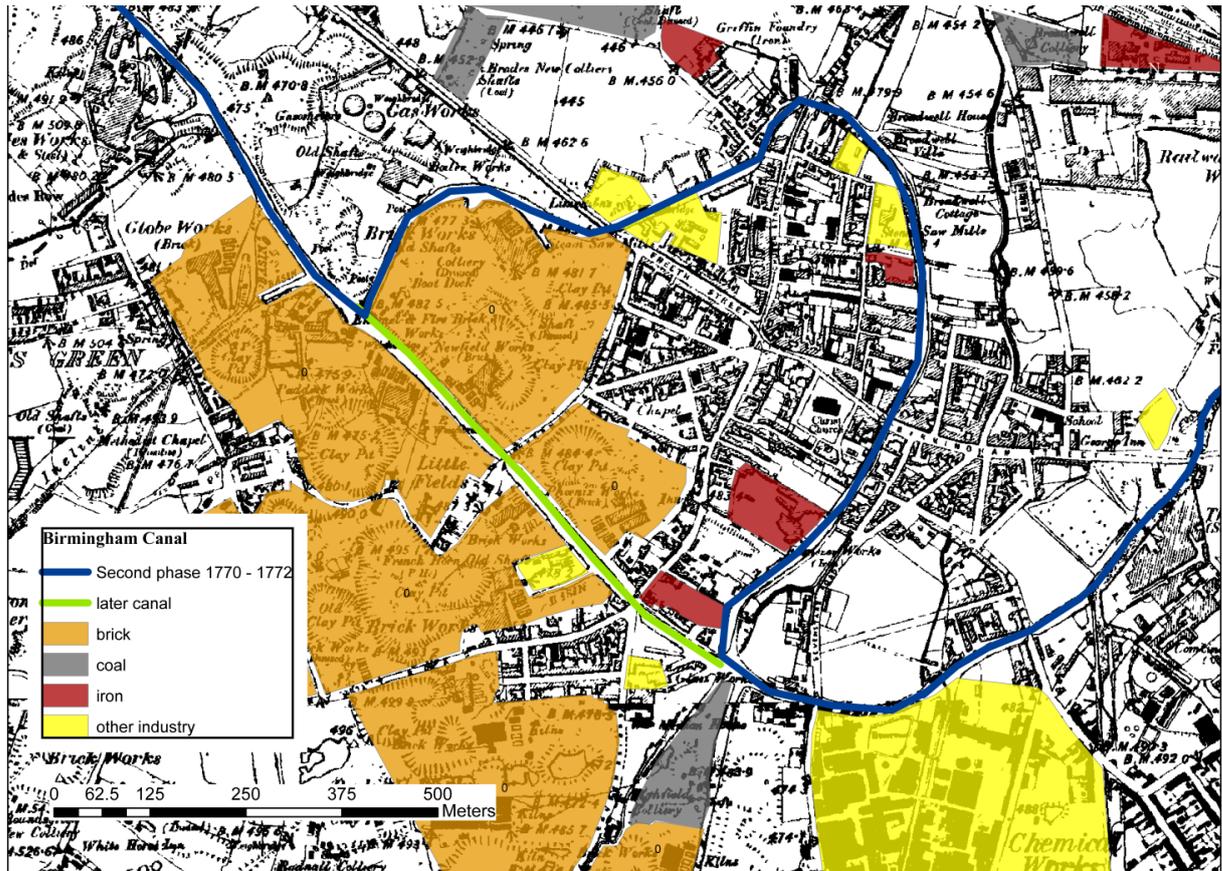
Figure 22 Oldbury's location and industry (1887-1890)[156]

Other industrialists followed, some founding large firms such as Izons (1782) and Kenrick

(1791), whilst others set up small firms with modest technology and a smaller work force.[157]

Many took over the mills along the Tame and converted them for their particular use, from a

hammer mill to a rolling and slitting mill, for example, whilst others set up new ventures on

attractive industrial sites alongside the canal.[158]

Local families also took advantage of the resources to build their own empires. Iron worker

families tended to intermarry and support one another by providing finance for ventures, or

working together in business. For example, the Turtons and Simcoxes, from West Bromwich,

[156] Ibid.

[157] Palliser, *The Staffordshire Landscape*, p. 183; Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 170; Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*.

[158] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 48.

who were related, established members of their families in London in the latter part of the seventeenth century to facilitate the sale of ironware there.[159] An important Oldbury family in this respect were the Parkers, who had ironworks in Tipton and Oldbury. They were direct descendants of the Darby family of Coalbrookdale, Abraham Darby's sister, Esther, having married Anthony Parker, a nailer from Hagley, from whom the family descended. Abraham and Benjamin Parker, the grandsons of Anthony and Esther were respected members of the community, living and working in the town (see Appendix 2). Along with their brothers, George, John and Richard, they had two furnaces, forges and a rolling and slitting mill at Tipton, and different members of the family ran other works in their own right. George, for example, leased the large Coneygre iron works in Dudley.[160]

Ashton describes Coalbrookdale and its subsidiaries as 'schools of instruction in the art of smelting and refining,' and members of the extended Darby family were spread across the Black Country and could count on support and encouragement from the parent company in setting up their businesses in the area.[161] Members of the Coalbrookdale community also transferred their skills to the coalfield of South Wales. Iron had been produced there on a small scale for some time, but the industry which was to develop in the region owed its existence to a small group of men who moved into the area to set up the Dowlais Iron works near Merthyr Tydfil and a furnace and forge at Cyfarthfa.[162] In a similar way, expertise was transferred from other metal-working regions into the Black Country. For example, two brothers from Sheffield, Montague and Samuel Taylor, moved to Oldbury towards the end of

[159] Rowlands, *Masters and Men: in the West Midland Metalware Trades before the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 11, 12.
[160] *The Dudley Herald, '*The Old Parker Family of Madeley (Salop), Dudley and Tipton. The Great Iron and Coal Masters.', Saturday 19 July,1919, p. 10; Gale, W. K. V., *The Coneygre Story* (Tipton, 1954).
[161] Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 53.
[162] Ibid., p. 95.

the eighteenth century to set up a steel works in the town at a time when steelmaking was beginning in the region, and their expertise added to the development of this industry.[163]

A change which was to have an impact on the development of West Bromwich in particular was the arrival of another member of the landed gentry into the Black Country, the Earl of Dartmouth, William Legge who purchased the Sandwell Estate in 1701.[164] Although primarily involved in national politics, and having other estates on which to focus their attention, the Dartmouths lived in Sandwell from the early 1700s until the 1850s and set about developing the estate to return a profit. Their first involvement in coal mining was in 1707 when two coal pits were opened followed by two the following year, and by 1719 the estate was 'said to contain a very good mine'.[165] It is not known how profitable the pits were at this time but, in common with the other southern villages on the concealed seam, after an initial investigation, further mining did not take place until the early nineteenth century. Landed families like the Dudleys and Dartmouths had the advantages of finance, connections and influence, which were especially important when it came to solving some of the biggest problems that the area had to deal with, such as transportation. The Earl of Dartmouth was one of the key sponsors for the Birmingham Canal Bill.[166]

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, businesses other than those connected with the extractive industries moved into the Black Country. One of the earliest was the firm of James Keir who set up a chemical works in Tipton in 1778 in partnership with a fellow army officer, Alexander Blair, to take advantage of the cheapness of fuel and convenience that the canal

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[163] Information from Sullivan Genealogical Archive of Family Data (SGA): Land Documents, Parish Records, Photographs, Wills.
[164] Greenslade (ed) *A History of the County of Stafford, Volume 17* pp. 27 – 43.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Raybould, T., 'Aristocratic Landowners and the Industrial Revolution: the Black Country Experience c.1760-1840', *Midland History,* 1984, Vol. 9 59-86, p. 74.

gave for the manufacture of alkali and soap.[167] The *Staffordshire General and Commercial Directory* of 1818 describes his extensive manufactory making, in addition to alkali and soap, white lead, red lead and metal sashes for windows.[168] The factory covered a large area and became a show place in the district (see Figure 23).[169] Keir and Blair also purchased land in Tividale where they opened their own coal mine, the 'Tividale Colliery', in order to supply the alkali works.[170] Glass making was the other non-extractive industry to move into the district during the eighteenth century, taking place in Dudley by 1790 and Smethwick by 1814.[171] One of the first businesses to be set up in Oldbury was William Hunt's edge tool factory at the Brades, on the border with Rowley Regis in the 1780s.[172] Elihu Burritt visited the factory in 1868 and described it as a small village of buildings, representative of the area as it embraced within one site all the individual components needed to produce a finished product (see Figure 24). It had its own mines, worked its own ore in around twenty blast furnaces, rolled and hammered it, turned it into steel and produced the finished product, tools which were sent around the world.[173]

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[167] Molliet, J. L. and Smith, B. M. D., *A Mighty Chemist: James Keir of the Lunar Society: Scientist, Technologist, Industrialist, Soldier, and Political Commentator* (England, 1982), p.27; Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*, p. 138.

[168] Bradshaw, T. and Parson, W., *Staffordshire General and Commercial Directory for 1818* (Manchester, 1818), p. clxxxiii; Molliet and Smith, *A Mighty Chemist: James Keir of the Lunar Society: Scientist, Technologist, Industrialist, Soldier, and Political Commentator* p. 27.

[169] Molliet and Smith, *A Mighty Chemist: James Keir of the Lunar Society: Scientist, Technologist, Industrialist, Soldier, and Political Commentator*, p. 31.

[170] Ibid., pp. 37, 38; Keir, 'Mineralogy in the South-West Corner of Staffordshire'.

[171] Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, p. 132; Rowlands, *The West Midlands from AD 1000*, p. 243.

[172] Daniels, T., *A History of Oldbury, Langley and Warley: Timeline* [Online] (2008), http://www.historyofoldbury.co.uk/2timeline.htm, (Accessed: 25/6/2012).

[173] Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land*, p. 81.
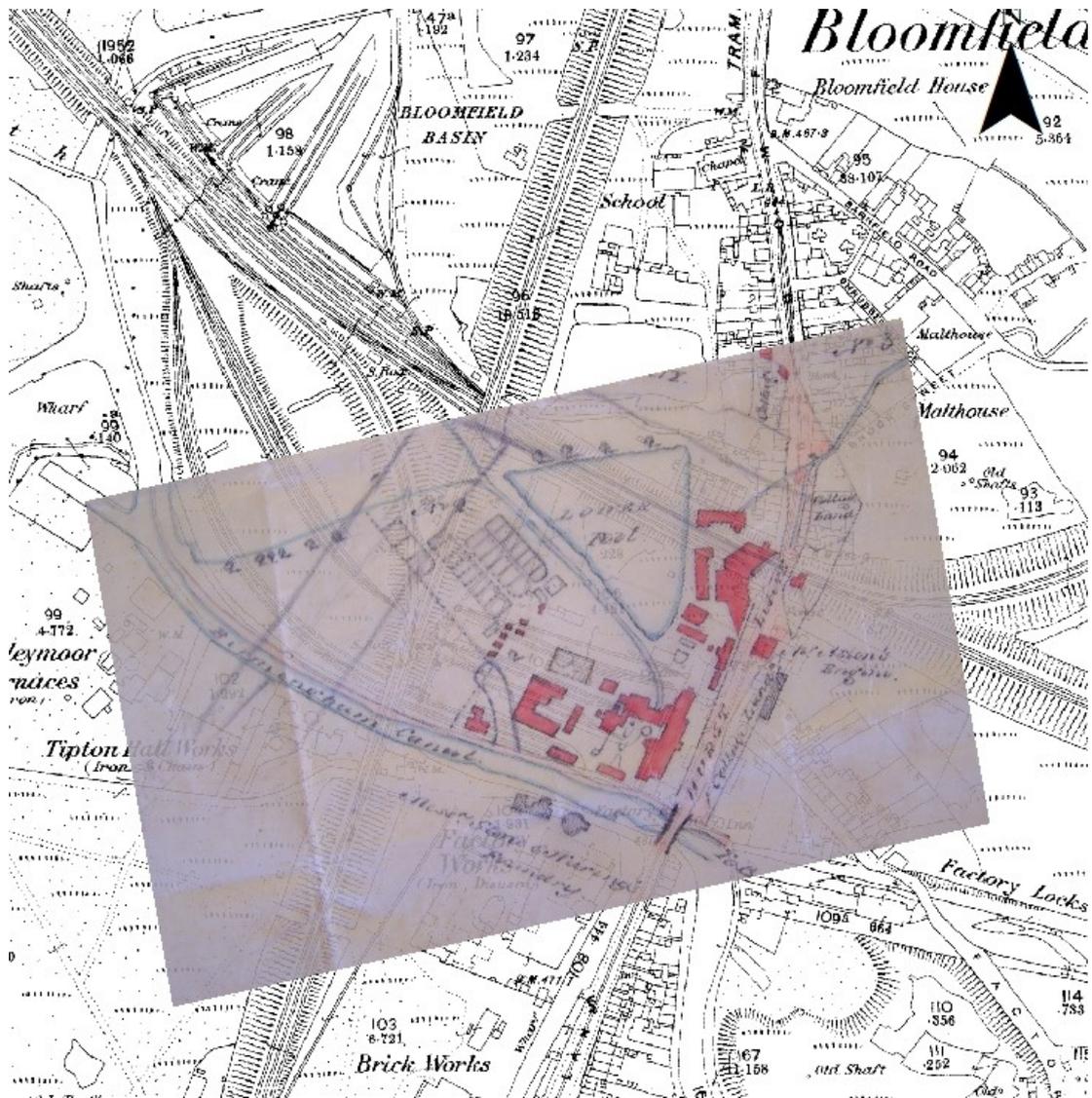
Figure 23 Position of Keir's alkali works in Tipton shown on an 1886 map[174]

[174] *Ordnance Survey County Series 1st Edition Scale 1:2500, Worcestershire County* (UK, 1854); SSTAS, D695/6/22, Tipton. Land in Possession of Messrs. Keir & Co. Showing Ironworks or Other Industrial Buildings. (n.d. 19th Century).
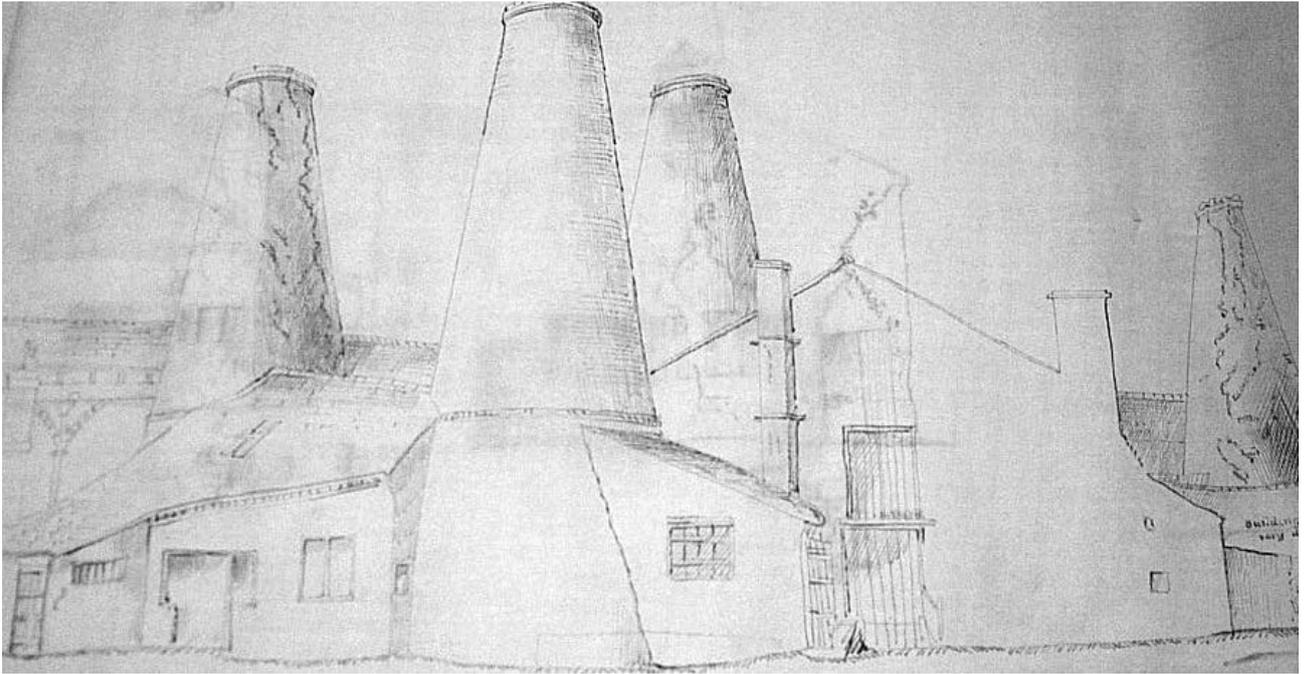
Figure 24 Brades edge tool works showing the results of mining subsidence[175]

The majority of Black Country villages experienced an increase in production and output and were growing in size accordingly by the end of the eighteenth century. King records the fact that the Black Country joined Derbyshire, South Wales and Shropshire as a large producer of iron by the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Export of nails and other iron-ware from Britain to North America and the West Indies increased, with nail exports alone rising from a few hundred tons per year in the late sixteenth century to over 1600 tons between the years 1749 and 1773.[176] Oldbury, however, appeared to be lagging behind the other Black Country towns. House building had not ventured much further than the toll road and adjoining lanes within the confines of the canal loop, with isolated farms and hamlets clustered around a few local pits or iron works in the surrounding countryside. Public buildings consisted of the chapel of St Nicholas, erected in 1529 before the dissolution of the monasteries, and was

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[175] BAH, Smythe Etches and Co, later Lee Crowder and Co, Solicitors of Birmingham MS 3375/927 2 Bundles of Plans and Sketches of the Brades Estate and Steel Works (1815-1875).
[176] King, 'The Production and Consumption of Bar Iron in Early Modern England and Wales', p. 19.

situated in the market place, a Meetinghouse, built in 1708, and a free school, built in 1780, but much of the fervour of industrial expansion seemed to pass it by.[177]

One possible explanation for this was the change in use of the major road running through the town in the early years of the eighteenth century. Roads played a major part in the development of an area since, in addition to enabling the movement of goods, they brought in people and information which were vital to the burgeoning industries. The ancient route from London to Holyhead had run via Smethwick, Oldbury, Tividale, Dudley, Himley and Bridgenorth and was featured in Ogilby's *Britannia* of 1675 and Philip Lea's map of 1700. The new version of the *Britannia Depicta* produced by J. Owen in 1723, however, indicated that this route was now 'wholly disused or laid aside' in favour of a direct route from Birmingham to Wolverhampton via West Bromwich Heath, Wednesbury and Bilston.[178]

The road facilitated the transport of coal to Birmingham from the northern Black Country villages.[179] As a major link between the larger towns, it was a busy thoroughfare and, with its relocation, concentrated the district's service provision in West Bromwich. This was an important factor as far as the growth of neighbouring settlements such as Oldbury and Tipton was concerned as it had a detrimental effect on their progress.[180] When the road was turnpiked in 1727, the centre of West Bromwich was relocated alongside it, and by 1752 a mail coach operated along the route.[181] The result for Oldbury was that, although it had been turnpiked in 1727, in common with the other roads in the district, it was now bypassed by the major transport route of the area.

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[177] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 55; McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*, pp. 53, 55.
[178] Ogilby, *Road Maps of England and Wales, Ogilby's Britannia*; Owen, J., *Britannia Depicta* (1723), p. 126.
[179] Greenslade, *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2*, p. 278.
[180] Stobart and Trinder, 'New Towns of the Industrial Coalfields: Burslem and West Bromwich', p. 127.
[181] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, p. 70.

A Parliamentary report dated 30 March 1728 described the situation: although tolls had been collected since 15 May 1727, nothing had been done to repair the road which was 'very ruinous and dangerous to passengers' although it was a 'great road'. As Hutton recorded in 1783, it continued to deteriorate.[182] Industrialists setting up a business in the area would, therefore, be more likely to choose West Bromwich rather than Oldbury at this time. A further factor which appears to have held Oldbury back was the continued lack of interest by the Lords of the Manor in developing the village's mineral resources. This is particularly surprising since the manor had passed into the hands of relatives of the Parrott family in the 1770s. The Parrott family were wealthy land and mine owners in the Coventry and Bedworth area and it is strange that they did not take advantage of the industrial opportunities opening up in the south of the Black Country around that time.[183]

Dawson's preliminary drawing for the Ordnance Survey map in 1816 depicts the two villages of Oldbury and West Bromwich. The first impression is that Oldbury is the larger of the two, as it has spread out from its original location on the main road, but only within the confines of the canal. The buildings, marked in red, are few in number, but there were a good many garden plots (marked in blue). West Bromwich on the other hand, whilst still a dispersed settlement, obviously attracted more people as the built up area extended along the length of the main road and a number of smaller hamlets grew in size (see Figure 25).[184]

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[182] 1728 (Journals of the House of Commons: From June the 15th, 1727, in the First Year of the Reign of King George the Second, to December the 5th, 1732, in the Sixth Year of the Reign of King George the Second, Volume No. 21, 15 June 1727 to 5 December 1732) 30 March 1728, A Petition re Toll Roads, p. 107; Hutton, *An History of Birmingham, 2nd edition*, pp. 263-64.

[183] Stephens, W. B., *Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Warwick Volume 8, City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 59, 65.

[184] Dawson, *Ordnance Survey Drawing, Wolverhampton Sheet OSD 212*.

Figure 25 Oldbury and West Bromwich (1816) [185]

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[185] Ibid. (1816).

The map shows that by 1816 the problems experienced from the redirection of the main road to West Bromwich in 1723 had been addressed. The old road through the village was abandoned in favour of a new road which led directly from Oldbury to Dudley, marked in beige on the map to indicate a major road.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the accessible coal seams in the north of the area began to give out. The response of the industrialists was to seek to extend the mining to new areas and to dig deeper seams. The first step was to extend their own landownership by enclosures.

Enclosures had been taking place in a piecemeal fashion over many centuries in response to the changing face of agriculture. Beighton's map records a vast amount of enclosure taking place in Oldbury in 1733. Figure 26 shows the eleven families in Oldbury who owned above 50 acres of land. Mr Freeth was the largest landowner with 180 acres. When the map was produced, he was in the process of purchasing large swathes of land: individual fields, strips in the open fields and pieces of the waste. The map shows that two types of enclosure were taking place: some of the large meadows were being divided and sold, and strips of open fields were being purchased and combined. This would have had an effect on the farming practices of the village, since access to common land had been restricted; a possible reason for many of the inhabitants taking up nail making. When industrialisation started in Oldbury, in the early nineteenth century, these land owners would be in a commanding position. Figure 27 shows the industrial development of their land during the nineteenth century. Oldbury's pattern of enclosure appears to have been a voluntary one since no acts of Parliament have been found to support it at this date.
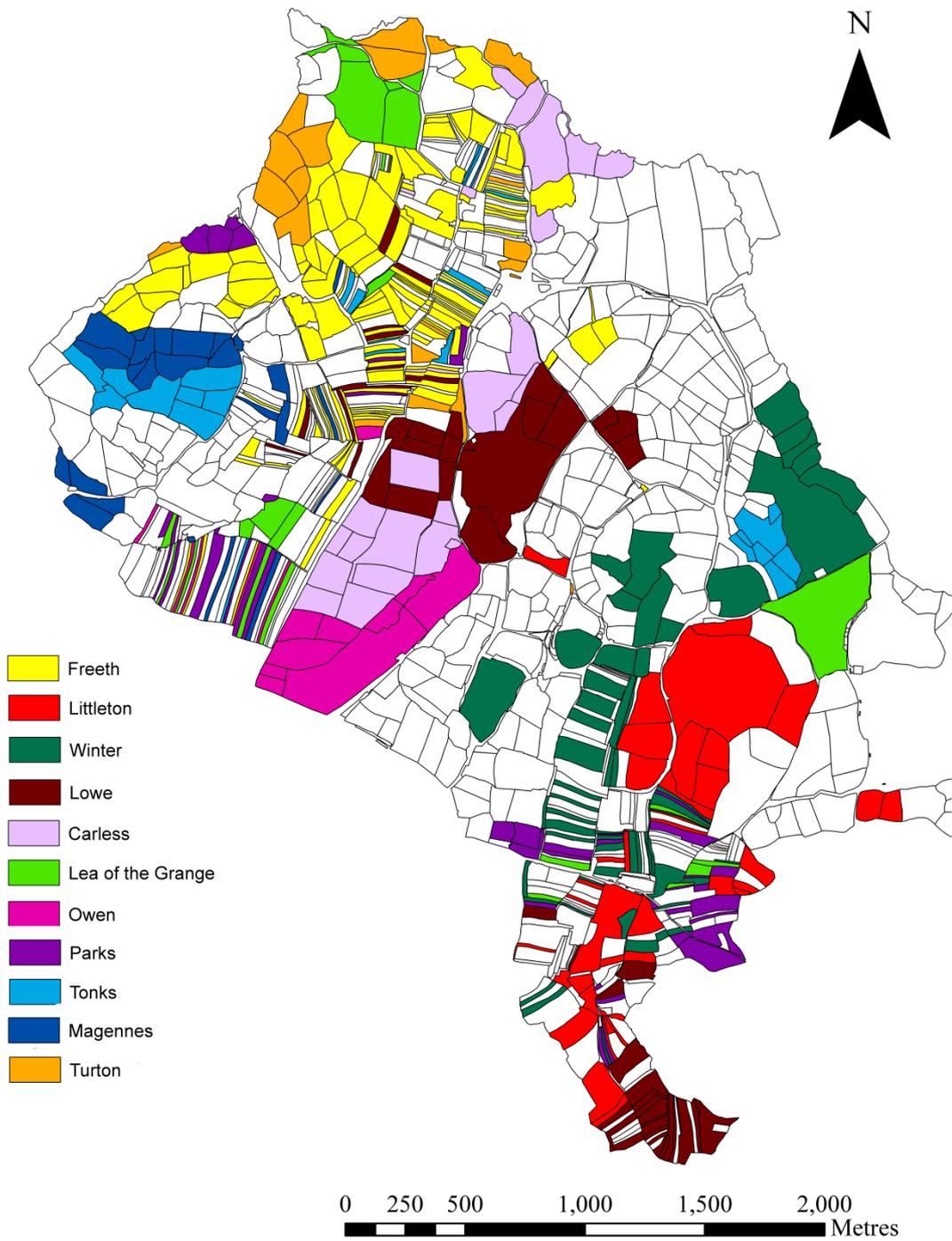
Figure 26 Landowners with more than 50 acres of land in Oldbury (1733)[186]

The legend lists the following landowners:
- Freeth
- Littleton
- Winter
- Lowe
- Carless
- Lea of the Grange
- Owen
- Parks
- Tonks
- Magennes
- Turton

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[186] Beighton, *Oldbury in the County of Salop*.
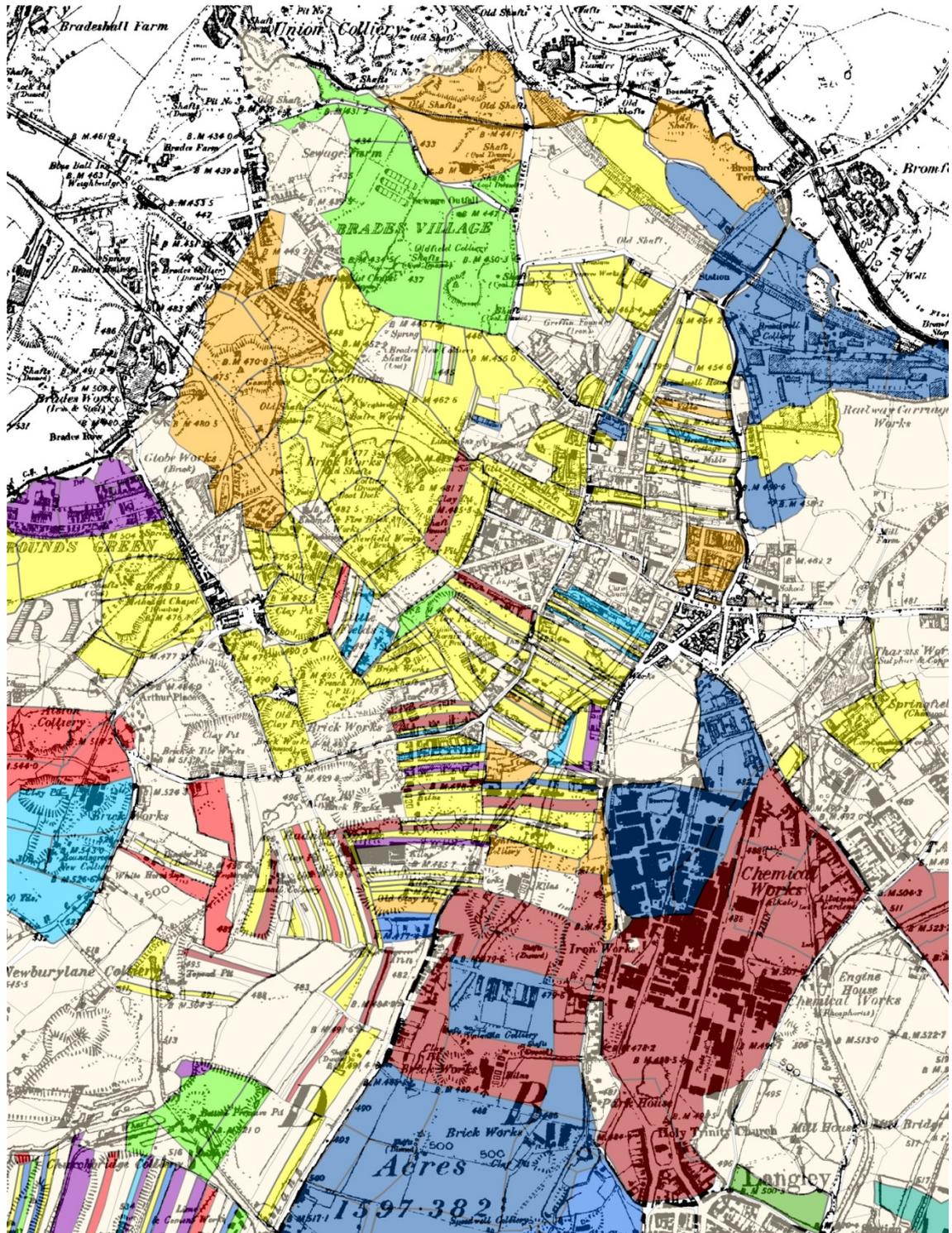
Figure 27 Future industrial use of the land held by the large landholders on Beighton's map (1733)[187]

[187] Map *Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 32so98ne, Edition 1, 1888; Worcestershire 39so98ne, Edition 1, 1887* , © Crown Copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA Map; Beighton, *Oldbury in the County of Salop*; created by the author using GIS.

In other areas of the Black Country acts were being obtained in order to enclose the land. The Dudley family applied for five acts of Parliament over a period of 23 years from 1776 to 1799 to enclose the remaining wastes on their estates in order to extend their mineral and industrial enterprises. The mineral rights were reserved to the Lord of the Manor in each act regardless of the ownership of the surface of the land.[188] Gradually, the practice spread across the region. The West Bromwich enclosure act was granted in 1801 and again the Lord was given a right to mine, but in this case it was stipulated that he could not mine nearer than 40 yards of any dwelling.[189] Oldbury's remaining small amounts of waste were enclosed by an Act of 1829, and put on the market for building purposes.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the key developments necessary for industrial growth were in place in the Black Country towns. They had access to and were beginning to extend the exploitation of their mineral resources; the canal network was in place supplying transport links across the area; industrialists were moving in to take advantage of the location and resources; there was demand and markets for their products; and there was a potential labour force in the great number of people who had been attracted to the area to take up nailing. Oldbury had not developed as fast as many of the other Black Country towns during the eighteenth century, due to the depth of its coal and iron resources, its isolation from a major route way until the latter part of the century and a lack of entrepreneurship among its leading élite. The possibility was there for industrial development during the nineteenth century, however, and it did have one factor in its favour, the availability of land.

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[188] Raybould, 'Lord Dudley and the Making of the Black Country', p. 2.
[189] Greenslade, *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2*, p. 97.

2.5 The nineteenth century – expansion and decline

The availability of land and improved transport access by canal encouraged the migration of industrialists into the village. Prime plots alongside the canal were purchased and local members of the landholding and yeoman classes of Oldbury began to participate by starting an industry themselves or by renting out their land for another to develop it.[190] Ferdinand Smith, for example, owned the Grange Colliery in Oldbury and rented it out to George Motteram, coal master from Birmingham, who then mined for coal and ironstone.[191]

Brick making was one of the first of Oldbury's major industries to develop in response to the house and factory building which was taking place. Brick making was very important to the region and featured in a number of the Black Country towns as beds of fireclay stretched from Bilston and Tipton to Cradley and Stourbridge. Etruria Marl, otherwise known as Old Hill or Oldbury Marl, for making the areas famous blue bricks used in industrial building work, is found in Oldbury. Maps show marl pits and brick works littering the landscape (see Figure 22). Hackwood claimed that nearly a million tons a year were dug out in the locality.[192] Brick making was one industry that employed women and children. The moulding and firing was usually done by men, but lifting the clay and carrying it to the moulder was a task undertaken by women and children. The life was not an easy one. An eye witness account by a journalist of women working in an Oldbury brickworks in 1883 describes them carrying about 1.5cwt of clay at a time on their heads and in their arms. The journalist observed them loading up, taking the clay and returning within seven minutes and estimated that a "pug" girl, as they were locally called, carried at least half a ton of clay every hour, or five tons a day.

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[190] Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600-1838*, p. 73.
[191] WAAS, 2422: 705:122, Grange Golliery, Oldbury (29.9.1837).
[192] Eastwood, T*., et al.*, *The Geology of the Country around Birmingham* (London, 1925), pp. 34, 122; Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 87.

For this they were paid two shillings. Men who worked in the brickyards earned double this amount.[193] Although he thought the work degrading, the journalist was surprised by the willingness and cheerfulness of the girls, and the strength and ease with which they performed the tasks. He saw no evidence that they were unwillingly enduring hardship or ill usage.[194]

In addition to the spread of mining and brick making in the southern Black County towns, the district also saw a growth in its iron industries. By 1815, following the extra demands for iron for armaments during the Napoleonic Wars, and the continued growth of industry alongside the expanding canal system, the Black Country provided almost a third of Britain's pig iron (see Figure 28).[195] This was achieved through a proliferation of additional small businesses, rather than existing companies which grew in size. Most of the factors that enabled the iron industry to expand were in place by this time; blast furnaces had taken over from the bloomeries and were converted to using coke and rolling and slitting mills proliferated. As the fortunes of the iron industry rose, however, those of the initial protoindustry, nail making, struggled.

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[193] Greenwood, J., *Girls of the Brickfields* [Online] (1883),
http://www.victorianlondon.org/publications4/mysteries-16.htm, (Accessed: 2/5/2011), pp. 122, 123.
[194] Ibid. p. 119.
[195] King 'The Iron Trade in England and Wales 1500 – 1815: The Charcoal Iron Industry and Its Transition to Coke'.
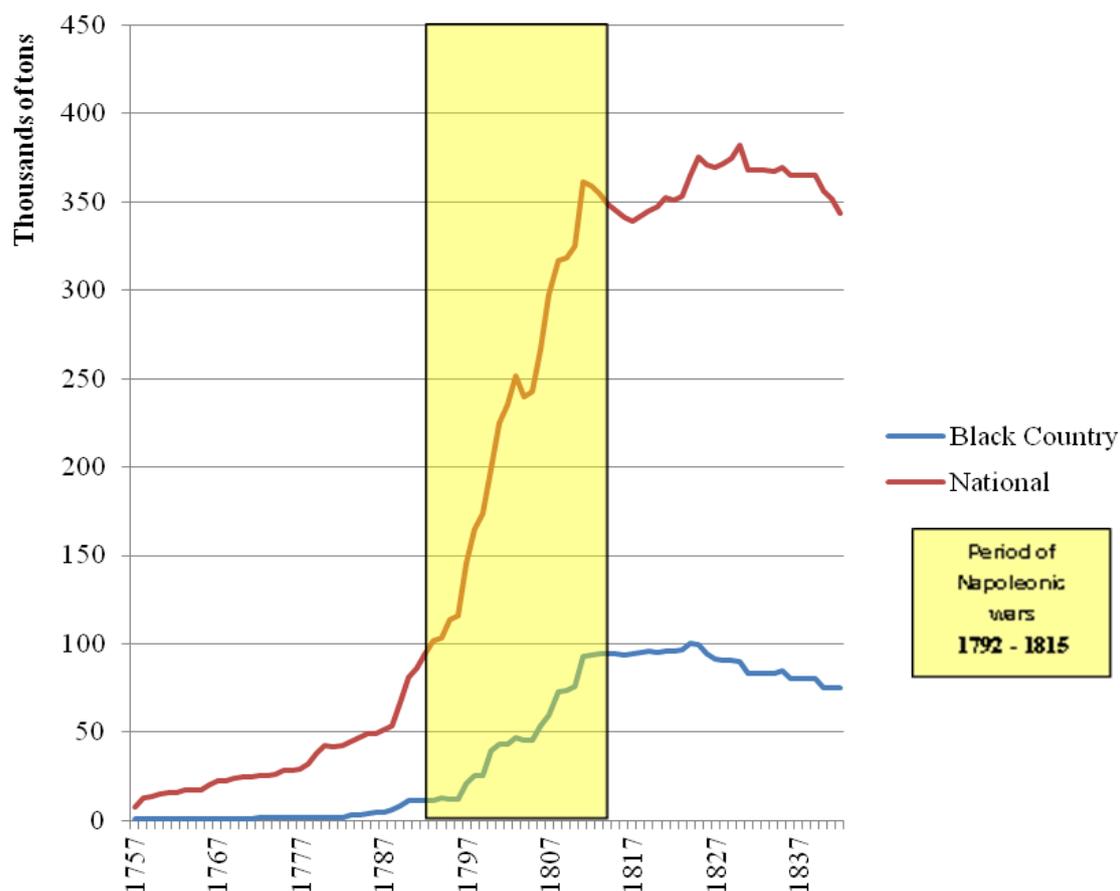
Figure 28 Black Country's share of national iron production (1757-1842)[196]

Although nail making provided the springboard from which many entrepreneurs set up their businesses, it had not developed. It still took place in small workshops attached to the nailmakers' homes, with the work increasingly being undertaken by the women of the family.[197] As industrialisation spread and new opportunities opened up, the men moved to more lucrative occupations, returning to nail making as a support during times of industrial crisis or unemployment.[198] Although nail making continued into the nineteenth century, a

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[196] Figures taken from ibid.
[197] Rowlands, 'Continuity and Change in an Industrialising Society: The Case of the West Midlands Industries', p. 129.
[198] Ibid.

series of events unfolded which sent the traditional workshop-based industry into an irreversible decline.

This fear was well founded, since Arthur Young, visiting the area on 13 June 1776, reported that local nail makers complained that their trade had fallen as a result of the war.[199] Although trading resumed in 1783 after the end of the war, the traditional form of nail making was still under threat, this time from machine-made nails, which were supplied to America from Europe.[200] At first, the British nail makers had no problem competing, due to the cheaper price of iron in England and the fact that machine-made nails were not suitable for all requirements. However, further outbreaks of war with America during the early nineteenth century and an embargo on the import of a whole list of British manufactured goods, including nails, heralded the beginning of the end for the trade.[201] The huge numbers of individuals and families thrown out of work during the war led to an acute problem for the local area. Thomas Attwood raised the dilemma with the Committee of the House of Commons on 29 April 1812 in his position as High Bailiff of Birmingham. He estimated that out of a population of around 400,000 in Birmingham and the surrounding manufacturing districts, up to 50,000 were involved in the iron trade. Around 10,000 men women and children worked in nail making which was in a deplorable state. He stated that they only existed in the trade 'hardly being said to live, since they work from four in the morning to ten at night and by their utmost exertions can earn only ten to twelve shillings a week, labouring men'. He also noted that some of the masters discharged their workmen but others kept them

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[199] Young, *Tours in England and Wales ... Selected from the Annals of Agriculture*, p. 140.
[200] 1842 (471) Report from the Select Committee on Payment of Wages: Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index.
[201] *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875 Statutes at Large, 9th Congress, 1st Session* [Online] http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=002/llsl002.db&recNum=416, (Accessed: 23/9/2013).

from a sense of duty and stockpiled nails for which they had no market.[202] William

Whitehouse, a nail monger from West Bromwich, gave evidence and confirmed the dire state

that the town was in. His estimate of nail workers in the Black County from information

given at a recent meeting in Dudley surpassed that of Attwood, being from 25 – 30,000. He

stated that before 1810 he alone had employed 1200 – 1500 men, women and children, but

now employed only 500 – 700.[203] Even when the embargo was lifted in 1814, the nail trade

did not recover to its former level as in both America and Britain the production of machine-

made nails was increasing and, by 1830, a number of factories had been set up in Birmingham

and Wolverhampton.[204] The relocation of the nail trade to the two major towns in the area

caused a further problem for the traditional nail makers, and a number of riots ensued as the

handmade trade began to decline and wages suffered.[205] Greenslade records that by the

middle of the nineteenth century, the industry had been replaced by other industrial concerns

that were moving into the area.[206] Although the shift to factory-produced nails was the logical

conclusion for a proto-industry, its relocation outside the nail making districts is illustrative of

the effects that new technology had on a whole area, by removing an industry which had huge

significance in terms of employment for a great number of people. The factories which did

set up in the area employed relatively few workers compared with the home-based trade. The

Oldbury Nail Company in 1884 is the only nailmaking factory in Oldbury which has been

identified. The heading of their price list indicates that it had recently taken over from an

earlier concern, the New Patent Forge Nail Company Ltd, along with its machinery and trade

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[202] 1812 (210) Minutes of Evidence, Taken before the Committee of the Whole House, to Whom It Was Referred, to Consider of the Several Petitions Which Have Been Presented to the House, in This Session of Parliament, Relating to the Orders in Council, pp. 1 – 5.

[203] Ibid., p. 19, 20.

[204] Greenslade, *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2*, p. 240.

[205] Timmins (ed) *The Resources, Products, and Industrial History of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District: A Series of Reports, Collected by the Local Industries Committee of the British Association at Birmingham, in 1865* , pp.113, 114.

[206] Greenslade, *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2*, p. 241.

mark. It was based in Halesowen Street which enabled access to the canal and railway for moving finished products (see Figure 29).[207]

Many of the men who left nail making moved into one of the branches of the iron industry, but it experienced a period of recession in the 1840s when the price of bar-iron slumped from £9 to £2.10s.0d. per ton in three years. Ironmasters were forced to reduce wages and several firms went bankrupt. The iron workers responded with large-scale strikes, widespread Chartist agitation and riots.[208] The situation improved when the Government sanctioned nearly 10,000 miles of new railway in 1844 and 1845, which in turn led to greater demands for iron and the price rose to £10.15s.0d per ton. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 boosted the industry further, freeing up trade with North America. New furnaces were built, bringing the Black Country up to its peak of production with 200 furnaces by 1860. Although new furnaces and ironworks were erected, technical developments were few and the pattern of iron working did not change.[209]

Although Oldbury had its share of iron foundries, forges and traditional small workshops, it also proved to be an ideal location for the larger factories of the nineteenth century. As land had not been used for mining there were a number of large sites close to the town and alongside the canal network which were available for building. Gradually, Oldbury's industrial base began to change. Two of the first to become established were the Alkali Works of Messrs Chance (1835), providing chemicals for their glass manufactory in nearby Spon Lane, and the Phosphorus Works of Messrs Albright and Wilson (1850).[210]

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[207] BCLM, 1978/105/001, The Oldbury Nail Co. (1884).
[208] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 6.
[209] Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*, p. 102.
[210] Chance, *A History of the Firm of Chance Brothers and Co.: Glass and Alkali Manufacturers*; Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*.

Figure 29 Nail factory in Oldbury (1884)[211]

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[211] BCLM, 1978/105/001.

In 1859, the Oldbury Railway Carriage and Wagon Company was established adjacent to the London and North West Railway and alongside the Birmingham Canal, thus facilitating shipments to London, Liverpool and overseas, where it counted New Zealand, Japan, India, Russia, Spain and South Africa amongst its customers.[212] The site contained all that was necessary to build the carriages on one site, including a pit shaft for coal, and a supply of iron from local iron mills, around thirty of which existed within a two-mile radius. The company also brought in parts from other metal-working industries in the adjoining towns, and is indicative of the way that division of labour was spreading through the industrial sectors of the Black Country.[213] These factories provided work for a significant number of people: Chances employed 400, Albright and Wilson 400, and the Railway Carriage works 800 (see Figure 30).[214]

Oldbury had two rail links. On 1 July 1852 the Stour Valley section of the London and North West Railway was opened to the north of the town, and in 1883 the Great Western Railway extended a line through Langley Green into the centre of Oldbury.[215] The coming of the railways was a mixed blessing. The Railway Carriage works provided employment for large numbers of people, but the speed and reduction in rates for freight transportation destroyed competition from the canals.[216] This was particularly relevant for the iron trade, where competition was keen and railway companies negotiated special rates for carrying heavier commodities.[217]

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[212] Morgan, A. E., *The Oldbury Railway Carriage & Wagon Company* [Online] (1938), http://metcam.co.uk.nstempintl.com/oldbury.htm, (Accessed: 5/2/2011).
[213] Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*, p. 39.
[214] Morgan, *The Oldbury Railway Carriage & Wagon Company* [Online]15/2/2011).
[215] *Morning Post* 'Railway Intelligence: Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Stour Valley - Opening', Friday 02 July 1852, p.2; *Worcestershire Chronicle,* 'The Oldbury Railway', Saturday 8 September 1883;*Morning Post* 'Railway Intelligence: Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Stour Valley - Opening', Friday 02 July 1852
[216] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 111.
[217] *Birmingham Daily Post* 'Railway Rates in the Iron Trade', Friday 15 December 1865, p. 3.
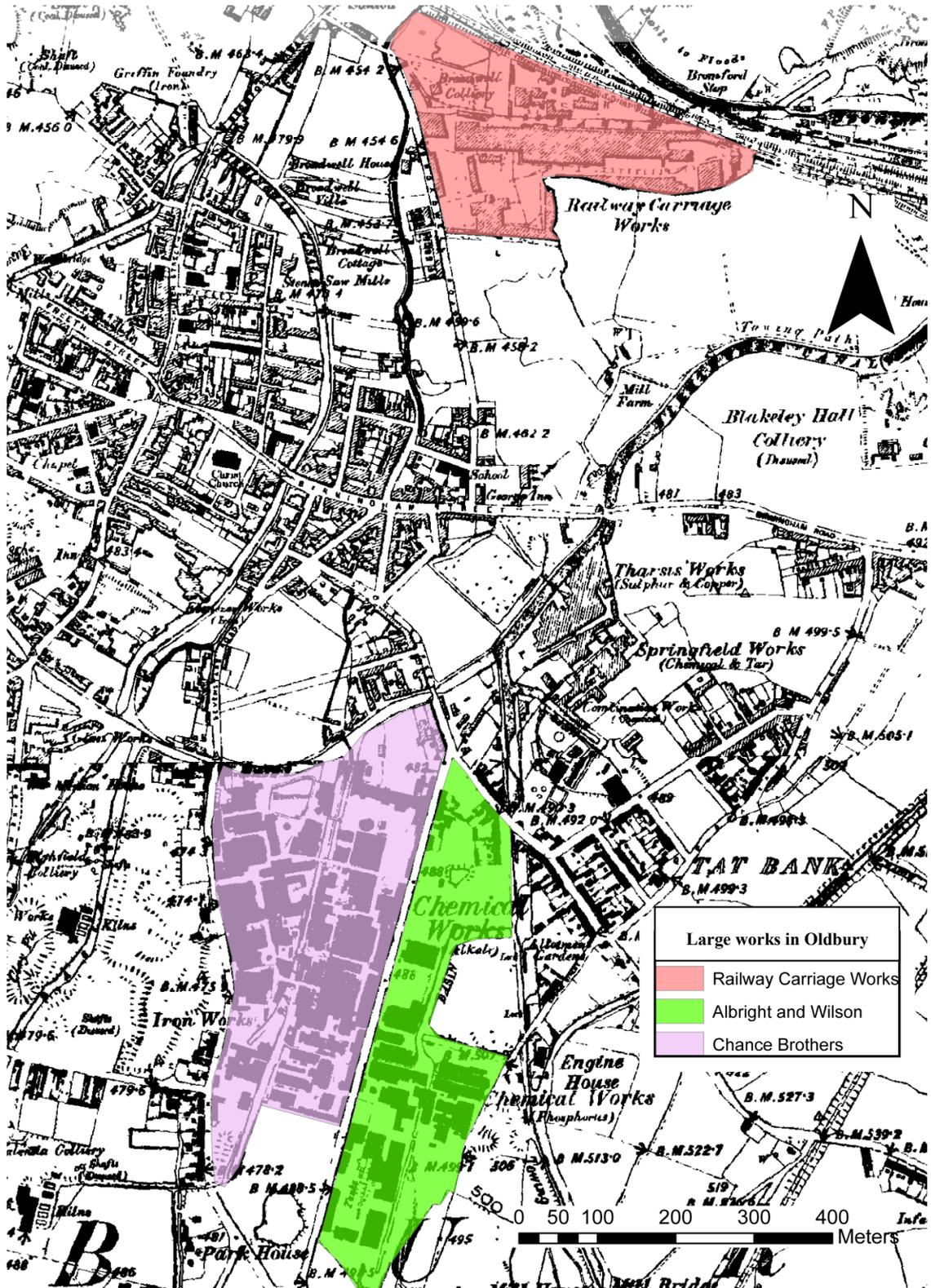
Figure 30 Three large industrial works in Oldbury (1887) [218]

[218] *Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 32so98ne, Edition 1, 1888; Worcestershire 39so98ne, Edition 1, 1887* **,** © Crown Copyright/Database Right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA. Maps created by the author using GIS.

In addition to these large works, a number of smaller workshops were established in the town employing fewer men.[219] The 1851 census shows a range of such firms, from building and timber merchant Samuel Marsh employing 30 men and the edge-tool workshop of Sarah Parkes employing nine men to Thomas Lancaster's saddler business, employing just one man.[220] A move towards the production of secondary metal articles such as frying pans, bolts, chains, and tools is also evident. This was in line with what was happening across the Black Country where the extractive industries in towns such as Bilston became replaced by metal-ware manufacturing.[221] As Oldbury developed as a town so its retail base expanded, giving employment to an increasing number of people through a range of outlets.

As new industries took root in the towns, some of the older industries experienced recession. By 1860, the first indications of the decline of the iron industry in the area began to show. The numbers of furnaces dropped from 200 to 170 over a three-year period and of these only 119 were 'blowing'.[222] The output was less than in other parts of the country. In 1860, for example, the Black Country produced 469,000 tons of pig iron, South Wales 969,000 tons, and Scotland 937,000 tons. Four years earlier, the total tonnage for each of the three areas had been a similar amount.[223] Iron ore began to give out in the South Staffordshire coalfield from the 1840s and coal from the 1850s. Gale notes that by 1883, the Earl of Dudley was the only ironmaster in the Black Country still using local ores.[224] One by one, the furnaces went out of blast until, by 1886, only 28 remained. A further problem was caused by the

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[219] Pigot, *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory for 1828- 1829*, pp. 874 - 78; Robson, W., *Robson's Birmingham and Sheffield Directory* (London, 1839), pp. 578 - 79; Cornish, W., *William Cornish's Birmingham: Trades, Corporation and General Directory* (Birmingham, 1861), pp. 857- 860.
[220] 1851 (HO.107/ 2024) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of Oldbury, Worcester Eastern Division, 3b , pp. 45, 47, 52.
[221] Raven, N. and Hooley, T., 'Industrial and Urban Change in the Midands: A Regional Survey', in: Stobart and Raven (eds), *Towns, Regions and Industries: Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, c.1700-1840* (Manchester, 2005), 23 – 41, p. 36.
[222] Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*, p. 103.
[223] Birch, A., *The Economic History of the British Iron and Steel Industry* (London, 1967), p. 133.
[224] Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*, p. 115.

introduction of the Bessemer process for making mild steel, which could produce cheaper substitutes for wrought iron.[225] Competition from the iron-producing areas of South Wales, Scotland and Yorkshire began to be felt as iron from these regions was shipped into the area.[226]

Some towns were harder hit than others. Bilston, which by 1820 had been producing nearly a third of South Staffordshire iron, suffered severely as the district's traditional industries went out of business, until new industries such as hollow-ware, tin plate and japanning took their place.[227] West Bromwich, on the other hand, with its concentration on finished metal goods such as enamelled cast iron hollow-ware, stoves, grates and bedsteads, was able to escape more lightly.[228] Many of the traditional manufacturing trades continued on a small-scale domestic basis until the later nineteenth century, but as with nail making, these trades were gradually replaced by factories with machinery to perform tasks.[229] Oldbury was not hit as hard as others as it had a varied manufacturing base. Many of the businesses which were attracted to the town were related to heavy industry such as Ludwig Lewis Demuth's Tar Distillery set up in 1866.[230] Others, however, provided a base which would take industry forward into the twentieth century: the British Cyanides Company Limited, set up by Chance Brothers and Albright and Wilson in 1894 to produce cyanide for use in gold mining went on to become British Industrial Plastics Limited (BIP).[231]

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[225] Ibid., pp. 114-15.
[226] Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*, p. 42.
[227] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 29
[228] Ibid., p. 27.
[229] Palliser, *The Staffordshire Landscape*, p. 183.
[230] CHAS, BS-MY, Midland and Yorkshire Tar Distillers Ltd (1868 - 1972).
[231] British Industrial Plastics, *Growth of a Group: A History of the B.I.P. Group, 1895-1949* (London, 1949); Dingley, C. S., *The Story of B.I.P., 1894-1962* (Oldbury, 1963), pp. 7, 8.

During the last ten years of the nineteenth century, the district's metal-working economy began to revive again by producing components for new industries, including cycles, manufacturing and engineering.[232] Oldbury experienced an increase in the number and variety of the smaller metal-based industries which brought diversification into the trades of the town. The manufacture of tubes and edge tools became a speciality.[233] These industries took the place of nail making as the town moved from proto-industry to factory industry.

Some of the Black Country's larger iron-founding firms survived by updating their technology and expanding in size, and the area was able to re-launch itself into relative prosperity, which lasted until the 1970s, but few of the smaller ironmasters were able to sustain the change.[234]

2.6 Conclusion

In order to understand Oldbury's economic and sociological background and to identify how important developments in the past affected its future, this chapter has sought to investigate relevant historical developments. This has revealed a number of important ways in which it diverged from the pattern which the other Black Country villages followed from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. Whereas other villages remained in the same county with a governing élite who were interested in taking industrialisation forward, Oldbury was located on the fringe of another county, manor and parish and had a high turnover of members of the landholding élite who were mainly interested in developing its agricultural resources. The one group of landholders who did make a difference were the Premonstratensian Canons who relocated the village to a position alongside the only main road crossing the district. This

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[232] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 106.
[233] Ibid., p. 105.
[234] Palliser, *The Staffordshire Landscape*, p. 172.

placed Oldbury in a formidable position to become a major player in the area, taking advantage of trade and setting the foundation for future development and growth. The dissolution of the monasteries appears to have been a key factor in halting this progress. With new landlords and a subsequent lack of leadership, the village was not able to capitalise on its early assets. Following the Black Death, many families increased their landholdings and became very wealthy. This widened the division between rich and poor which emerged during the industrial period into an upper, middle and lower class society. The geology of the area directed the course that farming would take in favour of pastoral rather than arable which prepared the way for a future dual economy of metal working and agriculture.

The spread and effects of industrialisation in the Black Country follows King's pattern of gradual development interspersed with a series of small 'revolutions' during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was followed by an intensification of production during the nineteenth century.[235] In the case of Oldbury, however, it is possible to identify an industrial revolution as it developed rapidly from a rural village to an industrial town over a period of around thirty years. Although it experienced the proto-industrial base of nail making, was in an excellent position to develop industrially from its position first on a major road, and then with a canal which circled the town, local people did not take advantage of these assets. The major reason for this delay was its absent landlords' lack of interest in developing its industrial capabilities. The advent of entrepreneurs from the late eighteenth century and the growth and productivity which followed enabled the town to catch up, over a short space of time, with the long-established industrial expansion of other towns.

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[235] King, 'The Production and Consumption of Bar Iron in Early Modern England and Wales', pp. 24, 26.

CHAPTER 3: THE POLLUTED TOWN: THE EFFECTS OF POLLUTION ON THE
TOWN OF OLDBURY DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Black Country industries made a significant contribution to the national economy, especially
through their extractive and metal-working activities. Nineteenth-century reports, however,
tended to focus more on the appearance of the neighbourhood, describing it in grim contrast
to the city of Birmingham, with even its name carrying a negative connotation.[1] The visible
effects of industrial pollution in the area had a large part to play in this. Eyewitnesses
described the inhabitants as living in a state of perpetual twilight[2] in their 'shabby towns' of
'smother amid smother' (see Figure 31).[3]

Figure 31 Image of the Black Country from *Illustrated London News* (1866) [4]

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[1] Smiles, S. (ed) *James Nasmyth, Engineer: An Autobiography* (London, 1883), p. 125; Sidney, S., *Rides On Railways* (Original pubication 1851) (Chichester, 1973), p. 165; White, *All Round the Wrekin*, p. 239.
[2] Sidney, *Rides On Railways*, p. 165.
[3] White, *All Round the Wrekin*, p. 239.
[4] *Illustrated London News, '*Black Country', December 1866.

Analysis of pollution in the industrial town has tended to focus on poor sanitation and the public health movement.[5] There has been far less investigation into pollution linked with industry: atmospheric pollution, or as it was known in the nineteenth century, 'smoke nuisance', and the dumping of industrial waste. Noise, which was an intrinsic part of industrial life, and is today considered a pollutant, has received minimal attention.[6] The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to build on existing knowledge by analysing the nature of pollution in the industrial town from four perspectives: human waste, smoke, industrial waste, and noise. However, due to the fact that noise did not generate concern at the time, the resources available for analysis are extremely limited. The main period of research in this chapter is from 1840 to 1900.

The chapter argues that the town of Oldbury suffered immense problems of pollution during the nineteenth century. It addresses the following questions: What were the effects of pollution on the lives of the populace and the fabric of the town? Was this pollution typical of the Black Country as a whole and of other English industrial regions? How did the local people, the industrialists and the government view the problem and what means were put in place to deal with it? What do these perspectives show about power relationships and attitudes to pollution by the political, social and economic élite?

3.1 Historiography and sources

There have been a variety of studies which consider pollution as part of town growth. Mick Aston and James Bond and Pamela Sharpe, for example focus upon household and human

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[5] Chadwick, E., *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain* (Edinburgh, 1842); Hamlin, C., *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge, 1998); Aston and Bond, *The Landscape of Towns*; Sharpe, P., 'Population and Society 1700 - 1840', in: Clark (ed) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000).
[6] Adams, M. S. and McManus, F., *Noise and Noise Law, A Practical Approach* (Chichester, 1994), p. 151.

waste and the way in which it affected the lives of the people within the town.[7] Christopher

Hamlin's study of public health and Anthony Wohl's *Endangered Lives* add to this, by

providing an investigation into pollution as part of a study of different aspects of public health

within the nineteenth-century town.[8] Hamlin takes as his focus the public health movement

that arose in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s, through a study of the work of Edwin

Chadwick.[9] Medical opinion of the time stressed the link between good health, a nutritious

diet and a healthy work environment, views that were overridden by Chadwick's emphasis on

providing sanitation and pure water supplies.[10] Hamlin perceives a political undertone in the

report. He believes that 'the stakes were much larger than piped-in water and good sewers'.

By addressing problems that were incidental to health and decent living conditions, the report

diverted the attention of the public from the failures of the much criticised Poor Law.[11] This

is borne out by reports of Board of Health meetings in Oldbury, where the focus is primarily

on sanitary provision.[12] Wohl's study of public health has a strong emphasis on social

experiences. Describing the situations that people were facing in regard to sanitation,

pollution and industrial diseases, he brings the experiences of the people in Victorian towns to

life. He gives a graphic description of the problems, and itemises the measures put in place to

address them. In doing so, he provides insight into the contrast between the perspective of

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[7] Aston and Bond, *The Landscape of Towns*; Sharpe, 'Population and Society 1700 - 1840'.
[8] Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854*; Wohl, A. S., *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1983).
[9] Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854,* p.2.
[10] Ibid., p. 56.
[11] Ibid., p. 157.
[12] For example:1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Commissioners' Meeting, Sanitary Condition of the Town', Saturday 2 September 1865; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Lecture on Sanitary Science by the Medical Officer of Health, Oldbury', 13 August 1866; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury, Smethwick and West Bromwich Water Bill', 1871;*Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Sewerage Question at Oldbury', 1876.

members of the working classes and the ideology of those seeking to bring about reform. These did not always correspond, as in the case of vaccination, for example.[13]

Compared with research into sanitary pollutants, the subject of smoke pollution in the industrial town has received far less attention. Stephen Mosley and Peter Thorsheim stand out as the two leading writers in this field.[14] Mosley focuses much of his attention on developments in one city, Manchester, describing the problem of smoke as encountered during its industrial expansion.[15] He sets out to discover why 'a whole community, from Manchester's ordinary factory hands to its leading merchants and industrialists, allowed smoke pollution to contaminate the atmosphere of southeast Lancashire for well-over a century'.[16] He does this by examining the nature of smoke, and its effects on health and the environment, the way in which smoke was viewed by the populace and the industrialist, and the search for solutions to the problem. His conclusion is that the people of Manchester were far from complacent about the problem. They recognised its effects on the fabric of the town and the lives of the people and sought to address the situation through political, legal and technical means. Mosley's study is particularly relevant to this thesis because it focuses attention on the way that an individual town sought to deal with the problems that it was experiencing at a local level, and provides a parallel with the experiences the Black Country towns were facing during the same period. His use of a wide range of sources, including the views of story tellers, poets, and medical practitioners is enlightening and has been emulated in this thesis through descriptions of pollution from local writers and visitors to the area.

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[13] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, pp. 132-33.
[14] Mosley, S., *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge, 2001); Thorsheim, P., *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800* (Athens, Ohio, 2006).
[15] Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester*.
[16] Ibid., p. 10.

Thorsheim, the other leading writer in this field, approaches the question by an examination of the thesis that 'Britain the "first industrial nation", and the first to become predominantly urban, was also the place in which the modern idea of pollution was invented'.[17] He tackles the topic in a chronological way, tracing the developments from the history of the use of coal and its ensuing smoke problem, through the beliefs of the 'miasma era', to the changes brought about by the smokeless zone legislation of the present day. He considers the subject from a national rather than local perspective. He gives detailed accounts of both the rise and spread of pollution, and the increasing awareness, by the authorities, of its effects on the populace and their urban environment. He details the scientific and technological aspects of pollution and the way in which policy was made to bring about the necessary changes to industrial practice, and points to early environmental awareness. Many of these issues have provided a background from which to assess the Black Country's experience of topics that were on the national agenda, in particular, the way that policy and technological changes were filtering down to the local level. This thesis examines the way in which smoke pollution was perceived over time, and the struggles that took place in Black Country towns, as they sought to come to terms with regulations and procedures, factors which support Thorsheim's argument that pollution was a concept that was being invented during the nineteenth century. Thorsheim's detailed references and bibliography highlighted primary and secondary sources that have proved particularly useful for effective research. The only weakness of Thorsheim's work, as far as this thesis is concerned, is the relative lack of information for the earlier part of the nineteenth century, compared with the period after 1880.

The methodology employed in this chapter does not directly follow the pattern of either Mosley or Thorsheim, but uses many of the themes raised by them as a framework to study

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[17] Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*, p. 2.

the effects of smoke pollution on the town of Oldbury, and the wider Black Country. To date, no study of smoke pollution in the West Midlands has been located by the author. The factual basis for the events that were occurring in both the region and the nation has been facilitated through a number of documents. A prime source of information is that provided by the annual and periodic reports of committees of inquiry held in the Parliamentary archives and papers. A searchable index and online images are available, providing a means of accessing relevant details.[18] On a local level, extensive records of Oldbury Board of Health survive as a paper archive at the National Archives.[19] They contain an unparalleled record of the problems that the town was experiencing from the middle of the nineteenth century, along with the efforts being made to solve them. Of particular interest is the Board of Health report for 1856, which gives a detailed picture of the housing, sanitation, and health of the town over a nine-month period, outlining the reasons for the establishment of the Board.[20] These resources provide the primary sources for information about the state of health of the town of Oldbury. Industrial archives exist for two of the major businesses, Chance Alkali Works and Albright and Wilson Phosphorus Works.[21] Reports from these records give an alternative point of view for the problem of pollution, since they tend to be presented from the perspective of the industrialist.

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[18] House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers* [Online] http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk/home.do, (Accessed: 2008 - 2013).

[19] TNA, MH 13/138Vol. 140, Oldbury, Openshore, Ormesby, Ormskirk.

[20] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester.

[21] Chance, *A History of the Firm of Chance Brothers and Co.: Glass and Alkali Manufacturers*; Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*.

3.2 Pollution from human waste

Pollution from human waste was not merely a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. As far back as Roman times, people were seeking to address the problem by building sewers and bathhouses, and aqueducts to supply clean water to their towns. The challenges that faced the expanding urban areas of the nineteenth century,[22] however, had more in common with dilemmas caused by high migration in the newly developing world of today. People who congregate in 'shanty' towns or refugee camps, tax the existing resources and give rise to vast inadequacies of water supply and waste disposal.

During the nineteenth century, the situation in Oldbury typified that of other parts of the country in respect to provision of sanitation and clean water supplies. This was a problem that was being highlighted in numerous Parliamentary reports, bills and acts.[23] The 1856 report for Oldbury stated that water was only available from wells or springs, within, or adjacent to, the town, and needed to be transported to people's homes.[24] This situation was repeated in a number of the Black Country towns, so a means of providing an adequate water supply to the district began to be explored. The solution was for a private company, South Staffordshire Waterworks, to provide the towns with water. An act of Parliament was obtained in 1853 to take this forward.[25] This was only the beginning of the process, however, as the Company had to obtain finance for the venture, through selling shares in the company,

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[22] Chadwick, *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain*, p. 4.
[23] For example, Greater Manchester: 1854 (443) Public Health Act (Barton-upon-Irwell). Copies of correspondence, memorials, and reports, in reference to the application of the Public Health Act to the township of Barton-upon-Irwell, pp. 23, 25; 1854 (147) General Board of Health. A bill to confirm provisional orders of the General Board of Health for the districts of Plymouth, Hanley, Haworth, Much Woolton, Aberdare, Bishop Auckland, Willenhall, and Over Darwen.
[24] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 14.
[25] Van Leerzem, J. and Williams, B., *The History of South Staffordshire Waterworks Company, 1853-1989* [Online] (1989), http://southstaffswaterarchives.org.uk/SSHISTRY2.doc, (Accessed: 12/3/2012).

and locate sustainable sources of water.[26] In 1858, the Black Country town of Walsall

received their first piped water supply. Walsall was closely followed by Wednesbury and

Darlaston (1859), and Tipton (1860). However, the population of Oldbury had to wait until

1862 for water to arrive in their town.[27] The 1856 report to the Board of Health states that

houses were being built with cisterns in the town, ready for when water arrived, but the

majority of water, at that time, still came from private wells or springs on the outskirts of the

town.[28] Alongside the need for a suitable water supply came the even more pressing need for

the disposal of sewage and waste. The 1856 report stated that Oldbury, in common with

many other English towns, suffered from the lack of 'all the requisite arrangements for

collecting and removing solid and liquid refuse' from the town.[29] The yards and streets where

the children played were 'saturated and unwholesome', exposing them to 'filth and disease'.[30]

The provision of privies was a major problem. They were inadequate in number and, as no

means of disposal was provided, so full that they could not be used. The back courts and

footways were no better, with piles of decomposing matter and ashes which children used as

toilets.[31] The few drains and sewers that existed were woefully inadequate. Liquid sewage

ran into open ditches and the local brook, or lay in pools around the doors of the houses. The

few sewers that did exist had outlets into the canal.[32] In the absence of drainage, water

flooded into cellars, many of which were described as being in a putrid state. There being no

means of bailing out the water, except by hand, the ground around the houses was saturated

with liquid refuse. Understandably, the parts of town where the sewage and rubbish lay the

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[26] Ibid., pp. 7-9.
[27] Ibid., p. 42.
[28] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 14.
[29] Ibid., p. 13.
[30] Ibid.. p. 13.
[31] Ibid., pp. 13, 14.
[32] Ibid., p. 15.

longest were the areas in which virulent fevers were reported as running through whole families, in many instances terminating in death.[33] In the larger towns the problem took on immense proportions. High death rates through cholera, and other epidemics, finally brought this situation to the attention of the upper and middle classes, setting in motion the wheels for change.[34] Incidents of cholera in Oldbury and the other Black Country towns will be considered in Chapter 4.

The problems were eventually recognised at a national level and Acts of Parliament were introduced to address them. One of the most important of these was the Public Health Act of 1848. Based on Edwin Chadwick's investigation into the sanitary condition of the labouring population of England in 1842,[35] the Act was to have widespread consequences. A General Board of Health in London was created with extensive powers to enforce standards of public health. Local Boards of Health were set up to implement the acts in a concerted way at ground level.[36] The request for a Board of Health to be set up in a town was to depend upon the petition of not less than one tenth of the inhabitants who were rated to the relief of the poor in the town or:

> where it shall appear that the proportion of deaths…. from typhus fever, diarrhoea, scarlatina or other febrile epidemic, endemic and contagious diseases…… have on the average of three years exceeded the proportion of twenty per cent of the total deaths or exceeded the average rate of deaths from such causes.[37]

The death rate requiring the establishment of a Board of Health was set at 23 per 1,000 of the population, a rate which was exceeded by Oldbury over a seven-year period (see Table 1).

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[33] Ibid., pp. 7, 15.
[34] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p. 119.
[35] 1842 (007) Sanitary Inquiry: England. Local Reports on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of England, in Consequence of an Inquiry Directed to Be Made by the Poor Law Commissioners .
[36] Evans, E. J., *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783-1870* (London, 1983), p. 297
[37] 1847 (546) Public Health. A Bill, [as Amended by the Lords] Intituled, an Act for Promoting the Public Health, p. 6.

Table 1 Mortality rate in Oldbury (1848-1854) [38]

Years	Number of deaths registered	Annual Mortality per 1,000 persons living in Oldbury	Annual Mortality per 1,000 persons living in England
1848	277	27	23
1849	251	23	24
1850	251	22	21
1851	389	33	22
1852	327	27	22
1853	366	28	23
1854	448	33	23
In the 7 years 1848 – 54	**2309**	**28**	**23**

No evidence has yet been found to explain the high numbers of deaths in the town in 1851 and 1854, but cholera and other epidemics were rife in built-up areas across the country during this decade. The supposition is that, given the insanitary state of the town, Oldbury would have fallen into a high-risk category.[39]

The high rate of mortality was not unique to Oldbury, however, as it was being experienced by all the Black Country towns. The twentieth annual report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, written in the year in which Oldbury's local board was appointed, found Staffordshire to have the highest mortality rate in the country, along with another substantial industrial area: Lancashire (see Table 2).

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[38] Table compiled from data in 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 6; 1859 (2559) Twentieth Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, p. xvi.

[39] 1854 (1818) Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Causes Which Have Led to, or Have Aggravated the Late Outbreak of Cholera in the Towns of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Gateshead, and Tynemouth, p. v.

Table 2 English counties with the highest rate of mortality (1857)[40]

Registration counties	Population at last census (1851)	Mortality rate from all causes 1857 (per 1,000 persons living)
Lancashire	2,067,301	27
Staffordshire	630, 545	27
Durham	411,579	25
Warwickshire	479,157	24
West Riding	1,344,782	24
East Riding	231,500	23
Cheshire	431,137	23
London	2,302, 326	22
England	17,927,609	22

Staffordshire contained 61 individual townships, 33 of which, according to the report, were above the stipulated level of 23 deaths per 1000. Of the 16 Staffordshire towns with the highest levels of mortality, all but two, the pottery towns of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Wolstanton, were in the Black Country.[41] Figure 32 shows the Black Country towns which headed the list. The shaded columns indicate towns which were in the wider Black Country area (see Figure 32; Appendix 3).[42]

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[40] 1859 (2559) Twentieth Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, p. xviii.
[41] Ibid., pp. 63, 64.
[42] Graph compiled using data from an extrapolation of the 1851 and 1861 census records and the Twentieth annual report of the Registrar General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, ibid., pp. 110, 111.
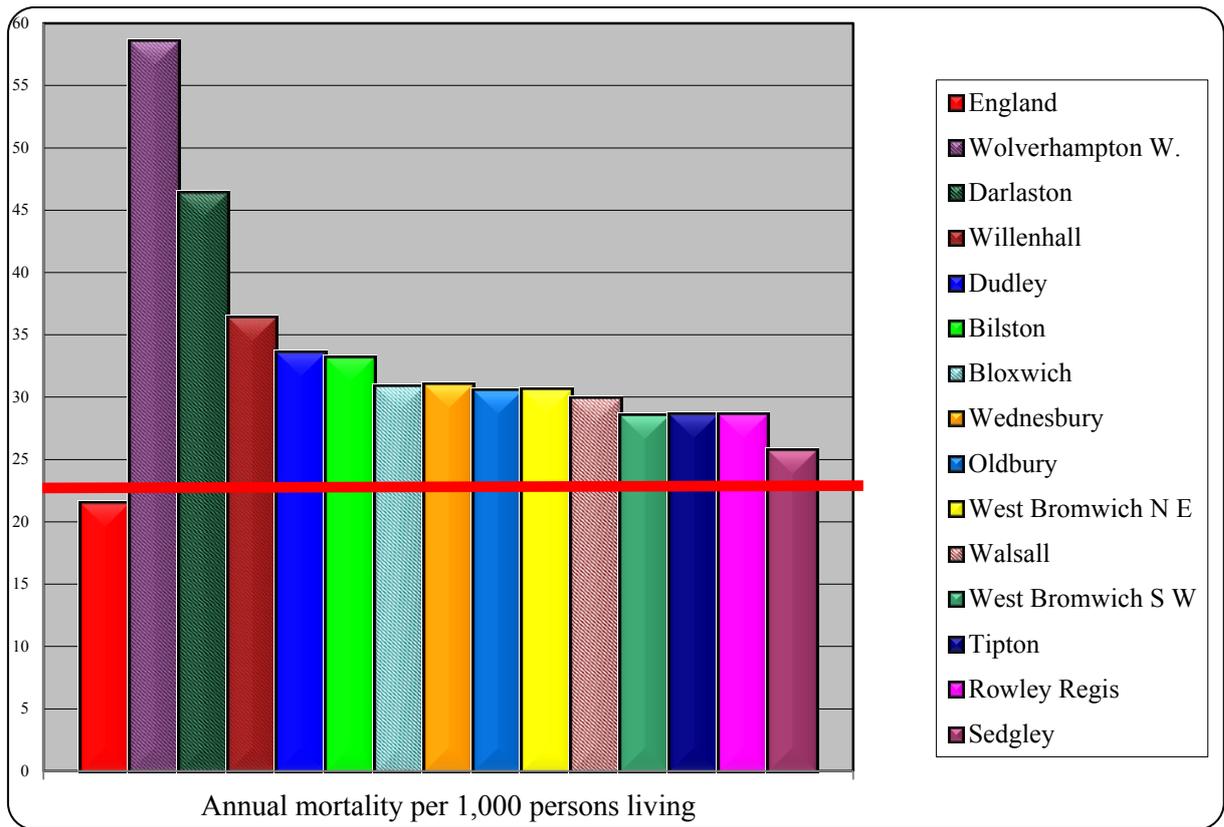
Figure 32 Death Rate in Black Country towns (1857)[43]

The reason for the high mortality level is readily understood when the figures for age at death are compared with others in the county, since the number of children who died before their fifth birthday was exceptionally high, the highest numbers of child deaths taking place before the first birthday.[44]

The report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England stated that the West Midland counties had suffered more than any of the other divisions, with 'the great coal and iron districts of Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Dudley being in a

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[43] Ibid.
[44] 1859 (2559) Twentieth Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, pp. 110, 111.

very unhealthy state'.[45] The mortality had been raised greatly above the average by small-

pox, diarrhoea, scarlatina and typhus. It went on to state that:

> if the authorities, who are intelligent and active in many things, do not bestir
> themselves, the population may again be decimated by epidemic cholera. The
> supply of water is execrable and the results are legible in the registers of death.[46]

The data in the Twentieth Annual Report is borne out by figures for Oldbury, produced in

1856 as part of an investigation into the health of the town.[47] Over a nine-month period, 329

deaths had occurred, 210 of which were children, with 150 of these being under one year old.

Scarlet fever and typhus were named as two fevers that commonly ran through whole

families, and the health bill for the town was 30 to 40 per cent higher than any other parish in

the Poor Law Union (see Figure 33).[48]

The outcome of the investigation was that a bill authorising the setting up of a local Board of

Health for Oldbury was passed on 16 February 1857.[49] The expectation was that the Board

would have regulatory powers to control and implement means to deal with the problems the

town was facing in relation to supply of water, sewage, drainage, and cleansing the town.[50]

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[45] Ibid., p. xxxi.
[46] Ibid.
[47] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester.
[48] Ibid., pp. 22-26.
[49] 1857 (16) Public Health Supplemental Bill (1857). A bill to confirm certain provisional orders of the General Board of Health applying the Public Health Act, 1848, to the districts of Ipswich, Oldbury, Stroud, Llangollen, and Dukinfield; and for altering the constitution of the local board for the main sewerage district of Wisbech and Walsoken.
[50] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p. 14; Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854*, p. 243.
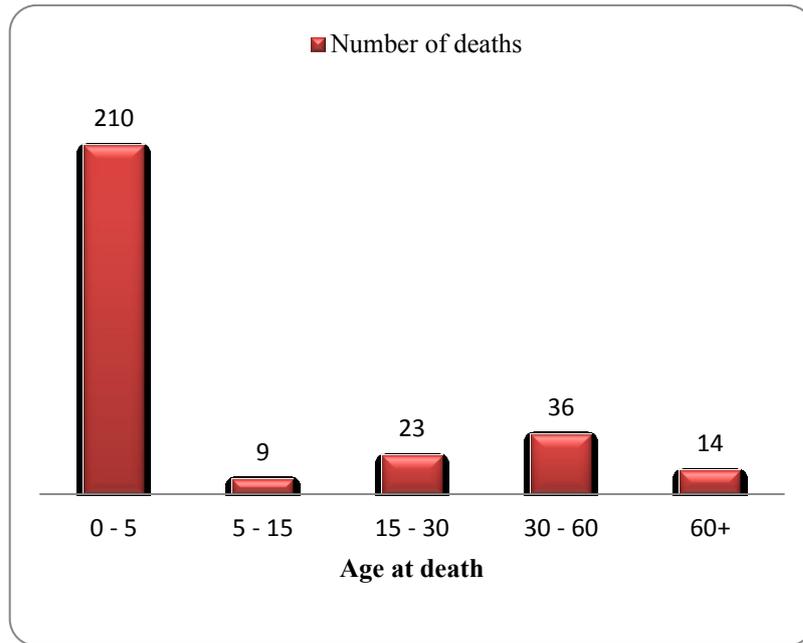
Figure 33 Deaths over a nine-month period in Oldbury (1856)[51]

One possible explanation for the state of the area could have been the fact that it was a

conurbation of small towns, each with their own local Board of Health and town government.

The small resources of these local boards made it far more difficult for them to instigate the

construction of a sewerage system or cope with the provision of clean water. Large towns,

such as Manchester or Birmingham, by comparison, had far more power and resources at their

disposal. Manchester, for example, set up a Board of Health in 1796 with a membership

which included medical officers from the Royal Infirmary, surgeons, apothecaries and

magistrates.[52] They were able to call upon the expertise of national medical experts to

support their decisions, when necessary, as in the setting up of an isolation hospital.[53]

A report on the meeting of Oldbury's Local Board in 1864 supports this hypothesis. An

invitation had been given to Oldbury to join with the towns of West Bromwich and

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Harris, H., 'Manchester's Board of Health in 1796', *Isis,* Feb. 1938, 28**,** 26-37;Pickstone, J. V., *Medicine and Industrial Society: A History of Hospital Development in Manchester and Its Region, 1752-1946* (Manchester, 1985), p. 25.

[53] Harris, 'Manchester's Board of Health in 1796', p. 29.

Smethwick, to share the costs involved in South Staffordshire Waterworks Company delivering a water supply to the towns.[54] This alliance illustrates the tendency for the adjoining towns to work together across political borders. It would have been expected that Oldbury and West Bromwich would co-operate, since they were both part of the same Poor Law Union. Smethwick, however, had its links with Harborne, and the Kings Norton Poor Law Union, and would have been expected to access facilities through them. [55]

Work towards providing Oldbury with a sanitary system proved a lengthy and drawn-out procedure. In 1864, seven years after the Board of Health had been set up, the subject of sewerage and water supply was tabled on the agenda of a meeting of the Board. Night soil was now being collected, but a sewerage system, which would cost the town £10,000, was still under discussion.[56] In the meantime, the population had to cope with the situation as best they could. The hardest-hit were the working-class families, who had no means of extricating themselves from the living situation in which they found themselves.[57]

The wealthier inhabitants of industrial towns traditionally lived outside, or moved from the centre to the windward, south-western side, to avoid the pollution.[58] In Oldbury, those who could afford to live outside the town did so, and the industrialists and professional men who remained in the town tended to live in the same district or street. In large towns, home and work became physically separated by creating an entire residential district for the affluent. A prime example of this is the district of Edgbaston in Birmingham.[59] Edgbaston contained the

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[54] TNA, MH 13/138, Meeting of the Oldbury Local Board 1864.
[55] Greenslade (ed) *A History of the County of Stafford, Volume 17* , p. 118.
[56] TNA, MH 13/138.
[57] Sharpe, 'Population and Society 1700 - 1840', pp. 520, 528.
[58] Aston and Bond, *The Landscape of Towns*, p. 153.
[59] From the late 1700's Edgbaston had developed to become a fashionable suburb of Birmingham. The land was owned by a single land owner who ensured that only people of an appropriate class could afford to build by setting the building leases at a high price and not allowing working class homes or industries to be set up there.

homes of large industrialists, who were setting up their businesses in the towns of

Birmingham's hinterland, like the Chance family, from Oldbury (see Figure 34). The

majority of the industries set up by such men, whilst providing a livelihood for the people of

the town in which it was based, contributed to the polluted atmosphere the inhabitants had to

endure, as the works discharged smoke and fumes into the air, and effluent into the water

supplies.[60]
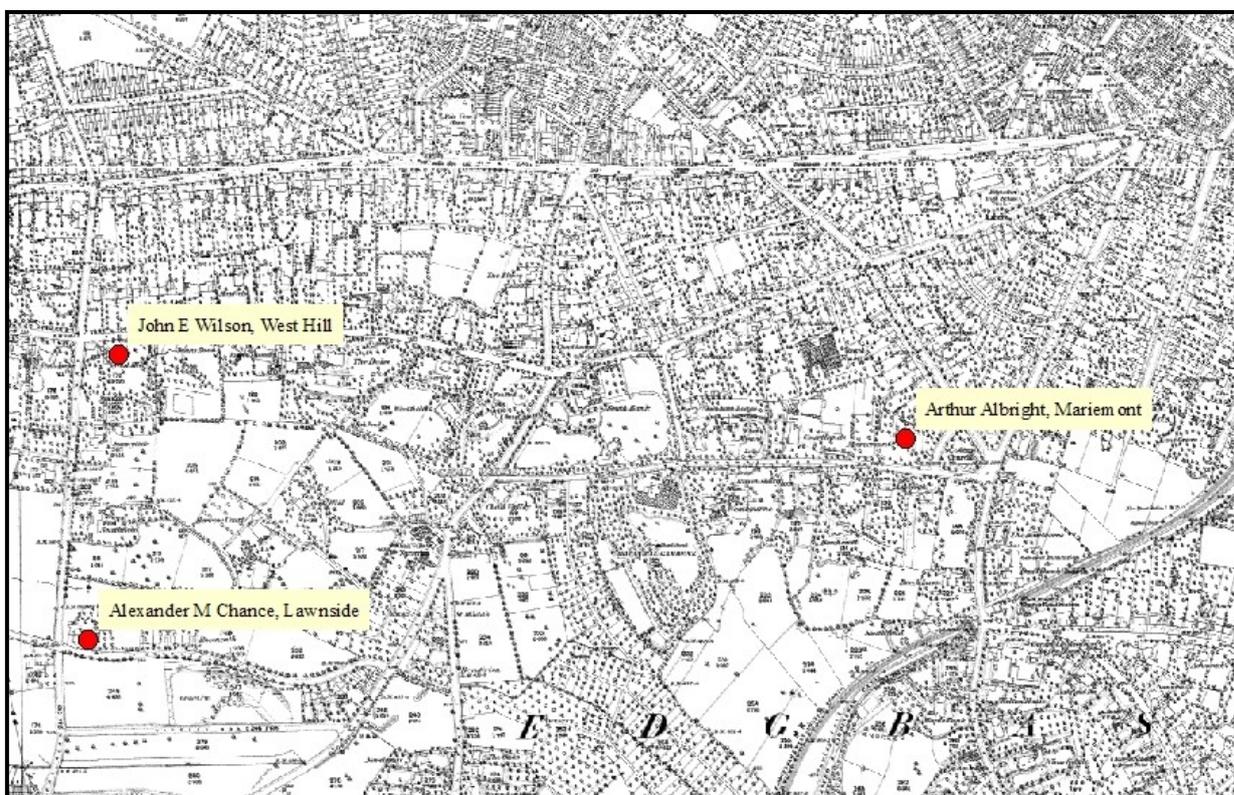
Figure 34 Location of homes of Oldbury industrialists in Edgbaston, Birmingham (1890)[61]

By the time that the 1831 census was taken a large number of male residents over the age of 20 were capitalists, bankers and professional men. Slater, T. R., *Edgbaston : A History* (Chichester, 2002), pp. 25, 26, 47.
[60] TNA, 1J/1J8, Nuisances Respecting Oldbury (4th December 1857).
[61] *Ordnance Survey County Series: Warwickshire 36013121, edition 1, 1890 © Crown Copyright/database right 2013. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service* (1890), constructed by the author using GIS.

3.3 Smoke pollution

The nature of air pollution had changed during the eighteenth century, with the shift from the use of wood, to coal, as an energy source. Although coal was in use as a household fuel from the sixteenth century, wood had been the preferred fuel for industrial purposes.[62] As wood stocks became depleted during the early eighteenth century, more and more industries adapted to the use of coal. By the end of the century, as population grew, and industry expanded, the increase in the number of users of fossil fuel brought with it a comparable increase in the size of the problem of pollution. As villages swelled into industrial towns, industries, which may have initially been on the outskirts of the village, became located close to the centre of the town, with housing spreading around them. Industries, such as iron works, were established next to extraction sites in the surrounding countryside, and houses for the workers were built in the same location. These hamlets, in their turn, began to grow and spread towards the town. Dispersed settlements transformed into an industrial conurbation.

From the early part of the eighteenth century Sheffield and Manchester had a reputation for high levels of smoke pollution. These were concentrated in the areas inhabited by the working classes, who lived near to the works, where the cheapest housing was located.[63] As the Black Country developed, it experienced similar pollution levels, but as a conurbation, rather than an individual town. Here the small spreading towns became meshed together as an 'interminable village' of 'houses, interspersed with blazing furnaces, forges and engine

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[62] Brimblecombe, P. and Maynard, R. L. (eds) *The Urban Atmosphere and Its Effects* (London, 2001), pp. 4, 5.
[63] Defoe, D., *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (original publication 1727) (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 482; 1843 (583) Report from the Select Committee on Smoke Prevention: Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, p. 78; Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester*, p. 31.

chimneys': a pall of smog hung over the whole area.[64] In addition to the smoke from the

works, the process of calcinating ironstone, and of turning coal into coke by burning in the

open air, led to the presence of many smouldering heaps in the furnace yards.[65] Oldbury had

four such furnaces, and became known as the 'town of the four moons', since it was so well

lit by them at night, that street lighting was deemed unnecessary.[66] As with other industrial

towns, heavy industry had initially been set up on the edge of the village. This changed over

the century, however, as the town expanded around it.

For people living in the emerging industrial towns, smoke pollution was accepted as a natural

consequence of the industry which provided them with a means of existence. The smoke was

even considered, by people in all strata of society, to have beneficial properties. It was

tolerated until it reached such proportions that it began to threaten the lives of the populace

through its impact on air quality and human health.[67] The problem that really concerned

people was 'miasma', a name given to a supposed airborne substance, produced by

decomposing biological material. This, it was believed, was to blame for most environmental

illnesses and diseases.[68] The piles of rotting vegetation and the raw sewage, to be found in

every urban location, were felt to be the cause of miasmas. Chadwick's report, published in

1842, warned about miasma escaping from piles of refuse, poor drainage, burial grounds,

pigsties and privies.[69] In 1856, the Board of Health Report for Oldbury expressed their

concerns, noting the odour, noxious gases and 'contamination of the atmosphere' from the

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[64] 1843 (508) Midland Mining Commission. First Report. South Staffordshire; Fyfe, J., *Merchant Enterprise, or The History of Commerce from the Earliest Times* (London, 1864), p. 258; Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* , pp. 2, 143.
[65] 1843 Vol. xiii (508), op cit, p. V.
[66] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 109.
[67] Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester*, p. 7.
[68] Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*, p. 10.
[69] Chadwick, *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain*, pp. 10, 11, 15, 25, 27.

piles of 'corrupting animal and vegetable matter' which 'tend to impair, or damage the health'. All these factors were highlighted in Chadwick's report.[70] Smoke, by comparison, was commonly viewed as a tool against pollution, containing carbon and sulphur, which, it was believed, would counteract the effect of miasma, and prevent disease.[71]

This view was widely prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century when John Atkinson, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, and an expert on the treatment of tuberculosis, suggested using it as a treatment for this disease.[72] According to the 1856 report, the smoke-polluting industrialists were quick to accept this belief. Hydrochloric acid gas from the alkali works in Oldbury was known to destroy crops, a factor that had led to the compensation of farmers, including the renting of their land. It was stated that it also took the colour out of drapers' goods, and was 'a very grievous nuisance to the inhabitants, particularly in wet weather and when the wind is in the direction to carry it into the town'.[73] However, in spite of its destructive properties, Mr T.R.Cooper, the Medical Officer, did not feel that it was prejudicial to health. Mr H. Reyner, the manager of the works, claimed that, of the 450 men who were employed in the works, there were never more than seven on the sick list at one time. Moreover, the 'muriatic acid gas', the historical name for hydrochloric acid, was believed to have a 'disinfectant power', and there were 'instances of consumptive men having being cured'.[74] In 1856, when attempting to introduce methods to improve the situation, members of the local Board of Health raised the problem with the factory owners. The owners, however, reiterated that they believed that the gas had 'undoubted antiseptic properties', and

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[70] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 13.
[71] Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*, p. 17.
[72] Atkinson, J., *Change of Air: Fallacies Regarding It* (London, 1848), p. 26.
[73] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester pp. 8- 9.
[74] Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

believed the town would be worse off without it.[75] They were not alone in making this claim.

Manufacturers in the chemical industries in Liverpool, Widnes and Manchester made similar

assertions.[76] The chemical constituents of the smoke and gases explain the awful smell that

residents were complaining about. Hydrochloric acid and nitric acid were described as having

a 'pungent odour', and hydrogen sulphur having the 'smell of rotten eggs'.[77] The long-term

effects of working and living within a range of such gases and smoke are now recognised as

having a cumulative, rather than immediate, effect on certain organs of the body, a factor that

would not have been known at the time.[78]

The conviction that smoke was beneficial was not the only reason that it was tolerated. A

smoky atmosphere was seen as a sign of prosperity, and this applied to the home as much as

to industry. The industrial chimney, belching out smoke, indicated employment and success,

matched by the fire burning brightly in the hearth, which gave a sense of well-being and

security.[79] This idea was expressed in fictional writing of the era with the 'cold and empty

grate' illustrating the other side of the employment coin: lack of work, leading to poverty and

destitution.[80]

Others, however, had identified the negative effects of smoke. As early as 1661 John Evelyn

registered the battle that London was having with smoke pollution. It spoiled all it alighted

on: clothing, buildings and furniture; and destroyed both metal and plant life. His opinion at

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[75] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1.

[76] Brenner, J. K., 'Nuisance Law and the Industrial Revolution', *Journal of Legal Studies,* June 1974, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 418.

[77] International Labour Organisation, *The International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC) Database* [Online] (1996 - 2012), http://www.ilo.org/dyn/icsc/showcard.listCards2, (Accessed: 20/09/2012).

[78] Amelin, A. G., *Theory of Fog Condensation* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 29.

[79] Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester*, pp. 70, 75.

[80] Dickens, C., *Barnaby Rudge and the Uncommercial Traveller* (undated) (London, reprinted 1933), p. 740; Gaskell, E. C., *Mary Barton: a Tale of Manchester Life* (London, 1848), p. 77.

that time was that it produced health problems, vomiting and respiratory infections.[81] Two

hundred years later people in industrial towns were recording the same information. The

vicar of Oldbury complained about the effect that the smoke was having on the walls of

buildings, a problem also being experienced in Manchester.[82] The Manchester Smoke

Abatement Exhibition Review of 5 April 1882 stated: 'it is evident that smoke, which

destroys flowers and trees in our parks, book bindings in libraries, the stone work of town

halls, etc., raises the cost, and greatly lowers the value of all the advantages purchased by our

rates and taxes'.[83] The review also outlined the difficulties experienced by housewives, who

had to choose between ventilating their homes, and keeping them clean.

A widespread belief during the greater part of the nineteenth century was that the atmosphere

dealt with the problem of smoke. One of the reasons for building tall chimneys, in addition to

improving fuel combustion, was to send smoke a further distance away from buildings in the

immediate vicinity.[84] This was seen as an answer to the problem in the Black Country, where

tall chimneys became a feature of the landscape. The Oldbury Board of Health requested, as

late as 1874, that the large industrial manufacturers build higher chimneys, in order to lift the

smoke above the level of the town; an action which the industrialists agreed to follow (see

Figure 35 and Figure 36).[85]

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[81] Evelyn, J., *Fumifugium, or The Inconveniencie of the Aer and Smoak of London* (London, 1661), pp. 5-7, 9.
[82] Daniels, T., *Making and Moving in Langley* (West Bromwich, 1999), p. 140.
[83] Horsefall, T. C., 'Social Aspect of the Smoke Question', in: *Manchester Smoke Abatement Exhibition* (5th April 1882), p.2.
[84] 1845 (289) Report from the Select Committee on Smoke Prevention; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, pp. 7, 20.
[85] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1; CHAS, PHS/1442, Langley and Langley Green from Barnford Hill Park (c1930).
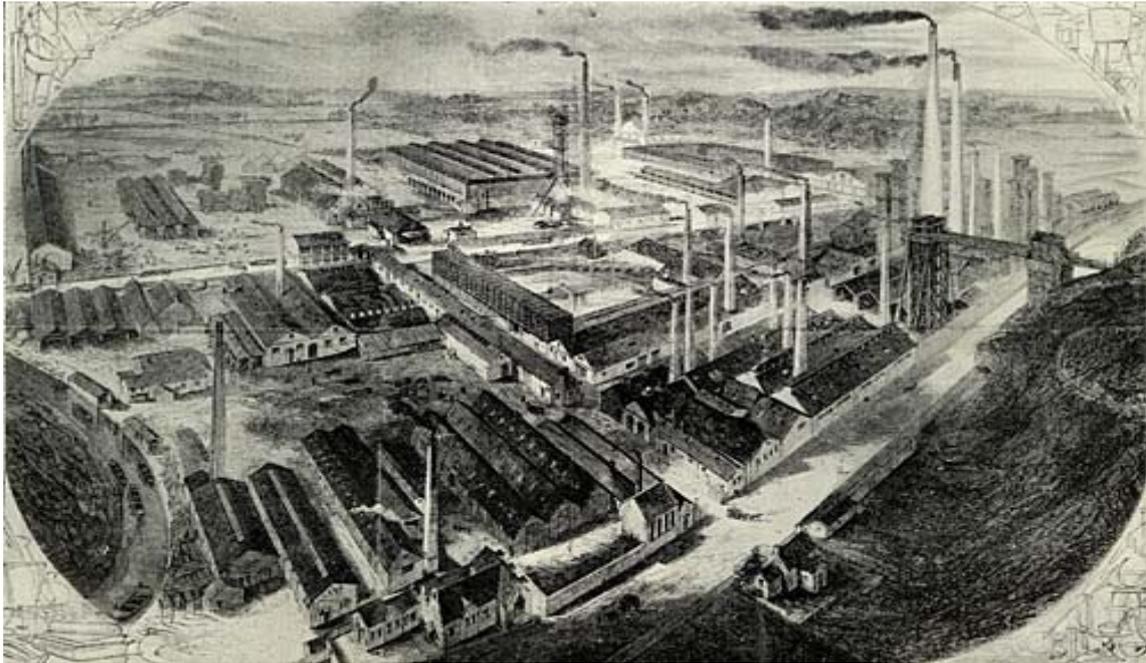
Figure 35 View of Chance Brothers Alkali Works Oldbury (1862) [86]
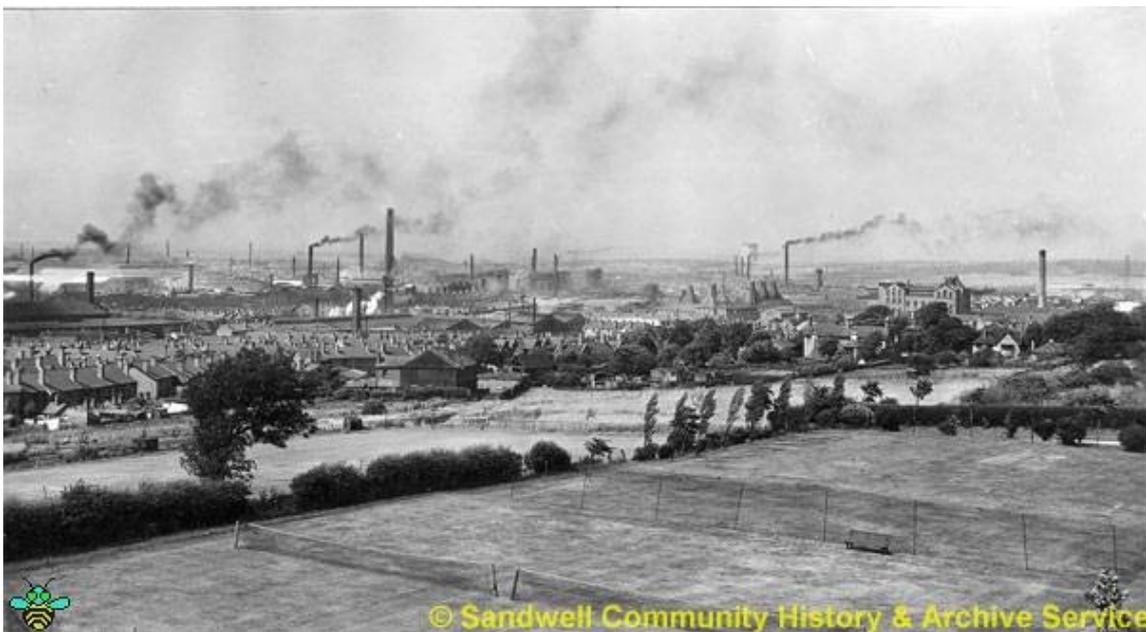
Figure 36 Oldbury viewed from Barnford Park (c.1930)[87]

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[86] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1.
[87] CHAS, PHS/1442.

Towards the middle of the century, it was clear that nature could not absorb the problem, and a smoke nuisance removed from one town would fall somewhere else. In Manchester and the Black Country, where industrial districts were adjoining, even if the town's smoke was blown away, that from another district would replace it, depending on the prevailing winds.[88] The industrialists from the alkali works in Oldbury, which discharged the most obnoxious smoke and gases, obviously wanted to play down the effects of the chemicals they were discharging into the air. Hydrochloric acid, they stated, was only a problem when the weather was damp, when it would fall as acid rain; the remainder of the time it was carried harmlessly away.[89] The inhabitants of the adjoining town of Smethwick did not agree, however, lodging a complaint with the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Injury from Noxious Vapours about the damaging effects the discharges from the alkali works were having on their town.[90] At a public meeting in 1862 Mr Charles Hicks, Surgeon and GP in Smethwick, was elected to represent the inhabitants at a meeting of the Select Committee in order to request a local act to compel the manufacturers to abate their nuisance.[91]

Contributors to the Oldbury health report of 1856 were divided about the benefits of having chemical industries so close to the town. The problem of living close to the works made gardening an impossibility, since everything which was planted died.[92] This confirms reports

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[88] Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester*, p. 23.

[89] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 9.

[90] 1862 (486) Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, on Injury from Noxious Vapours; Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, p. 226.

[91] Ibid., p 226.

[92] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 11.

that were also being made about the pollution from alkali works in St Helens, Lancashire.[93]

One fear was, that if pressure were put on the industrialists to curtail the pollution, removal of

the works might follow, with serious financial consequences. Another was that the effects of

pollution on businesses could hold back the town's progress. Mr W Williams, a medical

practitioner who had resided in the town of Oldbury for four years, gave his opinion that 'a

number of manufacturers would take up their residence in Oldbury if the alkali works were

not there'. It was well known, he stated, that the chemical gases injured metallic and silk

goods. Industries dealing in these commodities were, therefore, unwilling to establish their

works in the town.[94] This could well have been a contributing factor in the town's failure to

keep pace with West Bromwich, a rapidly expanding dispersed settlement that did not have

chemical works.

The climate and topography of the town had a part to play in the level of nuisance that

industrial towns experienced. The chemist and alkali inspector Robert Angus Smith noted in

1848 that, when the weather was fine, the smoke and gases readily ascended into the

atmosphere, leaving 'fine clean air' in the streets of the industrial towns, while cloudy and

moist weather caused the impurities to descend, and fogs to form.[95] Moseley noted this effect

on the area surrounding Manchester, where many of the industries were located in river

valleys. On calm days, the smoke was not lifted out of these valleys, a factor which was made

worse in winter by the cold damp air.[96] Manchester itself was bounded by hills to the south,

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[93] 1862 (486) Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, on Injury from Noxious Vapours; Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, pp. iii, iv.
[94] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 11.
[95] Smith, R. A., 'On the Air and Water of Towns', in: *Report of the Eighteenth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science: Held in Swansea in 1848* (London, 1849), p. 21.
[96] Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester*, p. 27.

north and east, limiting the movement of air, and ensuring that smoke lingered in the city.[97]

Although Oldbury is built on a slight knoll, its situation is very similar as it is sheltered to the

south and west by ridges of higher ground (see Figure 37). The large chemical works were

situated to the south of the town, and the prevailing south-westerly blew the smoke and gases

from the works directly into and over the town. Here they lingered, especially in winter and

in moist and overcast conditions. Damp weather also increased the likelihood of fog

developing, with the unavoidable outcome that people inhaled polluted air.
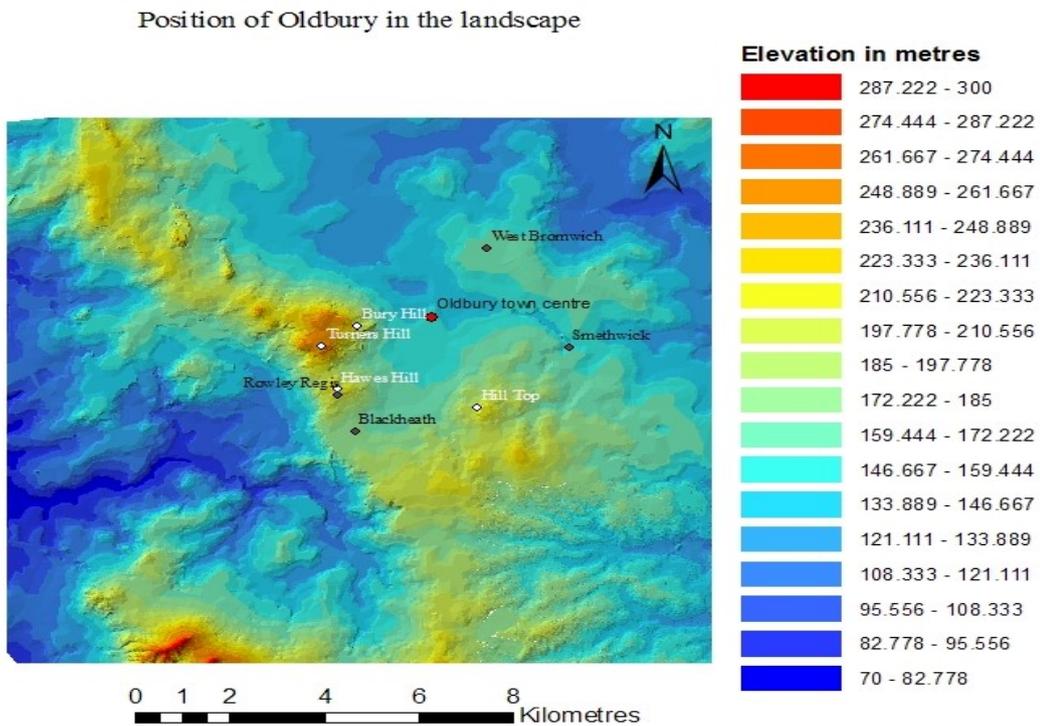
Figure 37 Topography of Oldbury and its neighbouring towns [98]

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[97] Ibid., p. 28.
[98] *Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 32so98ne, Edition 1, 1888; Worcestershire 39so98ne, Edition 1, 1887,* (vertical exaggeration factor x7); created by the author using GIS.

By the late nineteenth century, it was realised that the health of the population suffered because of pollution, both through the smoke they were breathing in, and the state of the surroundings of their homes. In 1882, the populations of industrial towns were described as 'pallid, unhealthy and with a stunted appearance'.[99] A significant effect of the smoke was to prevent the ultra-violet rays of the sun from reaching the ground, the effects being worse in the winter than in summer, due to added cloud cover. Although no records have been located for atmospheric pollution in the West Midlands in the nineteenth century, a Leicester research project in 1945 gives an indication of the effects on the area, estimating that the loss of sunlight around Birmingham was as much as 50 per cent, similar to the level in Salford. The lack of sunlight was identified as the cause of diseases such as rickets in humans and of stunting the growth of plant life, whilst inhalation of the smoke led to an aggravation of respiratory conditions.[100]

A comparison with the experience of another nineteenth-century industrial town is provided by J. Maule Sutton, Medical Officer of Health for Oldham, who concluded in 1882 that:

> Our atmosphere, our water, our food, our houses, our clothes, our persons, all are contaminated by dirt, and smoke is one of the most active agents in its production. The necessity for the prevention of smoke must therefore be apparent to every intelligent and unprejudiced mind and the best method for its extirpation or rather amelioration, par consequence an object of the greatest interest.

He felt that both the law and science would be needed to counteract the developing problem.[101]

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[99] Horsefall, 'Social Aspect of the Smoke Question', p. 3.
[100] West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, *Conurbation: A Planning Survey of Birmingham and the Black Country*, p. 156.
[101] Sutton, J. M., 'The Smoke Nuisance (From an Officer of Health's Point of View)', *Manchester Smoke Abatement Exhibition,* 22 April 1882,

Although smoke pollution was receiving growing attention, it was regarded as a problem

related to industry, and there was little awareness of the part played by the ordinary household

chimney. Due to the lack of interest in household emissions, it is difficult to estimate the

amount that it was contributing to urban pollution. The Leicester report estimated that 5.4 per

cent of the weight of coal burnt in the ordinary home escaped into the atmosphere, which

contained 2.7 per cent soot and tar, 0.3 per cent ash, and 2.4 per cent sulphur dioxide.[102] It

also revealed that the highest concentration of smoke and sulphurous effluent was within half

a mile of the centre of a city. Moreover, change in the weather affected the degree of

concentration up to a density of six times the normal average.[103] Annual figures from

recording stations showed the Black Country town of Bilston had a high level of insoluble

pollutants, falling only slightly below that of central Birmingham and London (See Figure

38). It is not possible to make a direct comparison between atmospheric pollution in 1944

and that of the 1800s, since the 1944 figures included pollutants such as emissions from motor

vehicles, which were not present a century earlier. However, the fact that a mid-Black

Country town is so high on the table of pollution is significant. The expectation is that

pollution would have generally decreased in the area since the end of the nineteenth century

as the majority of heavily polluting iron industries disappeared. In addition, a number of

smoke-controlling measures had been introduced during the latter part of the nineteenth

century, regulating the emissions in the remaining heavy industries.

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[102] West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, *Conurbation: A Planning Survey of Birmingham and the Black Country*, p. 154; Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, 'Atmospheric Pollution in Leicester, A Scientific Survey', *Atmospheric Pollution Research Technical Paper,* 1945, 1, 84.
[103] West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, *Conurbation: A Planning Survey of Birmingham and the Black Country*, p. 155.
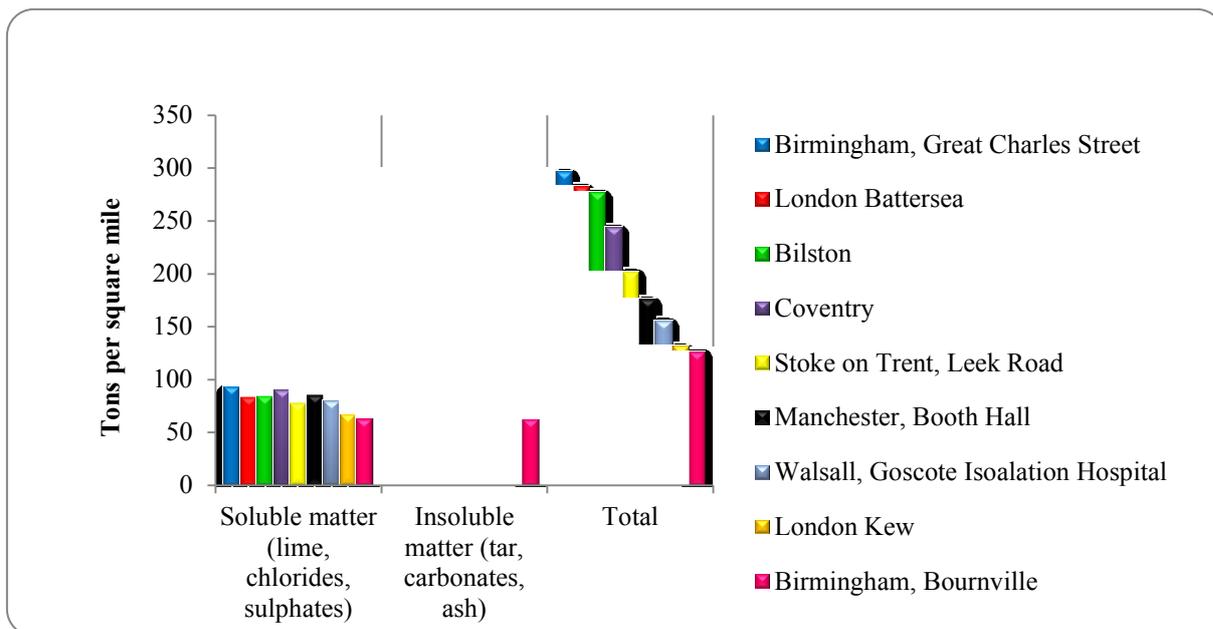
Figure 38 Annual rate of deposit of pollution in various centres (1945)[104]

In order to illustrate the way in which the smoke pall built up over the town, the location of industries has been highlighted on an 1887 historic map. A 200 metre buffer around each of these industries was produced in order to illustrate the way that smoke and gases drifted together, engulfing the area and blocking out the rays of the sun. The prevailing wind is south-westerly, but winds from all directions are frequently recorded, so a circular buffer has been used to illustrate the dispersing behaviour of the smoke, which, as the Leicester survey pointed out, could drift over many miles (see Figure 39). This picture of industrial pollution in Oldbury was repeated in each of the Black Country towns, with pollution from one town drifting into that of another. It is not difficult to come to the conclusion that, in relation to smoke emissions, the Black Country was one of the most polluted areas of England during the second half of the nineteenth century.

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[104] Ibid., p. 157, table xxxiii.

Industry in Oldbury in 1887
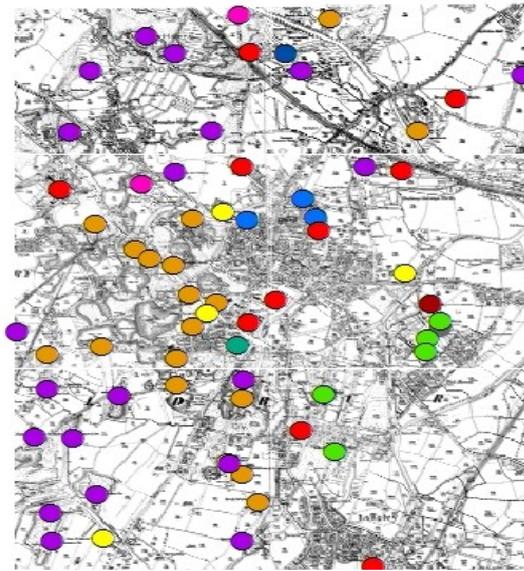
Legend
- Coal
- brick
- chemical works
- copper
- gas
- glass works
- iron works
- lime kiln
- metal works
- steam saw mill
- tar
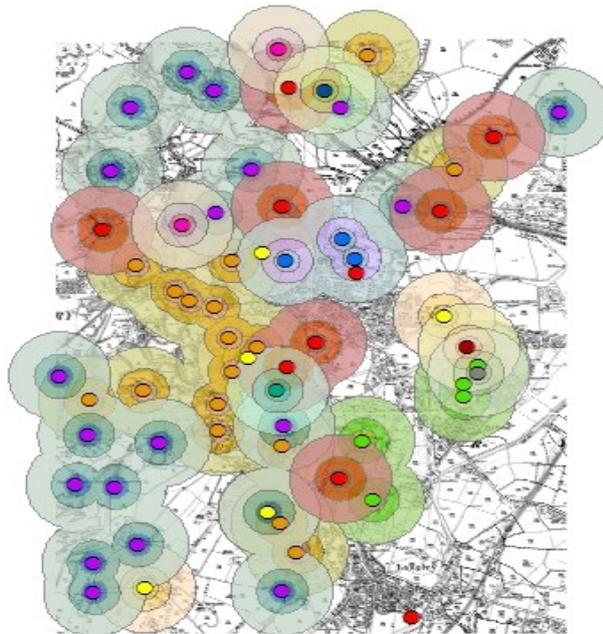
Illustration of spread of pall of smoke over the same area

1,100   550   0 Metres
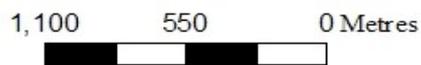
Figure 39 Effects of industrial pollution in Oldbury[105]

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[105] *Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 32so98ne, Edition 1, 1888; Worcestershire 39so98ne, Edition 1, 1887*, © Crown Copyright/database right 2009; maps created by the author using GIS.

Nineteenth-century eyewitnesses leave one in no doubt about the amount of pollution in the area. James Nasmyth visited the Black Country in 1830 on a tour of several industrial towns. He was appalled by the scene that confronted him, which he described as appearing as if the earth has 'been turned inside out'. He had visited both Manchester, which he enjoyed so much he decided to go and live there, and Coalbrookdale, where he was impressed by the 'cheerful zeal and activity of the workmen'. Both towns would normally elicit comments about the levels of pollution, but nothing is mentioned, perhaps because he was invited by the owners of industries to visit, and he would not wish to write in a negative way about his hosts. He had no such qualms about the Black Country, however, which left him with only one impression: devastation. Gazing from the high point of Dudley Castle, he stated:

> I sat and looked at the extensive district, with its roaring and blazing furnaces, the smoke of which blackened the country as far as the eye could reach…. and thought about the price we had to pay for our vaunted supremacy in the manufacture of iron.[106]

3.4 Industrial waste

A further cause for concern in industrial towns was the dumping of industrial waste. The sweep of industry left a marred landscape behind it, with spoil heaps, slag heaps, rubbish and industrial waste of all kinds strewn over wide areas.[107] The 1888 and 1889 Ordnance Survey maps for the town of Oldbury, for example, show the town surrounded by clay pits, marl holes, and waste heaps.[108] When draped over a contour map, the landscape that is revealed highlights the way that the topography of the area had been changed (see Figure 40).

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[106] Smiles (ed) *James Nasmyth, Engineer: An Autobiography* , p. 125.
[107] West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, *Conurbation: A Planning Survey of Birmingham and the Black Country*, p. 227.
[108] *Ordnance Survey Map of Oldbury, Northern Division Worcestershire/ Staffordshire, sheet no LXV111.13* (Southampton, 1885); *Ordnance Survey Map of Oldbury, Northern Division Worcestershire/ Staffordshire, sheet no LXV111.14* (Southampton, 1890).

Figure 40 Landscape of industrial waste around Oldbury (1888)[109]

In addition to the changes that it brought to the landscape, mining also led to problems of

subsidence. Elihu Burritt, visiting the area in 1869, described the way in which houses

descended four or five feet overnight, as characteristic of the Black Country. He visited

William Hunt and Sons at the Brades, Oldbury, where their entire works had subsided.

Originally built level with the canal, it was now 11 feet below it (see Figure 24).[110] Accidents

occurred across the Black Country due to pit shafts not being filled in when the pit was

abandoned. In 1889, for example, an incident was reported at Oldbury gasworks where the

ground suddenly gave way, and three or four boatloads of coal (75 – 100 tons) disappeared

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[109] Map created by the author in GIS from *Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 32so98ne, Edition 1, 1888; Worcestershire 39so98ne, Edition 1, 1887*. Viewed from the south east (vertical exaggeration factor x5)
[110] Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* , p. 179

down a hole in the ground that no one knew about.[111] There was also a problem with underground fires, due to spontaneous combustion of coal from old workings. These led not only to subsidence, but fissures opening up in roads, and burning holes through which fumes escaped. Ede describes one underground fire which burned for two years in Wednesbury, destroying the sewer pipes.[112] There are a number of occasions where deaths occurred due to this problem. In 1883, for example, three children from Oldbury died from burns they received whilst picking coals on a waste heap near Smethwick, when the cinders on which they were climbing gave way and they fell into burning ashes. A death is also recorded in Wednesbury in 1897, when a night watchman fell into a burning chasm in the road.[113]

Although Oldbury shared the problems of underground mining with the other Black Country towns, its main problem was the 150,000 cubic yards mound of chemical toxic waste from the alkali industry. Blue Billy, as the mound was locally called, was the vat residue from the nearby chemical works, where salt-cake (sodium sulphate) was manufactured for the glass industry, producing large amounts of waste calcium sulphate. In its contaminated form, calcium sulphate forms a blue-grey ash. This constituted the main body of the Blue Billy (see Figure 41 and Figure 42).[114] The mound was started in 1850. Waste deposited before 1888 had not been processed through the Chance sulphur recovery treatment, so, from the outset, there were problems with sulphide-bearing liquors seeping into the town brook, a tributary of the river Tame, which ran beside the mound.[115] This turned the water yellow, which stank, but the Medical Officer stated in the 1856 report that he did not consider it to be injurious to

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[111] *Gloucester Citizen* 'Alarming Occurance at a Gasworks', Friday 20 December 1889, p.4.
[112] Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, p. 266.
[113] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Sad Accident at West Bromwich ', Wednesday 30 May 1883, p.6; Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, p. 266.
[114] CHAS, PHS/2921, The Blue Billy (1966).
[115] TNA, MH 13/138.

health as there were no apparent cases of fever.[116] The mound itself emitted noxious fumes

from escaping gas, and a portion of it was in a state of combustion, giving out smoke. As

with the problem of fumes escaping from the works, the number of people who worked on the

mound was emphasised as proof that it was not harmful.[117]

Figure 41 Blue Billy from a WWII aerial photograph[118]

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[116] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 10.
[117] Ibid., p. 10.
[118] English Heritage, National Monument Record MSO 31348/ O-Y983, Air photograph (1941).

An analysis of the chemical composition of Blue Billy by Mr Claudet from the Assay Office, 6 Cannon Street, London on 31 March 1854 gave the results shown in Table 3.[119]

Table 3 An analysis of the chemical composition of the Blue Billy mound (1854)

Name of chemical 1854		Name of chemical in 1933[120]
Sulphate of lime	21.92	Calcium sulphate
Hyposulphate of lime	4.80	Calcium hyposulphate
Carbonate of lime	32.51	Calcium carbonate
Sulphate of soda	1.33	Sodium sulphate
Carbonic	23.01	Probably total carbonate (including magnesium) as carbon dioxide
Sand and clay	1.86	Silica
Sulphuret of iron	2.75	Iron sulphide
Alumina	2.82	
Water	9.00	

In 1933, a further examination of the mound, shown in Table 4, revealed the contents at that date.

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[119] Ranger, 1856, p. 30.
[120] Information provided by Dr Terry Daniels a former research chemist and Black Country historian, putting the equivalent names of the chemicals from Table 4 alongside those in Table 3, so that a comparison can be made.

Table 4 An analysis of the chemical composition of the Blue Billy mound (1933)

Older part of the mound pre Chance-Claus process 1850 - 1888		Layer which had been through process post 1888
Calcium sulphate	40.0	21.3
Calcium carbonate	26.3	55.5
Silica	3.1	1.3
Calcium Sulphide	Non detected	Non detected
Calcium Sulphite	1.1	Non detected
Magnesium Carbonate	1.8	1.1
Iron and Alumina	2.3	6.6
Insol in dil. HC1 (mainly coke)	11.7	3.0
Moisture and combined water	13.1	10.9

The analysis indicates that the Chance-Claus process of 1888 proved efficient in capturing the calcium sulphate, the level of which was significantly lower in 1933. The expectation is that by the 1930s some of the soluble pollutants had been reduced by rain, leaving the insoluble calcium sulphate in a stable condition.[121]

The older part of the mound was where the problem appeared to be, giving out a bad smell and causing people to complain of feelings of nausea when it was disturbed. In the 1960s, talks began prior to moving the mound to make way for road developments and, following the discovery of arsenic in a similar mound on Tyneside, caution was recommended.[122] A further

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[121] Ibid.
[122] TNA, BT 328/133, Alkali Waste: Correspondence with Alkali Inspectorate on Alkali Waste Tip at St Helens and the Problems with `Blue Billy' Waste Tip at Oldbury 1965-1968 (1968).

problem with the mound was its physical instability, necessitating the permanent evacuation of people from their houses in Old Park Lane when Blue Billy slipped towards them.[123]

Figure 42 Blue Billy being removed to make way for the M5 motorway[124]

The problem of pollution of the local water supply was not an easy one to resolve. In addition to the seepage from Blue Billy, in 1874 the Local Board of Heath also accused the firm of Chance Brothers of polluting the brook by discharging chemicals into it. The firm discounted this claim, pointing the finger of blame at houses higher up-stream whose privies had their outlet into the brook.[125] The problem continued to trouble the town for a number of years. In the 1890s both Staffordshire County Council and Birmingham Corporation attempted to take legal proceedings against Oldbury for polluting the River Tame with untreated sewage.[126] A further injunction was brought in 1905 when it was stated in their defence, that, although the town had introduced and updated its sewage works, their difficulties were exceptionally great

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[123] Information provided by Dr Terry Daniels during an oral interview.
[124] CHAS, PHS/2921.
[125] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1.
[126] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Pollution of the Tame', Thursday 8 May 1890, p.5.

owing to the large proportion of liquid waste from the chemical manufactories, the constitution of the sewage 'defying all ordinary known methods of treatment'.[127] The town therefore, faced two seemingly insurmountable problems: how practically to deal with pollution, and how to get the industrialists to co-operate with the newly formed Board of Health to lessen the emissions from their works.

3.5 Noise pollution

Noise, which these days is seen as a pollutant, was regarded as a nuisance in the nineteenth century, but one that had to be endured in the industrial towns since it was an integral part of manufacturing activity. It affected both the workers in noisy industries and the lives of the people who lived close to the works.

One of the most severe effects of working in a noisy industry was noise-induced hearing loss. Medical practitioners commented on its occurrence among metal workers, especially where the noise was continual. Dr Fosbroke writing in *The Lancet* in 1831 gave the condition the title of 'Blacksmith's deafness'.[128] He described the way in which it developed over time, beginning with weak impressions of sound, and increasing, with ringing and noise in the ears, vertigo and pain.[129] Writing in the same year, Thomas Thackrah included it in a list of ailments which afflicted people in different trades, linking hearing problems to those who worked near machinery.[130]

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[127] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 4 May 1904.
[128] Fosbroke, J., 'Practical Observations on the Pathology of Deafness, no 3', *The Lancet,* 5 March 1831, 15**,** 740 - 43, p. 648.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Thackrah, C. T., *The effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: with suggestions for the removal of many of the agents which produce disease, and shorten the duration of life* (London, 1832), p. 156.

The effect of the noise on metal workers is difficult to estimate for Oldbury and the other

Black Country towns, since noise was not newsworthy, unless a large explosion had occurred,

and deafness did not appear in local medical reports. From 1851 the census documents

recorded people who were deaf and dumb, but, since the two conditions were linked together

on the form, it is unlikely that the majority of those afflicted identified themselves under this

category. They may have had a degree of hearing loss, but they would still have been able to

speak. This is borne out by the fact that only 481 people were registered as deaf and dumb in

the 1881 census for Staffordshire.[131] Although no reports have been found which detail the

scale of the problem in the Black Country, it is possible to form a comparison from the tests

undertaken by Thomas Barr, in Glasgow.[132]

In 1886 Barr undertook a series of tests to examine the hearing of boilermakers and

ironworkers in the city, to ascertain the degree of hearing loss, and compare them with

postmen, whose work was mainly outdoors. He found that, compared to a normal hearing

range, boilermakers had only 9.5 percent, ironworkers 45.75 percent and postmen 75

percent.[133] He described the effect this had on the work and social life of the metalworkers,

but did not explain why postmen should have had a degree of hearing loss, albeit a small one

compared with the other two categories. The metal workers stated that they had stopped

going to church or public meetings, since they either could not hear what was being said at all,

or they missed so much that it wasn't worth attending.[134] Barr estimated that in Glasgow,

about 10 percent of people attending a meeting would be hearing impaired.[135] Given the size

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[131] 1881 Census of England and Wales, 43 & 44 Vict 37 c, 37, 1881, Vol 3, Ages, Conditions as to Marriage, Occupations and Birthplaces of the People, p. 271.
[132] Barr, T., 'Enquiry into the Effects of Loud Sounds upon the Hearing of Boiler Makers and Others Who Work Amid Noisy Surroundings', in: *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1886).
[133] Ibid., p. 227.
[134] Ibid. p. 228.
[135] Ibid., p. 229.

of the metal industry in Oldbury (see Figure 43), the expectation would be that many workers would have had hearing impairment, as in Glasgow, and this pattern would have been repeated across the Black Country towns.

Late twentieth-century studies have highlighted other effects of working in a noisy environment, which would not have been noted at the time: heightened levels of stress, increased blood pressure, and changes in behaviour patterns and levels of work efficiency, for example.[136] This is borne out in a study of work-related injuries, and associated risk factors among workers in iron and steel industries in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.[137] The workers were exposed to workplace hazards, such as excessive noise, fumes, dust, and to old and unguarded machines, a very similar situation to workplace conditions in nineteenth century England. The report found that workers who experienced heightened levels of stress, or tiredness at work, suffered from fatigue and low levels of alertness, and were more likely to make poor decisions and mistakes, which led to accidents.[138] Twenty three per cent of the workers drank alcohol during the working day, a custom that was widespread in the British metal industry in the nineteenth century. This was found to heighten the effects of tiredness and stress, and led to an increased risk of industrial accidents.[139] Although these links would not have been made in the nineteenth century, undoubtedly, the inhabitants of Oldbury experienced similar symptoms.

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[136] Bies, D. A. and Hansen, C. H., *Engineering Noise Control: Theory and Practice* (London, 1988), pp. 80, 81.
[137] Kifle, M*., et al.*, 'Work related injuries and associated risk factors among iron and steel industries workers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia', *Safety Science,* 2014, 63**,** 211-216.
[138] Ibid., p. 124.
[139] Ibid., p. 214.

Figure 43 Location of metal working industry in Oldbury [140]

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[140] *Ordnance Survey County Series 1st Edition Scale 1:2500, Worcestershire County* 1854. (UK, Landmark Information Group, Edina Supplied Service)© Crown Copyright/database right 2009; created by the author using GIS.

The noisy atmosphere of industrial towns had an effect upon the local inhabitants, as well as the workers, especially those who occupied the cheaper accommodation adjacent to the works. People in Oldbury complained that the huge steam hammers of the iron works could be heard for a considerable distance,[141] and, as the author can testify, their vibrations made ornaments rattle on the mantelpiece, and structures, such as bridges, shake.

Although the level of noise experienced by the general population would be unlikely to produce hearing defects, it would still have had an effect on the lives of the people.[142] Sleep deprivation would have been a major problem, and has been linked to feelings of annoyance, leading to stress, and reduced efficiency in carrying out tasks at work the next day.[143] Sleep deprivation was noted in a number of nineteenth century reports. As part of the evidence being given to the Factory and Workshops Commissioners about shortening the hours of the working day for children in the Black Country, for example, the opinion was given by Mr John Price, representative of Rowley Regis, that nailers working late into the night caused a problem for their neighbours.[144] He stated 'All adult male labour performed by the nail-makers ought to be confined to from 6 in the morning until 8 at night, and not to allow their tinkering noise, in fact, to be disturbing their neighbours until 10, 11 and 12 o'clock at night'.[145]

A W.C. Adams, who lived near to Chance and Hunts' works, complained in 1908 about the firm's gas engine, which was a great nuisance, running night and day, seven days a week, and making sleep difficult. He stated that he had not had a good night's sleep since it was

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[141] Daniels, *Making and Moving in Langley*.
[142] Adams and McManus, *Noise and Noise Law, A Practical Approach*, p. 93.
[143] Ibid., p. 94.
[144] 1876 (1443-1) Factory and Workshops Acts Commission. Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Factory and Workshops Acts, with a View to Their Consolidation and Amendment; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index. Vol. II. Minutes of evidence, p. 319.
[145] Ibid., p. 319.

installed, and 'when a man cannot get his rest after a hard day's work, I think it is time to complain'. He wrote a letter to the company, but nothing was done, and the local people just had to endure the noise.[146]

Noise has also been linked to cognitive performance in children. An article in *The Lancet* in 2014 noted that children exposed to chronic noise at school have poor reading ability, memory, and performance in tests.[147] Noise levels were remarked upon in nineteenth century reports by the factory inspectors, who examined the teaching of children. A report written in 1843 noted that the noise from the machinery was so great, that it was difficult to hear anyone speak.[148] In 1876 Mr Blenkinsopp, the sub-inspector for Wolverhampton, stated that, in the iron mills and blast furnaces, 'you may scream yourself hoarse, and then fail in ascertaining anything'. He found inspection in the iron mills the most exhausting work imaginable.[149] As all of the schools in Oldbury were in the vicinity of industrial works, it is highly probable the education of the children of the working classes were similarly affected (see Figure 44).

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[146] Daniels, *Making and Moving in Langley*, p. 142.

[147] Basner, M*., et al.*, 'Auditory and Non-Auditory Effects of Noise on Health', *The Lancet,* 2014, **383,** 1325-1332.

[148] 1843 (503) Reports of the Inspectors of Factories to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department. For the Half-Year Ending 30th June, 1843, p. 22.

[149] 1876 (C.1572) Reports of the inspectors of factories to Her Majesty's Principal secretary of state for the Home Department for the half-year ending 30th April 1876, p.75.
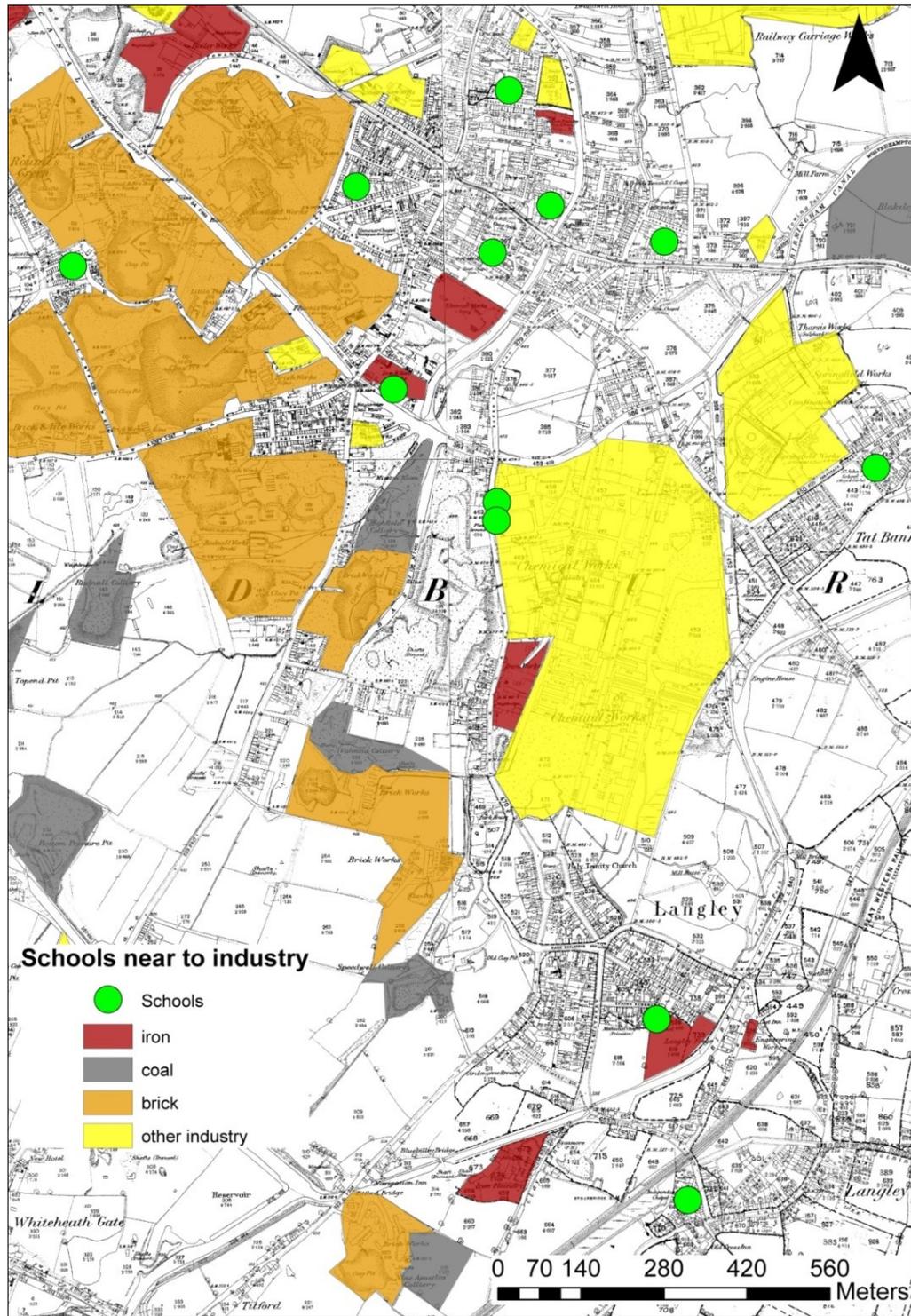
Figure 44 Location of schools in relation to industries in Oldbury[150]

[150] *Ordnance Survey County Series 1st Edition Scale 1:2500, Worcestershire County* 1854. (UK, Landmark Information Group, Edina Supplied Service)© Crown Copyright/database right 2009; created by the author using GIS.

Politically, pollution from noise was low on the agenda, and few Parliamentary reports have been located that mention it. In 1854, however, Dr Waller Lewis, Medical Officer to the General Post Office, visited Paris on the instructions of Viscount Palmerston, to investigate the laws that were in force in France, for regulating noxious trades and occupations.[151] There, noise was included in the list of public nuisances, and the Paris authorities detailed a number of industries which produced it, including those that manufactured metal goods. The report noted that the workers in such noisy industries had hearing problems, leading to deafness due to the continuous and monotonous noise of the hammer.[152] The report does not seem to have been acted upon, however.

Melville Adams and Francis McManus note that the nature of the locality made a difference to any action taken in relation to noise. If noise was typical of the area in question, as was the case for all the towns of the Black Country, little would have been done. Only if there was physical damage, was action taken. For example, if noise was accompanied by vibration which damaged buildings.[153]

3.6 The politics of pollution

The nature of the locality had an influence generally on the way that action was taken against polluters, whether they were individuals or companies. If letters had been sent to polluters, or the offenders had been approached, and a satisfactory result had not been obtained, the next step would be to take the offender to court. It was historically considered the accepted right of every dwelling to have clean air and light, and those who used their property in an

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[151] 1854-55 (1979) Report on the laws and ordinances in force in France for the regulation of noxious trades and occupations; by Dr. Waller Lewis, medical officer to the General Post Office.
[152] Ibid., pp. 15, 108.
[153] Adams and McManus, *Noise and Noise Law, A Practical Approach*, p. 152.

unreasonable way, which might cause a nuisance to others, could face legal action.[154] The

inherited system of legislation to deal with pollution, however, was created for a rural society,

where people often relied on their land for a subsistence existence. To cause a stench which

infringed the neighbours' rights, whether it be from keeping pigs, or from an offensive privy,

was usually brought as a private action, one individual against another, and tried in the local

court.[155] Common nuisance offences affecting the whole community could only find redress

before a grand jury, where the owner of a polluting industry was usually instructed to remove

it to a designated area on the outskirts of the village, or town.[156] The growth in urban living

brought with it an expectation that townspeople would show a degree of tolerance of pollution

that accompanied industry, and this in turn led to a relaxation of the law.[157] Although

industry was seen as the main polluter, it was also the master and provider, and it was

expected that people would be prepared to tolerate the pollution that ensued.[158] Few actions

were brought against the industrialists, due to the costs involved in court action, the difficulty

of tracing the nuisance back to one offender, and the low fines that were imposed if the action

was successful.[159] A case that occurred in Oldbury illustrates this point. In 1865 a local

draper, Mr John Powell, brought an action against Messrs Chance, owners of the alkali works,

for the damage done to his property.[160] An inquiry took place, with the Inspector of Alkali

Works noting that it was 'evident from the appearance of gardens around, that an occasional

escape of deleterious gas did take place from some work in or near Oldbury'. However, after

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[154] Blackstone, W., *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Vol 3, of Private Wrongs* (original publication 1768) (Chicago; London, 1979), p. 217.
[155] Ibid., p. 219.
[156] Blackstone, W., *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Vol 4, of Public Wrongs* (original publication 1769) (Chicago; London, 1979), pp. 167, 299.
[157] Brenner, 'Nuisance Law and the Industrial Revolution', p. 409.
[158] Ibid., p. 410.
[159] 1862 (486) Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, on Injury from Noxious Vapours; Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, pp. v, vi.
[160] 1866 (3701, 3701-I) Alkali Act, 1863. Second Annual Report by the Inspector of His Proceedings During the Year 1865, p. 7.

a thorough examination, no emissions could be found, and Mr Powell had no grounds to support his accusation that the problem came from this particular works.[161] The case was unproven, but Mr Powell and other residents were not convinced, and as they actually lived in the town, and the inspector did not, they appeared to be in a good position to make a judgement. The records state that during a routine visit the year after the action took place, gas was found to be leaking from the towers, which needed tarring, substantiating the views of the local residents and ensuring that Mr Powell eventually obtained the damages he sought. The sum involved was a mere £4, a sum which Chance could easily afford, and far less than the cost of defending the case in court.[162] A defence would have been necessary, however, as, if cases such as these were successful, they would set a precedent for making a claim which others would be bound to follow. The fact that public opinion often challenged the view that the industrialists wished to portray was also evident at a meeting of the Board of Health to consider extending the Albright and Wilson phosphorus works. The report stated that when it was contended that there was nothing injurious to health from the works, a 'great disapprobation arose from the 'public' and a scene of great confusion followed', whereupon order had to be restored.[163]

The scale of the problem within the growing towns presented a state of affairs with which the common law could not effectively cope, and new solutions had to be found. From the early nineteenth century, an increasing number of towns applied to the government for Acts to improve the environment. These gave authorisation to the town authorities to raise rates in order to improve the paving, lighting, cleansing, and to remove nuisances and annoyances. Initially, the majority of applications came from existing port and market towns, such as Great

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[161] Ibid., p. 8.
[162] 1867 (3792) Alkali Act, 1863. Third Annual Report by the Inspector of his Proceedings During the Year 1866, pp. 36, 46.
[163] TNA, MH 13/138.

Yarmouth and Exeter, but as the century progressed, towns which were experiencing industrial expansion, such as Burnley and Bradford, were added to the list. It soon became evident that the towns across the country were exhibiting similar problems, which needed to be addressed in a concerted manner. Committees of enquiry were set up to investigate the situation, and public health and nuisance removal secured a high place on the agenda.[164] At the end of each inquiry, an Act to deal with the problem was passed, providing official authority for local towns to act.

Although possessing the political leverage for change, the smaller towns found themselves to be impotent in addressing the local problems, because they had neither the technical knowledge nor the finance to deal with the situations they faced.[165] Oldbury covered a considerable area, but the rateable value was low, giving the local board few resources to act to improve the town's problems.[166] The government inspectors were involved, but only in a regulatory or advisory capacity, and correspondence between the Oldbury Board and the Secretary of the General Board of Health illustrates the difficulties such towns experienced. Many of the points raised were trivial, indicating their struggles to understand the working of the system and their role in it.[167] One important aspect involved the introduction and application of health and safety legislation which will be considered in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5 on the health of the population.

The issue of industrial smoke pollution was addressed directly with industrialists. The Select Committee on Steam Engines and Furnaces worked with them to improve plant design from

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[164] 1854 (244) Report from the Select Committee on Public Health Bill, and Nuisances Removal Amendment Bill: Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index.
[165] Luckin, B., 'Pollution in the City', in: Daunton and Clark (eds), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume 3: 1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 207–228, p. 228.
[166] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1.
[167] TNA, MH 13/138.

as early as 1819.[168] Bills were proposed which required that furnaces and engines should

'burn their own smoke', but due to the fact that committees held back from doing anything

that might be harmful to industry, it was not until 1852 that a bill was passed to address the

subject.[169] Even then a loophole enabled the industrialist to continue in business as long as he

had used the 'best practical means' to try to remedy the nuisance.[170] It was also deemed

impractical to apply this ruling to trades that were especially polluting, such as the brick

making and iron trades, giving minimal benefits to areas such as the Black Country.[171]

The 1863 Alkali Act adopted more stringent measures to control pollution from alkali works,

and an inspectorate was formed with the job of ensuring that acid emissions were regulated.[172]

The inspectorate saw the role as one of partnership with the manufacturers; developing a close

working relationship, and using persuasion, rather than force, to adopt measures of control.[173]

This factor, and the integral voluntary compliance of the manufacturer, led to a situation

where few prosecutions were made.[174] The new inspectorate produced its first report in 1864,

outlining the changes that were being made, and measures of control that had been instigated.

Messrs Chance of Oldbury, for example, had installed condensers, the plan of which was

included in the report.[175] Over the next few years, the inspectorate stated that these were very

effective, but local residents continued to complain about the release of noxious gases.[176] In

the case of *Powell v Chance*, the inspector acted in a supportive role to the manufacturer, and

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[168] 1819 (574) Report from the Select Committee on Steam Engines and Furnaces; &c.
[169] Brimblecombe and Maynard (eds) *The Urban Atmosphere and Its Effects* , p. 100.
[170] 1854 (244) Report from the Select Committee on Public Health Bill, and Nuisances Removal Amendment Bill: Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, p. 3.
[171] Ibid., p. 163.
[172] 1863 (135) Alkali Works Regulation. A Bill Intituled an Act for the More Effectual Condensation of Muriatic Acid Gas in Alkali Works, p. 2.
[173] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p. 228.
[174] McCormick, J., *British Politics and the Environment* (London, 1991), p. 92.
[175] 1865 (3460) Alkali Act, 1863. First Annual Report by the Inspector of His Proceedings During the Year 1864, pp. 22, 30.
[176] 1867 (3792) Alkali Act, 1863. Third Annual Report by the Inspector of his Proceedings During the Year 1866, p. 46.

even stated that 'in such cases they become defenders of the alkali works', a situation which could be regarded as contrary to their role as inspector.[177]

From the 1880s, activist groups were established in some of the larger towns to lobby for smoke abatement, although none have so far been located in Birmingham or Wolverhampton, the two largest towns in the region of the Black Country. The Smoke Abatement Institution came into being in Manchester in 1880 with the aim of keeping the issue on the Parliamentary agenda, and educating the public into the effects of smoke on their health and in their daily lives.[178] Other societies followed, many of them based in London and centring their work on the metropolis. In 1881 the Smoke Abatement Committee was formed from a merger between the National Health Society, chaired by Ernest Hart, the editor of the British Medical Journal, and the Kyrle Society organised by Octavia Hill.[179] They had a wide remit which included drawing attention to health matters, encouraging inventors, conducting practical trials, granting awards, setting up public exhibitions, recording statistics and imparting information and instruction to local authorities, manufacturers and the public.[180] Politically, smoke pollution was seen as a problem related to industry, but the societies also sought to draw the attention of the public to the problem of coal fires in the home. Exhibitions were hosted in different cities, to invite the population to examine the kinds of recommended smokeless stoves that were on the market.[181] Exhibitions of 'smoke-consuming appliances' were included in trade exhibitions at Bingley Hall in Birmingham in 1882, where local manufacturers displayed their appliances, but no record has been found of the Manchester

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[177] 1866 (3701, 3701-I) Alkali Act, 1863. Second Annual Report by the Inspector of His Proceedings During the Year 1865, pp. 7, 8.
[178] McCormick, *British Politics and the Environment*, p. 89.
[179] Stradling, D. and Thorsheim, P., 'The Smoke of Great Cities: British and American Efforts to Control Air Pollution, 1860-1914', *Environmental History,* 1999, **4,** 6-31, p. 10.
[180] 'The National Smoke Abatement Institution', *Nature,* 09 February 1888, **37,** 356-358
[181] MALS, FO52M7, Manchester Smoke Abatement Exhibition, the Exhibition Review 5th April 1882

exhibition visiting Birmingham.[182] The fact that one of the societies was based in Manchester

was not surprising, as there was a strong political action and campaigning body in the city.

From the 1830s there had been campaigns for public health reform and the Council was ahead

of national legislation in passing local acts to regulate housing conditions.[183] The Manchester

and Salford Noxious Vapours Abatement Association warned about the dangers of smoke

pollution from the alkali works, and they did manage to get the regulations tightened in the

Alkali and Works Regulation Act in 1881.[184] The problem was a complex one, however, and

would not finally be resolved until the years following the passing of the 'Clean Air Act' in

1956.[185]

3.7 Conclusion

Pollution was not a new phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Historically, it occurred

wherever growth outpaced the capabilities of a town to deal with its pollution-creating

elements. It was recorded in London on a large scale as early as the seventeenth century.

What was new to the nineteenth century, however, was the rapid expansion of villages into

industrial towns, with heavy industry and homes being located side by side. This led to

severe contamination of the urban living space in towns such as Oldbury.

The town faced several pollution issues: lack of sanitation, smoke emissions, dumping of

industrial waste, water pollution and noise, issues which faced all burgeoning towns to a

greater or lesser degree. The Black Country stood out among industrial regions, however, for

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[182] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Building and Manufacturing Exhibition at Bingley Hall', Tuesday 18 April 1882, p. 6; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Trades Exhibition at Bingley Hall', Tuesday 12 April 1892, p. 7.
[183] Douglas, I*., et al.*, 'Industry, Environment and Health through 200 Years in Manchester', *Ecological Economics,* 2002, **41,** 235-255.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Luckin, 'Pollution in the City', pp. 224, 226.
[185] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1.

the way in which pollution from heavy industry affected an entire conurbation of small towns. They were unable to free themselves from the polluting smoke, the prevailing wind merely dictated the levels of pollution they received. In addition to this, the marl pits and spoil heaps were such a common feature of the landscape that they appeared on the local maps. Oldbury had, in addition, chemical waste, which gave off fumes and polluted the water sources. Adjoining towns might complain about the effects of the drifting chemical-laden smoke, but Oldbury had to live with the 'nuisance' at source.

Even when the town authorities recognised the true nature of the problem, they found it difficult to find a means to deal with it, due to lack of knowledge and financial resources. The government response was to pass Acts of Parliament to enable the town to address the problems, but, due to loopholes in the acts, which enabled the worst polluting industries to continue in business, they had little effect on industrial zones, such as the Black Country.

The evidence presented in this chapter, especially that of eyewitnesses, suggests that, in many ways, the problems experienced by Oldbury was typical of other Black Country towns. They all had restrictive living conditions, and lack of facilities, that led to the high death rates recorded across the region in the twentieth annual report of the Registrar-General, and all shared the same long wait for a water supply to be forthcoming. The location of polluting industries within the borders of the towns led to a pall of smoke drifting over the whole area, and the landscape being marred with industrial waste. The problems experienced from underground mining led to subsidence across the region, with half sunken, lopsided buildings being a feature of the landscape. However, the amount of additional pollution from the chemical industries added a new dimension to the problems that the people of Oldbury were facing: problems which were likewise experienced by St Helens in Lancashire, which also

had chemical industries. As in Lancashire, the results of pollution, especially chemical waste, continued to be a problem into the twentieth century, a lasting monument to the pollution of the industrial town.

In addition to the pollution that was visibly manifest, the townspeople also had to endure pollution from a constantly noisy environment. Although noise was not recognised as a pollutant in the nineteenth century, recent studies have shown that it had a negative impact on the lives of the people. Those working alongside steam hammers and noisy machinery in metal working industries suffered a degree of hearing loss, which affected their lives, socially, as well as in the workplace. Those living near to the works would also suffer the effects of the noise, manifested in lack of sleep, irritability and reduction in their ability to perform well in workplace, home or school. Even though medical practitioners identified its impact on metal workers in the 1830s, little seems to have been done to investigate the problem until the 1880s, when Barr conducted his tests in Glasgow. Despite the compelling results of the tests, nothing appears to have been done to address the problem during the nineteenth century.

Attitudes to pollution by the élite of the Black Country towns were generally negative. The industrialists formed the highest stratum of the élite in many parts of the Black Country, and, as the owners of the most polluting industries, they defended, or denied, the amount of pollution they produced, and its effects on the neighbourhood. In many cases, this led to a double standard, since they chose to live outside the towns in order to avoid bringing up their own families in such a polluted atmosphere. There was, perhaps, a positive side to their influence, as in the care and provision they made for their own workforce, and the benefits they brought to the towns in which they operated. This will be investigated in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4: HEALTH OF THE POPULATION: CHALLENGES

In towns across the country pollution from water sources led to the spread of diseases such as cholera and typhoid. The blanket of smoke that covered the industrial towns obliterated sunlight, provoking other conditions, like rickets. Furthermore, breathing in smoke and toxic fumes exacerbated respiratory problems, leading, in some cases, to death. Many of the health issues were not recognised as attributable to pollution and were hidden from general view, but they seriously affected the lives of individuals, and their families. Although reformers, such as Lord Ashley, highlighted the plight of children working in mills and mines in the 1830s, and although disastrous explosions in coal mines attracted the attention of reformers, and the press, there was little attention given to the number of workers whose health was affected by breathing in cotton, or coal dust, in these very same industries.[1]

The health of the people of Oldbury during the nineteenth century is explored over two chapters. This chapter seeks to understand the issues confronting the population of the industrial town, and Chapter 5 considers the measures put in place to address them. The emphasis is on the period 1850 to 1900, when many changes and developments took place. Health issues faced by the population of Oldbury are explored in this chapter under the subjects of environmental health, occupational health, chronic health problems and the health of women and children. A thematic approach has been chosen in order to study, not only the medical problems, but, also, the factors that contributed to them. This has been done through asking the following related questions: What medical problems were the people of Oldbury facing? Did these change over the century? What impact did industrial illnesses have on people's lives? How did personal factors, such as a person's age, sex or class, influence their

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[1] Bartrip, P. W. J. and Burman, S., *The Wounded Soldiers of Industry: Industrial Compensation Policy 1833-1897* (Oxford, 1983), p. 15; *Berrows Worcester Journal* 'The Late Mine Explosion Near Oldbury', Thursday 3 December 1846.

vulnerability to health problems? To what extent was the situation in Oldbury typical, or

atypical, of the experience of other Black Country towns and industrial areas in England

during this period?

4.1 Historiography and sources

The historiography will cover Chapters 4 and 5, since the same sources have been used for

both chapters.

The starting point, for research into the health of the population of industrial towns, is Edwin

Chadwick's *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain*

(1842). His emphasis on sanitation to rid towns of pollution and disease, influenced policies,

set procedures and laid out a course of action.[2] Christopher Hamlyn and Anthony Wohl

evaluate the report; Hamlyn provides the background to Chadwick's ideas and the way they

were implemented, and Wohl, describes the effects that these ideas had on the health of the

people.[3] The first section of Anne Hardy's *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860* also

examines the state of public health in the nineteenth century. She discusses the improvements

made to the environment in relation to public health in Britain, and describes the living

conditions of the working classes. Problems that women were facing in the home are

addressed, although childbirth, which would have been the cause of a great deal of chronic

illnesses among women, is not explored.[4] Her conclusion is that despite the increase in

mortality and life expectancy, the overall gain in health among the poorer classes was

probably small.[5] Hardy also deals with the topic of infectious diseases in their nineteenth-

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[2] Chadwick, *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain*.
[3] Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854*; Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*.
[4] Hardy, A., *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860* (Basingstoke, 2001).
[5] Ibid., p. 46.

century setting, focusing on eight different examples which medical men were battling to understand and control: whooping cough, measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria, smallpox, typhus, typhoid and tuberculosis. Hardy finds that a high level of success was gained in the control of typhoid and typhus, following the introduction of sanitary measures, a fact which is also observable in the 1890 reports for Oldbury.

Charles Turner Thackrah and Donald Hunter, have both produced handbooks for medics and laymen. Thackrah's contemporary report looks at the effects of industry on the lives of workers in 1832. Basing his study on the three Ridings of Yorkshire, he describes the health of different groups in the workforce. He gives details about the manufacturing processes, the problems involved, and the life, clothes and habits of the workpeople, producing a picture of working life in the early nineteenth century, and the industrial illnesses from which people were suffering.[6] Hunter, writing over a hundred years later, gives an overview of industrial medicine, hazards in the workplace, and legislation up to 1959, when the book was written. While Hunter refers to nineteenth-century industry, he is mainly concerned with the first half of the twentieth century.[7] Peter Bartrip also deals with the subject of disease and accidents in the workplace.[8] He aims to find out why occupational diseases only gained the attention of politicians and medical men, after the late date of 1890.[9] He believes that the answer is the unspectacular and insidious nature of much occupational disease, which did not draw the attention of reformers. Although occupational illness was recognised in the early nineteenth century, nothing could be done to alleviate it. Neither was there a precedent for occupational

[6] Thackrah, *The effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: with suggestions for the removal of many of the agents which produce disease, and shorten the duration of life.*
[7] Hunter, D., *Health in Industry* (Harmondsworth, 1959).
[8] Bartrip, P. W. J., *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Amsterdam, 2002).
[9] Ibid., p. 2.

health regulations. Nor did the state have a part to play.[10] He gives an overview of a number of trades which were recognised as dangerous, the problems that led to this definition and the legislation to try to control the situation, which came over time. Bartrip's work highlights the lack of available data for those suffering from industrial diseases, a situation also found in Oldbury, and confirms their hidden nature.[11]

Compared to the research into environmental diseases, chronic health problems have received less attention, because, like industrial diseases, little data is available. One chronic illness which has received the attention of researchers, and which is relevant to this thesis, is mental health.

Mental health was a hidden problem in industrial towns and underwent considerable change during the nineteenth century. There is no attempt in this thesis to consider the medical history of mental health in detail. It is investigated here as one of the aspects of life for the people of Oldbury which was giving great cause for concern. The 1874 Board of Health raised the problem with the industrialists, who confirmed that the levels of insanity were high in the town.[12] The remit for this thesis is to investigate the numbers of people who were institutionalised because of a mental health problem, in order to gain a picture of their state of health, and the reasons for their admissions to the asylum.

Kathleen Jones, a historian of the asylum movement, outlines the history of the mental health service in Britain from the mid eighteenth to the last quarter of the twentieth century.[13] She considers Acts of Parliament and reform, different types of hospitals, public concern, and the

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[10] Ibid., pp. 283-4.
[11] Ibid., p. 3.
[12] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1.
[13] Jones, K., *Lunacy, Law and Conscience, 1744-1845: The Social History of the Care of the Insane* (London, 1955); Jones, K., *A history of the mental health services* (1972); Jones, K., *Asylums and After: A Revised History of the Mental Health Services: From the Early 18th Century to the 1990s* (London, 1993).

advances in mental illness during the nineteenth century. Jones provides a concise overview

of the way in which medical care developed. The early history of the asylum movement has

also been studied by Leonard Smith, for the period up to 1845. In addition to charting the rise

of the asylum, Smith also investigates the way in which the asylum was run, the people who

were sent there, and the treatment and care that was given.[14] He uses archival material from a

number of asylums to describe life inside, providing information that is often not included

elsewhere.

Peter Bartlett and Hilary Marland discuss mental illness in regard to different groups in

society. Bartlett considers the asylum in relation to the way that different levels of the group

he calls the 'social residuum', had access to mental health care, with particular relevance to

the Old and New Poor Laws.[15] This is a topic he deals with more fully in *The Poor Law of*

Lunacy. His central point is the importance of investigating the rise of the asylum within the

Poor Law system, rather than treating it as another arm of medicine. He highlights the

sometimes forgotten fact that many patients with a mental illness remained in the workhouse.

Not everyone was automatically transferred to an asylum, and many workhouses built special

wards to accommodate them.[16] In Oldbury, many with a mental disability who were easily

managed, remained in the workhouse, and only the most difficult cases found their way to the

asylum. Marland, investigates the confinement of women suffering from puerperal insanity, a

causal factor for a number of admissions to the asylum for women from Oldbury. She finds

that it was a condition from which patients either recovered or died. Few remained in the

asylum for lengthy periods. Marland notes that women were fearful of pregnancy due to the

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[14] Smith, L. D., *Cure, Comfort, and Safe Custody: Public Lunatic Asylums in Early Nineteenth Century England* (New York, 1999).
[15] Bartlett, P., 'The Asylum and the Poor Law, the Productive Alliance', in: Melling and Forsythe (eds), *Insanity, Institutions and Society, 1800-1914* (London, 1999).
[16] Bartlett, P., *The Poor Law of Lunacy: The Administration of Pauper Lunatics in Mid-Nineteenth Century England, with Special Emphasis on Leicestershire and Rutland* (London, 1999).

problems which could occur, and aware of the close proximity of death. This led to states of extreme excitability, exhaustion, and vulnerability where body and mind acted upon each other to set a course for disaster.[17] Frank Crompton brings the focus nearer home in his research into the archival evidence relating to Powick Asylum in Worcester, where patients from Oldbury were sent from 1852, when it opened. Crompton's aim is to provide a background to the asylum in the two decades after it opened, looking at both the ideological context in which it was founded and the changes which took place over time.[18] Not all of the high ideals envisaged at the outset were realised. The hoped for cures did not materialise, and the planned accommodation for 200 had grown to 680 by 1872, which meant a likely decrease in levels of care.[19]

The final section of this chapter considers the health of women and children, in the industrial town. Although much has been written about children, the health of women from the labouring classes in the home has received less attention. *Women's History,* edited by June Purvis, contains a series of chapters looking at the lives of women in different contexts. While the chapters on 'women and the family', and 'women and health' offer glimpses into the subject, detail, about the actual lives of the women, is missing.[20] Barbara Harrison was the writer for the chapter on women and health, a topic which she has more fully explored in *Not only the Dangerous* Trades, where she investigates women's work and health during the period 1880 – 1914. This is a detailed study of women's experiences in the workplace, and includes working hours, wages, the work environment, and the means put in place to address problems which arose. While she gives considerable attention to women's work in the

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[17] Marland, H., 'Destined to a Perfect Recovery: The Confinement of Puerperal Insanity in the Nineteenth Century', in: Melling and Forsyth (eds), *Insanity, Institutions and Society, 1800 - 1914* (London, 1999).
[18] Crompton, F., *Lunatics: the mad poor of Worcestershire in the long nineteenth century: writing 'History from below' of patients in a Pauper Lunatics Asylum* (2013).
[19] Ibid., p.2, 61.
[20] Purvis, J., *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945: An Introduction* (London ; New York, 2000).

factories, the heavier industrial work available to women in Oldbury, (largely brick making, and working at the pit head), are not mentioned. She does, however, cover the way in which work impacted on the health of women, especially when they were pregnant, and in relation to running the home, and caring for the family, for which there is a parallel in Oldbury.[21]

Anthony Wohl's Endangered *Lives* (1983) continues to be a key text for this thesis, bringing together several themes in his study of the health of the urban population.[22] Sanitary aspects are dealt with in detail, but Wohl also engages with the neglected areas of public health, such as atmospheric and river pollution, and industrial diseases. This provides a rounded synopsis of the state of the nation's health, and points to parliamentary and other primary sources for further research.

Primary data for the health of the population of the town of Oldbury, and the measures which were put in place to deal with issues arising, provide the background information for Chapters 4 and 5. Key sources, are the reports to the General Board of Health 1855 and the 1890s, and associated correspondence, parliamentary reports, census documents, and articles in the press and medical journals. For Poor Law purposes, Oldbury was linked to the town of West Bromwich in Staffordshire, and paupers were sent to West Bromwich Union Workhouse from 1834. Workhouse records are held at Sandwell Community History and Archive Services, but many are believed to have been destroyed during World War II. Only two ledgers survive, one for the beginning, and one for the end, of the nineteenth century: the Account Book for 1735 – 1832, and the Board of Guardians Minutes covering the years 1891 to 1911. These contain few records about individual workhouse inmates. Records for Powick Asylum are more detailed. Admission and discharge registers are held at Worcester Archives and

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[21] Harrison, B., *Not only the 'Dangerous Trades': Women's Work and Health in Britain, 1880-1914* (London, 1996).

[22] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p.2.

Archaeology Service, and the George Marshall Medical Museum hosts an on line database of patient's case notes. These provide information about their health on admittance, and while they were in the institution.

Details of industrial accidents have been obtained from parliamentary reports and newspaper archives. The firm of Chance Brothers kept detailed registers of accidents in their workplace from 1880, providing data for this industry.

4.2 Environmental health

The World Health Organization defines environmental health as:

> all the physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person….. and encompasses assessment, and control, of those environmental factors that can, potentially, affect health. It is targeted towards preventing disease, and creating health-supportive environments'.[23]

Although not using these exact words, medical men in the nineteenth century identified these issues as the primary health problems and targets for fast growing English towns.[24]

The population of Oldbury, along with many others in the country, was affected by both endemic, and epidemic diseases. Endemic diseases were those, such as typhoid and typhus, which were confined to a district, or locality, and often affected people in just one area of the town. Epidemics, such as smallpox and influenza, on the other hand, were contagious diseases, which broke out and spread rapidly and widely. Not surprisingly, it is the latter of these two problems, the epidemic, which provoked the most concern in the nineteenth century.[25] Epidemics were not limited to the working classes, even claiming members of the royal family as victims.[26]

The 1855 medical report for Oldbury is the first to indicate the problems that the town was facing in relation to endemic and epidemic disease. Produced to support the application for a board of health to be set up in the town, the report linked the high death rates to the town's

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[23] World Health Organization, *Environmental Health* [Online] (2013), http://www.who.int/topics/environmental_health/en/, (Accessed: 19/10/2013).
[24] See for example Smith, T. S., *A Treatise on Fever* (1830), Edwin Chadwick, *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain* and John Simon 1864 (3416) Public Health. Sixth report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council.
[25] Rosenberg, C. E., *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine* (Cambridge, 1992).
[26] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p. 1.

insanitary condition.[27] Of particular concern was the high level of deaths among children

under the age of 5 years (see Figure 53). Twenty seven of these deaths were recorded from

diarrhoea, two from inflammation of the bowels and one from enteritis. Deaths from

diarrhoea were giving cause for concern across the country, as figures reflected the fact that

they were increasing, especially in the industrial districts, such as Birmingham, Coventry,

Dudley, Leeds, Manchester, and Wolverhampton.[28] Four fifths of deaths from endemic

diarrhoea in these districts occurred in children under five years of age.[29] In 1855, the

figures for Oldbury were even higher, with 100 per cent of all deaths from diarrhoea

occurring in children in this age bracket.[30] Edward Greenhow, epidemiologist and physician,

gave the opinion that diarrhoea would be wholly preventable, if good sanitary arrangements

were introduced, an opinion that was echoed in the writing of other medical men at the

time.[31] Dr John Simon, for example, writing in 1865, concurred, and highlighted a second

reason for infant deaths from diarrhoea: children who were placed in the care of child

minders, while the mother went out to work. Such children were often improperly fed.[32]

Local reports observed that this was not such a problem in the Black Country, however,

since 'the industries in the neighbourhood offer little occupation to women'.[33] An impure

water supply was seen as one of the main causes of the problem, a situation which did not

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[27] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, pp. 7- 8.
[28] 1860 (2736) Public health. Second report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, with appendix, pp. 57–160.
[29] Ibid., p. 160.
[30] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, pp. 20- 29.
[31] 1860 (2736) Public health. Second report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, with appendix. pp. 58, 62; Bettany, G. T., *Greenhow, Edward Headlam (1814–1888)* [Online] (2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11431, (Accessed: 23/9/2014).
[32] 1864 (3416) Public Health. Sixth report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, p. 34.
[33] TNA, MH12/11673, Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Borough of Wednesbury (1892), p. 4.

find resolution until the last quarter of the century in many towns.[34] In the case of Oldbury

this took place during the 1880s, and it would be expected that the 1891 to 1895 Health

Reports would reveal a significant improvement. However, although the death rates from

diarrhoea and other intestinal conditions had fallen, the figures of death continued to

fluctuate. The figures for typhoid illustrate the fact that while the number of notifications

for some of these diseases were generally high, related deaths were comparatively low, a

probable reflection on the sanitary improvements that were taking place (see Table 5).[35]

Table 5 Deaths various diseases in Oldbury 1891 – 1895

Medical condition	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895
Deaths from childhood diarrhoea	12	4	20	14	20
Number of notifications of cholera	20	49	37	7	34
Number of deaths from Cholera	5	1	7	4	6
Number of deaths from phthisis	16	16	13	13	31
Number of deaths from heart disease	22	23	13	17	13

In addition to deaths from insanitary conditions, the 1855 health report also records the

number of deaths from diseases linked to the overcrowded and dirty environment, in which

people lived. Christopher Hamlyn describes the living conditions of the working classes in

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[34] Hardy, A., *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Diseases and the Rise of Preventive Medicine 1856 -1900* (Oxford, 1993), p. 3; Porter, D., *Health, Civilization and the State: a History of Public Health from Ancient to Modern Times* (London, 1999), p. 80.

[35] TNA Oldbury Local Board of Health Medical Officer's Annual Report (1892), pp. 2-4; TNA, MH12/11671, Medical Officer's Annual Report for Oldbury (1893), p. 3; 1894 (Oldbury Urban Sanitary Authority) Annual Report on the Health of Oldbury, p. 15; 1895 (Oldbury Urban Sanitary Authority) Annual Report on the Health of Oldbury, p. 21.

different areas of the country as 'breeding grounds for disease'.[36] The 1855 report recorded

seventeen cases of pulmonary tuberculosis, (phthisis), and nine deaths from 'typhus', which,

as Anne Hardy identifies, were encouraged in homes where domestic hygiene was poor, and

ventilation was lacking.[37] This would be an apt description of the homes of the poor in

Oldbury, which had little access to clean water, and whose windows would have been tightly

closed against the prevailing smoke. Middle-class visitors attributed the nausea they felt

when visiting working-class homes to the smell of unwashed bodies, and to the vermin,

behind wallpapers and in the beds.[38] Early health reports often confused typhoid with typhus,

the names being used synonymously.[39] The 1855 report only mentions typhus fever, and it is

not possible to ascertain from the report which of the two diseases was being recorded.

Pulmonary tuberculosis was one of the most important diseases in the nineteenth century,

affecting people from all classes of society. It is spread through inhaling tiny droplets of

saliva from the coughs and sneezes of an infected person, and usually becomes evident many

years after the initial infection is passed on.[40] Characteristically, the highest numbers of

deaths occurred in the 20 – 34 age group, as can be seen in the 1855 Health Report for

Oldbury, although the age ranges used in the report are wider (see Figure 45). Tuberculosis

was insidious in its debilitating effects, and inevitable outcome.

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[36] Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854*, p 124.
[37] Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Diseases and the Rise of Preventive Medicine 1856 -1900*, p. 191.
[38] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 36.
[39] Typhus fever was a bacterial disease spread through the bites of lice and fleas and commonly found in prisons and unhygienic overcrowded homes, whereas typhoid was passed on through contaminated water. Although recognised as different diseases by some medical practitioners in the 1840s the two diseases were still being confused in the 1870s. See Perry, R., 'The Discovery of the Difference between Typhus and Typhoid Fevers', *British Medical Journal,* 1879, **2,** 918.
[40] Woods, R. and Shelton, N., *An atlas of Victorian mortality* (Liverpool, 1997), p. 98.
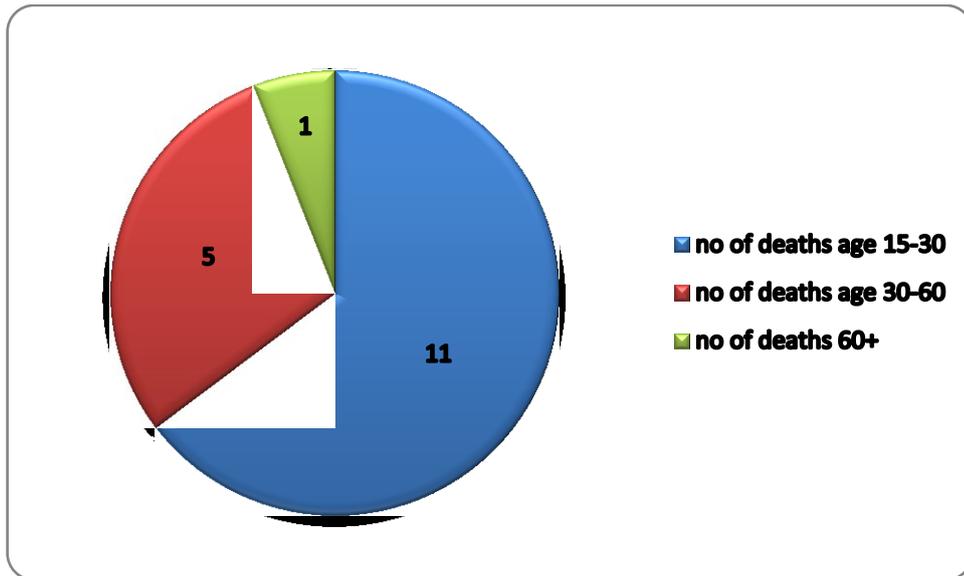
Figure 45 Deaths from tuberculosis in Oldbury over a nine-month period (1855)[41]

Hardy reports a decrease in the incidences of both typhus and tuberculosis after the 1870s, when the living conditions of the population of industrial towns improved. While this is confirmed for typhus, which is not mentioned in the 1890 reports, tuberculosis (phthisis) is still recorded (see Table 5).

While a small number of deaths linked with insanitary conditions in Oldbury were in the outlying areas of the town, the largest problem appeared to be in the centre (see Figure 46).

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[41] Compiled by the author from figures in 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, pp. 21-29.
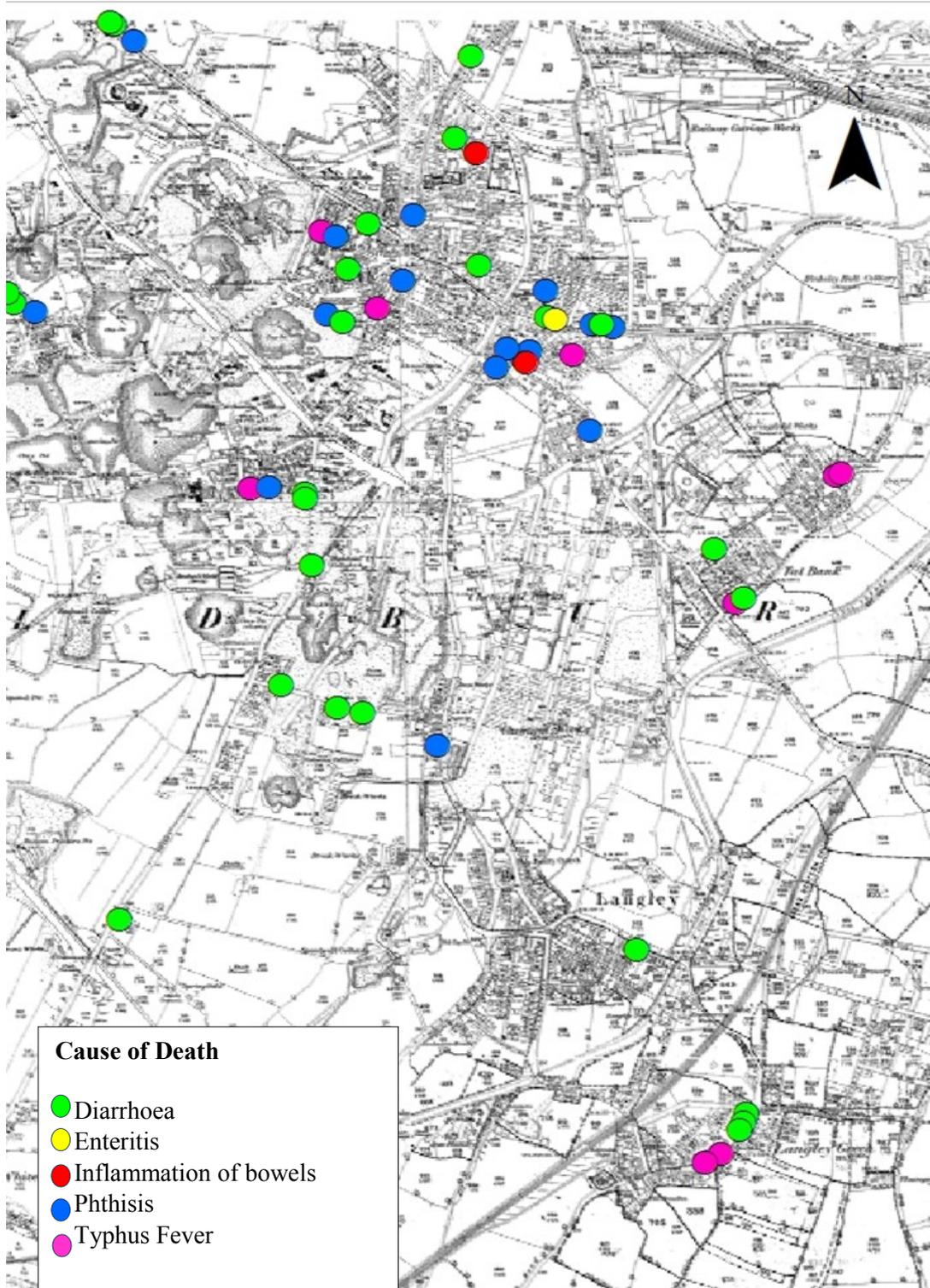
Figure 46 Deaths from insanitary conditions in Oldbury (1855)[42]

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[42] Ibid.; *Ordnance Survey Map of Oldbury, Northern Division Worcestershire/ Staffordshire, sheet no LXV111.13*; *Ordnance Survey Map of Oldbury, Northern Division Worcestershire/ Staffordshire, sheet no LXV111.14*. (1885). Constructed by the author using GIS.

In addition to disease spread, or fostered, by the sanitary and living conditions in Oldbury, the 1855 report also highlights the number of deaths linked to respiratory conditions: asthma (7), bronchitis (10), congestion and inflammation of the lungs (2), pneumonia (22) and pulmonary congestion (2). All the cases of bronchitis and inflammation of the lungs and nineteen of the twenty two cases of pneumonia occurred in the under-five age group, indicating that it was the youngest members of the community who were most at risk. Bill Luckin links the seasonal shifts in levels of asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia to the dangerously high levels of atmospheric impurity, in industrial towns.[43] Newspaper reports of fog-related deaths, indicate that these were highest in winter and early spring, and this is revealed by the records of respiratory deaths in the adjoining towns of Oldbury and Smethwick (see Figure 47 and Figure 48).[44]

Many of the deaths in Oldbury took place near the centre of town, next to the heavily polluting industries, although, in reality, there was nowhere in Oldbury where people could escape from the polluting smog (see Figure 49).

Figure 49

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[43] Luckin, 'Pollution in the City', p.209.
[44] *Morning Post,* 'London Fogs', Thursday 21 October 1880, p. 5; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Fog', Friday 3 January 1890, p. 8.
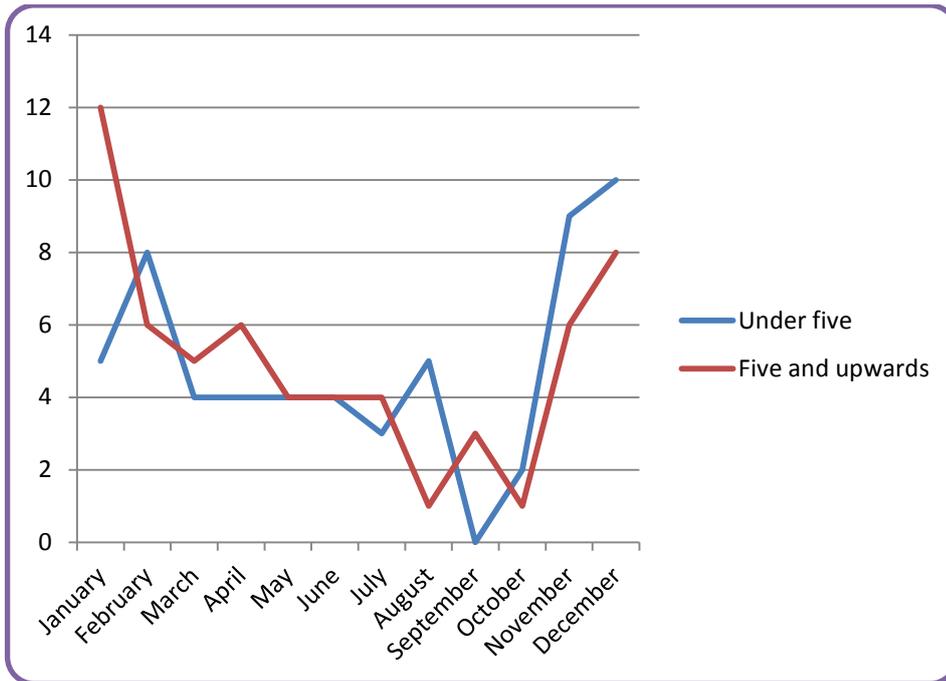
Figure 47 Deaths from bronchial conditions in Oldbury 1893[45]
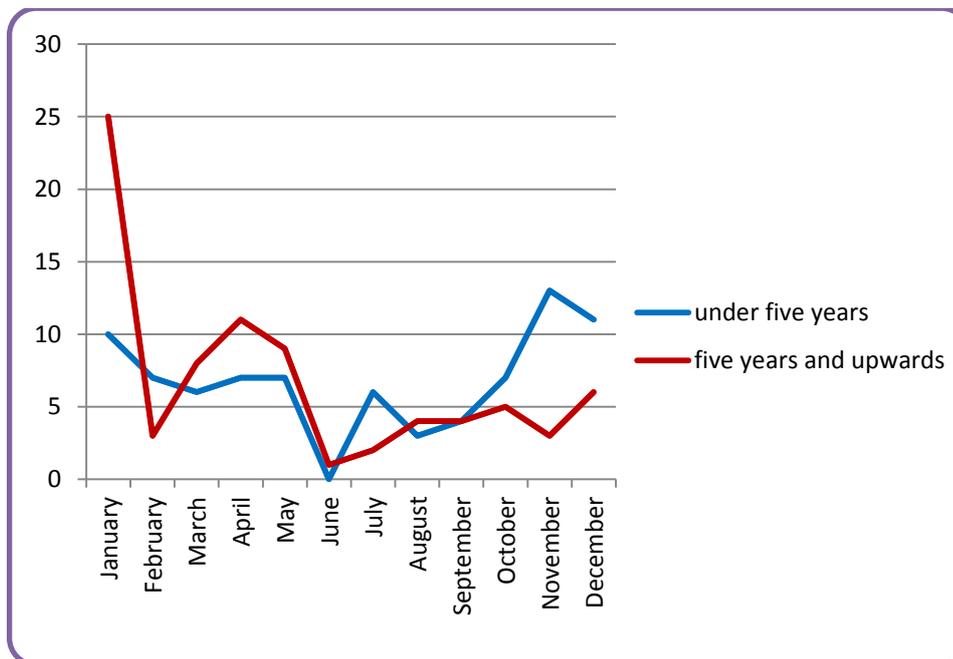
Figure 48 Deaths from bronchial conditions in Smethwick 1893[46]

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[45] TNA, MH12/11671, Medical Officer's Annual Report for Oldbury (1893)

[46] TNA, MH 12/14077, Smethwick Local Board Urban Sanitary Authority (1893)
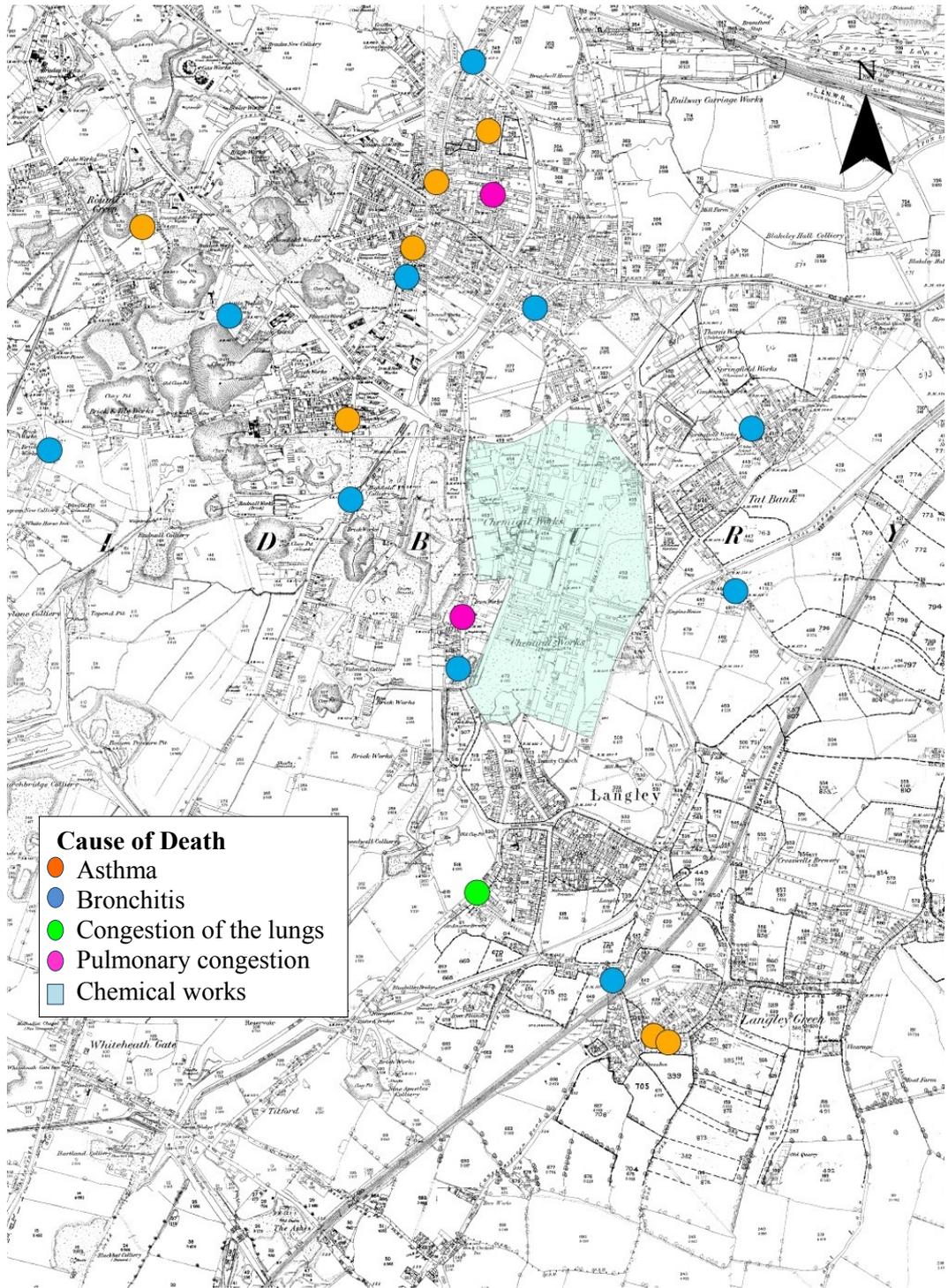
Figure 49 Deaths from diseases associated with polluted air in Oldbury (1855)[47]

[47] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester; *Ordnance Survey Map of Oldbury, Northern Division Worcestershire/ Staffordshire, sheet no LXV111.13*; *Ordnance Survey Map of Oldbury, Northern Division Worcestershire/ Staffordshire, sheet no LXV111.14*. Constructed by the author using GIS.

A report by the Royal Commission on Noxious Vapours, in 1878, attributed other health problems to the effects of smoke and gas, which would not have appeared in the health reports. These included nausea, poor digestion, lack of appetite, general malaise and sleepiness.[48] These environmental problems, which were the foundation of the poor health of the population in many of the English towns, were long-term issues which took several decades to solve, and, especially in the case of improving air quality, needed governmental intervention.

Although endemic disease was widespread in towns across the country throughout the nineteenth century, it was the epidemic diseases, cholera, and smallpox, which gave particular cause for concern. Of these, cholera was the most feared, owing to the speed of its progress. It killed by dehydration over a short period, which could be as little as ten hours, but was normally three to four days.[49] The first records for cholera in Oldbury are in the 1832 newspaper reports.[50] Asiatic Cholera was first diagnosed in Sunderland on 23 October 1831, and by 3 September 1832 it was being reported in Oldbury, and other Black Country towns. Table 6 reveals that incidence of cholera differed, even between towns in the same locality. Bilston was one of the worst affected towns in the country. By comparison, Oldbury escaped lightly.

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[48] 1878 (C.2159, C.2159-I) Noxious Vapours Commission. Report of the Royal Commission on Noxious Vapours, p. 524.
[49] Morris, R. J., *Cholera 1832 :The Social Response to an Epidemic* (London, 1976).
[50] *The Observer,* 'Cholera Morbus', 1832;1831 (183) Parliamentary Representation. A Return of the Population of Every Place in Great Britain Not Now Sending Members to Parliament, of Which the Population Has, by the Last Census, Exceeded 5,000 Souls; and the Amount of Assessed Taxes, for the Year Ending the 5th April 1831, in Each Place Respectively, p. 3.

Table 6 Report to the General Board of Health. Cholera victims in the Black Country as on 3rd September 1832[51]

Towns	Total cases	Total deaths	Population	Crude death rate per 1000 of population from cholera
Bilston	2006	600	14,492	41.1
Tipton	801	235	14,951	15.7
Dudley	508	109	23,043	4.7
Wednesbury	120	42	8437	4.9
Oldbury	105	20	5000 **[52]**	4

In 1848/9 cholera struck again with 2673 deaths in Staffordshire, of which 358 were in the West Bromwich district, to which Oldbury belonged.[53] The first fatal case in Oldbury occurred on 7 September 1849, and the last was on 11 November 1849. In all there were only 16 deaths from cholera in this two month period, and 21 deaths from diarrhoea.[54] On Thursday 15 November 1849 the Board of Directors of Chance Brothers declared that a day of National Thanksgiving should be observed at the Glass and Alkali works, like Christmas Day or Good Friday, for the cessation of the epidemic across the country.[55] Even though the cholera epidemics in Oldbury were less devastating than those in other parts of the Black Country, like the nearby town of Bilston, cholera continued to hold fear for the population.[56]

The other main epidemic disease to affect the population in Oldbury was smallpox. Ann Hardy describes smallpox as 'one of the most unpleasant diseases ever to have afflicted

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[51] *The Observer, '*Cholera Morbus', 1832;1831 (183) Parliamentary Representation. A Return of the Population of Every Place in Great Britain Not Now Sending Members to Parliament, of Which the Population Has, by the Last Census, Exceeded 5,000 Souls; and the Amount of Assessed Taxes, for the Year Ending the 5th April 1831, in Each Place Respectively, p. 3.

[52] No government records have been found which record the population of Oldbury at this date since it was included in the figures for Halesowen. The figure is taken from Robson, G., *Dark Satanic Mills?: Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country* (Carlisle, 2002), p. 253.

[53] Graham, G., *Report on the Mortality of Cholera in England, 1848-49* (London, 1852), p.6.

[54] Ibid., p. 266.

[55] CALS, Chance Bros & Co. (Smethwick) DIC/BM 20/161, National Day of Thanksgiving (Thur 15 Nov 1849)

[56] *The Observer, '*Editorial Article 1 -- No Title', 1871.

mankind'. Its symptoms were a high temperature and severe muscular pains, nausea and vomiting, followed after two to four days by the eruption of a rash.[57] Fatality rates depended on the type of smallpox contracted. Hardy records a fatality rate of 20 to 40 percent for 'ordinary' smallpox among the unvaccinated, but 100 per cent for haemorrhagic smallpox, the most severe type.[58] The first recorded outbreak in Oldbury was in November 1871 when a family 'imported' the disease to Oldbury from the town of Wolverhampton, where a smallpox epidemic was 'raging'.[59] A child of the family had contracted the disease, and the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) began arrangements to move the child to an isolation unit at the workhouse. As soon as they heard of this proposal, however, the family sold all of their effects for one shilling, 'which was as much as they were worth', and left town.[60] This in itself is interesting, showing a love for their child, not often recorded in working-class histories, and illustrating the fear that working-class people had of the workhouse.[61] The local board reacted to the situation by commandeering a group of cottages to turn into an isolation hospital and by November 1872, they were full, as the disease had reached epidemic status.[62] The MOH reported that it had spread through people going into houses where the disease was prevalent; the majority of people remaining under the impression that smallpox was not contagious.[63] A public meeting was called to discuss the precautions to be taken, and it was decided to set up a committee with members from the local and sanitary boards, the medical gentlemen, clergy, schoolmasters, and working men. The town was divided into four districts, overseen by subcommittees, who would engage nurses and adopt preventative measures. Disinfectant was provided, largely through a donation from Messrs. Chance,

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[57] Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Diseases and the Rise of Preventive Medicine 1856 -1900*, p. 112.
[58] Ibid., p. 113.
[59] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'West Bromwich Board of Guardians, Outbreak of Smallpox', 14 November 1871, p.6.
[60] Ibid.
[61] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Board of Health', Saturday 2 December 1871, p. 7.
[62] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Smallpox Epidemic at Oldbury', 12 November 1872, p.8.
[63] Ibid.

which, along with nursing care, was offered free of charge to those who could not afford it.[64]

A meeting of the board eight days later heard that the number of smallpox cases had vastly increased, but 'the arrangements had gone well'. Total numbers who had contracted the disease since it first appeared twelve months previously was 235 and there had been 80 deaths in total.[65] The disease slowly decreased, until, on 8 September 1873, the board was able to report that, for the first time since May 1872, there was no entry of death from smallpox in the records. The special hospital was empty and the remaining few patients were being treated in their own homes.[66] The next epidemic of smallpox did not appear in the town until March 1893, by which time the Board of Health were better prepared. The previous isolation unit had been closed, so the board began to convert cottages into an isolation hospital to accommodate 40 patients. They made arrangements with Smethwick and Rowley Regis to accommodate 10 patients each, in their smallpox hospitals and produced handbills to instruct the inhabitants how to protect themselves. Over the year there were 138 cases of smallpox, but only 4 deaths. Of these, 125 had been vaccinated, one of whom died, and of 11 who were not vaccinated, 3 died.[67]

Identification of the source of environmental diseases was crucial to their control. Throughout much of the nineteenth century the source of disease was identified as 'miasma', a term describing the unhealthy vapours believed to rise from swampy ground, or putrid matter.[68] Thomas Cooper, Oldbury's first MOH (1855), and a believer in the miasma theory, aimed to free the town from disease by getting rid of refuse.[69] While this was happening in

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[64] Ibid.
[65] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Smallpox at Oldbury', Thursday 21 November 1872, p 8.
[66] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury', Monday 8 September 1873, p. 8.
[67] TNA, MH12/11671, pp. 5-6.
[68] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 32.
[69] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 8.

individual towns across England, in the metropolis ground-breaking work into the causes of epidemics was taking place. In 1854, John Snow traced the source of a cholera outbreak in London to a water pump in Broad Street. He had the handle of the pump removed and cases of cholera immediately began to diminish. Snow did not hold to the miasma theory, but rather believed that the disease was caused by a poison from an infected person entering the water supply from faecal matter.[70] Other scientists were also working to discover the causes of infections. William Budd, a physician in Bristol Royal Infirmary and a pioneer in the promotion of the germ theory of disease, discovered that, like cholera, typhoid was waterborne. His paper on typhoid fever, published in 1873, is described as a 'classic work on waterborne transmission of enteric disease'.[71] In the 1850s and 60s, Louis Pasteur, working in France, refuted the spontaneous generation of disease through miasma. He went on to investigate the germ theory and continued to develop the science of immunology through his work on vaccines for anthrax and rabies in the 1880s.[72] Robert Koch, a German physician and scientist, discovered the bacteria which caused anthrax in 1876, those for tuberculosis in 1882, and the cholera bacillus in 1883.[73] By the 1880s, antitoxins were being prepared for use in vaccination programmes, laying the foundations for the advances in the prevention of disease that would take place in the twentieth century.

Even though the germ or contagion theory began to be accepted, the belief in miasma remained prevalent until the end of the century. Both theories favoured sanitary reform to improve the environment, however, and increased attention was given to sewerage, clean

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[70] Rosenberg, *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine*, p. 117.
[71] Tulchinsky, T. H. and Varavikova, E. A., 'A History of Public Health', in: *The New Public Health* (San Diego, 2000), p. 27.
[72] Ibid., pp. 31, 51.
[73] Ibid., p. 51.

water, and removal of waste. It also led to legislation that water companies should filter their supplies.[74]

4.3 Occupational health

In addition to environmental problems, the working population of industrial towns also experienced working conditions which impacted upon their health. These fell into two categories: industrial injuries and medical conditions caused by the work environment. They did not have the same high profile as diseases linked to sanitary conditions, which would bring them to the attention of reformers. This was especially the case for illnesses relating to the industrial environment, which tended to be a submerged social problem.[75] Accidents were immediately obvious, but diseases which developed over time, such as silicosis, miners' asthma and chronic bronchitis, had to be endured, since little could be done about them, and they usually affected the poorest class of people, who had little impact on legislation.[76]

Charles Thackrah writing in 1832 identified industrial illnesses in trades which produced dust and gave rise to bronchial complaints (see Table 7 for details of these trades in Oldbury).

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[74]1856 (2137) General Board of Health. Reports to the Right Hon. William Cowper, M.P., President of the General Board of Health. On the Metropolis Water Supply. Under the Provisions of the Metropolis Water Act.
[75] Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, p. 2.
[76]Benson., J, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History (Dublin, 1980), p.45.

Table 7 Trades causing bronchial problems in Oldbury 1835- 1839 [77]

Trade	Nature of the problem	Disease	Number of companies
Coal mining	Coal dust	Silicosis, pneumoconiosis	19
Corn millers	Flour	Asthma, coughs	2
Edge tools	Metal particles	Grinders asthma	1
Maltsters	Dust	Asthma and bronchial inflammation	8

Of these industries, coal mining employed the most men. John Benson records that, in 1865, there were 25,000 workers in the South Staffordshire coal field, which encompasses most of the Black Country.[78] It is probable that a good many of these workers suffered from pneumoconiosis, or silicosis, debilitating diseases which became visible after many years of working in the mines. Hunter notes that these two diseases are often indistinguishably combined in coal miners.[79] The symptoms were a cough, emphysema, and extreme tiredness, making it difficult for the men to continue to work.[80] Although the effects of the inhalation of the dust were well known, the irreversible damage to the lungs was not recognised. Thackrah appeared surprised to discover a 'remarkable case' of a miner who had died from pulmonary disease and whose lungs were 'infiltrated with black matter.. resembling, if not identical with coal'.[81]

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[77] Pigot, J., *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory* (London & Manchester, 1835), pp. 366 - 7; Robson, *Robson's Birmingham and Sheffield Directory*, pp. 578 – 9; Thackrah, *The effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: with suggestions for the removal of many of the agents which produce disease, and shorten the duration of life* , pp. 63, 65, 88, 94.

[78] Benson, J., *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1980), p.6; Benson, J., *The Miners of Staffordshire 1840-1914* (Staffordshire, 1993), p.21.

[79] Hunter, *Health in Industry*, p. 210.

[80] *Silicosis* [Online] http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Silicosis/Pages/Introduction.aspx, (Accessed: 12/9/2014).

[81] Thackrah, *The effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: with suggestions for the removal of many of the agents which produce disease, and shorten the duration of life*, p. 88.

The other main dust producing industry in Oldbury, was the edge tool works of William Hunt and Sons, at the Brades, which employed 150 men in 1848.[82] Workers in this industry suffered from grinders' asthma. Dr Arnold Knight wrote about the prevalence of the disease in Sheffield in 1830, quoting figures from 1822, which showed that, out of 2,500 grinders in the region, only 35 reached the age of 50.[83] The dust contained minute particles of metal, and led to a very painful demise, similar to consumption.[84] These work-related illnesses led to invalidity from work, poverty, and premature deaths, but their details were not recorded until the Factory and Workshop Acts of the 1890s.[85]

A large number of workers in Oldbury were employed in the chemical industries which manufactured poisonous substances. Messrs Albright and Wilson Ltd, Oldbury, founded in 1856, were the main manufacturers of phosphorus in England. By 1863 they employed 60 – 80 men.[86] One of the first methods used to transfer lethal white phosphorus was by the workman sucking it up a tube.[87] Phosphorus poisoning was one of the first four industry-related diseases to be officially recognised as occupational hazards in the 1895 Factory and Workshops Bill, the other three being lead and arsenic poisoning, and anthrax.[88] In its white form, phosphorus was a poisonous constituent in the manufacture of matches, where exposure to oxidising phosphorus led to phosphorus necrosis, or, as it was commonly called, 'Phossy Jaw'. Those with dental caries, or gum disease, were especially susceptible to this condition,

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[82] Lewis, S., *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (London, 1848), pp. 626-7.
[83] As quoted in: Waterhouse, J. S., 'Contributions Towards the Pathology of Grinders' disease of the Lungs', *Provincial Medical Journal,* 1843, 155.
[84] Thackrah, *The effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: with suggestions for the removal of many of the agents which produce disease, and shorten the duration of life*, p. 94.
[85] Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, p. 11; 1897 (C.8561) Factories and workshops. Annual report of the chief inspector of factories and workshops for the year 1896.
[86] 1863 (XXV.1) Public Health: Fifth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council. With Appendix., p. 162.
[87] Ibid., p. 163.
[88] Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, pp. 1, 159.

which rotted the jaw, causing great pain, disfigurement, and, without removal of the jawbone, death.[89]

Although reports indicated that workers at factories which produced matches were the most affected by the condition, there were a number of reports of incidents in the phosphorus works in Oldbury. The 1863 Government Public Health report described the manufacturing process at Albright and Wilson, and concluded that, out of the 60 - 70 men employed at the works, only a small number would be in a position to inhale any accidently released fumes.[90] A later report (1880) indicated that there had been seven instances in 29 years, one in 1866, five in 1871, when one of the men lost his lower jaw, and one in 1879.[91] The fact that the firm then employed 260 men seems to bear out the findings of the reports: incidents were not high in number. However, an account of a visit to Langley, by the journalist James Greenwood in 1883, told another side of the story. He described listening to a conversation in a public house opposite the works: Men, who were discussing the latest victim of the complaint, gave the opinion that men should leave the works when their teeth start dropping out, despite the wages offered. This indicates that the problem was, perhaps, more widespread than was officially acknowledged.[92] Up until the 1890s, when mechanisation was introduced, every stage of the manufacturing process had its own dangers. From 1851, when the company began, until the 1890s, the concentrated phosphoric acid was distilled in clay retorts, which leaked (see Figure 50). This was a problem, as at no time after distillation could the

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[89] Ibid., pp. 176, 177.
[90] 1863 (XXV.1) Public Health: Fifth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council. With Appendix., p. 164.
[91] 1881 (C2825) Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, for the Year Ending 31st October 1880, p. 14.
[92] Greenwood, *Girls of the Brickfields* [Online], p. 117.

phosphorus be allowed to meet with the air, or it would burst into flame: it had to be treated, handled, stocked, packed, despatched and delivered under water.[93]

Figure 50 Spent phosphorus retorts from Albright and Wilson used as a wall in Langley brook [94]

Other chemical industries mentioned in the 1880 report were a vitriol factory, a tar distillery, an alkali and brimstone works, and a sulphur and copper works. Of these, the sulphur and copper works were considered to have the most unhealthy employment conditions, because of bronchial irritation due to the sulphuric acid, and arsenic in the smoke.[95] The death rate was stated as being 'not extreme', but there is no suggestion to what this death rate was being

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[93] Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*, pp. 51-54.
[94] Photograph taken by the author (2011).
[95] 1881 (C2825) Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, for the Year Ending 31st October 1880, p. 14; Hunter, *Health in Industry*, p. 72.

compared.[96] Bartrip records that, at a meeting of the Medical Society of London in 1843 to investigate arsenic poisoning, members were told that workers at the Swansea Copper Works rarely suffered ill effects, or had a reduced lifespan from working with copper ore, which contained arsenic. However, as it was customary to sack anyone who showed symptoms of poisoning, the only workers left to testify were those who were still healthy.[97] In the discussion which took place between a visiting journalist and a worker in Oldbury, the 'informant' described the copper trade as 'an awful place in which to work'. The work turned you green; turned your teeth blue, and your hair grey, and played 'old Harry' with your blood if the copper got into your system.[98]

In all of the factories where men were interviewed for the 1855 and 1880 reports there were some employees who had been there for many years, and stated that they were in good health.[99] However, these reports could not possibly have included the number of men who had been forced to leave work due to breathing difficulties. Detailed morbidity statistics are, therefore, not available.

Injury at work followed a somewhat different pattern to industrial diseases. Industrial injuries were more obvious, and had a higher profile, especially where injury and death were commonplace, and numbers of children were involved.[100] One such industry was coal mining. Underground explosions, or rock falls, were disasters which led to numbers of men

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[96] 1881 (C2825) Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, for the Year Ending 31st October 1880, p. 14.

[97] Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, p.138.

[98] Greenwood, *Girls of the Brickfields* [Online], p. 118.

[99] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 9; 1881 (C2825) Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, for the Year Ending 31st October 1880, pp. 15,16.

[100] Bartrip and Burman, *The Wounded Soldiers of Industry: Industrial Compensation Policy 1833-1897*, pp. 9, 12.

and boys being injured, or killed, and which attracted a great deal of publicity.[101] A mining accident in 1846, in Oldbury, for example, was reported in 14 different newspapers, located as far apart as London, Leeds, Essex, Wales, Kent and Ireland.[102]

Although such disasters are well recorded in local papers and reports, it is difficult to get an impression of accidents to individual workers in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first mining report for Staffordshire gave the figures for the British Iron Company at Netherton near Dudley, which kept detailed records. It estimated that, for every 100 miners employed in the mines on the thick coal seam, there were around 72 accidents during a year, five of which ended in death (see Table 8).[103] This would have been replicated in every coal mine across the district.

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[101] Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 38.

[102] *Morning Chronicle,* 'The Coal Mining Accident in Oldbury', Friday 20 November 1846; *London Standard,* 'The Oldbury Coal-Mine Explosion', Friday 20 November 1846; *Essex Standard,* 'Terrific Explosion of Fire Damp near Oldbury', Friday 20 November 1846; *Freeman's Journal, Dublin, Republic of Ireland* 'Awful Coal Mine Disaster at Rounds Green near Oldbury, Nineteen Lives Lost', Saturday 21 November 1846; *Northern Star,* 'Terrific Explosion of Coal Damp at Oldbury', Saturday 21 November 1846; *Leeds Times,* 'Terrific Explosion of Fire Damp at Oldbury', Saturday 21 November 1846;
Morning Post, 'The Explosion at Oldbury', Saturday 21 November 1846; *North Wales Chronicle,* 'Dreadful Accident at Rounds Green Colliery near Oldbury, 19 Lives Lost', Tuesday 24 November 1846; *Kentish Gazette,* 'Awful Coal Mine Accident at Ronds Green near Oldbury, Nineteen Lives Lost', Tuesday 24 November 1846; *London Daily News,* 'The Oldbury Coal Mine Explosion', Wednesday 25 November 1846; *Derby Mercury,* 'Awful Coal Mine Accident at Rounds Green near Oldbury, 19 Lives Lost', Wednesday 25 November 1846; *Worcester Journal,* 'Late Mine Explosion at Oldbury', Thursday 26 November 1846; *Hereford Times,* 'Terrific Explosion of Fire Damp at Oldbury', Saturday 28 November 1846; *Berrows Worcester Journal* 'The Late Mine Explosion Near Oldbury', Thursday 3 December 1846.

[103] 1843 (508) Midland Mining Commission. First Report. South Staffordshire, p. iv.

Table 8 Injuries sustained over a one-year period at the British Iron Company, Netherton (1843) [104]

Accident	Severe	Slight
Burns	6	1
Broken leg	1	0
Broken collar bone	1	0
Cold from working in wet	1	0
Bruises and wounds to:		
Eyes	1	4
Head and face	4	6
Shoulders and arms	0	26
Fingers and thumbs	2	12
Breast and sides	1	11
Back	8	16
Legs and feet	7	9
Knees	3	6
Total injuries	**35**	**91**

The tables of accidents in the Reports to the Commissioners on the Employment of Children of 1842, recorded thirteen coal mining-related deaths in Oldbury for the previous year: seven from burns, four from falls of coal, one from suffocation from noxious gas, and one from falling out of the skip which carried the men up the shaft. Other towns in the Black Country recorded similar statistics (see Table 9).[105]

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[104] Ibid., p. iv.
[105] 1842 (380, 381, 382) Children's Employment Commission. First Report of the Commissioners. Mines, pp. 14 – 16.

Table 9 Deaths from mining accidents in the Black Country (1842) [106]

Accident	Burning	Falling coals	Suffocation from noxious gas	In shafts of coal pits	Explosions and fire damp	Other	Total per town
Bilston	1	3	1	8	2	0	15
Darlaston	0	0	0	2	2	1	5
Dudley	0	7	0	2	0	2	11
Oldbury	7	4	1	1	0	0	13
Rowley Regis	0	7	0	1	0	1	9
Sedgley	0	7	2	6	0	1	16
Tipton	0	4	0	3	2	5	14
Wednesbury	0	5	0	0	1	0	6
West Bromwich	1	9	1	1	1	0	13
Total injuries	**9**	**46**	**5**	**24**	**8**	**10**	**102**

It is unusual to find such detailed records, since the majority of districts gave no figures in their reports. Bradford, Leeds and Halifax, for example, just stated that explosions of fire-damp, falls of the roof, falling down the shaft, and bruises and broken bones, were the main incidents in their area.[107] The West Riding of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire stated that accidents were of 'daily occurrence in almost every mine, and so common that a record of them is seldom kept'; nevertheless, witnesses gave similar examples to those listed above.[108] Shropshire records gave no indication of the nature of the accidents in their mines, and North

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[106] Ibid., pp. 14 – 16.
[107] Ibid.. p. 140.
[108] Ibid., 139, 141.

Durham and Northumberland 'refused to give any evidence on the subject or evaded inquiry'.[109]

A great number of injuries also occurred through boiler explosions in many of the industrial towns.[110] An explosion at a brickworks near the centre of Oldbury in 1860, for example, sent hot steam and water at force into the shed where girls were working, causing six of them to be scalded to such an extent that three of them died, and one other was not expected to live.[111] An explosion in 1869 at the tar distillery works of Messrs Demuth and Company could be heard from a distance of several miles. It destroyed the buildings, set fire to two canal boats, and blew the retort 40 yards into the air, and over the top of another works. Four people died in horrendous circumstances, and a number of other people were injured. Two of the surgeons in Oldbury rushed to the scene, one of whom, Mr Sainsbury, along with Mr Chance from the Alkali works, headed a fund for the permanent relief of the families of the deceased and the temporary relief of the injured. Such appalling events were described as producing a 'profound effect on the neighbourhood'.[112]

One firm which kept detailed records of accidents and injuries was Chance Brothers and Co. Following the passing of the Employers Liability Act in 1880, they launched a Provident Accident Fund for workers, and recorded details about accidents which had taken place at the works.[113] During the period 1881-1890, 553 accidents had taken place that were serious

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[109] Ibid.. pp. 137, 148.

[110] Marten, E. B., *Records of Steam Boiler Explosions. (Brief Abstracts from Reports on Steam Boiler Explosions, etc.)* (1869), p. 8.

[111] *Manchester Times, '*Fatal Boiler Explosion at Oldbury', Saturday 4 August 1860, p. 3.

[112] *Birmingham Daily Post, '*The Explosion at the Oldbury Tar works, Two More Deaths', 1869;*The Morning Post, '*Serious Explosion of Naptha', 1869.

[113] Chance, *A History of the Firm of Chance Brothers and Co.: Glass and Alkali Manufacturers*, p. 219; CALS, DIC/BM 20/205, Oldbury Alkali Works Provident Society, Register of Weekly Disablement Allowances (1881-1913).

enough to lead to time off work (see Table 10). The number of men employed at the works in

1866 was 640.[114]

Table 10 Accidents at Chances Alkali works by year (1881 – 1890)[115]

Year	Number of accidents
1881	31
1882	39
1883	37
1884	70
1885	56
1886	48
1887	59
1888	78
1889	62
1890	73
	553

The largest group of accidents (254) were for those working in the chemical departments (see

Table 11). Of these, 86 accidents involved the chemicals they were working with, including

34 injuries to the eye through splashes of acid, caustic soda, or splinters of pyrites. One

person's leg was injured by stepping into a pan of molten sulphur, and 20 suffered from

burns, especially to the neck and face from caustic liquor, and acid. There were also 6

injuries to the feet from hot ash falling into the workers boot, or clog, and 5 scalds from hot

caustic liquor.[116] As there were several chemical industries in Oldbury, it would be reasonable

to assume that the same kind of accidents were being experienced in other works.

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[114] 1886 (192) Report from the Select Committee on the Employers' Liability Act (1880) Amendment Bill;
together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix, p. 351.
[115] CALS, DIC/BM 20/205.
[116] Ibid.

Table 11 Injuries in the chemical departments at Chances Alkali works (1881 - 1890)[117]

Department	Contact with Chemical	Fall	Contact with tools or machinery	Injured by activity	Other	Total
Alkali	14	21	13	6	0	**54**
Ammonia	6	10	6	5	0	**27**
Ash	7	5	2	0	0	**14**
Caustic	24	10	11	1	1	**47**
Muriatic Acid	4	2	2	1	1	**10**
Rectd Acid	4	0	2	1	0	**7**
Salt Cake	8	15	15	5	4	**47**
Soda	0	1	4	1	0	**6**
Sulphur recovery	6	3	1	1	2	**13**
Vitriol	12	1	7	3	3	**26**
Yellow liquor	1	2	0	0	0	**3**
	86	**70**	**63**	**24**	**11**	**254**

In addition to the 86 accidents recorded from direct working with chemicals, a number of accidents were listed which were common to the other departments of the Alkali works (see Table 12).

Table 12 Injuries in the other departments at Chances Alkali works (1881 - 1890)[118]

Department	Contact with Chemical	Fall	Contact with tools or machinery	Injured by activity	Other	Total
Hauling	4	32	83	7	4	**130**
Building workers	3	9	20	1	3	**36**
Fitters	3	16	32	5	10	**66**
Labourers	3	4	14	1	3	**25**
Craftsmen	0	7	22	1	1	**31**
Others	1	4	4	0	2	**11**
	14	**72**	**175**	**15**	**23**	**299**

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[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

The level of accidents and injuries varied with the type of work that was being undertaken. Haulers, who did some of the heaviest jobs in the works, for example, experienced a higher number of accidents from falls, and contact with heavy machinery, than those working in other departments. Accidents clustered around the loading and unloading of boats, with a number of back injuries being reported as the loads were moved, and injuries to limbs from falls into, and out of, the boats. These injuries would have been typical in all the works alongside the canals in Oldbury, involved in the transportation of goods. The other employment with a high number of accidents due to falls and contact with tools, were the fitters, who were often working at a height, or descending into shafts.

During the early part of the nineteenth century, the attitudes of the workers to industrial accidents and illnesses tended to be fatalistic.[119] The hazards were recognised, but in the days before risk assessment any response was reactive, and injury was accepted as just another workplace incident. At Chances' works, even though the injuries appear to have been serious, especially eye and back injuries, few men took more than one or two weeks off work.[120] A few injuries called for longer absences from work, most of which were related to falls (see Table 13).

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[119] Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, p. 3.
[120] CALS, DIC/BM 20/207, Oldbury Alkali works Provident Society (from 1909 known as Chance and Hunt Ltd Provident Society) (1881-1929).

Table 13 Returns from Chance's disablement register 1881 - 1890[121]

Year	No of men claiming benefits	Amount paid out	No. of weeks sickness	Longest no of weeks off work	Details given for this injury
1881	31	£57.10s	118	11	Burns, crushed
1882	39	£58.18s.4d	121	24	Fall
1883	37	£42.6s.8d	94	28	Fall
1884	70	£130.8s.4d	273	50	Shoulder - fall
1885	56	£113	238	34	Foot - caustic
1886	48	£88.15s	186	29	Back
1887	59	£112.13s.4d	235	33	Toe - ash
1888	78	£150.5s	326	33	Broken leg - fall
1889	62	£136.13s.4d	198	52	Hand - fall
1890	73	£126.18s.4d	277	36	Side - fall

The men were paid 10s a week for the first 26 weeks, when the amount was reduced to 5s for the remainder of the illness. The fact that the men generally earned around 26s a week during this period would have made it quite difficult for a family to survive, and could well have been the reason why so many went back to work as soon as possible.[122] Even though the amounts paid out were small by comparison with their normal wages, the men who worked for Chances were fortunate to belong to such a scheme; many in other industries had no financial support following a workplace injury, or accident. Peter Bartrip notes, 'the single most distinguishing feature of the victims of workplace disease was their socio-economic status, the poor, the unenfranchised, the unorganised, the politically impotent, and the inarticulate'.[123] It was not surprising, therefore, that the majority of those injured, or made ill through the work environment, were resigned to their situation.

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[121] Ibid.

[122] 1886 (192) Report from the Select Committee on the Employers' Liability Act (1880) Amendment Bill; together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix, p. 363.

[123] Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, p. 2.

4.4 Chronic health problems

A further cause for concern in the overcrowded towns was the high level of chronic disease, much of which was managed within the family. Chronic diseases or conditions are those such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, which are on-going, and debilitating. Many of the industrial diseases also developed into chronic conditions, such as asthma and bronchitis, which were slow in progression, and long in duration. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the treatment for these conditions had more to do with the symptoms, than the cause, as the underlying disease was not often recognised.[124] Heart disease, for example was not mentioned in Oldbury's 1855 health report, but deaths from anasarca (dropsy) (6), and congested lungs (1), in the thirty to sixty plus age groups could have been indications that heart disease was present.[125] By the time the 1890 reports were produced the disease was more widely recognised, and 'heart disease' had a section of its own on the form (see Table 5).

Jason Szabo writing about chronic disease in France in the nineteenth century, identifies a list of chronic health problems that hindered, or prevented, people from working, including: asthma, blindness, cardiac disease, deafness, deaf-mutism, deformities, dropsy, epilepsy, general tremors, gout, hernias, idiocy, incontinence, loss of a limb, paralysis, rheumatism, rickets, and skin conditions.[126] Only four of these conditions are recorded as leading to death in the 1855 report: asthma, anasarca (dropsy), paralysis, and rheumatism.[127] The others would

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[124] Feil, H., 'History of the Treatment of Heart Disease in the Nineteenth Century', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* 1960, **34**, 19-29.

[125] Ibid., p. 19.

[126] Szabo, J., *Incurable and Intolerable: Chronic Disease and Slow Death in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Brunswick, N.J.; London, 2009), p. 17.

[127] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, pp. 21 – 29.

certainly have been present among the people of Oldbury, some as hidden conditions, but would not necessarily have been stated as the cause of death and so are not recorded.

Other chronic conditions were related to a person's background, lifestyle, and environment. Alcohol abuse among the working classes, for example, was seen as a social and medical problem by medical and middle classes. Thackrah observed that the 'debauched habits' of many of the workers led to diseases of the liver and stomach, congestion in the vessels in the head, a large abdomen, feeble and sluggish circulation, and concluded 'such men, of course, are unhealthy and short-lived'.[128] He also recognised the fact that men were 'addicted to intemperance', even young boys, in some professions.[129] A link was made between alcoholism and mental health by the industrialists in Oldbury, and the Board of Health who discussed the problem of the high number of 'imbeciles' in the town.[130] Members of the Board of Health suggested that the fumes from the alkali works were responsible. The industrialists did not deny the problem existed, but told the board to 'enquire into the excessive drinking in Oldbury, the vast number of gin shops, and the extraordinary extent of intermarriage' which provided 'a clue' to the high percentage of lunacy in the town.

In addition to suffering from chronic health problems, many found that their whole status in society had changed. If men were unable to work, they could no longer support their families, and, with unemployment, came a loss of the friendships they had in the workplace. Szabo found that the misery, shame, and 'social death' from living with a chronic condition, led many to wish to end their lives.[131] This is one of the factors recorded as a reason for people

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[128] Thackrah, *The effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: with suggestions for the removal of many of the agents which produce disease, and shorten the duration of life*, pp. 13, 59, 132.
[129] Ibid., pp. 50, 122.
[130] WAAS, 705:233/4406/1.
[131] Szabo, *Incurable and Intolerable: Chronic Disease and Slow Death in Nineteenth-Century France*, p. 80.

from Oldbury being admitted to Powick mental asylum, suffering from mental health problems.

Mental illness or handicap was perceived to be a problem which was increasing during the course of the nineteenth century. Jones suggests that this perception was due to the general rise in population, the means in place to identify the problem and the greater availability of asylum accommodation, rather than an actual increase in lunacy cases per head of the population.[132] Smith notes that in 'socially cohesive small towns' the ability to tolerate disordered or disturbed behaviour was greater than in the rapidly developing larger towns.[133] Only those who were considered a danger to themselves, or whom others recognised as suffering from insanity, needed to be placed in an institution where they could be 'kept safely locked up and, if necessary, chained'.[134]

Between 1852 and 1919, 145 people from Oldbury were admitted to Powick Asylum, in Worcester. Their case notes indicate the kind of behaviour which families were trying to cope with, and which was felt to be serious enough to warrant being sent to the asylum. These included people being destructive, violent, suicidal, showing unpredictable behaviour, threatening, talking incoherently, and hallucinating.[135] Some families had experienced the problem for some time, until a particular event triggered the request for admittance into the asylum. For others, it was a recent occurrence. One 49-year-old woman, for example, was stated to have had an attack lasting twelve months. She frequently locked herself in a room,

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[132] Jones, *Asylums and After: A Revised History of the Mental Health Services: From the Early 18th Century to the 1990s*, p. 115.
[133] Smith, *Cure, Comfort, and Safe Custody: Public Lunatic Asylums in Early Nineteenth Century England*, p. 94.
[134] 1744 (Harper Collection of Private Bills 1695-1814) A Bill, Intituled, an Act to Amend and Make More Effectual the Laws Relating to Rogues, Vagabonds, and Other Idle and Disorderly Persons, and to Houses of Correction.
[135] *George Marshall Medical Museum* [Online] http://www.medicalmuseum.org.uk/archive.aspx#, (Accessed: 12/2/2013)

refused to eat, and tended to violent behaviour. Her admittance was triggered by threats of

suicide and threatening her husband with a knife.[136] More typical was an attack which had

lasted one or two weeks, where an event had precipitated the behaviour, such as the loss of a

child, loss of a job or economic hardship.

The largest number of people coming from Oldbury (71) were said to be suffering from *mania*

(see Figure 51 Mental illness of people in Oldbury). Of these 47 were women and 33 were

men. The youngest was 15 and the oldest 60 years of age, but the largest number came from

the 30 year old age group (27). The causes of their illness was given for 16 of these: alcohol

related (5), grief (4), hereditary (2), destitution (2), physical illness (1), change of life (1), and

following pregnancy (1).
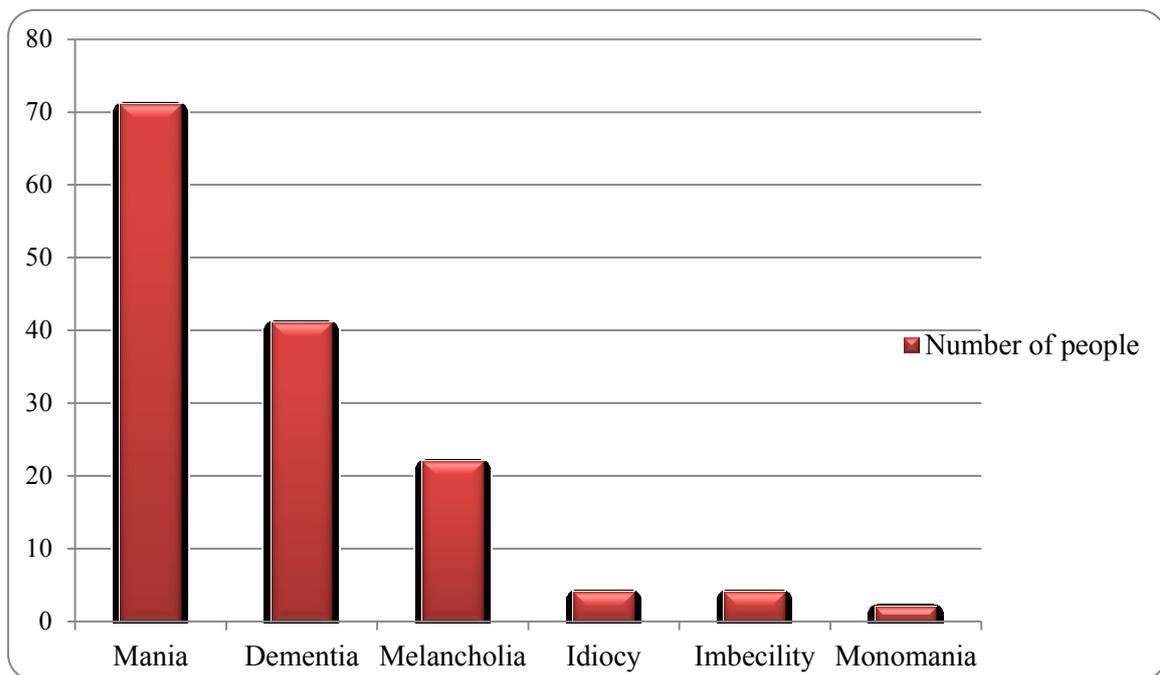
Figure 51 Mental illness of people in Oldbury[137]

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[136] Ibid., case no 5067.
[137] Ibid.

Daniel Tuke describes mania as manifesting itself in excitement, loss of self-control, threats of violence, insomnia, and incoherent speech.[138] Destructive behaviour and incoherence of speech were mentioned in the case notes for each of the patients from Oldbury, a number of whom threatened violence to themselves or others. They are also described as being very restless, wandering about by day and night.

The other two main forms of mental illness experienced by people in the town were dementia (38) and melancholia (21). Dementia patients suffered from memory impairment, loss of self-control, uncharacteristic behaviour, personality changes, and paranoid ideas.[139] Tuke describes melancholia as feeling of misery in excess of what is justified by the circumstances in which the individual is placed.[140] The case notes indicate that voices often told people to kill themselves or someone else. Many of them refused their food, which would have been another worry to the family, and one person actually starved to death.[141]

The rhetoric in the early years of the nineteenth century was towards a cure for mental illness which involved discovering its cause and a means of treating it. It was initially believed that the cause of the illness could either be a physical condition or one which affected the mind.[142] Sir William Ellis, writing in 1838 believed that it was chiefly the latter, 'a disease of the brain

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[138] Tuke, D. H., *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine ... With the symptoms, treatment and pathology of insanity and the law of lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland. Edited by D. H. Tuke* (London, 1892), pp. 739 – 775.
[139] Jacques, A., *Understanding Dementia* (Edinburgh, 1992).
[140] Tuke, *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine ... With the symptoms, treatment and pathology of insanity and the law of lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland. Edited by D. H. Tuke*, p.787.
[141] *George Marshall Medical Museum* [Online].
[142] Smith, *Cure, Comfort, and Safe Custody: Public Lunatic Asylums in Early Nineteenth Century England*, p. 104.

and nervous system'.[143] Table 14 lists the causes of mental illness given in the patient notes for people from Oldbury, along with examples of why they were placed into each category.

Table 14 Cause of mental illness in patients from Oldbury[144]

Cause [145]	Reason given
Hereditary	Female patient aged 43 had contemplated suicide – her mother and sister had died insane.
Physical	Epilepsy, rheumatism or senile dementia.
Related to women	Childbirth, change of life or menstruation.
From a 'dissolute life'	Alcoholism or syphilis.
Poverty, destitution	Loss of work, reduced circumstances, loss of money and anxiety about pecuniary matters. 'She is broken hearted because she has given up her home'.[146]
Grief/ loss	Two children died three months previously, lost a sister through drowning, lost parents or siblings, husband died, deserted by husband.

In total, 82 people (56 per cent) from Oldbury died in Powick from the time it opened to the last patient's recorded death in 1919.   The cause of death is recorded for 43 of these, giving an indication of the underlying illnesses from which people were suffering, providing a further indication of the types of chronic illness people were experiencing in Oldbury (see Figure 52).

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[143] Ellis, W. C. S., *A Treatise on the nature, symptoms, causes, and treatment of Insanity, with practical observations on Lunatic Asylums, and a description of the ... Asylum ... at Hanwell, etc* (1838), p.41.
[144] *George Marshall Medical Museum* [Online].
[145] Ellis, *A Treatise on the nature, symptoms, causes, and treatment of Insanity, with practical observations on Lunatic Asylums, and a description of the ... Asylum ... at Hanwell, etc*, pp. 60, 71.
[146] *George Marshall Medical Museum* [Online], case no 6799.
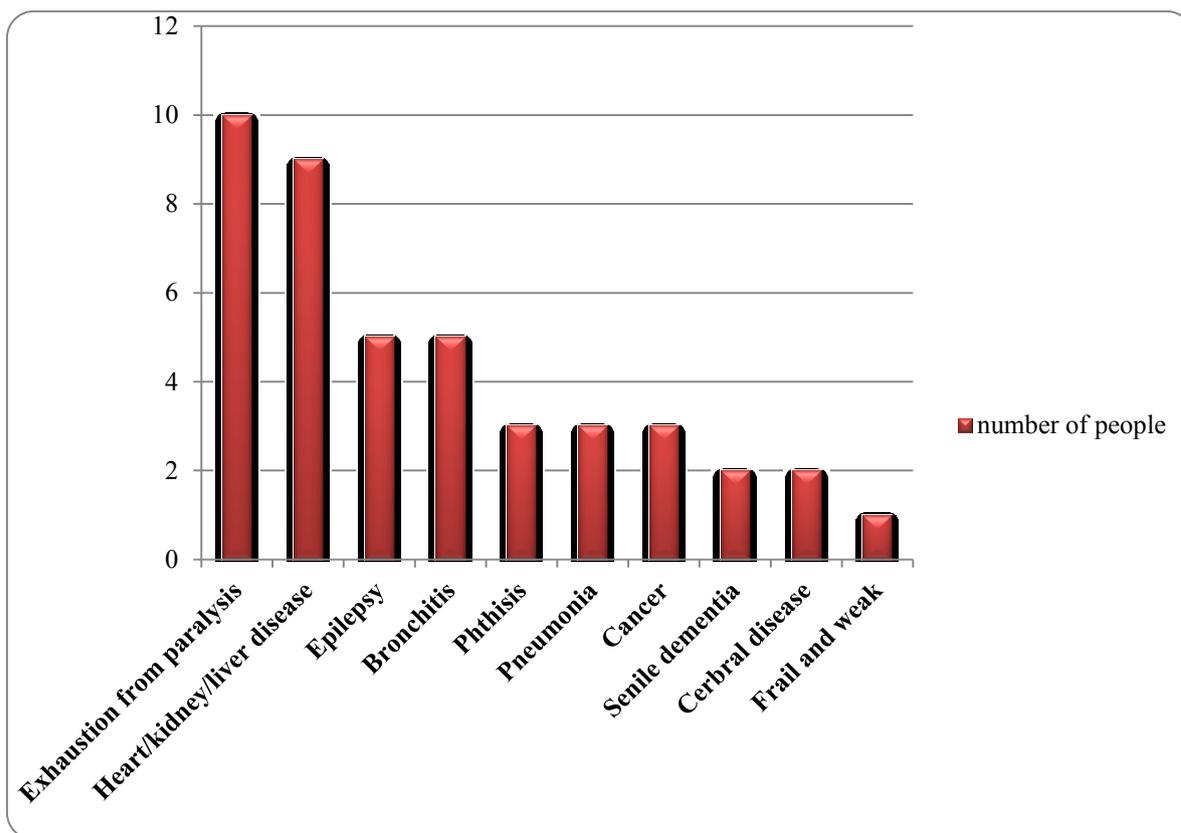
Figure 52 Cause of death of Oldbury patients in Powick Asylum[147]

Not all of the people with a disability received care in institutions which kept such good records, with some even losing their identity. David Plant from Oldbury, for example, was the third of six children and he was deaf and dumb from birth. His father died when he was young and the family split. Nevertheless, he learned a skilled trade and the 1871 and 1881 censuses record him lodging in Oldbury and working as a glass painter. The reason for losing his job and moving as a pauper into the West Bromwich workhouse will probably never be known, but the 1891 census records the fact that he was a glass painter and gives him the label of 'imbecile', although he was actually deaf and dumb. He was still residing at the workhouse at the time of the 1901 census, although the fact that he was a glass painter was not recorded and his place of origin is stated as 'unknown'. Unable to communicate, he

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[147] Ibid.

appears to have lost his identity, and at 48 years of age was just one more 'imbecile'. The fact

that he came from nearby Oldbury and was able to perform a skilled trade was forgotten.[148]

4.5 The health of women and children

<u>The health of women</u>

A large burden of care fell upon the wife and mother, who often had health problems of her

own. In the first half of the nineteenth century, apart from considering the vulnerability of

women in the workplace, and basing policies on the need to protect them, women's health

was largely ignored in government reports.[149] Much of this was due to the way that women

were perceived by society. They were considered the weaker sex, physically inferior to the

male, and with a feeble constitution.[150] Although this may have applied to middle and upper

class women, those in the industrial towns had stamina. Many of them worked long hours in

strenuous occupations, while running a home, and bringing up a large family. This made

them susceptible to similar industrial injuries as the men in trades such as nail and brick

making. A suggestion was made to those investigating women's role in the workplace, that

the manufacture of heavier types of chains and nails in the Black Country was not a suitable

task for women. However, the investigators came to the conclusion that these reports came

from men who were not happy with women in the trade, since they undercut the amount the

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[148] 1861 (RG 9 2022) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of West Bromwich, Sub-District Oldbury 10, p. 28; 1871 (RG 10 2974) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of West Bromwich, Sub-District Oldbury 10, p. 21; 1881 (RG 11 2841) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of West Bromwich, Sub-District Oldbury 21, p. 46; 1891 (RG 12 2274) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of West Bromwich, Union Workhouse, p. 17; 1901 (RG 13 2725) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of West Bromwich, Union Workhouse, p. 28.
[149] Harrison, *Not only the 'Dangerous Trades': Women's Work and Health in Britain, 1880-1914*, p. 145.
[150] L'Esperance, J., 'Doctors and Women in Nineteenth-Century Society: Sexuality and Role', in: Woodward and Richards (eds), *Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1977), p. 113.

men could get in wages. The report concluded that the women should be allowed to use 'their

own good sense' to decide what work was too laborious for them.[151]

It is difficult to identify the health problems from which the women suffered in Oldbury, as

the 1855 and 1892 health reports do not make a division between male and female. They

focused on age, and cause of death, with particular emphasis on deaths of children. Many of

the health issues that the women had, therefore, were the same as the men, so far as

environmental and chronic health problems are concerned. This is revealed in the registers

for patients at Powick, with both men and women included in the details of health issues in

Figure 52. While issues such as puerperal insanity could not be ignored, the majority of

health problems affecting women after the birth of a child would not have been reported to

doctors, nor would they figure in health statistics. Harrison observes that childbirth was

'probably the most important cause of ill-health, chronic debility, and disability' in women of

child bearing age.[152] One means of improving the health of the mother was to limit the

number of pregnancies. Contraception was possible, although disapproved of medically, as it

was feared that it could create more problems than it solved. In the minds of many medical

men of the time it was linked to prostitution, and immorality. The women themselves often

attempted to abort a pregnancy, even though this was greatly frowned upon.[153] Angus

McLaren, writing about birth control in Britain and the United States in the first half of the

nineteenth century, notes that not all nineteenth-century doctors were negative about

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[151] 1876 (1443) Factory and Workshops Acts Commission. Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Factory and Workshops Acts, with a View to Their Consolidation and Amendment; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index. Vol. I. Report, Appendix, and Index, p. lxxxiii .
[152] Harrison, B., 'Women and Health', in: Purvis (ed) *Women's History: Britain, 1850 - 1945* (London, 1995), p. 171.
[153] McLaren, A., 'The Early Birth Control Movement : An Example of Medical Self Help', in: Woodward and Richards (eds), *Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1977), 89 – 104, p. 94.

contraception. Those who dealt with women hospitalised due to exhaustion from frequent abortions, or protracted labours, welcomed the idea.[154]

Harrison quotes from a Women's Health Enquiry of 1933, which asked working-class women if they usually felt 'fit and well'. Only 31 percent gave a positive response, The others attributed their ill health to a variety of ailments, which included anaemia, headaches, constipation, rheumatism, gynaecological troubles, toothache, varicose veins, ulcerated legs, and gastric and respiratory problems. It was noted that working-class people usually had lower expectations for their health, and considered some ailments as being 'expected', so a number of health issues would have been overlooked by the women.[155] Harrison notes that women's perceptions, and lack of knowledge, led to a plethora of untreated conditions. The admission records for women arriving in Powick Asylum, give details of the ailments from which women from Oldbury were suffering, in addition to their mental condition, revealing an experience comparable with the women in the 1933 report. Of the 85 women whose admission records are available, 26 (30 per cent) were stated as having no health problems. Listed general ailments, that were also included in the 1933 report, included anaemia (6), headaches (1), constipation (4), rheumatism (1), gynaecological (3), varicose veins (2), ulcerated legs (4), gastric problems (5) and respiratory problems (8). In addition there were 11 cases of epilepsy, 7 heart failure, 5 general paralysis, 3 stroke, 2 goitre and 11 cases where the women were stated to be extremely dirty and 'covered in vermin.[156]

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[154] Ibid., 89 – 104, pp 94.
[155] Harrison, 'Women and Health', p.165.
[156] *George Marshall Medical Museum* [Online].

<u>The health of children,</u>

The 1855 medical report for Oldbury, as for those in other towns in the Black Country, and across the nation, was produced out of concern for the high numbers of children dying in the town, and the realisation that something had to be done about it. This focus on child deaths continued throughout the nineteenth century, and was used as an indication of how changes were making a difference, and how much more needed to be done.[157] Early focus was on improving the physical state of the town, so that the illnesses linked to poor sanitation, such as diarrhoea, could be eliminated. This has been discussed in relation to environmental health problems. The 1855 report does not only concentrate on deaths linked to environmental issues, however. It lists all the diseases and medical conditions that were identified as causing the death of children under five years of age in Oldbury, over a nine month period (see Figure 53). A number of these conditions were descriptions of symptoms rather than a particular disease, and it is sometimes difficult to know the exact cause of death. Debility, for example, the largest reason given for death (35), along with anaemia(4), would probably have indicated children who failed to thrive, for one reason or another, and the biggest contributing factor to this was probably malnutrition. Working-class families did not have a nutritionally balanced diet, and malnutrition was reflected in morbidity rates from a number of other conditions. Children with a poor physical stature often succumbed to secondary infections following childhood diseases, such as pneumonia following a case of measles, for example.[158] Similarly convulsions (25) could have been the result of some other illness, such as a high fever, or the final stages of fatal diarrhoea.[159] Both convulsions and hydrocephalus, which caused a surprisingly high number of child deaths in the town (16),

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[157] Harrison, *Not only the 'Dangerous Trades': Women's Work and Health in Britain, 1880-1914*, p. 87.
[158] Tulchinsky and Varavikova, 'A History of Public Health', p. 297.
[159] Hardy, A., 'Diagnosis, Death, and Diet: The Case of London, 1750-1909', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 1988, 18**,** 387-401, p.390.

were also used to label tuberculous meningitis.[160] Although the actual cause of death was obscure, the homes that the children lived in, and their limited diet, had a big part to play in any outcome.
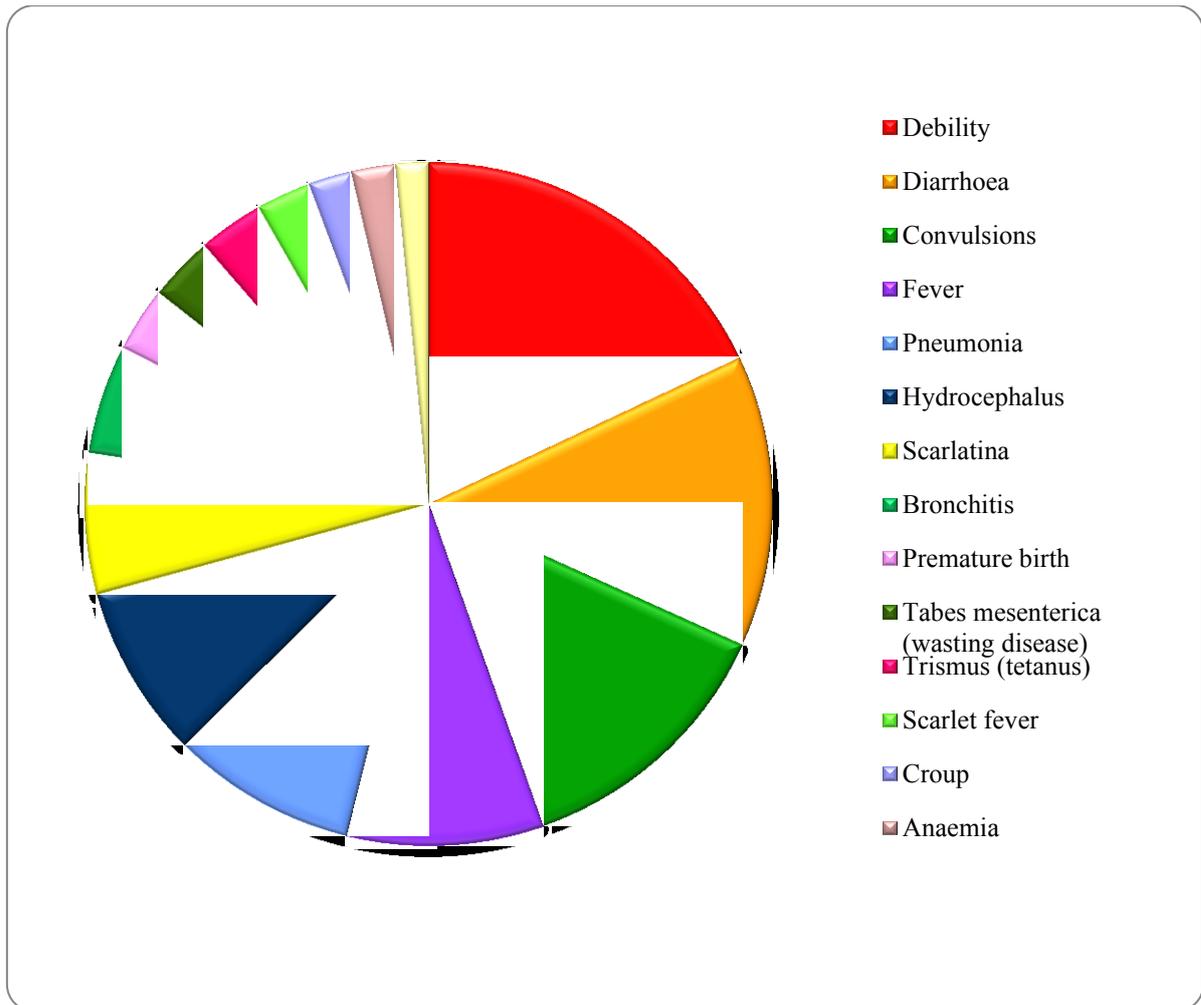
Figure 53 Main causes of deaths in children under five years of age in Oldbury (1856)[161]

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[160] Ibid., p. 389.
[161] Compiled by the author from figures in 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, pp. 21 – 29, and shows number of child deaths in each category.

A number of childhood diseases were recorded in the reports for Oldbury. Those noted in the 1855 report were scarletina (13), and scarlet fever (5). Scarlet fever was one of the most feared childhood diseases during the nineteenth century, along with whooping cough, and measles. Hardy notes that scarlet fever accounted for some 10,000 deaths each year in England and Wales during the nineteenth century.[162] The Black Country, along with London, Lancashire and the West Riding and the mining districts of Durham and South Wales, had the highest mortalities from the disease.[163] All three diseases are referred to as epidemics in the medical reports. The reports produced in the 1890s, recorded each disease in a separate section of the report (see Table 15).

Table 15 Deaths from childhood diseases in Oldbury 1855 – 1895 [164]

Disease	1855	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895
Measles		22	3	27	0	0
Whooping Cough		6	31	5	2	0
Scarlet fever	6	1	8	3	1	1

Scarlet fever is a throat infection caused by a group A streptococcus. Transmission is by droplet infection, but may also occur through contaminated milk.[165] The 1893 report stated that there had been 131 cases of scarlet fever in the town, compared with 8 in 1892, and 34 in 1891. The disease had continued throughout the year but the preventative measures taken, described as disinfection, had kept the death rate low.[166] Hardy notes that scarlet fever was

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[162] Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Diseases and the Rise of Preventive Medicine 1856 -1900*, p. 56.
[163] Ibid., p. 59.
[164] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester; TNA Oldbury Local Board of Health, ; TNA, MH12/11671; 1894 (Oldbury Urban Sanitary Authority) Annual Report on the Health of Oldbury; 1895 (Oldbury Urban Sanitary Authority) Annual Report on the Health of Oldbury.
[165] Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Diseases and the Rise of Preventive Medicine 1856 -1900*, p. 56.
[166] TNA, MH12/11671, p. 4.

one of the first diseases to have a preventative policy developed against it in the nineteenth

century, with the setting up of isolation hospitals in the 1870s.[167]

The medical reports followed a national standard format during the 1890s, which assisted in

chronicling the progress being made towards reducing the death rate. The later reports also

gave details of additional information, such as the number of inquests that had taken place

during the year. The 1892 report, for example notes that there were 26 inquests in the year,

12 of which related to children under one year. There were 5 uncertified cases, 6 accidental

deaths and one of wilful murder.[168] Accidents that led to death appear to have been

commonplace in the nineteenth century, and newspapers are full of examples of 'sad' stories

of children whose clothes had accidently caught fire, who drowned in the canal, or were

suffocated whilst lying in the parents' bed.[169] Nor was a case of wilful murder an isolated

incident. Infanticide was a means that people used to deal with the birth of unwanted

children, and there is evidence to indicate that this was a recognised problem in Oldbury.[170]

Newspaper reports throughout the century recorded incidents where the bodies of new-born

babies had been found at the bottom of pit shafts or in the canal, and described situations

where neighbours reported women who were known to have been about to give birth, but

where no baby was present. In 1851, the coroner observed that the bodies of a number of

babies which were discovered buried in the same location had died violently.[171] The fact that

a number were found in one place indicates either that one person, such as a midwife, was

getting rid of unwanted babies for the women, or that it was an isolated spot known to those

who wanted to find a way out of the predicament in which they found themselves.

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[167] Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Diseases and the Rise of Preventive Medicine 1856 -1900*, p. 56.
[168] TNA Oldbury Local Board of Health,
[169] For example, *Birmingham Daily Post* - 'Oldbury. A child drowned', Saturday 12 April 1884.
[170] Sauer, R., 'Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Population Studies,* 1978, 32**,** 81-93, p. 92.
[171] TNA, HO 45/3878, Murder of Children at Oldbury Colliery (1851).

Two reasons are cited for infanticide: the bearing of an illegitimate baby, and parents who were living in extreme poverty and were unable to cope with bringing up another child.[172] In this case, it might be expected that instances would escalate during times of depression, when the wage earner could be out of work, and the family struggling to survive, but no evidence has been found in the reports for Oldbury to substantiate this.

4.6 Conclusion

The medical reports produced for Oldbury in 1855 and the 1890s reveal the health issues that the people of Oldbury faced in relation to endemic and epidemic disease. Of particular concern was the high number of child deaths, many of which were caused by medical conditions that could have been prevented. This problem was facing fast growing towns across the country as they struggled with environmental predicaments linked to impure water supplies, and inadequate waste disposal. In addition to the listed medical conditions, the people of Oldbury also experienced chronic diseases such heart disease and asthma, and illness and disease linked to their occupation. A window into the type of illness that people were suffering from is given through the patient records at Powick asylum, and the experience of medical men, such as Thackrah, as he visited workplaces in different areas of the country. The case books from the asylum also indicate the way in which the experiences of everyday life in the industrial towns impacted upon a person's mental health.

Changes over the century can be observed through the later health reports, which reveal that the situation was improving. The numbers of stated illnesses were decreasing, and the incidences of child death, while still high, were much lower than those recorded in 1855. These changes were mainly due to the ability of medical practitioners, in conjunction with the

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[172] Sauer, 'Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century Britain', pp. 84, 85.

Board of Health, to ensure that sanitary conditions were improved, and measures taken to try to prevent, or lessen the effects of epidemic diseases.

Industrial illnesses and accidents also had a big impact on the lives of the people, the majority of whom, in Oldbury, were men, and their families. Workers in Oldbury reported lung diseases, such as bronchitis and asthma, which were being experienced in the cotton and pottery industries, because of the dust in the working environment. Many of these diseases were hidden from both public view and the national statistics. People who were affected by relentless and debilitating conditions were often confined to their own homes. Of particular concern for workers in Oldbury was working with phosphorus, known to cause 'Phossy Jaw', and copper working, where the fumes contained arsenic. There was little that medical personnel could do about such occurrences, until regulatory acts were introduced towards the end of the century. Industrial accidents often left appalling injuries leading to invalidity or premature death. This affected the whole family. If the bread winner was injured, the family suffered economically. This is observed in the asylum reports where loss of work and standing in society appeared to have led to a number of men developing a mental illness.

The health challenges that people in Oldbury were facing during the nineteenth century, were typical of those in industrial towns across the country. All lacked amenities, and endured the same environmental and chronic illnesses. Oldbury differed from many of the other towns in respect to employment-related illnesses and accidents, especially those linked to the chemical industries. However, Oldbury provides a case study of the health problems that faced the population of most of the Black Country towns and industrial areas across England during the nineteenth century. The next chapter will consider the measures which were put in place to seek to address these issues.

CHAPTER 5: HEALTH OF THE POPULATION: INTERVENTIONS

In the nineteenth century, the government became increasingly aware of the way in which

health problems in the developing towns were increasing. Census and other returns revealed

high death levels, and eyewitness accounts gave a very bleak picture of life in some of these

towns.[1] From 1839 to 1841, Edwin Chadwick organised a nationwide investigation into the

sanitary condition of the labouring population, publishing the findings in 1842.[2] One of the

first outcomes of the report was the production of the Public Health Act of 1848, which

established a General Board of Health in London, whose function was both to oversee and to

regulate. It also set up local boards of health, in individual towns, to put the plans into

action.[3]

This chapter considers the steps taken to seek to improve the health of the population under

three headings: Policies of Public Health, Provision of Public Health, and Providers of Public

Health. This is done by posing the following questions: What impact did the different groups,

individually and collectively, have on the way that health care changed over the century? Did

they work to a plan or were they involved in crisis management? Were their aims realised?

5.1 Politics of public health

The state's involvement in public health in the early years of the nineteenth century was

reactionary: limited to intervention during crises affecting the whole nation. The spread of

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[1] Cherry, G. E., *Urban Change and Planning : A History of Urban Development in Britain since 1750* (Henley-on-Thames, 1972), p. 33; Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* ;Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*;Smiles (ed) *James Nasmyth, Engineer: An Autobiography* ; White, *All Round the Wrekin*.
[2] Great Britain. Poor Law Commissioners*., et al.*, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain; Edited with an Introduction by M.W. Flinn* (Originally published 1842) (Edinburgh, 1965);Chadwick, *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain*.
[3] 1847 (546) Public Health. A Bill, [as Amended by the Lords] Intituled, an Act for Promoting the Public Health.

cholera in 1832, when wide measures needed to be instigated to control it, is an example.

These measures took the form of regulations to limit movement of people and shipping, and

were removed after the event.[4] To some extent, the authorities were able to learn from their

experiences, and formulate mechanisms to deal with situations as they arose.[5]

One of the earliest methods instigated for town improvement, for example, involved

identifying problems at a local level, and applying for Acts of Parliament to address them.[6]

The acts empowered each town to raise money from the rates to make changes. Initially, this

involved paving the streets, street cleaning and lighting, which made a significant difference

to small communities. If necessary, a Board of Health was set up to instigate the acts at a

local level. The Government performed regular inspection visits, and gave advice. The aim,

at government and local level, was to improve the fabric of the towns, thereby improving the

health of the population, and lowering the death rate.[7]

The way in which this plan operated at town level is explored in the case of Oldbury. The

first part of the plan was simple to implement. Industrial growth during the early years of the

nineteenth century had drawn many influential people into the town, and they highlighted the

need for action. In 1855, the vicar, Rev H.B.Bowlby, was concerned at how many babies he

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[4] Morris, *Cholera 1832 :The Social Response to an Epidemic*
[5] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p. 3.
[6] One of the first was for the town of Daventry in 1806. 1806 (Local and Personal Acts 1797-1834: A Collection of the Local and Personal Acts, to be Judically noticed, Passed in the Forty-Sixth Year of the Reign of His Majesty King George the Third: Being the Fourth Session of the Second Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. London: Printed by George Eyre and Andrew Strahan, Printers to the King's most excellent Majesty.1806, volume no. 2 (21 January 1806 to 27 April 1807)) An Act for paving, cleansing, lighting, and watching the Town of Daventry, in the County of Northampton; and for regulating the Market there; and for enabling the Bailiff, Burgesses, and Commonalty of the Borough of Daventry, to purchase the Moot Hall, and to rebuild the same. [12th July 1806.]
[7] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p. 95.

was burying. Industrialists were also concerned at the state of the town.[8] Several

industrialists headed the list of people petitioning for improvements.[9] An application was

made in 1855 for a Board of Health to be set up in the town, which was successful. The Act

of Parliament giving authority to set up the Board, and raise the rates to improve the town was

passed in 1856.[10]

A key person in implementing the plan and the link between government and the local Board

of Health was the Medical Officer of Health. Oldbury's first MOH was Thomas Cooper, one

of the doctors in the town. The responsibilities of the position were numerous and increased

as the century progressed: identifying risk situations; informing the local board of the

measures which needed to be taken; making reports to the local board on the state of the town

and the health of the population; preparing an annual report on the sanitary state of the district

for the government, including tables outlining cause of death and infant mortality (1845);

ensuring that government directives were followed, such as vaccination programmes (1853);

the setting up of isolation hospitals (1866); and reporting cases of notifiable diseases, such as

cholera and typhoid (1889).[11]

The responsibility for putting the recommendations of the MOH into practice lay with the

local board. This was not always a smooth procedure, as far as Oldbury was concerned.

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[8] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 7.

[9] TNA, MH/IJ IJ8, Petition for Application of a Public Health Bill

[10] 1857 (16) Public Health Supplemental Bill (1857). A bill to confirm certain provisional orders of the General Board of Health applying the Public Health Act, 1848, to the districts of Ipswich, Oldbury, Stroud, Llangollen, and Dukinfield; and for altering the constitution of the local board for the main sewerage district of Wisbech and Walsoken.

[11] 1845 (574) Sewerage, drainage, &c. of towns. A bill for the improvement of the sewerage and drainage of towns and populous districts, and for making provision for an ample supply of water, and for otherwise promoting the health and convenience of the inhabitants; 1852-3 (447) Vaccination extension. A bill intituled an act further to extend and make compulsory the practice of vaccination; 1866 (202) Public health. A Bill [as Amended by the Select Committee] to Amend the Law Relating to the Public Health, p. 11; 1890-91 (205) Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act, 1889, Infectious Diseases (Prevention Act, 1890, and Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1890.

Whilst many of the recommendations were implemented successfully, others brought the

MOH, and the local board, into conflict. Oldbury urgently needed to improve the sanitation

in the town, and, in 1865, the MOH suggested that the installation of a sewerage system

should be a priority. This was considered by the members of the board, who were

immediately divided in their opinion. Those members who were concerned at the state of the

town, agreed with the MOH, and demanded the installation of a sewerage system directly.

They stated that the town was 'an immense cesspit', and that they were 'more like a Public

Disease Board than a Public Health Board'.[12] Others, however, were more wary of spending

money, and wanted to tackle each part of the town as, and when, it became necessary. Those

who wanted to sewer the whole town at the same time won the vote, but the ratepayers

thwarted their plans as soon as cost was mentioned.[13] A group of these, mainly owners of

small house properties, formed a society called the 'Ratepayers' Protection Society', who

were a force to be reckoned with. They even managed to oust a later MOH, Dr Hayward,

from his position in order to put an end to his proposals. This experience led Dr Hayward to

recommend, at a meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in

1868, that in order to be effective, a Medical Officer of Health should be appointed by a

central authority, independent of the local authorities, and should not be engaged in private

practice.[14]

In 1866 the government passed a Sanitary Act, placing the responsibility for removing

nuisances, and supplying clean water, with the local authorities.[15] The Act only gave the

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[12] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Commissioners' Meeting, Sanitary Condition of the Town', Saturday 2 September 1865, p. 3.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Edgar, A., *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, Birmingham Meeting, 1868* (London, 1869), pp. 473, 474.
[15] 1866 (202) Public health. A Bill [as Amended by the Select Committee] to Amend the Law Relating to the Public Health.

power for the local authorities to act. It did not insist that they did so. Consequently it did not make any difference to towns such as Oldbury, who were still debating among themselves as to what should be done.

In 1874, the government decided to measure the success of the work undertaken by the Boards of Health across the country. It sent out questionnaires, the answers to which formed the basis of a Parliamentary report. As far as Oldbury was concerned, the report made poor reading.[16] Over the eighteen years since Oldbury had appointed its Board of Health, few changes had been made in the town. Although some of the recommended personnel, such as an Inspector of Nuisances, a Clerk, and a Surveyor of Highways, had been appointed, it had, at the time, no Officer of Health, Factory Inspector or certifying surgeon, each one of whom were crucial to the implementation of the Act. This situation meant that no reports had been produced, detailing epidemic diseases or deaths, and no appraisal of the state of sanitation was recorded. In reality, the town continued with the old parish system, where responsibilities for work was decided by the Vestry.

Oldbury was not alone in this state of affairs. The Sanitary Committee's report highlighted a number of towns across the country which were in a similar situation. Many towns had still not appointed officers, found someone to give medical advice or performed inspections. Epidemics of typhus, measles, cholera, scarlet fever and smallpox continued to sweep across England during the 1860s. Central action was required if these were to be controlled.[17]

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[16] 1874 (C.1109) Second Report of the Royal Sanitary Commission. Vol. 3. Part 2.--Tabular Abstract of Answers in Writing Received to Circular Questions Issued by the Commissioners, and Letters and Memoranda, p. 240, 241.
[17] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 5-6.

Oldbury lagged behind others in the provision of an adequate sewerage and water supply system, since many towns already had these in place.[18]

The state of the town appears to have gained it a reputation outside its borders since, although a small town, Oldbury was cited in government and other reports as an illustration of the results of sanitary neglect. As late as 1870, for example, a report in the *British Medical Journal* cited Oldbury alongside the towns of Rotherham, Kings Lynn, Wisbech and Appledore, as places where sanitary conditions were 'disgraceful'.[19] The water situation in the town was 'appalling', with wells situated a few feet from the privies and open middens. People travelled up to half a mile to obtain water. Some resorted to using canal water, which was 'in reality the main town sewer', to wash themselves. Unsurprisingly, typhoid was rife at the time.[20] Such reports, and the continual appearance of epidemics, highlighted the need for closer cooperation between the government and the local authorities.[21]

The government response to the 1874 survey was to swiftly produce further Acts of Parliament addressing the situation. A key example was the 1875 Public Health Act.[22] Medical Officers, who could take charge of the health of the town, or a group of towns, were seen to be a priority and the Act insisted that these should be appointed.[23] Previous acts had given recommendations, but this act gave directives. The preliminary act was followed by others to deal with the details. The 1878 Public Health (Water) Act, for example, made it mandatory that each town supplied 'wholesome water' to within a reasonable distance of

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[18] 1874 (C.1109) Second Report of the Royal Sanitary Commission. Vol. 3. Part 2.--Tabular Abstract of Answers in Writing Received to Circular Questions Issued by the Commissioners, and Letters and Memoranda.
[19] Hart, 'Waterborne Typhoid: A Historic Summary Of Local Outbreaks In Great Britain And Ireland, 1858-1893', pp. 87, 88.
[20] Ibid., p. 88.
[21] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 6.
[22] 1875 (55) Public Health. A Bill for Consolidating and Amending the Acts Relating to Public Health in England, p. 66, clause 184.
[23] Ibid., p. xiii, clause 278.

every home.[24] Water supply had previously been sporadic, around 2-3 hours a day, 2-3 times

a week in Oldbury, meaning that people had to store the water, increasing the risk of

contamination. This was no longer acceptable, and the towns that had not done so were

required to act to remedy the situation. Oldbury Local Board received correspondence from

the Local Government Board urging the committee to make headway with the sanitary

situation of the town. Partly to put a stop to this, and to prevent the Local Government Board

from sending a workforce in to do the job and give the town the bill, as they had done in other

places, the committee decided to act.[25] The subject was discussed at a meeting of the board

on 4 February 1876, where the suggestion was made that a government loan, paid back over

50 years, should be taken to finance the necessary work.[26] It was estimated that £30,862 was

needed to complete a sewerage scheme, and pave the streets. The Board was currently paying

out £3000 per annum to deal with night soil, clear the highways and make street

improvements. It was suggested that, without needing to raise the rates, this amount would be

more than adequate to effect the annual repayment and its interest. It was proposed that a

committee be formed to take the venture forward, and this was agreed. Their object was to

improve the town and spend as little of the ratepayers' money as possible in securing that

improvement. In so doing, the Board would be doing its duty and saving lives.[27] There is no

record of the discussions and action of the appointed 'Improvement Committee', but the

measure was implemented, because as of 1878, the Local Board began to borrow large

amounts of money from the government (see Table 16).

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[24] 1878 (144) Public Health Act (1875) Amendment. A Bill [as Amended by the Select Committee] to Amend
the Public Health Act, 1875, So Far as Relates to the Supply of Water, p. 1.
[25] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Sewerage Question at Oldbury', 1876, p. 5.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

Table 16 Government loans taken out by the town of Oldbury, 1878-90[28]

Date	Stated Purpose	Amount borrowed £	Number of years repayment
1878/9	Sanitary	10,000	Not stated
1878/9	Street improvement	6,000	20
1878/9	Sewerage	8,000	30
1878/9	Sewerage	8,000	50
1887	Working capital for gas undertaking	4500	10
1887	Fire engine and appliances	815	10
1887	Fire brigade station	450	30
1889/90	Land for library purposes	100	50
1889/90	Free library	550	50
1889/90	Free library furniture	150	30
1890	Land for public offices	1,650	10
1890	Public offices	2,010	30
1890	Furnishing public offices	640	10

On Friday 17 January 1879 the work began, with the Chairman, and members of the Local

Board, meeting on the site proposed for the sewage works in order to turn the first turf. The

vicar of Oldbury offered an appropriate prayer. The Chairman expressed his wishes for the

success of the undertaking and formally turned the turf. The Board then adjourned to the

[28] Figures taken the following Parliamentary papers:1878 (339) Public Works Loan Board. Fourth Annual Report of the Public Works Loan Board, 1878-79; 1878 (C.2372) Eighth Annual Report of the Local Government Board; 1880 (208) Public Works Loan Board. Fifth Annual Report of the Public Works Loan Board, 1879-80; 1881 (261) Public Works Loan Board. Sixth Annual Report of the Public Works Loan Board, 1880-81; 1884 (C.4166) Thirteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board. 1883-84; 1884 (C.4515) Fourteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board. 1884-85;1887 (C.5131) Sixteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board. 1886-87;1887 (266) Local Taxation Returns (England). The Annual Local Taxation Returns. Year 1885-86. Part 3. 4. Municipal Borough Accounts. 5. Borough Urban Sanitary Accounts. 6. Other Urban Sanitary Accounts. 7. Joint Board Accounts. 8. Rural Sanitary Accounts. 9. Port Sanitary Accounts. 10. Burial Board Accounts. 11. Commissioners of Baths and Washhouses, Accounts Of. 12. Lighting and Watching Inspectors, Accounts Of. 13. Commissioners of Markets and Fairs, Accounts Of. 14. Bridge and Ferry Trustees, Accounts Of;1889 (C.5813) Eighteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board.

Talbot Inn for a banquet.[29] During the speeches, a suggestion was made for a town hall and free library to be built, 'in order that the rising generation might have something better than those present had had'. The details of loans, outlined in Table 16 included money for these buildings.

A clean water supply was outside the powers of the Board. There were continual complaints to the provider, South Staffs Water, for improvements to be made to the quantity and quality of supply, to no avail. In 1870, Oldbury, Smethwick and West Bromwich applied for a bill to ensure a better supply of water themselves. This was not successful, however, and the area continued to be reliant on the water company.[30] Gradually, the quality and quantity of water was improved, and work took place to ensure that water was freely available at all times, and piped, if not to the individual homes, at least to standpipes.[31]

Industrialisation had a major impact on the health problems of towns across the country, but its effects were more difficult to address. Atmospheric pollution, especially where thick fogs were accompanied by a rise in the death rate, linked to bronchitis, asthma and other respiratory diseases caused increasing concern.[32] Reform involved working with the manufacturers to improve conditions in their factories, and legislation to deal with the problem at a local level, as has been discussed in Chapter 3.

If industrial injuries, and occupational diseases, were to be dealt with, national legislation was also necessary. The first Acts of Parliament were reactionary, addressing problems that had been brought to the government's attention, as in the case of women and children working in

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[29] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Sewerage Question at Oldbury', 1879.
[30] Van Leerzem and Williams, *The History of South Staffordshire Waterworks Company, 1853-1989* [Online], pp. 57 - 60.
[31] Ibid., pp. 57 - 60.
[32] *Russell, F., London Fogs (London, 1880)*, p. 26, 27.

coal mines (see Table 17). Over time, the acts became more proactive, being designed to

improve working conditions and the health and safety of the employees. The example in

Table 17, for the coal industry, was repeated for other industries, with the introduction of

legislation specific to their trade.

Table 17 Acts of Parliament regulating work in coal mines 1842 – 1881 [33]

Date	Bills and Acts	Important changes to legislation
1842	Mines and Collieries Act	Addressing the employment of women and children in mines.
1850	Coal Mines Inspection Act	Appointment of inspectors, setting out their powers and duties.
1860	Mines Regulation Act	Improved safety rules and raised the age at which boys could go down the mine from 10 to 12 years of age.
1872	Coal Mines Regulation Act	Introducing training for pit managers.
1881	Mines Regulation Act	Empowered the home secretary to hold inquiries into the causes of mine accidents.

5.2 Provision of public health

A further area of public health was the provision of hospital services. Oldbury did not have a

general hospital or dispensary. Prior to 1834, paupers from the village who were ill or infirm,

were sent to Halesowen workhouse, for which no records survive. After 1834 they were sent

to West Bromwich workhouse. If hospital treatment was needed in the eighteenth century,

patients would probably have been sent to Birmingham, some four miles distant, which, from

1779, had a general hospital.[34] Treatment depended upon having a sponsor, however, a

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[33] Living Heritage, *Reforming Society in the Nineteenth Century, Coal Mines* [Online]
http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-
heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/overview/coalmines/, (Accessed: 20/9/2014).
[34] Reinarz, J., *Health care in Birmingham: the Birmingham teaching hospitals 1779-1939* (Woodbridge, 2009),
p. 5.

person who subscribed to the hospital, and was able to recommend the person as a patient.[35] Jonathan Reinarz notes that 33 patients were admitted to Birmingham General Hospital from nearby West Bromwich in 1795, mostly on the recommendation of Lord and Lady Dartmouth.[36] With few wealthy patrons in Oldbury to pay a subscription at this date, it was unlikely that many from the town were sent there.

In the nineteenth century a number of specialist hospitals opened in Birmingham, along with Queens's Hospital (1841), which took general cases. Queens Hospital was located in the centre of Birmingham, and is believed to be the first purpose built teaching hospital in England.[37] The hospital treated work-related incidents, and a number of firms began to subscribe to the hospital in order for their workers to be sent there.[38]

When West Bromwich became the regional base of the Poor Law Union it also became the centre of medical care for the surrounding towns. A dispensary was set up in the High Street in 1867 and a district hospital in Edward Street in 1869, both of which were paid for by public subscription.[39] An infirmary was also added to the Union Workhouse in Hallam Street in 1884 with a 'lying in' ward, and a contagious block to care for patients with specific needs.[40] When Chance and Sons set up their Accident Fund, in 1880, they made a subscription of £50 per year to West Bromwich Hospital Saturday Collection. This enabled them to send injured workers to the hospital when necessary. They also subscribed £5. 5s per year to West

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[35] Ibid., p. 1.
[36] Ibid., p. 23.
[37] Ibid., p. 57.
[38] Ibid., p.63.
[39] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, p. 126.
[40] CHAS, GWB/1/19, West Bromwich Union Board Minute Book 1891 - 2 (1892).

Bromwich Hospital (Eye Department), something that was necessary, given the high number of eye injuries they had in the works.[41]

Although no details of the number of wards or beds are given, a description of the old hospital wards was included in a booklet produced to celebrate the formal opening of the new hospital, on 30 March 1928, which was to be named Hallam Hospital (see Figure 54).[42]

> *The Past.* The West Bromwich Infirmary was a gloomy place in former times.
>
> In some ways it shewed an advance in ideas compared with many others throughout the country. The ground plan was good in the arrangement of the wards and sanitary blocks, but inside, the wards were cheerless as the walls were unplastered brick, which though painted looked cold. The floors belonged to a by-gone age in hospital construction. Constant scrubbing and years of use had worn them down, so it was well apparent that they had served their time, and were dangerous.
>
> These wards were heated by large central stoves with flues going up through the ceiling. The only merit of these dust-collecting monsters was that they gave out a good heat, thereby relieving the dulness of the wards.
>
> The bath-rooms were as old-fashioned as the floors, and the baths bore a strong resemblance to ancient sarcophagi. There was no proper division into medical and surgical wards. Nor was there any operating theatre. Operations were done in a side room which was dark, inconvenient in every way and destitute of proper instrument cupboards and fixtures. Needless to say, there was no electric lighting. The Infirmary kitchen opened directly off the corridor connecting the two main wings. Beyond the fact that the distance for carrying food was short, there was nothing else that could be said in its favour; it also was a relic of the times before the birth of the modern hospital and labour saving appliances.

Figure 54 Description of West Bromwich Infirmary prior to 1925 [43]

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[41] CALS, DIC/BM 20/207.
[42] Wellcome Library, P759, Hallam Hospital West Bromwich, The Administrative Block, The X-ray Department and The Nurses Home, Formal Opening by Sir William Willcox,K.C.I.E, G.B., C.M.G., M.D., F.R.C.P., Physician to St Mary's Hospital London (1928).
[43] Ibid.

The booklet explained that the wards were updated, and given electric light and central, heating, but otherwise the fabric of the wards was the same as when it had been the workhouse infirmary (see Figure 55).

ONE OF THE HOSPITAL WARDS.
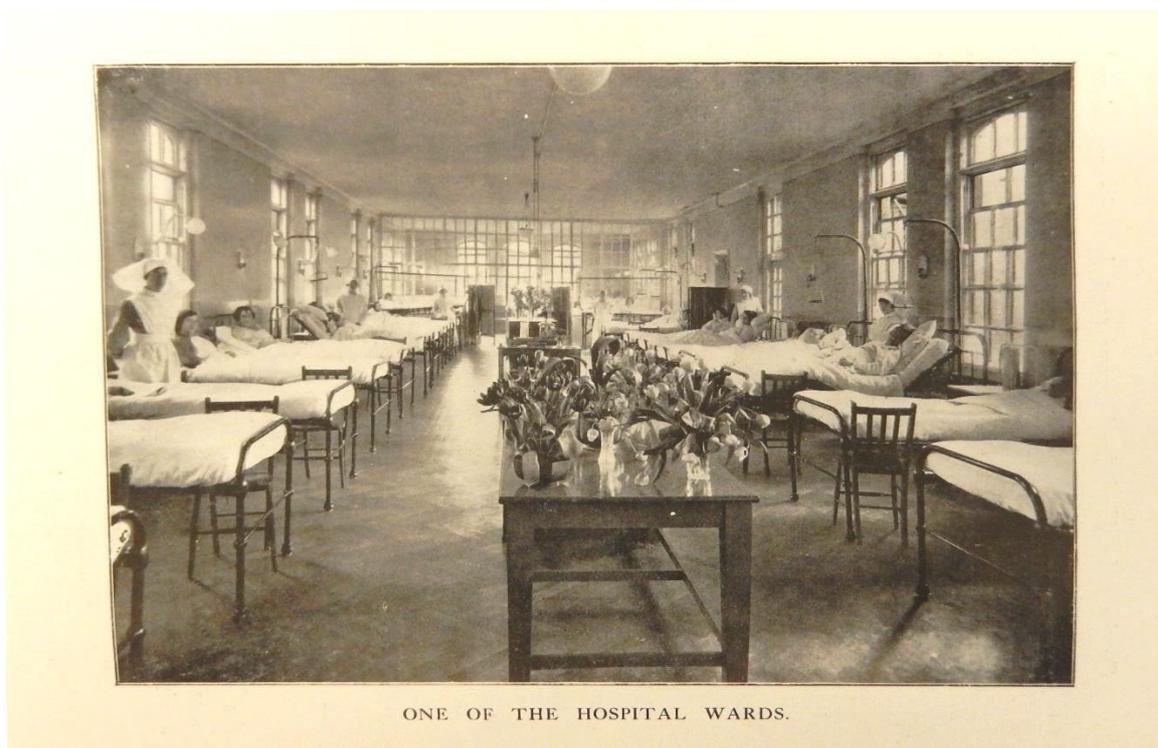
Figure 55 A ward in the old infirmary, updated for the new hospital (1925) [44]

The Sanitary Act of 1866 recommended that isolation hospitals should be set up to care for people suffering from infectious diseases and Oldbury complied with the recommendation, only to close the facility again in 1874 due to pressure from the ratepayers.[45] During a smallpox epidemic in the 1890s, an isolation hospital was set up in Heath Lane on the edge of West Bromwich and cottages in Newbury Lane, Oldbury, were converted for the purpose. They included nurses' rooms, a kitchen, and three wards to accommodate around forty people. Although such facilities provided the isolation and disinfection which would not have

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[44] Ibid.
[45] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Local Board', Monday 13 April 1874.

been possible at home, some preferred to remain in their own homes. In the case of smallpox, however, the local authorities found that they needed to be insistent. During April 1893, there was an outbreak in Oldbury, and an incident was reported of over 30 people visiting the house of a smallpox victim 'to ascertain what the disease was like'. In addition, another sufferer was seen walking about the market place. The MOH stated that the people of Oldbury did not believe that smallpox was contagious.[46] The local board adopted a resolution to isolate patients, compulsorily, if need be.[47] When patients exceeded the 40 who could be accommodated in the cottages, Oldbury arranged with other towns, which had spaces in their isolation hospitals, to take some of Oldbury's patients. No provision was made for the treatment of other cases of infectious diseases in the locality before 1904; they were treated at home.[48] If practitioners attended cases of diphtheria they were issued with anti-diphtheria serum, and any cases requiring tracheotomy were sent in an ambulance to one of the Birmingham hospitals.[49] Birmingham hospitals also received other infectious cases from Oldbury: enteric fever cases were sent to the General Hospital, and typhoid cases to the General or Queens hospital.[50] This could not continue indefinitely, so, in 1904, Smethwick and Oldbury joined together to extend Smethwick's infectious diseases hospital to accommodate people from both towns. The hospital was on a piece of land where the two towns joined. It was completed in 1905.[51]

The other hospital to which people from Oldbury were admitted was the Asylum at Powick, Worcester, which was opened on 11 August 1852.[52] Smith notes that the hospital was set up

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[46] TNA, MH12/11671.
[47] *The British Medical Journal,* 'Small-Pox in Great Britain', 1893, p. 906.
[48] TNA, MH48/474, Smethwick and Oldbury Isolation Hospital
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Crompton, *Lunatics: the mad poor of Worcestershire in the long nineteenth century: writing 'History from below' of patients in a Pauper Lunatics Asylum*, p.6.

on the model of a therapeutic 'curative' institution, based on the approved practices of 'moral management'.[53] The aim was to create a tranquil atmosphere where a cure would be possible. The rules set out by the commissioners stated that there must be at least one acre of ground for every ten patients, an uninterrupted view of the countryside, and free access to air and sun.[54] Wards were arranged so that patients diagnosed with the same syndrome would be placed in the same area of the hospital, and special rooms were constructed for those who were violent, or incontinent, and needed special handling, or care.[55] This changed in 1860, when all patients were grouped by the ease by which they were managed.[56]

The staff tried to make the wards as homely as possible for the patients, with pictures on the walls, plants, tanks of fish and comfortable chairs.[57] This seems a step forward from life in an asylum ward before the 1840s, when a display of the means of restraint were often exhibited as deterrents to unwelcome behaviour.[58] Not only were there no restraints in Powick, but picnics and excursions to places of interest were arranged, and two thirds of the inmates were involved in work: domestic or laundry for the women, building, and other trades, such as baking, mending shoes, or working on the 552 acre farm, for the men.[59] The composer Edward Elgar took a great interest in the asylum, and, with his uncle and father, helped to set up an orchestra with Elgar himself as bandmaster.[60] The patients also appear to have had a

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[53]Smith, L., '"A Sad Spectacle of Hopeless Mental Degradation": The Management of the Insane in West Midlands Workhouses, 1815–60', in: Reinarz and Schwarz (eds), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Suffolk, 2013). 103 – 120, p. 113.

[54] WAAS, L362.210, 942447, A History of Powick Hospital , p. 3.

[55] Crompton, *Lunatics: the mad poor of Worcestershire in the long nineteenth century: writing 'History from below' of patients in a Pauper Lunatics Asylum*, p. 17.

[56] Ibid., p. 41.

[57] WAAS, L362.210, 942447, p. 3.

[58] Smith, *Cure, Comfort, and Safe Custody: Public Lunatic Asylums in Early Nineteenth Century England*, p.118.

[59] Crompton, *Lunatics: the mad poor of Worcestershire in the long nineteenth century: writing 'History from below' of patients in a Pauper Lunatics Asylum*.

[60] WAAS, L362.210, 942447, p. 6.

more than adequate diet, since records of the weight of patients from Oldbury show a gain of around three stone during the time in which they were resident.[61]

The other area of government involvement in the health of the people, which made a significant difference, was the issue of directives and regulations about infectious diseases. This can be seen most forcefully in relation to vaccination. Naomi Williams observes that the Vaccination Acts were 'one of the few statutory measures to directly challenge the rights of an individual in matters of public health for the good of the wider community'.[62] The first Vaccination Act was produced in 1840 following a particularly devastating smallpox epidemic, and, as was the case for many of the early bills, it was permissive.[63] Medical practitioners gave the vaccinations, but the overall programme was administered by the Poor Law authorities.[64] This scheme was only partly successful, as anything organised thorough the Poor Law authorities was greeted with suspicion.[65] If it was going to be effective, vaccination needed to be made compulsory, as in some of the other European countries. In 1853, the government produced an Act, to be enforced by medical personnel and local authorities, making vaccination against smallpox compulsory for children under five.[66] The implementation of the Act led to an increase in the number of children vaccinated, but it also produced a great deal of anti-vaccination feeling. Those who did not have their children vaccinated were identified through the birth registers, and the local government boards were instructed to follow them up. Parents who refused to comply could be fined repeatedly.[67] As was noted in Chapter 4, the benefit of vaccination was evident in the figures from Oldbury,

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[61] *George Marshall Medical Museum* [Online].
[62] Williams, N., 'The Implementation of Compulsory Health Legislation: Infant Smallpox Vaccination in England and Wales, 1840-1890', *Journal of Historical Geography,* 1994, 20: 4, p 396.
[63] 1840 (152) Vaccination Extension. A Bill, Intituled, An Act to Extend the Practice of Vaccination.
[64] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 37.
[65] Williams, 'The Implementation of Compulsory Health Legislation: Infant Smallpox Vaccination in England and Wales, 1840-1890', pp. 397-8.
[66] Ibid., p. 398.
[67] Ibid., p. 399.

which revealed a reduction in fatalities from smallpox following vaccination.[68] While it cannot be denied that the effects were remarkable, many were concerned that the results did not justify the means used. Parents believed that it was their right to decide what was best for their children and some felt that to override the views of the parents, was an infringement of people's liberties, and their right to choose.[69] Others objected from religious, cultural, and social beliefs or the fear that the practice of transferring vaccine directly from one child to another, was unsafe.[70] This was not a totally unfounded view, since there had been a number of complaints from parents in Oldbury that vaccination was making the children ill, and one court case claiming that it had caused the death of a baby.[71] Despite protests, the Act remained in force until 1891, when a conscience clause was introduced, which enabled parents who objected, to claim vaccination exemption certificates. Even then, doubts were expressed as to the ability of working-class parents to make a reasoned decision about having their children vaccinated.[72] It was a topic about which people in Oldbury felt strongly. In 1892, at a public meeting of the Unionist party before a local election in the town, one of the questions from the floor, was whether the candidate would vote for the repeal of the compulsory vaccination act. The response was that the candidate, Mr Bridgeman, would wait until the result of the Royal Commission was made known, before pledging himself on the issue.[73] In 1898, when reporting on the vaccination issue, the *Gloucester Citizen* recorded that, anti-vaccinationists in the Oldbury and Langley districts were appearing at the police

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[68] Hart, E., 'Report on Vaccination As A Branch Of Preventative Medicine. II (Continued)', *The British Medical Journal,* Mar.16.1895, 1785**,** 595-599, p. 599.

[69] Durbach, N., 'Class, Gender, and the Conscientious Objector to Vaccination, 1898-1907', *The Journal of British Studies,* 2013, 41**,** 58-83, p. 60.

[70] Ibid., p. 59; Williams, 'The Implementation of Compulsory Health Legislation: Infant Smallpox Vaccination in England and Wales, 1840-1890', p..396.

[71] CHAS, GWB/1/19; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Alleged Death from Vaccinaton at Oldbury', Friday 06 May 1892, p.5.

[72] Williams, 'The Implementation of Compulsory Health Legislation: Infant Smallpox Vaccination in England and Wales, 1840-1890', p. 399.

[73] *Birmingham Daily Post* 'Unionist Meeting at Oldbury', Saturday 30 April 1892, p. 8.

courts in 'strong force', in order to take advantage of the exemption clause in the new

Vaccination Act. The day before there had been '89 applicants in respect of 129 children.

The amount of fees being £10 18s'.[74] So many parents wanted to apply for exemption, that

the justices were requested to hear applications in the evening. The main problem was, that

only the fathers could apply for exemption certificates, and, as they were 'compelled' to come

in the morning, this meant them losing a day's pay, an amount of around 12s. The men asked

if someone could come for the certificate on their behalf, but were told that it had to be the

father, unless there were special reasons for his absence.[75] In 1907, an amended conscience

clause was passed, which made it easier to attain exemption, and the rate of exemptions

nationally grew to 25 percent of all births.[76]

5.3 Providers of public health

The MOH and other trained medical men in the town were key figures in the provision of

public health. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, doctors or surgeons normally

belonged to one of three governing bodies: The Royal College of Surgeons, The Royal

College of Physicians, or the Society of Apothecaries. Although doctors could only belong to

one of these they often worked across disciplines, practising a combination of medicine,

surgery, midwifery and pharmacy.[77] In Oldbury, Thomas Cooper, the longest-serving

surgeon in the town became the MOH in 1856 when the Board of Health was appointed.[78] In

addition to working as a surgeon, Thomas Cooper sat on many of the boards that were

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[74] *Gloucester Citizen,* 'The Vaccination Act', Wednesday 23 November 1898, p. 3.
[75] Ibid., p. 3.
[76] Durbach, 'Class, Gender, and the Conscientious Objector to Vaccination, 1898-1907', p. 58.
[77] Waddington, I., 'GPs and Consultants in Early Nineteenth Century England: The Sociology of an Intra-Professional Conflict', in: Woodward and Richards (eds), *Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth Century England Essays in the Social History of Medicine* (London, 1977), 164 – 188, p, 178.
[78] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p.7.

seeking to make a difference to the life of the town. In 1857, in his position as Medical Officer of Health for the Oldbury section of the Poor Law Union, he had a responsibility for a population of 12,978 people. He lived in Oldbury and stated that his nearest patient lived 100 yards away, and the furthest, 4 miles distant.[79] Three Medical Officers of Health were appointed between 1856 and 1900 (see Table 18).

Table 18 Medical Officer of Health in Oldbury 1856 – 1900 [80]

Name	Dates served as Medical Officer of Health	Notes
Thomas Cooper	1855 -	The date of Dr Cooper resigning has not been located
Henry Hayward	1865 – 1867	Ousted by the rate-payers society
	1867 – circa 1881	No medical officer of health
Andrew Cunningham	Circa 1881 -	

In their position as practising GPs, Dr Cooper and his colleagues became very important in the lives of the people of the town, and were always the first on the scene to help with any disaster, or emergency. The call of the lower classes for their services depended on their individual financial circumstances. There were around 20,000 registered practitioners in England in 1860, with an estimated number of around 1,500 patients each.[81] Oldbury exceeded the national average. In 1855, Oldbury had five surgeons for a population of 11,640, giving an average of 2,322 patients each.[82] Medical charges were usually between 2/6 and 7/6, depending on the social standing of the patient.[83] Many accepted lower rates than

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[79] 1857 (230) Poor Relief. Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons, Dated 18 August 1857, p. 102.
[80] No date of appointment has been located for Dr Cunningham. !881 is the first time that he is mentioned as Medical Officer of Health in reports. *Birmingham Daily Gazette* 'Health Department', Friday 02 October 1868, p.6; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Local Board', Saturday 3 September 1881, p. 5.
[81] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 17.
[82] Billings, M., *M Billing's Directory and Gazetteer of the County of Worcester* (Birmingham, 1855), pp. 397, 398, 400.
[83] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 17.

this, however, if little could be spared.[84] They were influential people, who knew a family's situation at first hand, and it might be expected that the family doctor acted on their behalf in times of trouble. Doctors tended to hold back from involving themselves in family affairs, however, in case it was seen as meddling with individual liberty.[85]

The MOH also became responsible for instructing the population in medical matters. On 2 September 1865, a new MOH, Mr Hayward, was appointed in Oldbury, who believed that it was important to educate the public in the facts. On 13 August 1866, he gave a lecture in the Junction Hotel entitled 'Sanitary Science: the modus operandi of the various disinfectants, the best means of testing and purifying water etc., with illustrations and specimens'. Invitations were sent to 'gentlemen in the district interested in sanitary matters', and about forty people attended. He cited John Snow's discovery at the Broad Street pump, and had acquired test samples from the various pumps in and around Oldbury, some of which were said to be opaque, 'charged with organic matter, and with animalcules flitting across the field of vision'. He then demonstrated how the use of purifying precipitants could produce perfectly clear, transparent water. He advocated their use in the household water supply, and recommended several disinfectants to ensure the cleanliness of the home.[86] Improving the water supply was a costly venture, and took time to accomplish, but disinfectants, and a means of filtering drinking water, were available for use in the home. The middle classes had the opportunity to adopt these recommendations, since the invitations to attend the meeting were sent out to a select group of 'gentlemen'. Even accessing an affordable supply of water was a problem for

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[84] Waddington, 'GPs and Consultants in Early Nineteenth Century England: The Sociology of an Intra-Professional Conflict', p. 175.
[85] Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, p. 31.
[86] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Lecture on Sanitary Science by the Medical Officer of Health, Oldbury', 13 August 1866.

the working-class community. The people who would have benefited most from these

measures, probably found them to be beyond their means.

In the majority of English towns, non-medical staff held positions that would normally have

required men with medical experience. The role of coroner, for example, was most often

performed by a solicitor. A number of people set themselves up as medical professionals with

no training at all.[87] In August 1868, Thomas Holland, one of the listed surgeons in Oldbury,

was fined two sums of £5 for having taken, and used, the name and title of surgeon, to which

he was not qualified. He practised in Oldbury for a number of years, and the other medical

men of the town had not interfered. When he began to sign death certificates, and act as

surgeon to a friendly society in the town, undercutting the prices of the trained doctors, they

decided to act to 'protect their professional interests'. Prosecution did not seem to make any

difference, as he was before the courts again two months later, when, along with another man

in a similar situation, he was fined £20.[88]

Purchasing over-the-counter medicines was a further recourse to medical intervention by the

working classes of Oldbury. Exaggerated claims were made, to cure everything from the

common cold, to tuberculosis and they often contained substances such as heroin or cocaine.

Another choice was to try a household remedy, such as goose fat and brown paper 'vests' to

cure a chest complaint.[89] The pharmaceutical trade expanded over the century, and became

more professional, with imported and manufactured medical supplies to replace some of the

more traditional home-made remedies. Chemists and druggists became part of the retail

scene. In 1828, Oldbury had no chemists or druggists, by 1835 there were five 'grocers and

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[87] Stacey, M., *The sociology of health and healing: a textbook* (London, 1988), pp. 51, 52.
[88] 'Conviction of an Unqualified Surgeon', *The British Medical Journal,* Aug.22.1868, 2, No 399**,** 210;
'Successful Prosecutions under the Medical Acts', *The British Medical Journal,* Oct. 17.1868, 2, No 407.
[89] Estes, J. W., 'The Pharmacology of Nineteenth-Century Patent Medicines', *Pharmacy in History,* 1988, 30**,** 3-18, p. 13.

druggists', and from 1842 to 1896, there were between three and four chemist shops in the town. This gives an indication of the greater purchasing power, and willingness to spend money on their health, by even the poorest classes.[90]

A number of the larger industrialists in Oldbury set up sickness or accident schemes for their workforce, part of which paid for the attendance of a doctor.[91] Funeral expenses were often included both for the subscribers and their wives and children. The worker had a set amount deducted from his wages which was matched by the company. The Provident Society, set up by the firm of Messrs Chance for their workforce, provided several benefits: a dispensary fund, which retained the services of a surgeon, a burial fund which covered the workers and their families, a convalescent home in Quinton, and an accident fund. The firm paid in an amount equal to that paid by the workmen for the year. It was well used by the workforce. In the year 1884, for example, claims were made for 70 cases of disablement, 43 stays in the convalescent home, the largest number since the home was opened in 1874, and payment on the death of 7 men, 9 women and 33 children.[92] At this time the firm had a workforce of around 640 men.[93]

The other large firm, Albright and Wilson, also set up an Accident and Insurance Society in 1880, managed by a committee of workmen consisting of five foremen, and seven workmen. As with Chance Brothers, Albright and Wilson contributed an amount equal to that of the men. They also set up a separate sick club, again managed by a committee, to which the firm gave £80 a year. This provided a sick allowance of ten shillings a week for twenty-six weeks,

[90] Information is taken from Piggots and Kelly's Trade directories which cover this period; Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p. 21.
[91] Bartrip and Burman, *The Wounded Soldiers of Industry: Industrial Compensation Policy 1833-1897*, p. 30.
[92] CALS, DIC/BM 20/207, Published Annual Reports and Accounts.
[93] 1886 (192) Report from the Select Committee on the Employers' Liability Act (1880) Amendment Bill; together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix, p. 351.

and five shillings a week for a further twenty-six weeks, besides free medical attendance, and medicine.[94] They also set up a convalescent home in Malvern for members of their workforce,[95] and both firms were generous in providing social events, and trips, at the firms' expense. From 1872, Albright and Wilson, for example, organised an annual works trip for the men and their wives on the first Saturday in July, providing free transport; an early example of a wider 'welfare' system.[96] Other firms in the area also followed this practice.

Work-place benefit schemes were usually linked to the larger industries, where finance was made available by the industrialists to initiate, or support, the venture. For those outside the large workplaces, however, the only way to make provision during times of accident or sickness was to be part of a self-help organisation. These ranged from informal groups set up by workers in the same industry, to professionally organised national concerns. An example of local support from fellow workmen was in the mining districts, where owners and men usually provided for miners who had an accident, or were off work due to sickness. The evidence of men interviewed for the Midland Mining Commission in 1842 stated that the amount provided in the Black Country was usually six shillings a week.[97] If the injury was fatal, the widow was given a shilling and sixpence a week plus an additional shilling for each child under ten years old, when they would be old enough to go to work. This continued while the mine was open, and as long as the woman did not remarry. The mine owners were usually at the forefront of donating money to funds for widows and orphans after a fatal

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[94] 1899 (C.9188) Use of Phosphorus in the Manufacture of Lucifer Matches. Reports to the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the Use of Phosphorus in the Manufacture of Lucifer Matches; by Professor T. E. Thorpe, Ll.D., F.R.S., Principal Chemist of the Government Laboratory; Professor Thomas Oliver, M.D., F.R.C.P., Physician to the Royal Infirmary Newcastle-Upon-Tyne; Dr. George Cunningham, M.A., D.M.D., Senior Dental Surgeon to the London Hospital.
[95] Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*, p. 85.
[96] Ibid., p. 108.
[97] 1843 (508) Midland Mining Commission. First Report. South Staffordshire, p. 3.

explosion, and for taking responsibility in the case of an accident.[98] They either provided the doctor and the weekly amount to the man, or his widow and children, or the amount was paid half-and-half by the mine owner and the 'butty', the middle man who engaged the workers and paid their wages. A number of men interviewed for the report described the provision for men who were sick, and where there was no miners' sick club. They stated that the other miners would subscribe among themselves as much as they thought would make the six shillings. The 'doggy', the person in charge of the men, collected this every week as long as the person was ill. If a sick club was available, miners generally subscribed around three pence a week and this provided them with the six shillings, and the services of a doctor.[99] Oldbury had two miners' clubs in 1865, neither of which was well supported: a Miners' Refuge Friendly Society with 20 members and a Miners' Gift Friendly Society with 35 members.[100] It is not surprising that take up was so low as it tended to be the middle, or better-paid working-class individuals who joined the clubs. The more poorly paid were usually in a situation of living from hand-to-mouth, and to join a club which required a regular payment was out of the reach of many. Some general clubs even included a regulation that those involved in mining, or other dangerous trades, had to pay an extra contribution, and some even denied them admittance.[101] A number of other trades had special clubs for their members, such as the Honourable Order of Engineers, with a membership of 60 people in Oldbury and the Brick and Tile Makers Association, the only Trade Union mentioned in the town at that time, with 58 members.[102] These were both small associations set up within Oldbury. Membership of the engineer's society was similar to those in other towns such as

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[98] *Berrows Worcester Journal* 'The Late Mine Explosion Near Oldbury', Thursday 3 December 1846.

[99] 1843 (508) Midland Mining Commission. First Report. South Staffordshire, p. 3.

[100] 1866 (406) Friendly Societies. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies in England.

[101] 1874 (C961, C961-I) Fourth Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into Friendly and Benefit Building Societies. Part I. Report of the Commissioners, with Appendix, pp. 338, 352, 365.

[102] 1875 (408) Friendly Societies and Trade Unions (England). Reports of the Registrar of Friendly Societies in England for the Year Ending 31st December 18741875 (408), p. 196, 47.

Longton - Engineers Friendly Society (22), Tinsley - Engineers Retreat (38), and Sheffield - Engineers Sick and Benefit Society (96).[103] There were no other brick and tile makers in the report, and trade unions differed in size from between 20 to 40,000 men, according to location and the number of men involved in the work. This made it impossible to make a comparison.

Some clubs were open to all trades, and these were often affiliated to a national organisation. The two largest clubs in the country were the Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows, which had two lodges in Oldbury, with 154 members in 1866, and The Ancient Order of Foresters which also had two courts and 174 members in the town.[104] Set up as social clubs in the eighteenth century, both developed into benefit clubs in the early nineteenth century. They were similar to the Freemasons, on whose style and traditions they were modelled, and appealed to better-paid workingmen who were able to purchase their own insignia and contribute the one shilling towards the funeral.[105] Like Freemasons, who also had a lodge in Oldbury with 31 members, they had ceremonies, lectures, oaths, passwords and particular ways of shaking hands, rituals which played a part in maintaining a sense of brotherhood and fellowship.[106] People were expected to join the club for life, and the monthly payments assured ten shillings a week sick pay for the first year of illness, and five shillings after twelve months' continuous sickness, £10 for a member's death and £5 for that of his wife, and superannuation benefits after the age of 70.[107]

Francis Neison highlights how workers in the different trades benefited throughout their lives, by listing the numbers of weeks of sickness each class of worker took over 50 years, from the

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[103] Ibid., pp. 175, 196, 205.
[104] 1866 (406) Friendly Societies. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies in England, p. 191.
[105] *Gosden, P. H. J. H., Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in the 19th Century (London, 1973),* p. 49.
[106] 1866 (406) Friendly Societies. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies in England, pp. 191, 192; Gosden, *Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in the 19th Century*, pp. 49, 50.
[107] Neison, F. G. P., *The Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows* (London, 1869), pp. 5, 54.

age of 20, when they joined, until they were 70 years of age. As would be expected, those pursuing outdoor and rural occupations, and spending more time in the open air, took fewer days off sick, whilst those following the more unhealthy occupations, such as colliers and miners, headed the list of number of days taken, along with shipwrights.[108] It was hardly surprising, therefore, that a number of societies charged miners a higher rate.

A number of philanthropic groups flourished in the industrial towns, many of them organised by middle-class health-conscious Victorian women.[109] Birmingham and Wolverhampton each had a branch of the Ladies Sanitary Association, with Lady Dartmouth, and Lady Wrottesley as patronesses.[110] These were branches of the Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association formed in 1852.[111] Manchester had become a focal point for reform, and self-help societies, including the headquarters of the first Cooperative association.[112] Women members of the Sanitary Association were convinced that the way to reduce infant mortality was to educate working-class women. They did this by holding town meetings, distributing tracts and free cleaning materials, and organising training classes. Although it did not seem to make much impact on children's mortality rates, an improvement in hygienic practices in the home was recorded.[113]

Middle-class women were at the root of administering many of the voluntary groups that were set up to meet specific needs in Oldbury. During a bad winter in 1881, when many were out of work, a meeting was called to decide how best to help people who were suffering in the

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[108] Neison, F. G. P., *Present Knowledge of the Mortality and Sickness of Members of Friendly Societies : Being a Brief Review of the Data Founded on Actual Observation That Have Been Adduced, with the Objections to Each Respectively : Submitted for the Consideration of the Royal Commission on Friendly Societies* (London, 1871), p. 37.

[109] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860* , p. 44, 77.

[110] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Wolverhampton Ladies Sanitary Association ', Saturday 30 October 1886.

[111] MALS, M126, Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association (1852).

[112] Turnbull, J. and Southern, J., *More Than Just a Shop : The History of the Co-op in Lancashire* (Preston, 1995), p. 6.

[113] Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, p.75.

town. It was decided to distribute tickets for people to obtain free food and a committee of men of good standing was formed to oversee this. A women's committee was formed at the same time to work at grass-root level: visiting the homes to give out the tickets and distribute clothing and blankets to those in need.[114] Women appearing at the door of a working-class home would have been more acceptable than a male outsider who, even though bringing the same commodities, might be seen as an authoritative figure, and provoked concern. Women tended to be more practical, and would have been more willing to accept help, particularly from other women. Men, on the other hand, might have seen it as 'charity', and an affront to their ability to provide for their families and refused the help, even when it was desperately needed.

5.4 Conclusion

As epidemics swept across the country and the death toll grew, action needed to be taken. Fundamental to the health of the population was a safe environment and the government, local authorities and medical men needed to work together if conditions were to improve. They shared aims: to see a lowering of the death rate, an improvement in the health of the population and improvements to the fabric of the towns. Although to some extent their work was of an independent nature, their combined actions enabled positive changes to be made.

Members of the local middle classes and medical men in the towns knew the situations at first hand and joined the committees which took the lead in approaching the government for the authority to make improvements. They were willing to sit on boards and implement the necessary procedures, but they could not do this without finance and support. The government response to their requests was to provide acts of parliament which enabled them

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[114] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Distress at Oldbury', Friday 21 January 1881.

to raise local finance through the rates in order to effect improvements. In addition to providing medical services for the people in the town, medical personnel were also involved in implementing preventative measures against disease. Sickness in the workplace also had a debilitating effect on the population and this could only be resolved through the involvement of the industrialists and factory owners.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, legislation was put in place and standards were raised in the town and the workplace. Sanitation was improved and effective means of controlling communicable diseases were applied through vaccination programmes and education of the public. This was not without its setbacks, however. Not everyone was happy with the way in which changes were implemented. Oldbury ratepayers complained about the cost, a factor which restrained the implementation of sanitary arrangements for about twenty years, and there was a real concern about the loss of rights and interference where it was not needed, as in the case of vaccination. Some of the procedures needed to be tightened and further legislation was produced to ensure that the acts gave directives rather than recommendations.

Had the initial aims to lower the death rate, improve the health of the population and the fabric of the towns been met? Yes and no. The death rate certainly decreased among the adult population and people lived longer, but the death of children, especially before their first birthday, was still a cause for concern. This suggests that the health of the population had also improved and in some areas this was the case. Smallpox, a deadly killer for much of the century, was still evident, but decreasing in Oldbury by the end of the century. Health services, hospitals, dispensaries and sickness clubs improved the health of the population, either by direct care, or finance to survive times of illness and time off work. Mental

hospitals began to offer approved practices of moral management and extensive care. However, child deaths remained high, the health of industrial workers saw little improvement, and problems relating to air pollution were not tackled. For much of the century, improvements to the fabric of the town (such as the provision of clean water, a sewerage system, improved housing and cleaner streets) were delayed, but eventually began to be realised. Much was achieved however, and the foundations were laid for the public health service of the next century.

CHAPTER 6: THE ÉLITES AND THEIR INFLUENCE

During the course of the nineteenth century, the Black Country encountered an overwhelming number of problems. In the early years, it faced a rapidly growing population, lack of basic facilities and practically non-existent public and voluntary institutions. The middle years saw local unrest, strikes and rioting against low wages and high food prices, and an alarming rise in the death rate through sickness and disease. The latter part of the century saw a number of measures brought in to deal with these problems but also witnessed the extinction of many of the basic trades, on which the area depended, followed by unemployment and calls upon poor law provision. The individual towns were self-governing and lacked the resources to deal with the difficulties they were facing. The challenge of finding solutions to these problems was undertaken by a small group of men in each town, who became its governing élite. Trainor identifies this group as coming from a number of class bases which varied according to the individual town.[1] Although women began to appear in philanthropic roles in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Black Country, they rarely took up formal leadership positions until the end of the century.[2] This chapter will consider the makeup and influence of the group of men who took up this challenge as far as Oldbury is concerned by seeking to answer the following questions: To what extent did the Oldbury élite reflect and fit, into the model drawn out by Trainor for other Black Country towns? In what ways did the members of the élite work together to address problems and effect change? To what extent did the élite influence social change in Oldbury? These will be investigated under three headings: The Black Country élite, The Oldbury élite, and Areas of élite involvement. The last of these three divisions will be further divided into the various roles in which the élite were involved.

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[1] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p.17.
[2] Ibid., p. 96.

6.1 Historiography and sources

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, power and influence was still firmly in the hands of the aristocracy and gentry, who held wealth, status and authority. There were those, however, who felt that this needed to change. Patrick Colquhoun writing in 1814, described the acceleration of economic growth and rapid prosperity that had been experienced by Britain during the latter part of the eighteenth century through improvements in agriculture and the spread of industrialisation.[3] He identified the way individuals had profited from their wealth by increasing their land and property ownership but expressed the opinion that, in order to bring about national prosperity, this should be extended to the mass rather than the few.[4]

These ideas were to become a reality during the nineteenth century as a move from the traditional to professional élite took place and the part subsistence lifestyle of the farm labourer gave way to the wage-earning lifestyle of the factory operative. The instigators of this change were the new class of wealthy industrialists who aspired to enter the traditional aristocratic and gentry power structure. By the middle of the century, the leading élites were not only perceived by their inherited status and class, but also by their sources of livelihood and standing in their communities, where many of the strategically powerful positions were filled by members of the middle classes.[5]

As the Black Country governing and influential élite came from a number of different classes, it is important to identify what each class membership entails, something which historians have attempted to do without producing a clearly accepted definition. Whereas the makeup of

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[3] Colquhoun, 'A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire', p. 49.
[4] Ibid., p. 6.
[5] Thompson, F. M. L., *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), pp. 2-5.

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the upper level of society, the aristocracy, is normally agreed, the middle and lower classes

are variously subdivided and classified according to the needs of individual pieces of

research. Some of these classifications are complex, with Harold Perkin making divisions of

'Upper Class, Middle Class, Lower Middle, Higher Skilled, Lower Skilled, Unskilled and

Agricultural, and Wageless families'.[6] Historians researching one particular class tend to

divide it in order to identify its members. Richard Trainor, for example, writing about

middle-class élites, divides this class into upper middle, middle middle and lower middle,

whilst leaving the other two classes as upper class and working class respectively.[7] A further

problem when defining class is the fact that its membership is dependent on other relevant

information. A person who is considered to be a member of the élite in a village or town may

count for little at county level and nothing at all on the national scene. A class definition

based on wealth might entitle a wealthy man to be part of the upper classes, while the means

by which he earned his money made him unacceptable to other members of the class. The

definition of class is particularly relevant to a study of industrial élites where a decision needs

to be made whether to categorise according to their social class or their function within the

town or workplace. Trainor employs both these classification schemes to identify the élite,

which he has adapted to fit the Black Country experience (see Table 19). These have been

followed where possible in order to facilitate comparisons.

Research into the role of the élite has tended to concentrate on the upper strata: the landed

élite. F.M.L. Thompson, for example, focuses on the role and influence of the aristocracy and

gentry in England both on a national basis as peers of the realm and in the practical running of

their estates and relationships with the local community.[8]

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[6] Perkin, H. J., *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (London, 1969), p. 420.
[7] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, pp. 385-9.
[8] Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*.

Table 19 Schemes for analysing members of the Black Country élite[9]

Functional scheme		Social Class scheme	
F.A. Aristocracy	Peers and gentry owning at least 1,000 acres, but not active in local industry	S.A. Upper class	As in (A) of functional scheme
F.B. Industrial	1. Ironmasters and manufacturers 2. Coal masters and chartermasters (butties) 3. Merchants and factors of coal, iron nails and timber	S.B. Upper Middle Class	Those with 100 or more employees, or a leading position in their industry or £250 or more rateable value, or 4 or more resident servants, or £20,000 or more personalty at probate, or ownership of 100 acres or more in the Black Country
F.C. Dealing	1. Retailers 2. The drink trade 3. Craftsmen and service operators – builders saddlers, plumbers, carriers	S.C. Middle Middle Class	1. Upper Professional and Commercial Operations. (F.D.1) 2 Substantial industrialists or dealers with 10 – 99 employees outside their family or description as 'substantial', prominent etc, or retailers with High St location or residence away from shop or £40 – 249 rateable value, or 2-3 resident servants, or£2000 - £19,999 personalty at probate, or ownership of 10 – 99 acres in the Black Country 3. Lower professional and commercial occupations (F.D.2)
F.D. Professional and commercial	1. *Upper*. Bankers, Anglican clergymen, lawyers and doctors, chief clerks to local boards 2. *Lower*. Nonconformist ministers, brokers, factors and merchants (not B3), commercial travellers and salesmen, accountants, insurance agents, auctioneers, surveyors, engineers, mine agents, architects, works managers, mining bailiffs, graduate teachers and heads of middle class schools	S.D. Lower Middle Class	1. Minor employers with 1 – 9 employees (1-4 in retail) outside their families, or £20 – 39 rateable value, or 1 resident servant, or£200 - £1999 personalty at probate, or ownership of 1 – 9 acres in the Black Country 2. White collar employees (E functional scheme)
F.E. Lesser White Collar	Clerks not in D1, teachers not in D2, minor officials, relieving officers and inspectors, and under-managers.	S.E. Middle Class Unspecified	As in section F of Functional Scheme
F.F. Middle class unspecified	Private residents, gentlemen, ladies and unidentifiable 'retired' people	S.F. Working Class	1. Self-employed, blue collar supervisors, skilled workmen 2. Semi-skilled and unskilled workmen
F.G. Workingmen	As in Social Class category F		
F.H. Other			

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[9] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, pp. 358 – 59.

Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Towns, edited by David Cannadine,

considers issues of estate management, the relationship of the élite with the rural community

and élite influence on urban development. This is done through bringing together a collection

of essays which investigate élite influence in the towns of Cardiff, Southport, Bournemouth,

West Bromwich and Dudley. Richard Trainor is the author of the chapter on West Bromwich

and Dudley in which he explores the relationship of the Earls of Dudley and Dartmouth with

the respective towns.[10] Trainor finds that the two aristocrats combined major economic

interests with significant social and political activities in the area.[11] Both families had

substantial incomes and held large tracts of land in the Black Country.[12] In the early years

they were dominant in public affairs and contributed heavily to civic projects and benevolent

activities such as giving a park to the town or opening their grounds for the use of the

people.[13] As the century progressed and their early dominance waned they continued to be

effective in directing the way the town progressed by the projects they supported. In return

they received esteem from the local people who appreciated not only the basic services they

financed but the display and excitement that landed gentry brought to a grimy industrial

town.[14] Such studies are important as they give a national and regional perspective to the

power of the élites which is difficult to assess at the local town level. As far as the Black

Country was concerned, however, aristocratic influence was limited to a few of the towns and

even this decreased as the nineteenth century progressed and 'self-made men' began to take

on élite roles.

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[10] Cannadine, D. (ed) *Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester, 1982).
[11]Trainor, R., 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier: The Earls of Dartmouth and of Dudley c1810 to 1914', in:
Cannadine (ed) *Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester 1982), p.72.
[12] Ibid., pp.75, 76.
[13] Ibid., pp. 80, 81.
[14] Ibid., pp. 114, 115.

Richard Trainor has also undertaken a wide-reaching analysis of middle-class élite activity in the Black Country with relevance to changes which were taking place nationwide.[15] He traces the distinctive characteristic features of the formation of the élite from 1830 to 1900, an important period in the economic growth of the Black Country, through a study of the towns of Dudley, Bilston and West Bromwich. He has been able to observe the changes that took place as the traditional élite took a back seat to the up-and-coming industrialists during the second half of the nineteenth century. Trainor's work has been a key point of reference in this study, making it possible to place Oldbury in its regional setting.

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall also focus on the emergence of the upper-middle classes through an examination of how issues of cultural change, nonconformity and gender influenced the lives of the Cadbury family of Birmingham and the Taylors of Essex.[16] The stated aim of their research is to 'reconstitute the world as provincial middle class people saw it, experienced it and made sense of it; to accurately reconstruct an emerging culture'.[17] With particular focus on the place and position of middle-class women during the years 1780-1850, they make a pivotal link between Christianity, godliness and the family.[18] During this period the place of the middle-class women was seen to be firmly in the home, at the heart of the family, running the household, raising the children, and making it a place their husbands were happy to spend time in. Davidoff and Hall's description of the lives of the Cadbury family provides an illustration of the kind of lifestyle that the upper-middle classes of Oldbury were enjoying, particularly the families of Oldbury's key industrialists, Albright, Wilson and Chance, who were friends of the Cadburys. Phillada Ballard adds to this information through

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[15] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*.
[16] Davidoff, L. and Hall, C., *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 1987).
[17] Ibid., p. 28.
[18] Ibid., p. 74.

her study of the upper-middle classes of Birmingham, giving examples of networking among a number of key families.[19]

Theodore Koditschek (Bradford) and R. J. Morris (Leeds) also take as their subject the élite of two thriving industrial towns.[20] Both give an overview of the changes wrought in an industrial community by a new breed of entrepreneurs. Koditschek, sets out to study the development of an industrial proletariat and bourgeoisie simultaneously.[21] Starting from Bradford's proto-industrial base he charts the way in which a new group of industrial entrepreneurs moved the worsted trade in Bradford into the factory era, pushing aside, as they did so, the early traditional elite. Much of the problems that the élite in Bradford had to deal with during the early years of growth are also found in Oldbury. The deeply divided class lines Koditschek describes in Bradford are not an obvious part of Oldbury's experience, however. Morris sets out to examine the nature and formation of middle class élite in the town of Leeds. Here the financial stability of the town was intertwined with the fortunes of the industrialists in the textile mills, although they did not assume the leadership positions in the élite, this role was taken up by professional people and merchants. He emphasises the way power and influence was exercised through the voluntary organisations in which the élite were involved. This finds a parallel in lives of the élite in Oldbury, who were also members of the voluntary organisations which were involved in town improvement. In Oldbury, however, it was the middle class, rather than the upper class élite who took up these roles.

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[19] Ballard, P. D. 'A Commercial and Industrial Elite: A Study of Birmingham's Upper Middle Class 1780-1914' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 1983).
[20] Koditschek, T., *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990); Morris, R. J., *Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990).
[21] Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850,* p. 21.

The individual histories of family firms provide an overview of the developments which were taking place industrially in a specific locality. The two leading firms in Oldbury, Albright and Wilson and Chance Brothers have both produced a detailed history giving information about their links and involvement with the town and its people.[22] Although these leading industrialists had status and influence beyond the bounds of the town and acted as benefactors within it, it was the men of Trainor's middle middle and lower middle classes who were the primary activists for change and the influence of both these groups is considered in this chapter.

6.2 The Black Country élite

The balance of authority changed over time in the Black Country villages with the Lords of the Manor, landed gentry, landowners and industrialists taking the lead at various stages of its growth. Trainor identifies peers and very large untitled landowners as the highest strata of society or upper classes in the area.[23] Oldbury fitted into the general pattern of the region before the dissolution of the monasteries when the influential group was the Lords of the Manor and the religious houses at Halesowen, Wolverhampton and Sandwell, who owned much of the land. In the case of Oldbury the Abbot of Halesowen Abbey was also Lord of the Manor, owning land across the region and proactively developing its resources for the benefit of the religious community.

With the dissolution of the monasteries, the land was sold to local aristocrats, many of whom also became Lords of the Manor. The possession of land was the basis of their credibility, and the foundation of their status, wealth and continuity, since it was held in trust for the next

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[22] Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*; Chance, *A History of the Firm of Chance Brothers and Co.: Glass and Alkali Manufacturers*.

[23] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900,* p.17.

generation. With the acquisition of land came enormous economic and political power and social prestige; they regarded it as their birth-right to govern and dictate the social norms.[24] From this time forward Oldbury's future was shaped by a disinterested or absent élite and while other Black Country towns prospered, formed and strengthened by their élite, Oldbury took a back seat as a static village community without an identifiable leader. The aristocratic influence in the Black Country was dominated by the Dudleys (Wards) who were established in the area from at least the twelfth century, and the Dartmouths (Legges) who moved into West Bromwich in 1701. Both families held a considerable amount of land from which they drew a substantial part of their income.[25] The Ward family's ancestral home was originally Dudley Castle until damage sustained during the English Civil War (1646) caused them to move to their second home, Himley Hall on the outskirts of Dudley. The Legges' family home was at Sandwell Park in West Bromwich. The two families were very different in the way they utilised their land and their involvement in the industrialisation of the area. The Dartmouths, although dabbling in industry, were primarily lessors and acquired their money from agriculture and renting their land.[26] The Dudleys, on the other hand, were unusual for an aristocratic family in that they became interested in industry from an early date and made their money primarily from the industrial use of their land.[27] By the nineteenth century, the Dudleys had become the largest employers in the district and influenced industrial development through their own involvement and participating in decision- making boards - usually through their agents. The towns with which the peers were involved became the two

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[24] Beckett, J., *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914* (Oxford, 1986), p 5, 43; Newby, H., Bell, C., Rose, D., Saunders, P., *Property, Paternalism and Power: Class and Control in Rural England* (London, 1978), p. 32.
[25] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 87.
[26] Raybould, 'Aristocratic Landowners and the Industrial Revolution: the Black Country Experience c.1760-1840', pp. 79, 81.
[27] Ibid., p. 68.

foremost towns in the area, facilitated to a large extent by the influence and largesse of the individual peer.

For generations, landed gentry had assumed a paternalistic responsibility for the people who dwelt on their land. David Roberts notes that the nobility saw this as an attribute, and part and parcel of their standing in life.[28] The lower classes were the recipients of benevolent acts but were expected to show deference in return.[29] This hegemonic style of management and relationship was carried over into the towns with which the Dudleys and the Dartmouths were involved. Both peers contributed to the setting up of institutions such as schools and libraries, gave a park to the town, opened their grounds to the public for recreational purposes and headed the list of benefactors for popular causes.[30]

Other aristocratic involvement in the Black Country came from titled families who were absentee landlords with interests in the villages and towns on the periphery of the area where they owned property and land (see Table 20). Some of these men played an influential role in the development of the towns to which they were connected, but the majority took little interest in local affairs.

The aristocratic involvement in Halesowen, of which Oldbury was a part, came from the Lyttelton family of Hagley Hall, Worcestershire. It appears to have been a token involvement as far as Oldbury was concerned, however, limited to Lord Lyttelton's function as the impropriator of the parish church and holding the presentation of the living. He did

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[28] Roberts, D., *Paternalism in early Victorian England* (London, 1979), pp. 1 - 5.
[29] Ibid., p. 6.
[30] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900,* p. 318.

occasionally appear in the town to support causes in which he was interested, such as the setting up of Oldbury Working Men's Club in 1866.[31]

The reason for the lack of aristocratic interest in the town can be traced to the dissolution of the monasteries, when the Manor of Halesowen was divided up and Oldbury was sold to the Dudley family in 1539. It was only held by them for a short time, however, as Sir Robert Dudley settled Oldbury on his wife, Amy Robsart, creating it as a separate Manor in 1557. When Amy died, instead of reverting to the Dudleys, the Manor of Oldbury was left to Robsart heirs from whence it descended through the Cornwallis family who had also purchased the Manors of Smethwick and Harborne. The Lord of the Manor lived in Blakeley Grange, the old manor house, until the seventeenth century, when the manor began its descent through the female line, and the grange and its lands were rented out. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the title holders were absentee landlords who lived in Coventry and then in Arbroath, Scotland. Their main contact with the town involved the annual holding of a manor court to deal with the buying, selling and renting of land, and by the middle of the nineteenth century they had disposed of much of their land holdings.[32] For the descent of the Manor, see Appendix 4.

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[31] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Working Men's Club', 8 November 1866, pp. 472- 76.
[32] WAAS, Palfrey Collection, 899:31/3762/2/I, p. 62; Nash, *Collections for the History of Worcestershire, Volume 1*, pp. 510, 520.

Table 20 Aristocratic involvement in the Black Country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [33]

Title	Family name	Ancestral home	Owned property or land in	Lord of the Manor
Lord Dudley	Ward	Himley Hall, Staffs.	Dudley, Sedgley, Kingswinford, Rowley Regis, Himley	Dudley, Sedgley, Kingswinford, Rowley Regis, Himley Hereditary from 1678
Earl of Dartmouth	Legge	Sandwell Park, Staffs.	West Bromwich	West Bromwich after 1819
Earl of Bradford	Bridgeman	Weston Park, Staffs.	Walsall (west and south)	Walsall Hereditary from 1557
Duke of Cleveland	Vane	Raby Castle, Co. Durham	Wolverhampton	Wolverhampton
Lord Hatherton	Littleton	Teddesley Park, Staffs.	Walsall (north and east)	
Marquess of Stafford and Duke of Sutherland	Leveson-Gower	Lilleshall Hall, Staffs. Trentham Hall, Staffs. Dunrobin Castle, Scotland Cliveden, Bucks.	Wolverhampton Rowley Regis Oldbury	Rowley Somery, Stow Heath

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[33] Raybould, 'Aristocratic Landowners and the Industrial Revolution: the Black Country Experience c.1760-1840'.

Land agents were crucial to the roles that the aristocrats played in industrial development. The agents of both the Dartmouths and the Dudleys were well respected and had a high standing in the towns in which they were involved, acting as sub-peers. The agents appointed by the Dartmouths were absent and only visited occasionally while, during the second half of the century, those for the Dudleys kept a substantial house in Dudley. They sat on many of the decision-making boards such as those to set the price of iron and coal, and meetings to support the projected railway line from Birmingham to the Black Country. Due to the estate power, they had great influence in such meetings.[34] They took on the day-to-day running of the estate and were able to make decisions at this level, with any higher or more important decisions being made by the Earl.[35] The Lords of the Manor in Oldbury used stewards in a similar way, but, as with the Earl of Dartmouth, their interest was mainly as lessors, and the steward's work was therefore linked with land sales and organisation for leasing. Many of them were lawyers since they needed to handle the legal affairs of the landowners, in addition to managing the estates. From the middle of the nineteenth century, Thomas Ball Troughton held this position for the Lord of the Manor of Oldbury. Troughton was Clerk to the County Court of Warwickshire, and had an office in Coventry, which was where the Lord of the Manor had resided, and only visited the town from time to time.[36] Edward Caddick, a West Bromwich solicitor, replaced him in 1870. By this date, the Lord of the Manor lived in Scotland and Caddick represented the estate in legal and practical matters.[37] Caddick was very involved in Oldbury as one of the primary solicitors, a situation which was influenced by

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[34] *Morning Chronicle,* 'Railways', Monday 8 September 1845;Trainor, 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier: The Earls of Dartmouth and of Dudley c1810 to 1914', pp. 78, 79; *Morning Chronicle,* 'Railways', Monday 8 September 1845, p. 6.
[35] Trainor, 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier: The Earls of Dartmouth and of Dudley c1810 to 1914', p.79.
[36] *The London Gazette,* 22 July 1856; *The London Gazette,* 'Bankruptcy Act 1861', 28 August 1866, p. 2545.
[37] Daniels, *A History of Oldbury, Langley and Warley* [Online], accessed 32/7/2013.

his standing with the Lord of the Manor, and his name appears on numerous documents and wills of the people of the town.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the most influential people were still the peers and landed gentry but a number of these had begun to invest in their land's mineral resources and became involved in industry themselves, such as the Duke of Sutherland, the Marquess of Anglesey and Lord Hatherton on the Cannock Chase Coalfield.[38] Land, however, was seen as both an investment and a way to increase social status, its acquisition providing the first step in setting oneself up as a gentleman. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, industrialists and individuals were buying land and adopting the way of life of a landowner. Even if they were not able in their lifetime to acquire all the trappings of the gentry they had the hope that their children would be able to do so and sent them to the best schools and universities to acquire appropriate education and culture.[39] The land they owned was not necessarily in the towns in which they had their main businesses, but furnished a lifestyle which put them on the same footing as the landed gentry with whom they would often sit side by side on boards or committees.[40]

Attitudes to land use by peers and industrialists differed, leading to a varying relationship. On the one hand, the peers would support the industrialists when it suited them since it was in their interests to maintain links with neighbouring manufacturers and promote joint interests, and they saw themselves as patrons of local industry.[41] The industrialists also used this relationship to forward their own ideas. Matthew Boulton contacted a number of peers for support when seeking to assure an assay office for Birmingham, established in 1773, and

[38] Raybould, 'Aristocratic Landowners and the Industrial Revolution: the Black Country Experience c.1760-1840'.
[39] Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914*, p. 119.
[40] Ibid., pp. 70, 73.
[41] Jones, C. and Jones, D. L., *Peers, Politics and Power: the House of Lords, 1603-1911* (London, 1986), p.451.

valued the support and advice of both the Earls of Dudley and Dartmouth.[42] Peers could also

be quite forceful in opposing matters that would interfere with their own interests, however.[43]

Changes that would affect their landholdings, such as land enclosure or the building of canals,

therefore required Parliamentary jurisdiction.[44] Britain's Parliamentary system was

concerned with protecting the rights of the landed élites who made up its membership and

would have looked favourably on their views in such a matter. This did not appear to be a

problem in Oldbury as there were no dominating land owners and those who did hold land

appeared to be willing to make a profit from it by leasing or selling it for housing, industrial

use or factory building.

Few of the landholders in Oldbury who were involved in such transactions resided in the

town. A case in point was Rev. Thomas Green of Badby in Northampton who held land in

and around the town centre during the nineteenth century. Thomas's great-great-great-

grandfather, John Green, blacksmith of Birmingham, began to increase his land holding from

1678, by purchasing land in various locations, including prime sites in New Street in

Birmingham. The land was passed down through the family who gained an income from

renting it on 21-year leases.[45] Further land was acquired through a judicious marriage of

Thomas's grandfather to an heiress in 1741 and the resulting acquisition of land and money

elevated the family to a higher level.[46] Thomas's involvement in Oldbury during the

nineteenth century was concentrated on the leasing and selling of land and he made visits to

the town for this purpose.[47] He lived the lifestyle of a landed gentleman as Vicar of Badby

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[42] Ibid., p. 446.
[43] Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914*, p. 229.
[44] Chandler, J. A., *Explaining Local Government. Local Government in Britain since 1800* (Manchester, 2007), p. 4.
[45] BAH, Lee Crowder Collection MS 3375/458605, (6 March 1678).
[46] BAH, Lee Crowder Collection MS 3375/458614, (23 January 1741/2).
[47] CHAS, 5590, New Chapel Committee Minutes 1896 - 1910 (1896).

with his wife and seven servants, among who were listed a butler, a ladies maid, a cook, a coachman and a groom.[48] In this respect, the Greens had joined a rising group of families who, through a number of entrepreneurial moves, coupled with astute marriages and investments, became upwardly mobile. One family which did this on a large scale in the Black Country were the Leveson family who progressed from the merchant classes of the fifteenth century to become members of the landed aristocracy. They went on to play a major part in the industrial development of the area and the political, social and economic life of England as the Leveson-Gowers.[49]

By 1830, the roles and influence of the governing élite were changing. The influence of the peers began to wane as the population grew and more middle-class members came forward to take up a leadership role. The peers were still prominent and influential but, especially in the case of the fourth Earl of Dartmouth, were becoming out of touch with the local inhabitants. As a member of Parliament, he continued to stand for Staffordshire, but did not actively represent the views of local businessmen and industrialists, as did Lord Hatherton in the case of the ironmasters, ensuring that their concerns were heard and accompanying them to a meeting with Sir Robert Peel.[50] The Earl of Dudley maintained his influence through his agent who sat on a number of boards. Dudley's main interest politically was to protect and extend his own interests. He supported the local Tories and sought to dominate them by influencing the choice of candidates, bringing in a London lawyer, John Benbow, to stand for the town in 1844.[51] Although the influence of both peers in town politics and decision-making began to decline, they were both well liked and appreciated for their benevolent

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[48] 1861 (HO RG 9/944) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of Daventry, Badby, pp. 7, 8.
[49] Richards, E., *The Leviathan of Wealth: The Sutherland Fortune in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1973), pp. 3-5.
[50] Trainor, 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier: The Earls of Dartmouth and of Dudley c1810 to 1914', p. 85; *The Spectator,* 'Miscellaneous', 22 July 1843, p. 7.
[51] Trainor, 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier: The Earls of Dartmouth and of Dudley c1810 to 1914', p. 87.

acts.[52] Their changing role, along with the fact that both families found that living in the

polluted atmosphere of the Black Country was not commensurate with their aristocratic

status, probably provided the impetus for a move to another location. In 1846, the Wards

purchased Witley Court, Great Witley, Worcestershire, making it their chief residence and in

1848 the Legges purchased Patshull in Pattingham, Staffordshire on the edge of

Wolverhampton and moved there as their main seat.[53]

The move of the peers from active to absentee landlords opened the way for a number of

members of the rising middle class to take the lead in local government, a situation that

Oldbury did not have to face since the middle class had always taken an effective role in the

life of the town. Towns such as Oldbury lacked the influence and power that came from the

financial and benevolent support of a landed estate and a voice in county affairs that came

with it, a factor that could have contributed to Oldbury taking second place as a major town in

the area to fast-growing West Bromwich. Such connections inevitably had a bearing on a

town's autonomy, however, and Oldbury was free of the constraints that such a relationship

incurred.[54]

6.3 The Oldbury élite

Although the upper-class land holders in Oldbury were keen to make a profit from their land

they gave very little to the town in return. The large industrialists who began to emulate their

lifestyle and did not live in the town took their position as active élites. The three largest

industrialists, Chance, Albright and Wilson, set up their works in Oldbury but lived in

Edgbaston, Birmingham where they climbed the social ladder. In 1881, Arthur Albright lived

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[52] Ibid. p. 107.
[53] Ibid. p. 79.
[54] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900,* p. 12.

in Westbourne Road, near to the Botanical Gardens. He was described as a chemical manufacturer employing 250 persons, and his neighbours were Ralph Heaton, a magistrate, alderman and metal manufacturer employing 300 hands, and Richard Chamberlain, Alderman and Mayor of Birmingham, and retired brass founder.[55] John Wilson and Alexander Chance and their families lived a short distance away (see Figure 34).

The Chance and Albright families concentrated their élite efforts in Birmingham. The Chances were interested in education and sat on school boards and Arthur Albright supported the work of his sister and brother-in-law, Lydia and Edmund Sturge. The Sturges were leading figures in the anti-slavery movement in Birmingham.[56] Following the example of the peers in West Bromwich and Dudley, the Chance family gave a park to Oldbury, built a school for children of their workforce and donated to popular causes, especially those with an Anglican background. Albright and Wilson, who were Quakers, followed their example, donating a park for the benefit of the townspeople. Some of the larger ironmasters reacted in a similar manner. William Bennitt, one of the largest ironmasters in the district and owner of the Oldbury furnaces, lived outside the district in Stourton Hall in Kinver with a large family and several servants. He was involved along with James Timmins Chance, of Chances glassworks and Thomas Cooper, one of the town's medical practitioners, in setting up a volunteer force in Oldbury in 1860, which became the 16th Company, 39th Worcestershire Volunteer Rifles. This was a particular interest of his as he was the Captain of the Dudley troop of the Queen's Own Regiment of Worcestershire Yeomen Cavalry. His son, Pynson Wilmott Bennitt, the owner of a brick works in Oldbury, was the first captain of the Oldbury Company. Unfortunately, William Bennitt went bankrupt in 1866 and moved to Kensington,

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[55] 1881 (RG11/ 2956) Census of England and Wales, Registration District Birmingham, Edgbaston, pp. 52-53.
[56] CHAS, 6009, Oldbury Wesleyan Circuit Register of members (1892); Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*, p. 11.

London, where he lived until his death. His son continued to run the voluntary regiment until

1868, when he too resigned. Such men were typical of upper middle class paternalists in the

Victorian era. They were willing to contribute financially to projects, particularly those that

interested them, but also to be involved in a practical way. Richard Trainor notes that such

local volunteer forces provided recreation for working men in the industrial towns. Led by

members of the middle classes, enlisted men often included workingmen and trades people,

bringing a spirit of camaraderie to groups of men who would not normally have socialised

together.[57] Many of the leading figures were on Christian name terms with their men,

something which was a source of pride to both masters and men.[58]

With the upper-class landholders being detached from the life of the town and the upper

middle classes tending towards a paternalistic involvement, the main influence and input into

the running of the town came from the middle middle and lower middle classes. A number of

these were also land owners but, as Trainor notes, they were of modest means compared with

the richer industrialists and somewhat isolated from higher propertied classes.[59] Trainor

categorises the Black Country middle classes as 'employers in industry and dealing,

professional and commercial men, white collar employees and people with non-landed

"independent" income' (see Table 19).[60] These men can be identified through trade

directories, minutes of meetings, such as those for the Vestry, Nonconformist churches, local

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[57] Trainor, R.H., *Black Country elites, the exercise of authority in an industrialized area 1830 – 1900* (Oxford, 1993), p. 342.
[58] Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*, p. 82.
[59] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 5.
[60] Ibid., p. 17.

boards of health and school boards, lists of ratepayers, and newspaper reports of attendance at events.[61]

These were the men who had always taken the lead in Oldbury and many of them were held in great respect by the townspeople. Grandsons of the early iron founders could be found living on the profits of industry in many of the Black Country towns, whether or not they were actively involved, and held a position at the top of the middle middle classes. Anthony Parker, for example, the great-grandson of Abraham Darby's sister Esther, is recorded as living in Oldbury by his own means. In the list of trustees for the first Methodist church in Oldbury (established 1803) he is recorded as an ironmaster, but by the 1841 census he had retired and lived alone attended by two servants and a groom and was obviously a man of some standing. He usually headed the list of benefactors donating to worthy causes and was among the first to be asked to sit on any board or committee that was established, although he rarely seems to have accepted the invitation.[62]

In addition to the original residents of the area, the early 1800s saw a number of people moving to the district to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the rapidly expanding towns. *Pigot's 1829 Directory* lists a number of professional people who had taken up residence in Oldbury at this date including three vicars/pastors, five surgeons and an attorney.[63] It is not possible to use trade directories alone to gain a picture of this group of élites, however, since many, such as Nonconformist ministers, were not listed.

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[61] Hann, A., 'Industrialisation and the service economy', in: Stobart and Raven (eds), *Towns, regions and industries: urban and industrial change in the Midlands, c.1700-1840* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 52, 55.
[62] 1841 (HO 107/908/7) Census of England and Wales, Registration District of Halesowen, Sub-District Oldbury 2a, p.2.
[63] Pigot, *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory for 1828- 1829.*

Trainor notes that a number of the immigrants who moved into the area during the early years of industrialisation were upwardly mobile and soon became respected ironmasters.[64] An example is the family of Samuel Taylor. Samuel came with his brother Montague from Sheffield in the closing years of the eighteenth century to set up a steel works in the town. The industries set up by such men quickly prospered. Montague died in 1808 when his estate was valued at less than £100. The business was continued by Samuel and Samuel's son, David, who ran it after his father's death in 1849. In addition to running the works, the family also purchased land, houses, shops and a public house, which provided them with an income from another source.[65] David was well respected in the town, with his obituary giving him the title of 'Squire of Oldbury'. He was a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and sat on many of the early boards for church and town improvement and gave a statue to the town which local people named 'Polly on the Fountain'.[66] When the recession in iron began in the early 1860s, David rented out the business and, following the pattern of the higher élites, retired to the countryside. On David's death in 1881, his estate was valued at £17,273.[67] The family was one that functioned within its own class. His children married local people and his closest friends were business people of a similar status, and this appears to have been typical of Black Country middle middle and lower middle classes. This differed from the experience of industrialists of a similar class who were setting up businesses in nearby Birmingham where links with trade led to greater opportunities. David's cousin Joseph Gillott, for example, moved from Sheffield to Birmingham in the 1820s where he became a

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[64] Ibid., p. 32.
[65] SGA Parish Records, Wills, Land Documents.
[66] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Unveiling a fountain at Oldbury', Thursday 3 August 1882, p.5.
[67] SGA information from the will of David Taylor, proved in Lichfield, 13 July 1882.

large pen manufacturer with the lifestyle of a member of the upper classes and a recorded personalty of a quarter of a million pounds.[68]

In the same way that an aristocratic family would take responsibility for their local town or village, so the dynasties of the middle-class Black Country élite adopted a familial responsibility for their particular town, with children following in their father's footsteps. This did not only apply to the upper-middleclass élite. David followed Samuel into his trade, his church membership and also his position on local boards, and many other families pursued a similar line. They displayed concern for and commitment to the welfare and prosperity of the town and its people. Many were generous with their finances and time as is revealed by the lists of contributors to the different causes and minutes of meetings. Members of the Marsh family, for example, sat on the Vestry, the Highway Committee, the Board of Health and a number of Wesleyan committees dealing with the chapel and the school and were listed as contributors in numerous money-raising appeals. The majority of the élite had church connections, predominantly Nonconformist, and therefore came from a tradition of active involvement with those less fortunate than themselves.[69] Names that would be synonymous with making a difference for the town in years to come made their first appearance at the beginning of the century, with many belonging to the newly erected Wesleyan Chapel. A list of the trustees indicates the kind of men who were stepping forward to take leadership roles (see Table 21).

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[68] SGA; *Joseph Gillott Pen Maker* [Online]
http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~thegrove/gillott.html, (Accessed: 12/11/2013).
[69] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900,* p. 133.

Table 21 Trustees of the first Methodist Church in Oldbury (1802).[70]

Name	Profession	From	Living in
Montague Taylor	Steel manufacturer	Sheffield	Oldbury
Edward Fisher			
Samuel Nicklin	Tanner	Oldbury	Oldbury
Edward Whitehouse	Scythe maker		Brades, Oldbury
Samuel Taylor	Steel manufacturer	Sheffield	Brades, Oldbury
William Orton	Scythe maker		Brades, Oldbury
William Parkes	Boat owner	West Bromwich	Brades, Oldbury
Alexander Gordon Dudley	Liquor Merchant	Dudley	Brades, Oldbury
Thomas Millington	Yeoman	Oldbury	Brades, Oldbury
Thomas Webster	Steel Hardener		Brades, Oldbury
Joseph Beck	Steel cutter		Brades, Oldbury
Oliver Johnson	Farmer		Brades, Oldbury
John Nicklin	Wesleyan Minister	Redditch	
Anthony Parker	Ironmaster		Rowley Regis
Samuel Nicklin the younger			Rowley Regis
Samuel Richards	Roller	Oldbury	Oldbury
William Partridge	Maltster	Oldbury	Oldbury
Samuel Marsh	Builder	Oldbury	Oldbury
Thomas Mason	Glazier	Oldbury	Oldbury
Joseph Round	Bricklayer	Oldbury	Oldbury
Thomas Wakeman	Cooper	Oldbury	Oldbury
Alfred Taylor	Victualler		Rounds Green Oldbury
William Houghton	Steel converter		Rounds Green Oldbury

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[70] CHAS, 6003, Oldbury Circuit, Abstract of Deeds and Documents (1891), p. 3.

Within the list were many who were businessmen and manufacturers in their own right, such as the Taylor brothers, Anthony Parker and Samuel Marsh who became important figures in Oldbury. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the majority of such leaders were members of the lower middle classes, according to Trainor's methods of identification. They progressed to middle middle class as their businesses took off and they became more affluent. The list of trustees also contains the names of working-class men such as Joseph Beck, a steel cutter and Samuel Richards, a roller. While this was not unusual in Nonconformist churches where all men were seen as having equal worth and master and worker could both be found holding offices side by side in the church, trustees would normally have been men of the middle classes with the finances to support the position. It is illustrative of the way that men from different walks of life were stepping forward to be involved in management in the early nineteenth century, with those with a lower income also wishing to take on responsibility.

The other group of people who were interested in playing a part in the government of the town, at first through the vestry meetings, and later though the various boards and committees, were the owners of the town's shops and small business. The retail base grew dramatically between 1826 and 1861. At first, local people supplied basic services, but by 1861 a number of people had moved in to supply the specialist outlets normally found in the bigger towns, such as a furniture broker, confectioner, hosier and tobacconist.[71] This was happening in all the small industrial villages of the Black Country as the urban nature of the region began to expand economically and demographically (see Figure 56).

Figure 56

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[71] Pigot, *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory for 1828- 1829*; Robson, *Robson's Birmingham and Sheffield Directory*, pp. 578 – 79; Cornish, *William Cornish's Birmingham: Trades, Corporation and General Directory*, pp. 857 – 60.
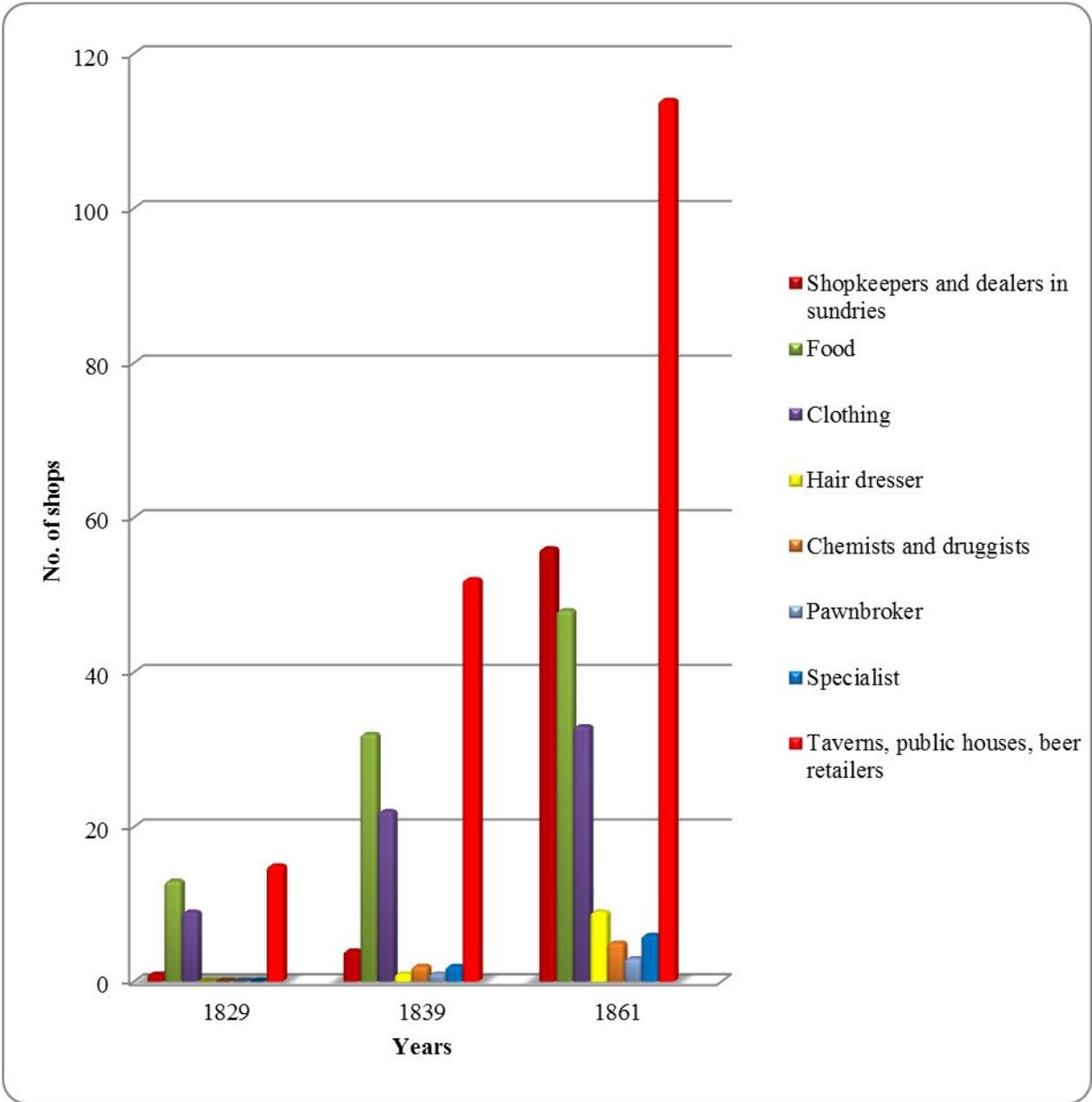
Figure 56 Oldbury's retail base (1829-1861)[72]

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[72] Ibid.

6.4 Areas of élite involvement

6.4.1 Committee membership

In keeping with Trainor's findings for the Black Country as a whole, the élite of Oldbury were a socially diverse group. They did not include members of the aristocracy and landed classes who brought wealth and standing to the towns, but they did contain businessmen of the upper middle class who had resources and a growing prestige. The middle middle-class members from the ranks of small employers and shopkeepers made up the largest group. These were closer to the workforce and were the people who got things done. They were joined by a smaller group from the lower middle classes and working men.[73]

The membership of the Board of Health in Oldbury is illustrative of this mix. Although the large industrialists used their power and influence to add weight to the application for a board to be formed, by putting their names at the head of the list and sending one of their managers to represent them when the inspector arrived, they did not take an active part in setting up the Board of Health or sitting on it. The membership was almost entirely made up of people from the middle middle classes with the majority coming from the smaller industrialists and professional groups. This did not change over the nineteenth century as sons of early town élites followed their fathers into leadership roles: David Taylor, son of Samuel Taylor, steel manufacturers, Benjamin Sadler, son of James Sadler, brick makers, and Samuel Marsh, draper, son of Samuel Marsh, builder, for example. As was the experience of the upper classes, middle-class sons shared a similar background and education to each other and their families had standing with the local population. They were joined by members of the professional classes, doctors, lawyers and religious leaders, who increased in number as the

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[73] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900,* p. 359.

town expanded. Members of this group usually took the position of chairperson in any of the meetings they attended. This was a role that the clergy would be expected to take and was probably offered to them at the beginning of the meeting. In rural society, they traditionally held a high-status position, next to that of the landowner and often became landowners themselves through endowments gifted to provide for their livelihood. Many members of the clergy also sat on the bench as magistrates, something which did not endear them to the local people.[74] This group were relatively affluent, and their lifestyle, accommodation and dress set them apart from the lower middle and working classes. During the early half of the century, they lived side-by-side in some of the more prosperous areas of Oldbury: Church Street and Birmingham Street. David Taylor always lived outside the town, in a house rented from the Rev. Green on Bury Hill, Rounds Green, and a number of the principal inhabitants moved to the more substantial housing in The Square around the church as soon as it was built (see Figure 57).

Even so, they were never far from the lower classes with whom they had close relationships as employer, medical practitioner or clergyman. A typical feature of the Black Country élite was the number of shop keepers, dealers and publicans who were also included in the ranks.[75] Trainor notes that there was no sharp difference between the individual members of the group; they were all superior to the working classes.[76]

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[74] Chandler, *Explaining Local Government. Local Government in Britain since 1800*, p. 8.
[75] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, pp. 62, 95.
[76] Ibid., pp. 74, 361.

Figure 57 Square of middle-class housing around the Parish Church in Oldbury [77]

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[77] Photographs taken by the author;

Becoming a member of the Vestry, one of the other church committees and later the Board of Health was the primary way a person entered the town élite. As there was no aristocratic membership, Oldbury élites tended to be less well-off, but this did not hold people back from seeking to take part. Only ratepayers could become members of the Vestry or Board of Health and they were elected by a ratepayer vote. Both organisations had subgroups to deal with various issues, which gave the opportunity for a number of people to be involved. There were also a small number of paid posts.[78] Oliver Johnson was appointed to the position of Surveyor of the Highways in Oldbury, for example, with his salary coming from the rates. Johnson became a key figure in town administration simultaneously holding the posts of Surveyor of Highways, Clerk to the Burial Board and Assistant Overseer of the Poor as well as being a provisions dealer.[79] J. A. Chandler makes the point that many of these posts were assigned to the less affluent members of the community and this is borne out by Oliver Johnson's will, proved in 1874.[80] It contained effects of under £300, indicating that he was not among the wealthy in the town. He sat on many of the local boards, however, and had the respect of the townspeople, his name appearing as a witness on numerous wills and deeds. This emphasises the fact that wealth alone did not make an élite in industrial towns such as Oldbury; involvement and willingness to serve were equally important.

Not all of those invited to be part of a committee actually took up the offer. Two people who were usually top of any compiled list were Anthony Parker and David Taylor. Both men were willing to put their names to petitions, and to give to charitable causes, but appeared reluctant to accept the invitation to be part of a committee. This is understandable as some of the committees were time-consuming. Minutes of meetings show that they were taking place on

[78] Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914*;ibid., p. 27.
[79] Information taken from Board Minutes, Census Records, Reports of Meetings.
[80] Chandler, *Explaining Local Government. Local Government in Britain since 1800*, p. 12; Oliver Johnson's will was proved at Worcester 8 July 1874.

a weekly basis, and as the same group of people were invited to sit on a number of different committees, this could amount to several meetings a week.

6.4.2 Power and authority

Power and authority in the town devolved from the top down with responsibility for law and order initially resting with the aristocracy who took the position of magistrates and Justices of the Peace (JPs). Over time, a number of manufacturers joined their ranks including James Timmins Chance of Chance's glassworks, John Edward Wilson of Albright and Wilson, and William Bennitt who held a number of offices including JP, Magistrate and Deputy Lieutenant for Worcestershire.[81] JPs had wide jurisdiction and powers and were involved in both administration at county level and the affairs of individual parishes. This included: approving parish accounts, adjudicating appeals from residents against decisions made by the parish, such as their eligibility to pay the rates or poor relief, calling out the militia in cases of civil disorder, instructing constables in their duty and overseeing the running of prisons and workhouses in their area.[82] During the period from 1835 to 1860, the number of magistrates increased in the Black Country. Their role as the primary law enforcement authority was crucial.[83] From 1807, Oldbury had a Court House where a Court of Requests was held once a fortnight with a debtor's prison attached.[84] This became the County Court in 1846. The names of many of the local industrialists appear in the role of magistrate, which would have brought them into contact with a wide range of local people.[85] Reports of Court proceedings produced in 1826 indicate that it was busy with 4,548 debtors appearing during the course of

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[81] Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*, p. 48.
[82] Newby, *Property, Paternalism and Power: Class and Control in Rural England*, p. 223.
[83] Philips, *Crime and Authority in Victorian England : The Black Country 1835 - 1860.*
[84] Pigot, *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory for 1828- 1829*, p. 874.
[85] 1807 An Act for the More Easy and Speedy Recovery of Small Debts within the Parishes of Hales Owen, Rowley Regis, Harborne, West Bromwich, Tipton, and the Manor of Bradley, in the Counties of Worcester, Salop, and Stafford. [25th April 1807.]

the year for debts of between £1 and £5, from Oldbury and nearby locations.[86] During the

1850s, the élite of West Bromwich, which was rapidly developing into a major town in the

Black Country, attempted to have the County Court transferred to their town. The people of

Oldbury responded by collecting signatures and sending a petition to London to request that

the Court remain in Oldbury. This was granted and it remained in Oldbury until 1888 when

West Bromwich, which had by then attained borough status, finally managed to acquire the

court.[87]

Members of the upper-class Black Country élite were involved in politics. The first and

second Earls of Dartmouth, for example, were commissioner and president of the Board of

Trade respectively, and the third Earl stood for Parliament for Staffordshire.[88] The larger

industrialists followed this example although John William Wilson, son of John Edward

Wilson of Albright and Wilson, was the only person connected with Oldbury to successfully

stand for Parliament as the Liberal Unionist candidate for North Worcestershire in 1894. This

was at the end of the period under investigation and it has not been possible to gauge the

influence this had on the town.[89] Oldbury was staunchly Liberal and gave Conservative

candidates a hostile welcome.[90] J. W. Willis Bund, Conservative candidate for Worcester

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[86] 1830 (16) Courts of Request. (Suits or Claims.) an Abstract Return of the Number of Suits or Claims Entered in Each of the Courts of Request for the Recovery of Debts Under £5, in England and Wales, and in the Several Courts in Ireland, in Each of the Years 1826 and 1827 (II.) pp. 20, 21.

[87] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 115; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Proposed Removal of Oldbury County Court', Friday 13 July 1888.

[88] *Oxford DNB*: Handley, S., Marshall, P., Rigg, J M., Skedd, S J., Legge, William, First Earl of Dartmouth (1672–1750) Politician, Legge, William, Second Earl of Dartmouth (1731 – 1801) Politician, Legge, George, Third Earl of Dartmouth (1755 – 1810), Politician [Online] http://www.oxforddnb.com/search/quick/?quicksearch=quicksearch&docPos=1&searchTarget=people&simpleName=earl+of+dartmouth&search=GO (Accessed: 5/8/2012).

[89] Williams, W. R., *The Parliamentary History of the County of Worcester: Including the City of Worcester, and the Boroughs of Bewdley, Droitwich, Dudley, Evesham, Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Pershore, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, 1213-1897, with Biographical and Genealogical Notices of the Members* (Hereford, 1897), p. 74.

[90] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Uproarious Meeting in Oldbury', Saturday 3 April 1880, p 8; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Division', Thursday 3 December 1885;*Worcestershire Chronicle,* 'Election Notes', Saturday 7 November 1885, p. 5.

East sought, in 1885, to appeal to the concerns of the local population, promising that in issues such as wages in the iron trade and changes to the poor law he would stand up for what was just for both masters and men. Such proposals were not what many working men wanted to hear and on one occasion a riot ensued and he had to continue the discourse in a private room to a select few.[91]

6.4.3 Town government

The government of the town was initially shared between different groups: County magistrates, the Lord of the Manor though the Court Leet and Baron, the Vestry, surveyors of highways, and constables. The Lord of the Manor was not obliged to attend in person and his bailiff would often represent him and implement his authority in matters such as breaches of the peace, trade offences and nuisances, and issues surrounding land management and transfer, and tenant disputes.[92] *Pigot's Directory* of 1829 records that the Oldbury Court Leet and Baron was held once a year under the Lord of the Manor.[93] The day-to-day running of the village was dealt with by the chief officers, the constables, churchwardens, and overseers. No one group controlled the running of the village and the opportunity to be part of one of the groups was open to all the male inhabitants. Public meetings were called to discuss local issues, giving everyone a voice.

The nature of government changed over the second half of the nineteenth century as the élites moved from reactive problem-solving to deliberate planning, especially concerning the amenities of the town. Koditschek's description of the environmental disaster that was

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[91] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Uproarious Meeting in Oldbury', Saturday 3 April 1880, p.8; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Division', Thursday 3 December 1885, p.5.
[92] Herber, M. D., *Ancestral Trails, The Compete Guide to British Genealogy and Family History* (Gloucestershire, 2000), p. 501.
[93] Pigot, *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory for 1828- 1829*, p. 874.

happening in Bradford could equally have applied to Oldbury.[94] The housing situation was not ideal, although described in the health report of 1856 as being 'better than in some places' and there were a number of back-to-backs and courts. The streets needed paving and lighting and the town needed sewers and a supply of clean water. Such improvements required an administrative structure, information and finance, something which the town did not have, and it became evident that a new system of central government was needed to implement change. This was a situation that industrial towns across the country were facing. Stephen Yeo notes in regard to Reading that there was 'a sense of before and after in relation to the great change between early and mid to late nineteenth century', a situation which equally described towns in the Black Country.[95] Many towns applied for bills to appoint improvement commissioners with the authority to make necessary changes to their towns, and Oldbury followed the same path in 1853. The list of the Commissioners' responsibilities outlined in the application was immense for such a small group of élite with few resources (see Appendix 5).[96]

The possession of the bill gave the town the authority it needed, however, and one of the first acts of the newly elected committee was to apply to the General Board of Health in London for an inspector to come and look at the situation.[97] The list of townspeople who headed this application comprised a cross section of the town's élite including those who resided both in and outside the town.

With the coming of the Local Board everything was under the jurisdiction of one body with an elected committee drawn from the ratepayers of the town. If a member of the community

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[94] Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850,* pp. 106-7.
[95] Yeo, S., *Religion and voluntary organisations in crisis* (London, 1976), p. 37.
[96] *Berrows Worcester Journal,* 'Oldbury Improvement', Saturday 12 November 1853, p. 1.
[97] *Worcestershire Chronicle, 'Improvement of Oldbury', Wednesday 25 January 1854,* p. 6.

wished to bring a problem or suggestion then it had to be done officially by formal representation at the meeting. A number of subcommittees were formed, such as the Burial Board, Finance Committee and Public Works Committee which each concentrated on one area of town improvement. A number of statutes and laws had been produced which gave the Board the power and authority it needed to make necessary changes. One of the first acts they applied, in 1857, was the Highway Act, to try to clear up the main area of town where market stalls were erected illegally. Its implementation on this occasion created 'a great deal of dissatisfaction' leading to a number of meetings of the inhabitants and a deputation being sent to the commissioners to request that the order be rescinded. Backed by the Act, the Board of Health was able to stand its ground and insist on the Act's application, stating that they would try to find a place for a market hall in the town. The problem was solved by the landlord of the Waggon and Horses in Church Street who offered to erect a market hall on land at the back of his public house.[98] This 'dissatisfaction' would rear its head time and again as the new Board tried to implement change.

The majority of the members of the middle-class élite were men of modest means and they were faced with a group of ratepayers across the region who did not feel that the whole burden of town improvement should fall on them. The rateable value of Oldbury was low and many of the ratepayers intended to keep it that way. A newspaper article examining the state of the Black Country in 1866 found Oldbury 'the worst and most inexcusably dirty of all the towns' with Eel Street in particular being described as 'nestling in its own filth'. It placed the blame on the 'tyranny and obstructiveness of small householders' in the form of the Oldbury Ratepayers Protection Society. The report describes the way in which the members of the Board of Health and their proposals were ridiculed at a meeting of the Society, presumably in

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[98] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury. The Erection of a Market Hall', Wednesday 9 December 1857, p. 4.

order to suppress their activities.[99] Élites across the Black Country had to contend with such

'ratepayer politics' throughout the century.[100] A lack of resources imposed financial

limitations on the élite who were also faced with a number of practical and legal obstacles in

promoting public health.

One of the biggest of these for the Black Country, and one which divided its élite, was the

problem of industrial pollution. Boards of Health and Town Commissioners wished to

enforce the law but were often dissuaded from doing so by the industrialists who threatened

loss of jobs. West Bromwich Commissioners gave in to the industrialists' pressure and

agreed to an exemption for the town from smoke consumption clauses.[101] The same outcome

was experienced in other towns, even though they sought to bring perpetrators to court, since

magistrates often held back from making a prosecution that meant closure of a works. In

Bilston on Monday 23rd March 1868, for example, a colliery proprietor was brought before

the magistrate for creating a smoke nuisance. The magistrate stated that although it was

desirable to rid the district of polluting smoke, it was 'ridiculous to suppose that legislation

could be enforced to the stoppage of trade'. [102] Oldbury Board of Health tried to negotiate

with the industrialists in order to resolve the problem and although there were disagreements

between the élite on the Board and the industrialists these do not seem to have destroyed their

working relationships. Much time was spent in Board of Health meetings discussing how

they should proceed. They tried to balance the pressure from residents to act and the promise

from the industrialists that they would do something about the situation. The outcome of such

discussions was often conciliatory rather than threatening, and they would usually approach

the industrialist in a mild manner. In this instan,ce they decided to request a date by which

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[99] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Sanitary Conditions of the Black Country', Monday 16 July 1866, p. 7.
[100] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 258.
[101] Ibid., p. 253.
[102] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Echoes from the Black Country', Monday 23 March 1868, p. 6.

the work would be done.[103] In reality, they did not carry out many of the substantial changes, such as providing a sewerage system, until the 1875 Public Health Act forced them to do so.[104]

The number of expectations placed on the small group of men who bore the brunt of responsibility was immense, ranging from the high standards set by inspectors and government officials to the much lower expectations of the inhabitants of the town.[105] When the Board of Health attempted to make the changes that the government was urging they often found themselves facing a number of different factions with differing agendas. Local people complained about pollution and newspaper journalists cited the town as one of the dirtiest in the country, but when they attempted to take action they were opposed by industrialists and local people. The industrialists were more focussed on profit than public health and local people resisted clean-up operations which would have prevented them keeping pigs in the court yards, or putting up the rates in order to finance an improvement scheme.[106]

6.4.4 Organisations

Many of the problems the town faced tended to draw the classes of the élite together towards a common aim. This was especially necessary when faced with some of the major crises which arose during the course of the century: riots, strikes, the effects of movements such as Chartism and the results of slumps in employment. The early reaction to being faced with mobs of disgruntled people, as in the case of the miners' riots in 1831, was to take authority

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[103] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury, the Board of Health and Messrs Chances Chemical Works', Monday 21 December 1857, p. 3.
[104] 1875 (55) Public Health. A Bill for Consolidating and Amending the Acts Relating to Public Health in England p. 66, clause 184.
[105] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900,* pp. 272, 273.
[106] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Board of Health Meeting', Saturday 8 September 1866, p. 4.

by reading the Riot Act and calling out the troops.[107] As the century progressed, however, such conflicts were channelled towards regional conciliation boards and those connected with the separate trades, freeing the individual towns from the problem.[108] During periods of unemployment and need the élites would often work together to supply food and other necessary items. The middle middle classes would usually be involved in the organisation and distribution of food or clothing while the upper middle classes contributed finance to fund the relief.[109]

While such schemes were instigated by the town's middle classes, the higher élite were supportive, providing finance or adding weight to a project by attending and speaking at key meetings, but they rarely sat on the boards which implemented the work. In 1858, for example, the Rev. H. B. Bowlby, Vicar of Christ Church, Oldbury, set up a Penny Bank savings scheme which proved popular and had reached a membership of 84 people who had saved around £50. He now wished to put this bank on a more formal footing and advertise the benefits to others in the town. A meeting was called to discuss it where Edward Chance was asked to take the chair and other important members of the élite were invited, a number of whom spoke on the value of thrift. This led to the setting up of a management committee drawn from 'all classes, work and denominations' who worked together to formulate the rules of the bank, which, at that point, was the only one in the town.[110]

Many members of the higher élite were active in areas which personally interested them, which for members of the Chance family was education. As well as setting up a school for children of their workforce and those of other local firms, and a night school in Oldbury, they

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[107] *Westmorland Gazette,* 'Riots in the Collieries', Saturday 17 December 1831, p. 4.
[108] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 368.
[109] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Distress Among the Unemployed', Thursday 16 December 1886, p. 4.
[110] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury, A Penny Bank', Monday 18 October 1858, p. 4.

were active across the district. James Chance sat on a number of boards including that of the

Free Grammar School, Birmingham, and the South Staffordshire Educational Association.

Such links kept him well informed on current issues; knowledge which he could transfer to

the education concerns in Oldbury.[111] In a similar way, medical practitioners and religious

leaders had links with national organisations, attending meetings and sitting on committees.

Rev. H. B. Bowlby, for example, who went on to become Bishop of Birmingham, was typical

of the town's religious leaders who were active in a number of Christian associations. At a

regional and national level, he was president of the Peace Society and the Midland

Temperance League.[112] Such networks ensured that national information was passed to

boards and organisations in the town, and national organisations were informed of the specific

problems industrial towns were encountering. Such contacts also lessened the isolation felt

by many of the industrial élite.

Not all contacts between élites in the region and those in the Black Country were as

harmonious, and Trainor notes that, although the individual Black Country towns had

autonomy in dealing with matters related to their town, intervention from powerful

neighbouring élites or those in large businesses could raise constraints.[113] This influence was

not as powerful in its outworking as that experienced by Salford in relation to Manchester,

however.[114] Members of Salford élite expressed the view that they were treated like children

by the élite of nearby Manchester who overrode much of what they were trying to achieve and

stifled initiatives.[115] Black Country towns were occasionally treated in a similar way by the

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[111] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Free Grammar School', Thursday 12 July 1866, p. 5; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'South Staffordshire Educational Association', Monday 11 December 1865, p. 6.
[112] *Birmingham Post* 'The Late Bishop Bowlby', 3 August 1894, p. 5.
[113] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 12.
[114] Ibid., p. 379.
[115] Garrard, J. A., 'The History of Local Political Power - Some Suggestions for Analysis', *Political Studies,* 1977, 25**,** 252–269, p. 264.

authorities in nearby Birmingham, but this was more likely to lead to a reaction rather than submission. The attacks on Black Country local boards by Joseph Chamberlain, Mayor of Birmingham, during a dispute over Birmingham's application to Parliament to take over the South Staffordshire Gas company, for example, had a unifying rather than divisive effect. The individual Black Country town boards responded by holding emergency meetings which led to a joint petition being sent to Parliament, resulting in the throwing out of the bill.[116]

Over the course of the century, the paternalism of the upper élites was replaced by philanthropic acts which enabled the people to help themselves. Élites were involved with the outworking of the poor law and sat on regional boards which were trying to find a solution to the problems which arose in the latter half of the century when a number of trades were experiencing slumps, and there was an immense amount of poverty being experienced through unemployment.[117]

The work of the boards and the involvement of the upper élite were supported by a number of voluntary organisations which were engaged in different areas of provision. In education, for example, different groups worked together to ensure that the supply of places for children was adequate, so that they could hold off the necessity to form a school board for the district and keep control in their own hands.[118] Activities such as this crossed the voluntary/municipal line, as Trainor notes in relation to organising civic processions and controlling the local 'wakes'.[119] Working side by side and jointly, the different groups provided social, educational and leisure activities and, by the end of the nineteenth century, Oldbury had

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[116] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Corporation and the Gas Companies, Failure of the Bill', Saturday 25 April 1874, p. 5; Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900,* p. 264.
[117] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p, 5.
[118] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury: School Accomodation', Monday 15 December 1884, p.8.
[119] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p.126.

similar organisations to the other Black Country towns. These included mechanics and technical institutes, workingmen's clubs, temperance societies and sports and cultural facilities.[120]

6.4.5 Civic growth and pride

Over the course of the nineteenth century the élite of Oldbury were able to move from problem-solving to civic progress and see many of their early optimistic aims become a reality. In 1879, at the turning of the first turf prior to the construction of a sewage plant for the town, the then chairman, BT Sadler, referred to his late father James Sadler for whom, he said, this had been a dream he had fought long and hard for, and which he would have loved to have seen coming into being.[121]

These civic amenities were not so difficult to effect; the much needed cemetery was funded through a loan of £4000 from the Public Loan Commissioners in London.[122] In line with other Black Country towns, many of the amenities were developed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century (see Table 22).[123]

In 1878/9, the Board of Health took out further government loans amounting to £32,000 to improve the sanitary situation in the town and which had to be repaid from the taxes over a 20-50 year period, depending on the individual loan. Loans were also applied for to bring gas to the town, build a fire station and a free library in the 1880s and public offices in 1890. In total, around £43,000 was borrowed from government sources (see Table 22 Civic amenities in Oldbury and other Black Country and nearby important towns (1857-1899)).

[120] Ibid., p.128.
[121] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The Sewerage Question at Oldbury', Monday 20th January 1879, p. 5.
[122] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury. Meeting of the Burial Board', Thursday 10 December 1857, p. 4.
[123] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 276.

Table 22 Civic amenities in Oldbury and other Black Country and nearby important towns (1857-1899)[124]

	Oldbury	West Bromwich	Dudley	Bilston	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Birmingham
Market Hall	1857	1874	1850	1892			1879
Cemetery	1857	1859	1899	1855		1857	
Town Hall	1869	1875	Used Mechanics Institute	1872	1877		1879
Isolation Hospital	Pre 1874						
Gas Works	1880						
Parks	1884	1878	Castle grounds	1895	1870s		
Fire Station	1887						
Free Library	1890	1870	1883	1870	1868	1857	1860
Public Offices	1890						
Sewage Works	1895						
Technical School	1899	1882	1883	1896	1884-5	1888	

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[124] Information for Oldbury obtained from: Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*; McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Local Board', Monday 13 April 1874. Other information taken from Table 6.9 in Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 277.

Although the loans contributed a major part of the cost of such buildings, there was usually a shortfall which was raised by public subscription. The involvement of upper-class philanthropists was an important feature of such civic progress as small towns such as Oldbury would not have had the resources to complete such large projects from their own means. Both Chance Brothers and Albright and Wilson, for example, gave £800 each towards the fund for the free library and John Homer Chance presented the town with a Horse Ambulance in 1897. Such philanthropic activity also provided the town with a number of educational and social institutions aimed at improving the lives of the people, and land for building and other purposes such as parks and cemeteries.[125]

The position of the philanthropic élite was reinforced by the status they were given at public events where they usually took pride of place. Trainor notes that this recognition at ceremonial level was as important to the town as the largesse which they distributed. It cemented the relationship between the town, the élite and their families.[126] This is illustrated by members of the Chance family who, in 1854, attended a concert in aid of the Mechanics Institute as honoured guests, and brought a large party of family and friends with them from Birmingham.[127] Philanthropic actions were one of the main ways in which middle-class women became involved, sitting on committees, working with charitable groups and supporting events where they could use their domestic experience. These ranged from high-focus fund-raising events which were attended by upper-class and higher middle-class women to the smaller fund raising events organised by different groups in the town, which often took the form of a bazaar or tea party.

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[125] McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*, pp. 7- 9.
[126] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 147.
[127] *Worcestershire Chronicle,* 'Oldbury Mechanics Institute', Wednesday 19 April 1854.

Trainor lists a number of motivations for individuals to serve including 'religious duty, civic pride, anxiety about local economy, desire for social betterment and stability, and interest in the welfare of their firm or occupational group'.[128] All of these are evident in newspaper and other reports about Oldbury during the nineteenth century, for different members of the élite. What is commendable is the long-standing commitment of a number of men to the town, their determination to work through discouragements, and the tremendous pride they had in their achievements. By the final decade of the century, the majority of the Black Country towns had moved on to become urban district councils, and Oldbury along with Warley Wigorn and Warley Salop was constituted an urban district council in 1894, with Langley appointed as a ward of the district. Rev. McKean, the highly respected minister of the Unitarian Chapel was selected to be the first Chairman, and William Shakespeare, a local solicitor, was nominated as the Clerk to the authority.[129] This testifies to the success of élite involvement over the course of a century.

6.5 Conclusion

Initially the Black Country, as in towns and villages across the Britain, was governed by the aristocratic and landed élite. This changed over the course of the nineteenth century as the landed aristocracy began to take a back seat and a diverse mixture of professional and industrial individuals stepped forward to take their place. The upper middle classes, supported by active middle middle-class élite, made up of small industrialists, professional men and retailers, assumed the leadership of the town. Although Oldbury possessed a diverse governing élite, members differed in their makeup and activities. Lacking both aristocratic influence and the input of the landed classes the men who stepped into leadership roles in the

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[128] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*, p. 103.
[129] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'The District Council Elections in the Black Country', Tuesday 23 October 1894, p.7.

town were mainly from the middle middle classes. The upper middle classes assumed a supportive role. They emulated the peers in provision of amenities and finance and were willing to give time and backing to middle middle-class ventures, but did not take an authoritative position in the town. Without the constrictions of upper class or upper middle class control the middle middle classes of Oldbury found themselves with a difficult problem on their hands. They had free reign in the area of town planning, but with no direction from an upper middle class the town was run by a series of boards and committees. This led to problems as far as realising their plans, and left them at the mercy of groups like the rate-payers' organisation who dictated what could and could not be done over much of the century. Addressing problems and effecting change was, therefore, a long drawn-out process. Relationships between the groups of the élite appear to have been of a positive nature. Middle middle classes came up with the ideas, usually influenced by their professional class members. The medical practitioners, clergy and solicitors would suggest schemes that needed to be adopted and seek to push them through to a successful, although long drawn-out conclusion. The upper middle classes gave support, when asked, by supplying finance or attending meetings as important guests and speakers to add weight to the proposals under consideration.

The group was able to influence social change in Oldbury over the course of the century. At first, it seemed as if the problems they faced would overwhelm them, with a rapid growth in population coupled with a dearth of social provision. Essential improvements to housing, amenities, and the introduction of culture-specific institutions were not achieved until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Education was one success story with large numbers of children and adults attending school and evening classes, heightening the expectation of important life outcomes as far as literacy and job prospects were concerned. In this, they

were supported by members of the upper middle classes who had a specific interest in education. By the close of the century, the town had many of the public facilities found in some of the larger towns, such as reading rooms and libraries. It is questionable, however, to what extent these were being accessed by members of the working class and little seems to have been achieved as far as breaking down cross-class barriers between the middle and the working classes.

CHAPTER 7: THE DEVELOPING STRENGTH OF NONCONFORMITY

The élites in Oldbury played a part in managing the politics and social policy of the town.

However, the culture of the town was shaped substantially by voluntary organisations,

especially the Nonconformist churches. The situation in Oldbury is typical of many industrial

towns in this respect. The Nonconformist presence was large and well established. In 1843,

in response to an investigation by the Midland Mining Committee, the vicar of Oldbury stated

that nineteen out of every twenty people in the town were Nonconformists.[1] Although this

was probably an overestimation, the high number of Nonconformist chapels and churches in

such a small town bore witness to the fact that most church members were Nonconformist.

The aim of this chapter is to look at the place of Nonconformity in the rise of the industrial

town, its role within it and its effects on the different classes and groups in society by asking

the following questions: Oldbury's experience of Nonconformity began in the seventeenth

century. To what extent did this early experience influence the acceptance and growth of

Nonconformity in Oldbury in the nineteenth-century? Stephen Hughes, in his study of early

industrial developments in the metal-working towns around Swansea, identified church

buildings as expressions of religious identity.[2] To what extent could it be said that the

Nonconformist chapels in Oldbury provided an identity for the working classes and

strengthened their place in the community? Historians have recognised the way in which

Nonconformist churches trained working men and encouraged them to take up positions of

responsibility in the church.[3] Is there evidence that the training received in the Nonconformist

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[1] 1843 Parliamentary Papers: 1843, Vol. xiii (508), Midland Mining Commission, First Report, South Staffordshire.
[2] Hughes, *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea*, p.284.
[3] Gilbert, A. D., *Religion and society in industrial England : church, chapel and social change, 1740-1914* (London, 1976), p. 85; McLeod, H., *Secularisation in Western Europe 1848-1914* (Basingstoke, New York, 2000) , Hempton, D., *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900* (London, 1996), p. 166.

churches in Oldbury enable men to also take up a leadership position in the workplace or town, and if so, in what way? This will be examined under the headings of Early Nonconformity, Nineteenth-century expansion, Social action and Wider influence of Nonconformity

7.1 Historiography and sources

In the 1960 Ford Lectures, Dr Kitson Clark argued that although the claims of religion occupied a large part in the nation's life, this was not reflected in the way that history was currently being researched. He urged that the role of religion should be considered in its nineteenth-century context and should include the neglected study of Nonconformity.[4] This was an important reflection, especially in relation to the study of religion in the developing industrial areas where Nonconformity often took a leading role. A number of studies followed, looking at the foundations of the 'new' and established denominations and their involvement in national and local social, political and economic life. Among the first historians to look at the organisational response of the Church of England to social and political change were Owen Chadwick and Kenneth Thompson, with Chadwick also examining the Anglican involvement in the industrial town.[5] The Industrial Revolution gave rise to a number of problems following the inundation by large numbers of people into ill-prepared parishes and, as Chadwick indicated, the established church had to adjust. Many of the Church of England records of the time indicate that Nonconformity either did not exist or was a force to be resisted and Chadwick reflects this by putting the Church of England centre stage in his research. Thompson takes this a step further, looking at the effects of

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[4] Kitson Clark, G. S. R., *The Making of Victorian England: Being the Ford Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford* (London, 1970), pp. 20, 23.
[5] Chadwick, O., *The Victorian Church Part 1, 1829/1859* (London, 1971); Thompson, K., *Bureaucracy and Church Reform: The Organizational Response of the Church of England to Social Change, 1800-1965* (Oxford, 1970).

urbanisation and industrialisation and the response of the Church of England to the social change which was taking place. These works provide an overview of the position of the Anglican Church in England at a time when a great deal of attention was being given to the number of seats available in the Anglican Church per head of the population. As will be discussed later, the position of the established church in Oldbury appears to have been a weak one in a number of respects.

The study of Nonconformity has taken a number of forms. John Wilkinson gave a general overview of the history of Nonconformity from the Act of Uniformity in 1662, while others concentrated on Nonconformity in a specific area: E.T. Davies (South Wales), S.J.D. Green (Yorkshire) and Hugh McLeod (London), for example.[6] All three writers examined the social structure of Nonconformity during the eighteenth century, although Green only dealt with the last thirty years. Davies argued that it is not possible to divorce the religious life of the people from the society to which they belong, and traced these relationships in the churches in South Wales over time.[7] He found that one of the greatest strengths of Nonconformity in Wales was its working-class character. There was a distinct division between the established Church, attended by landowners, large farmers and professional men, and the chapel, which was attended by the labouring population, who were mainly Welsh speaking.[8] This division was so marked that it was 'presumed that to be Welsh was naturally to be Nonconformist' during much of the nineteenth century.[9] He attributed this division to the fact that the Anglican church never fully engaged in Welsh culture.[10] Green also undertook a social history of

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[6] Wilkinson, J. T., *1662 - and After: Three Centuries of English Nonconformity* (London, 1962); Davies, E. T., *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff, 1965); McLeod, H., *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London, 1974); Green, S. J. D., *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-192* (Cambridge, 1996).
[7] Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, p. 12.
[8] Ibid., p. 17.
[9] Ibid., p 30.
[10] Ibid., pp. 137- 38.

religion in the three towns of Halifax, Keighley and Denholme, in the West Riding of Yorkshire from 1870 to 1920.[11] Whereas Davies focused on the differences between the Nonconformist chapels and the Anglican Church in Wales, Green detailed the endeavours of the different denominations in Yorkshire as they sought to reach out and provide activities for the local population. He noted the predominance of voluntary provision by the churches, especially in relation to education and the Sunday School movement, an experience also shared by the churches in Oldbury.[12] Green found that the middle classes dominated the religious scene in South Yorkshire in relation to church membership, attendance and affiliation, where religious commitment reflected the divergent social priorities of the different classes.[13] McLeod also approached his study of religion and society in industrial England by looking at three different locations, this time in London. Each of the districts chosen is predominately populated by a specific class of people: Bethnal Green (working class), Lewisham (middle class), and the West End (upper class).[14] He found that the segregation of the classes into districts extended into religious activities, where each group experienced differences in church attendance and Christian pursuits. A religious census, taken between 1902 and 1903, confirmed the association between Anglican church attendance and wealth, on the one hand, and Nonconformity and modest prosperity, on the other.[15] This mirrored the experience of the churches in South Wales, but on a much larger scale, and contrasted with those in Yorkshire and the Black Country where different classes of society met within each congregation. McLeod also provided an interesting insight into the way in

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[11] Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-192*0, pp. 1, 21.
[12] Ibid., pp. 21-2, 215.
[13] Ibid., p.13.
[14] McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, pp. 102, 170, 200.
[15] Ibid., p.26.

which the Nonconformist churches became involved with social provision within the different class groups.

Of particular relevance to this thesis is the work of A.D. Gilbert who considered religion and society in industrial England.[16] Gilbert stated that his primary object was to 'explore the links between religious and social changes' during the period from 1740 – 1914. He used statistical evidence from a number of sources including denominational and visitation records to provide the quantitative data to support his findings. He identified the breakdown of traditional community in the large towns and cities, and the ability of the Methodists to exploit these situations, rather than attempting to change or override them, and concluded that 'denominational religion was a midwife of the new urbanised industrial society, not an offspring'.[17]

From the late twentieth century social historians, such as E.P. Thompson, began to consider religion alongside other life experiences, values and identities of the different classes within the population. Thompson concentrated on the English working class where his aim was to give the working class a voice and 'rescue them from the condescension of posterity'.[18] He drew this out through a discussion of working-class traditions, experiences of home, work, leisure and community life. He charted the reaction of the working class, to the situations in which they found themselves, as one of protest and demonstration. Thompson identified Methodism as the primary influence, as far as working-class religion was concerned. He approached the topic in a somewhat hostile manner, using the title of 'the chiliasm of despair' for the chapter's section heading.[19] He generalised about Methodism's psychic exploitation

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[16] Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914.*
[17] Ibid.. pp. 114. 207.
[18] Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1991), p. 12.
[19] Ibid.. p. 411.

and its sexual significance. Even the words of the hymns were said to hold sexual

innuendoes.[20] As subsequent analysis reveals, the experience of Methodism in Oldbury does

not bear out Thompson's findings. Paul Thompson, in *Voices from Within,* also sets out to

add the voices of the people to the historic text, but, on this occasion, by interviewing those

born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[21] Thompson wrote at a time when oral

history was at the periphery of academic research and the possibility of using the memories of

people to add to the text was new. By asking questions, which contemporaries did not think

worth recording, a new dimension of real experiences was added to the documental

evidence.[22] The responses to the questions asked by Thompson, throws a new light on

experiences that were being described by the people of Oldbury.

The upsurge in interest in the social history of religion, has led to a number of interpretations,

many of which became traditionally accepted as part of the nineteenth-century experience. It

was suggested, by writers such as Davies, Green and McLeod, that secularisation began

during the latter part of the nineteenth century when the government began to take over many

of the roles formerly associated with the Church. This, it was believed, led to the consequent

decline of religion, class conflict and the irreligion of the working classes. McLeod, in

particular, has written extensively on these subjects and includes examples from the Black

Country in his work.[23] A further theory which has attracted much interest is Harold Perkin's

identification of religion as the midwife of class in England during the industrial era. The

training they received in the church system enabled the working classes to obtain

'emancipation from the dependency system, to provide a model of class organisation and to

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[20] Ibid.. pp. 405 – 9, 411.
[21] Thompson, P., 'Voices from Within', in: Dyos (ed) *The Victorian City, Images and Realities* (London, 1973), pp. 59 – 82.
[22] Ibid., p. 60.
[23] McLeod, H., *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1984), p. 196; McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe 1848-1914* .

influence class conflict in the direction of non-violence'.[24] Towards the end of the twentieth

century, a number of these theories were being questioned as historical research gained a

wider focus. Callum Brown and Mike Snape, for example, agreed that secularisation was in

fact a twentieth-century experience.[25]

From the last quarter of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century, studies focusing

on the religious experience of individual towns began to appear. Stephen Yeo wrote about the

background of voluntary organisations in Reading, Mark Smith investigated the topic of

religion and the industrial society in Oldham and Saddleworth, and Geoff Robson brought the

subject nearer to home through his research into religion and irreligion in the Black

Country.[26] Robson is one of a number of historians who used the evidence from the 1851

religious census to consider the religious state of different towns; in this case a comparison of

the experiences of the Black Country and Birmingham, to try to ascertain why the results for

two places, so near in location, were vastly different.[27] The Methodist movement has been

identified by a number of writers as the major Nonconformist group in many towns and a

history of its involvement in the life of the people was studied by Robert Wearmouth and

David Hempton.[28] Wearmouth gave a general overview of the influence of Methodism with

particular reference to the towns in the north of the country while Hempton wrote from an

insider's knowledge of what experience and expressions of faith entail. This provides an

alternative to the Marxist premise of E.P. Thompson who searches for non-religious reasons

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[24] Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*, p. 196.
[25] Brown, C. G. and Snape, M. F. (eds) *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh McLeod* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 9-10.
[26] Yeo, S., *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London, 1976); Smith, M., *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth, 1740-1865* (Oxford, 1994); Robson, *Dark Satanic Mills?: Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country*.
[27] Robson, *Dark Satanic Mills?: Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country*.
[28] Wearmouth, R. F., *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850* (London, 1937); Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*.

for the actions of Christians due to his own convictions about the irrationality of Christian belief.[29]

Church buildings and the way in which they add to our understanding of the place of religion in the lives of the people are often omitted from a study of religion and its influence. Those who do address the topic tend to be archaeologists or architectural historians, and three texts in particular have been used to provide a background to this area of research: *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea* by Stephen Hughes, which examined the developments in the metal-working towns around Swansea; Susan Strachan's unpublished doctoral thesis 'Religious Observance in the South West Woollen Industry'; and Ken Powell's *The Fall of Zion: Northern Chapel Architecture and Its Future*.[30] All of these studies research industrial regions, and provide a valuable point of comparison. Both Strachan and Hughes saw the building of chapels, their form, architecture and spatial visibility as expressions of religious identity. They were overt symbols of the community's security and belonging, the seat of many of their customs and traditions and played an important role in the life of the community.[31] Powell identified the more fluid organisation of the Nonconformists who were less bound by formal parochial frameworks and characterised Nonconformist architecture as the architecture of the people.[32]

The review of literature points to a number of commonly recognised features in the life of industrial areas: the way in which the class a person belonged to influenced the church they

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[29] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, p. 5.

[30] Hughes, *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea*;Strachan, S. C. 'Congregation and Community: Religious Observance and Identity in the South West Woollen Industry, c.1760 to 1860' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2008); Powell, K., *The Fall of Zion: Northern Chapel Architecture and Its Future* (London, 1980).

[31] Strachan 'Congregation and Community: Religious Observance and Identity in the South West Woollen Industry, c.1760 to 1860', pp. 305 - 6; Hughes, *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea*, p. 284.

[32] Powell, *The Fall of Zion: Northern Chapel Architecture and Its Future*, pp. 15, 44.

attended, the voluntary organisations which reached out to the working classes, the churches

which provided education and social aid, and the questions surrounding the extent of church

attendance. These topics are investigated in relation to Oldbury through research using

relevant primary documents. Church, chapel and school minute and record books give not

only the factual information about the people involved, decisions and outcomes, but also the

aims and plans of the groups, their use of available resources, the problems encountered and

their successes and failures. Unfortunately, only a limited number of records survive and

there are therefore large gaps in the information. This can often be filled by newspaper

articles which report on many of the events in the industrial town. As far as religious

activities are concerned, the reports consistently describe these in a positive light.

Parliamentary archives provide practical information about building permits and costs,

funding applications and charities for the whole country, which gives a possibility of

comparing what was happening in Oldbury with other towns. The original returns of the 1851

religious census give a snapshot in time of the churches in a town and this will be discussed

more fully in relation to the results they record for Oldbury.

7:2 Early Nonconformity

In 1851, at the time of the religious census there were twelve Nonconformist and two

Anglican churches in the town of Oldbury and its vicinity (see Table 28). At the end of the

eighteenth century, there had been two churches in the town, one Anglican and one Unitarian.

There is little evidence that this explosion met with opposition. What was there in Oldbury's

early experience of Nonconformity that made the people so willing to embrace this growth?

Oldbury's first religious building, the Episcopalian chapel of St Nicholas, a chapel of ease,

was built in 1529 a few years before the dissolution of Halesowen Abbey to prevent the

inhabitants having to undertake the four-mile journey to their parish church of St John's in Halesowen and this was still in use at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It would be expected, therefore, that the Anglican Church would have had a strong presence in the town, but this appears not to have been the case. The chapel was built at the expense of the local people on land donated by a local landowner for the purpose and was licensed, but apparently not consecrated. These two factors may have been the reason for its history of possession by different groups: Catholic (1529), Anglican (1538), Fifth Monarchy Men (1667), Presbyterians (circa 1672) and Anglican (1705).[33]

As is indicated by so many changes of possession of the chapel, the history of religion in Oldbury was not straightforward. At the time of the Act of Uniformity, in 1662, Rev. William Turton, the vicar of nearby Rowley Regis, left his church and moved to Birmingham, becoming the first pastor of the New Meeting House in the town. He kept strong links with the area, however, and provided preachers from the New Meeting House for the Nonconformist pulpit at Oldbury, where his family worshipped, preaching there himself on a number of occasions.[34] Nonconformist meetings were outlawed in 1664 when the Conventicle Act was introduced to forbid the meeting of more than five people who were not members of the same household for unauthorised worship, and the Five Mile Act of 1665

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[33] Page, W. and Willis-Bund, J. W., *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester Volume 2* (London, 1906), p. 75; WAAS, 1/1/109/115, Michaelmas: Copy of Letter of Wm Cardale (1667); Page and Willis-Bund, *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester Volume 2*, p. 81; Nash, *Collections for the History of Worcestershire, Volume 1*, p. 522.

[34] *Revolutionary Players: The Riots at Birmingham* [Online] http://www.search.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk/, (Accessed: 9/09/2012); Scott, J., Kendrick, J, *Protestant Nonconformity, &C. Two Discourses, Delivered September 10, 1817, at the Annual Double Lecture, at Oldbury the Former by James Scott, and the Latter by John Kenrick, M.A* (Birmingham, 1817), p. 17.

forbidding Nonconformist ministers from teaching in schools and from going within five miles of incorporated towns or the place of their former livings.[35]

That Oldbury paid no heed to the regulation about conventicles is evident from a meeting in the Chapel in 1667 when the speaker was a member of the Fifth Monarchy Men, an extreme and violent Puritan sect that was prominent in Britain from 1649 to 1661.[36] Although the leaders had been hanged in 1661, the sect continued for a number of years in the areas outside London, as is evident from a report of a meeting in Oldbury.[37] The report stated that, in September 1667, the troop of horse stationed in Stourbridge was sent to Oldbury to keep order, as a crowd of around 2,000 had gathered around the chapel to hear the Fifth Monarchy Man speak.[38]

Whether the chapel was actually in the hands of the Fifth Monarchy Men or some other Nonconformist group at this time is not clear, but the report is interesting for a number of reasons. The estimated crowd of 2,000 would have been a conjecture on the part of the writer of the report, but it does suggest that an extremely large number of people had gathered in a small and seemingly insignificant village. The event took place a few years after the Act of Uniformity (1662) when Nonconformity was outlawed nationally. The openness and interest on the part of people in the area in attending such a meeting could well be indicative of their willingness to accept the teaching of such groups, paving the way for the high level of Nonconformity that would characterise the region in the nineteenth century. The ensuing riot

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[35] Mackenzie, E., *Protestant Dissenting Chapels* [Online] (1827), http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43361#n1, (Accessed: 25/09/2012)10/09/2012.
[36] Solt, L. F., 'The Fifth Monarchy Men: Politics and the Millennium', *Church History,* 1961, **30**, 314-324, pp. 314, 318.
[37] Burrage, C., 'The Fifth Monarchy Insurrections', *The English Historical Review,* 1910, **25**, 722-747, pp. 745, 746.
[38] WAAS, 1/1/109/115.

in response to bringing in the troops was an early indication of a reaction that would be typical for the area when popular feeling was aroused.

Meetings continued to be held in direct opposition to the Conventicle Act and, in 1684, troops were again stationed in the district to suppress the meeting at the direct order of King Charles II. The King had heard report of a dangerous conventicle continuing to be kept at Oldbury which was attracting several hundred people. The King wanted the meeting stopped and its leaders arrested.[39] Concern at the activities of the people in Oldbury could well have been the reason why the Anglican Church began to send curates to the village in 1663.[40]

Not all the meetings that followed the great ejection of ministers were of such a confrontational nature. The family of William Turton inaugurated a Double Lecture in Oldbury to commemorate the event. The lecture took place annually and was attended by Nonconformist ministers and their congregations from as far away as Coventry, Kingswood near Birmingham, Evesham, Bromsgrove and Kidderminster, as well as the local Black Country towns.[41] The meeting was an ecumenical one and ministers agreed to set aside their individual doctrines and preach only the 'truths' that were common to all, a course which was followed until 1782 when the two Priestley brothers, Timothy and Joseph were each invited to give a lecture, even though they were from different religious persuasions. While Timothy was happy to abide by the rules, Joseph was not. Fearing that the meetings were turning into

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[39] TNA, Calendar of State Papers: Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles II (1938).
[40] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 57.
[41] Scott, *Protestant Nonconformity, &C. Two Discourses, Delivered September 10, 1817, at the Annual Double Lecture, at Oldbury the Former by James Scott, and the Latter by John Kenrick, M.A*, pp. 17, 21. The ejection took place on St Bartholomew's Day, 24 August 1662, but the exact starting date for the event is not known. A second claim for a basis for the lectures was ascribed to the Turton family inaugurating it in 1688 as a vote of gratitude for their safety after part of their house fell in. The former claim bears more weight, however, as the event took place on the anniversary of the ejection.

debates, the Unitarians took control of the proceedings and, in future, chose leaders of their own persuasion.[42]

An impression of the size of Nonconformity in the Black Country during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, in comparison to Anglicanism, is given in the returns of the Compton Census, an ecclesiastical census taken in 1676 and named after Henry Compton, the Bishop of London who was given the task of compiling the information. The census was intended to provide details of the number of Conformists, Papists and Nonconformists in England and Wales.[43] The incumbents of the different parishes made records and the responses for the various Black Country villages are given in Table 23.

The village of Handsworth and the town of Walsall lie on the edge of the Black Country and have been included as they add to the wider picture of the numbers of Catholics and Nonconformists that were in the area at this date. Although Oldbury, Cradley and Romsley were chapelries of Halesowen they do not appear to have been included in the figures for the town. Halesowen recorded only seven dissenters, yet by this date the chapel of ease at Oldbury had been in the hands of dissenters for at least nine years, and appears from reports to have been a magnet of Nonconformity in the Black Country. In 1672, when the Act of Declaration of Indulgence granted some religious freedom to Nonconformists, a Presbyterian Church in Oldbury was one of twenty-four buildings which were licensed in Worcestershire, a further indication of a number of Nonconformists living in the town.[44]

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[42] Carpenter, B., *Oldbury Truth or The Conduct of the Ministers at the Brades* (Birmingham, 1782); Matthews, A., *Congregational Churches of Staffordshire* (London, 1924), pp. 145- 48.
[43] Whiteman, A*., et al.*, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition* (London, 1986), p. 432.
[44] Page and Willis-Bund, *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester Volume 2*, p. 81.

Table 23 Local returns in the Compton Census (1676)[45]

Place	Conformists	Papists	Nonconformists	Notes
Cradley				Chapelry of Halesowen
Darlaston	293		7	
Dudley	380	6	45	Conformists believed to be males over 16 only
Halesowen	554	3	4	
Handsworth	500	101	1	
Oldbury				Chapelry of Halesowen
Rowley Regis	420			384 absent but not obstinate refusers
Sedgley	945	55	200	
Walsall	1360	40	200	
Wednesbury	854	1	45	
West Bromwich	621	2	15	

The earliest Nonconformist chapel in the Black Country is said to have been the Messiah or Cinder Bank Baptist Chapel, Netherton whose baptism records date from 1654.[46] There are records of Dutch and other continental Anabaptist refugees in the area during the early seventeenth century, which would explain the establishment of the chapel.[47] Other early churches in the region are listed in Table 24. It is evident that Oldbury fitted well into the early Nonconformist pattern of the area.

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[45] Information taken from Whiteman, Clapinson and British Academy., *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition* . The villages of Smethwick and Tipton were not recorded as they were under the peculiar jurisdictions of either the Bishop or Dean of Lichfield. In a similar way the villages of Bilston, Willenhall, Wednesfield and the town of Wolverhampton were not included as they came under the category of 'Royal Peculiars'.

[46] Scott, *Protestant Nonconformity, &C. Two Discourses, Delivered September 10, 1817, at the Annual Double Lecture, at Oldbury the Former by James Scott, and the Latter by John Kenrick, M.A*, p. 35; *Worcester Branch of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry* [Online] http://www.worcesterbmsgh.co.uk/parish/netherton-st-andrew-(nr-dudley), (Accessed: 3/3/2012).

[47] *Ebenezer Baptist Chapel* [Online] (2008), http://www.ebenezeroldhill.org.uk/history.html (Accessed: 3/3/2012).

Table 24 Black Country and surrounding district: Early Nonconformist churches (1654 – 1717) [48]

Name of chapel	Start date
Netherton	1654
Oldbury	*1667**
Gornal, near Dudley	1684
Bromsgrove	1693
Stourbridge	1698
Wolverhampton	1701
Cradley	1704
Coseley	1717

*(author's estimated date)[49]

Oldbury chapel (see Figure 58) was recorded as being in the hands of the Nonconformists until the time of Queen Anne's bounty when it was taken back into Anglican possession at or around the year 1705.[50] The Presbyterians, who were in possession of the chapel at the time, continued their meetings in a family home, which was licensed as a place of worship until they were able to establish their own chapel on land given for the purpose in 1708. During the Sacheverell Riots in 1715, this chapel had become a Unitarian Meeting House and continued to have strong links with the Birmingham Old Meeting House, which supplied its pulpit. Along with a number of Nonconformist churches in the district, it was targeted by the Tory Mob which, after setting fire to the Old Meeting House in Birmingham, proceeded to destroy the chapel at West Bromwich and then moved on to Oldbury, setting fire to the Meeting House while the minister was preaching. The Meeting House was rebuilt and the

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[48] Note: these are all the chapels located to date (08/11/2014), and do not necessarily form a definitive list. Scott, *Protestant Nonconformity, &C. Two Discourses, Delivered September 10, 1817, at the Annual Double Lecture, at Oldbury the Former by James Scott, and the Latter by John Kenrick, M.A*, p. 17; McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*.

[49] This is the date that the chapel was recorded as being in the hands of the Fifth Monarchy Men.

[50] Page and Willis-Bund (eds) *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester, Volume 3* p. 150.

period of Nonconformity remained unbroken.   At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a

Nonconformist chapel existed alongside the Anglican chapel of ease.[51]

Figure 58 Oldbury Chapel, near Halesowen (c 1800)[52]

The fact that the chapel of St Nicholas was in Nonconformist hands for so long is not

surprising. The Church of England was set up as a monopolistic organisation, dependent on

the state but weakened financially by the depredation of clerical livings during the Tudor

era.[53] Impropriation had transferred the tithes which normally provided a living for the

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[51] Sharpe, E., *Pictures of Unitarian Churches with Explanatory Remarks* (London, 1901), p. 85.
[52] Williams, R., *Oldbury Chapel Near Halesowen* [Online] (c1800),
http://www.search.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk/engine/resource/default.asp?txtKeywords=oldbury&lstContext=
&lstResourceType=&lstExhibitionType=&chkPurchaseVisible=&txtDateFrom=&txtDateTo=&originator=%2F
engine%2Fsearch%2Fdefault_hndlr%2Easp&page=&records=&direction=&pointer=3459&text=0&resource=27
35, (Accessed: 4/12/2011).
[53] Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*, p. 4.

incumbent into the hands of laymen, a factor which led to absenteeism in a number of locations so that many of the church buildings became neglected and fell into disrepair.[54] Ecclesiastically, Oldbury fitted this pattern and was considered to be a poor parish, a fact reflected in the receipt of funding from the Bounty of Queen Anne, which used the tax from Church of England clergy incomes for the 'Augmentation of the Maintenance of Poor Clergy'.[55] A gift of £200 was given five times between the years 1716 and 1793 to support a curate to work in the village.[56] The fact that the village had a Nonconformist chapel of long standing could also have been the reason for the lack of local funding and support. Nonconformity was strong in Oldbury in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

7.3 Nineteenth-century expansion

Oldbury mirrored the experience of industrial towns across the country at the beginning of the nineteenth century when it experienced a vast escalation in the number of people migrating to the town (see Table 25 and Table 26). The scale of the migration demanded an organisational response from the Anglican Church which was responsible for the religious, social and administrative structure of the village at this time.[57] Mark Smith describes an Anglican Church in Oldham and Saddleworth that was striving to reach the people and meet their needs, being 'quick to detect the arrival of new conditions', but this situation appears to be

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[54] Ibid., p. 5.
[55] *Queen Anne's Bounty* [Online] (2011), http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchcommissioners/history.aspx, (Accessed: 3/12/2011).
[56] Hodgson, C., *An Account of the Augmentation of small livings, by The Governors of the Bounty of Queen Anne for the Augmentation of the Maintenance of the poor Clergy, and of benefactions by Corporate bodies and individuals to the end of the year 1825. Also the Charters, ... by which the proceedings of the Governors are regulated; to which are prefixed practical instructions ... on various subjects relating to Queen Anne's Bounty* (1826), p. 422.
[57] Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform: The Organizational Response of the Church of England to Social Change, 1800-1965*, pp. 1, 31.

unusual as the parochial systems in the industrial Midlands had the opposite experience. [58]

They were described as being 'ill equipped to cope with increased pastoral responsibilities',

and the Anglican Church in Oldbury is a case in point.[59] Anglican churches in Black Country

towns such as Dudley and West Bromwich had strong links with the landed gentry which fed

into town government, whereas the Anglican Church in Oldbury had struggled during the

eighteenth century to try to regain the footing lost in the seventeenth century, and to exert its

position in the face of a deep-rooted Nonconformist presence. It did not have the support of a

wealthy landowner and the tithes which would normally have sustained the curate were

removed in the sixteenth century. By 1807, its chapel of ease was described as being in a

'very ruinous condition', a factor which led to the nationwide circulation of a Royal Letter

Patent for Oldbury Chapel, authorising a brief to try to raise £2311 4s 0d to rebuild it. The

letter describes the inhabitants as being:

> unable to raise the sum amongst themselves, being for the most Part tenants at Rack
> Rent, working Mechanics, and labourers in Husbandry, and heavily burthened with
> the Poor, and therefore incapable of undertaking so Great a Work without the
> Charitable Assistance of well-disposed Christians.[60]

Without a church building, the Anglicans were in no position to support and care for the large

numbers arriving in the town. In 1800, the population was estimated at around 4,000 and

even when the building was in use it could only seat around 250 people.[61]

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[58] McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 17; Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth, 1740-1865*, p. 33.
[59] Gilbert, *Religion and society in industrial England : church, chapel and social change, 1740-1914*, p. 111.
[60] SALS, D\P\pux/2/9/1, Letters Patent of George III (16 February 1807), Somerset Records Office, Archive no D\P\pux/2/9/1.
[61] Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*, p. 109.

Table 25 Population of Oldbury from the Census returns (1811-1851)[62]

Census years	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851
Halesowen and 11 villages in the Shropshire part of its parish which included Oldbury	**6,888**	**8,187**	**9,765**	**13,124**	**17,452**
Halesowen town				**2,056**	**2,412**
Oldbury	*4,000* [63]		*5,000* [64]	6,572	10,155

Table 26 Population totals for the villages in Halesowen Parish (1841)[65]

Location	Population
Halesowen	**2,056**
Cakemore	357
Hasbury	919
Hawn	110
Hill	936
Huntington	158
Illey	94
Langley	802
Lapal	351
Oldbury	**6,572**
Romsley	413
Warley-Salop	356

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[62] 1843 Abstract of the Answers and Returns Made Pursuant to Acts ... "For Taking an Account of the Population of Great Britain ..." 1841; 1852 Census of Great Britain, 1851;1862 Census of England and Wales, 1861.

[63] Estimation made in document requesting finance for building a new chapel: SALS, D\P\pux/2/9/1, Somerset Records Office, Archive no D\P\pux/2/9/1.

[64] No government records have been found which record the population of Oldbury at this date since it was included in the figures of Halesowen. The figure is taken from Robson, *Dark Satanic Mills?: Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country*, p. 253.

[65] 1843 Abstract of the Answers and Returns Made Pursuant to Acts ... "For Taking an Account of the Population of Great Britain ..." 1841.

The letter does not seem to have resulted in the desired response, as in 1826, His Majesty's Commissioners approved a grant to aid the building of a new church.[66] Even though the grant was approved it was not until 1841 that the new church was actually built.[67] Provision for the curate was also dealt with through an Act of Parliament in 1834 ordering the sale of land in Oldbury for the 'perpetual Augmentation of the Curacy'.[68] It is evident therefore that, for the early years of the nineteenth century, due to lack of resources, the Anglican Church in Oldbury was severely hampered in its ability to respond to the problems that the town was facing.

It was at this difficult point in the history of the Anglican Church in Oldbury that a number of new Nonconformist groups began to arrive in the town. With a mandate to live out their beliefs by serving their fellow men, they quickly began to respond to the many needs around them. Gilbert describes Nonconformity as being at its most influential in emerging industrial towns since their forms of church government allowed decision making to take place at a local level, by the church elders or diaconate, rather than waiting for approval by a national governing body. This made them better equipped than the Anglican Church to respond quickly to developing situations, and enabled them to take over many of the roles formerly associated with the Anglican Church.[69]

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[66] 1826 Sixth Annual Report of His Majesty's Commissioners Appointed by Virtue of an Act of Parliament, Passed in the Fifty-Eighth Year of the Reign of His Late Majesty King George the Third, C. 45; Intituled "an Act for Building and Promoting the Building of Additional Churches in Populous Parishes", p. 5.

[67] In 1840, Oldbury appeared in a list of churches under construction: 1840 (640) New Churches. The Twentieth Annual Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for Building New Churches, p. 6.

[68] 25th July 1834 (Private Acts 1815-1834: A Collection of the Private Acts Passed in the Fourth and Fifth Year of the Reign of His Majesty King William the Fourth, being the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Volume No. 1 (26 June 1833 to 25 June 1834)) An Act to Authorize the Sale of Lands Settled for the Perpetual Augmentation of the Curacy of Oldbury in the County of Salop

[69] Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*, p. 21.

On their arrival in Oldbury, the Methodist's first act was to start a Sunday School for children of the poor, which opened in 1799. This was followed by the building of a chapel in New Meeting Street in 1800 with seats for 668 people.[70] The key benefactors were the industrialists who were setting up industrial concerns in the village and who had the finances which the Anglican Church was struggling to find. In the original trust deeds for the first Wesleyan Chapel dated 31 March 1802, it was stated that the expenses of the building were shared jointly and equally between 23 named trustees and amounted to £300 (see Table 21).[71]

In 1805, on the day of the Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School Anniversary, it was announced that 180 children had received instruction, including 80 who had been taught to write, commendable at a time when the teaching of writing on a Sunday was frequently frowned upon.[72] The only other school at this time in Oldbury was the Free School, with places for 40 children and opened around 1780, with links with the Unitarian Meeting House whose ministers fulfilled the role of school-master from 1789 to 1864.[73] The other Nonconformist group to build a church in the early years of the nineteenth century was the Particular Baptists, who set up a small church in the form of a vestry in Canal Street in 1816 to cater for 100 people.[74] Following the population explosion identified by the 1841 census, Oldbury saw a rapid increase in the number of churches being built. Of the churches built in the wider Oldbury district between the years 1700 and 1900, 74% were Nonconformist (see

Table **27**).

[70] Keyworth, C. W., 'The Black Country Circuit. The Story of Oldbury Methodism ', *The Methodist Recorder,* 1904**,** 9 - 10, p. 9; 1851 (HO 129.381) Census of Religious Worship, H0 129.381.2.3.7.
[71] CHAS, 6003, p. 3.
[72] BCLM, BCS 41, Hymns to be Sung at the Methodist Chapel, Oldbury (1805).
[73] McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*, p. 53.
[74] 1851 (HO 129.381) Census of Religious Worship.

Table 27 Chapels and churches newly constructed in the Oldbury district before 1900[75]

Time period	Number of chapels or churches constructed					
Pre 1760	Anglican	Nonconformist				
1760 - 1800	Nonconformist					
1801 - 1810	Nonconformist					
1811 - 1820	Nonconformist					
1821 - 1830						
1831 - 1840	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Nonconformist		
1841 - 1850	Anglican	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Nonconformist
1851 - 1860	Anglican	Nonconformist				
1861 - 1870	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Nonconformist		
1871 - 1880	Nonconformist	Nonconformist				
1881 - 1890	Anglican	Nonconformist				
1891 - 1900	Anglican	Anglican	Nonconformist	Nonconformist	Anglican	Anglican

■ Nonconformist   ■ Anglican

In Oldbury, Methodist Churches formed the highest group of Nonconformist churches, (see Figure 59); themselves divided into Wesleyan (8), New Connexion (4) and Primitive (4) Methodists.

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[75] Includes Langley and the Brades. Information taken from archives, maps and the Census of Religious Worship. Each square counts for one building. These are new builds, but rebuilding was also taking place across the area during this period.
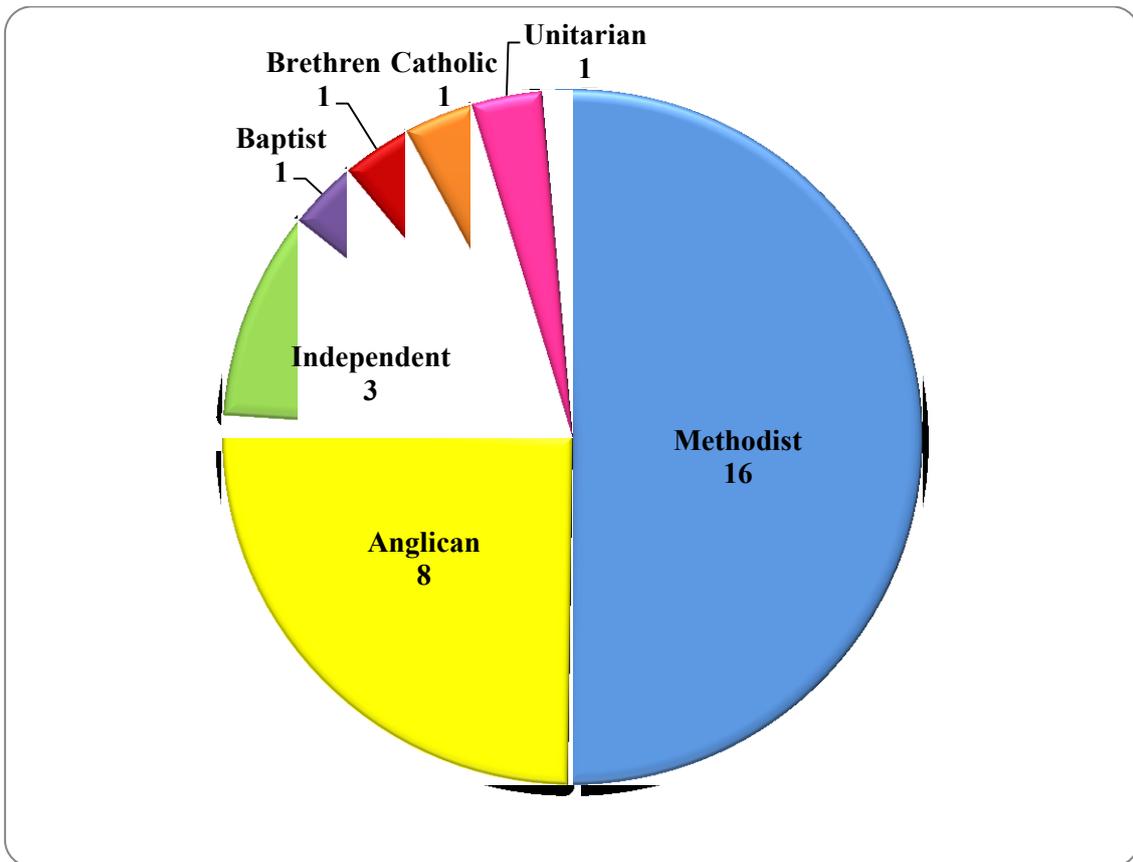
Figure 59 Churches in Oldbury according to denomination (1700-1900)[76]

Over half the chapels and churches (12) were located in central Oldbury (see Figure 60), with six more being located in Langley. These two areas also had the earliest chapels, the Chapel of St Nicholas (est.1529) and the Unitarian chapel (1708), both in Oldbury, and the Independent Chapel in Langley (1798). During the second half of the nineteenth century, chapels and churches were built to serve the housing estates around Oldbury, a feature which Stephen Hughes also notes in relation to the small groups of working-class communities in the Swansea area.[77]

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Hughes, *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea*, p. 284.
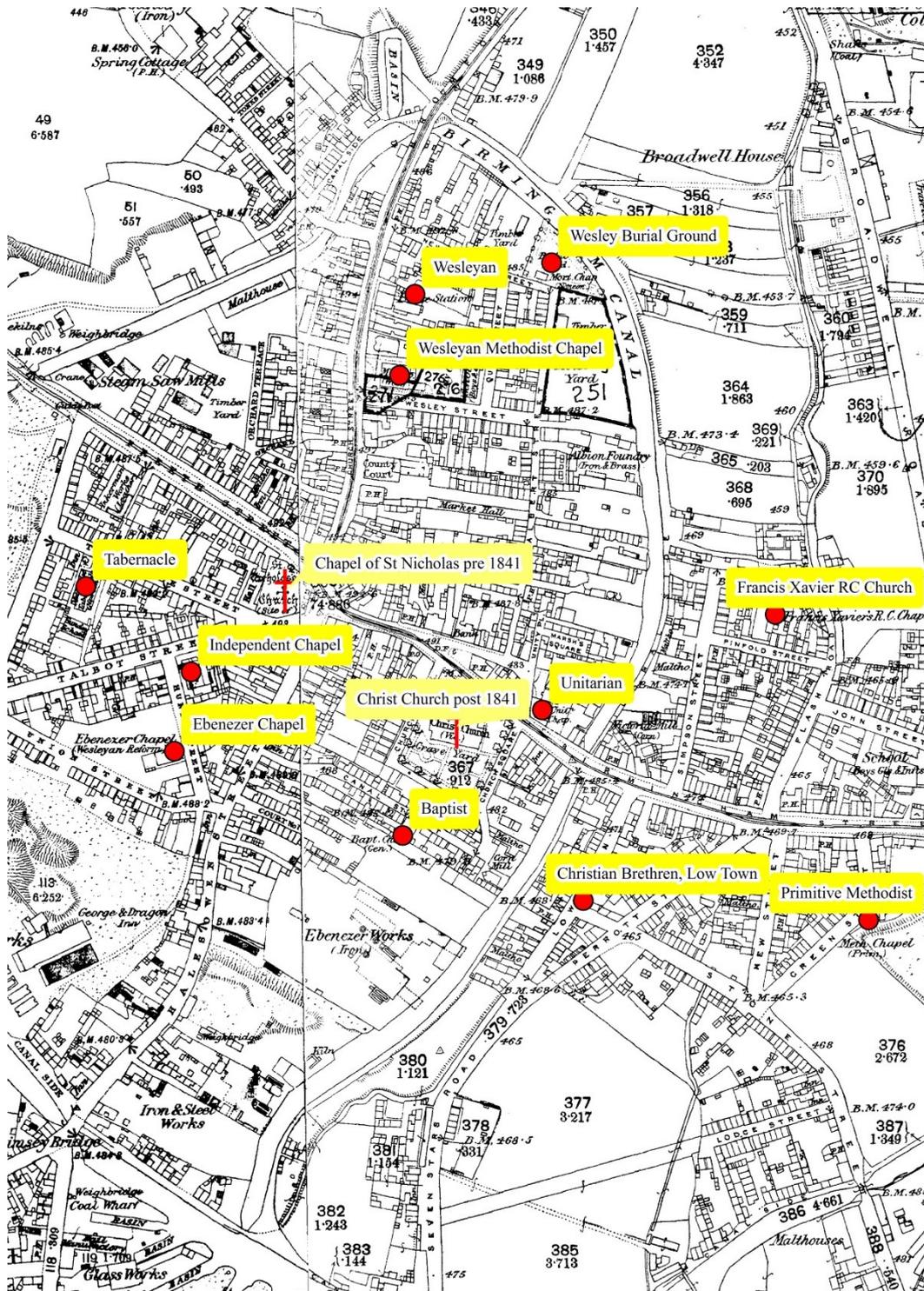
Figure 60 Chapels and churches in central Oldbury 1700 - 1900[78]

Map labels:
- Wesley Burial Ground
- Wesleyan
- Wesleyan Methodist Chapel
- Tabernacle
- Chapel of St Nicholas pre 1841
- Francis Xavier RC Church
- Independent Chapel
- Unitarian
- Ebenezer Chapel
- Christ Church post 1841
- Baptist
- Christian Brethren, Low Town
- Primitive Methodist

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[78] *Ordnance Survey Map of Oldbury, Northern Division Worcestershire/ Staffordshire, sheet no LXV111.13*, constructed by the author using GIS.

Many of the first Nonconformist chapels in Oldbury began in people's homes, a factor which was not unusual for this period. As soon as the group was large enough and they could afford to, they built their own chapel. Andrew Drummond makes the point that Nonconformists had to depend entirely on voluntary subscriptions, both for the support of their clergy and in the purchase and upkeep of the building, whereas finance for both were provided for the Anglican community.[79] Many of these buildings were, therefore, of modest size and constructed in a simple style and, due to the commitment of the people to build, were places they identified with. This was also the case for many of the early chapels which were built when Nonconformity was not tolerated and dissenters wanted to keep a low profile.[80] Chapels constructed in the second half of the nineteenth century did not share this problem. Their prominent position in a townscape of terraced houses and industrial works provided visual interest, in addition to advertising their presence, and many of the initial churches were rebuilt or extended in a more elaborate style.[81]

Cornelius Holtorf and Howard Williams describe churches and graveyards as important time markers, connecting the present with the past and creating 'memories and identity for the community'.[82] Andrew Drummond makes the point that Nonconformity had no architectural tradition of its own, but quickly adopted a classical style.[83] This was the style adopted by chapel builders in Oldbury where the architecture of the Nonconformist chapels and schools was remarkably similar; imposing square buildings, of one or two storeys with symmetrical facades, round arched windows and triangular pediments (see Figure 61). The use of this

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[79] Drummond, A. L., *The Church Architecture of Protestantism: An Historical and Constructive Study* (Edinburgh, 1934), p. 42.
[80] Strachan 'Congregation and Community: Religious Observance and Identity in the South West Woollen Industry, c.1760 to 1860', p. 43.
[81] Powell, *The Fall of Zion: Northern Chapel Architecture and Its Future*, pp. 7-8.
[82] Holtorf, C., Williams, H., 'Landscapes and Memories', in: Hicks (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Historical Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2006) 235-254, p. 241.
[83] Drummond, *The Church Architecture of Protestantism: An Historical and Constructive Study*, p. 43.

distinct style of architecture would have been a conscious choice, indicating the use of the

building and making the point that they were different from the Anglican and Catholic

churches which at this time followed the traditional Gothic style. It has also been suggested

that a classical style of building indicated a long-established cultural tradition which might

have proved more of an attraction to the wealthy and intellectual middle classes.[84] It could

also mean that they were simply following the general trend for Nonconformist architecture,

however, since Susan Strachan identifies its popularity in the woollen towns of South West

England during the nineteenth century.[85]

Figure 61 Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Oldbury [86]

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[84] Powell, *The Fall of Zion: Northern Chapel Architecture and Its Future*, p. 8.
[85] Strachan 'Congregation and Community: Religious Observance and Identity in the South West Woollen Industry, c.1760 to 1860', p. 179.
[86] The chapel was built to this extent in 1853. Photographed by the author.

7.4 Social action

Anthony Cohen in his study of community describes chapels as the centre of the life of a village, providing a community identity with which people could relate.[87] They were a base where community events took place and places where people could go in times of social and economic distress to find support and comfort. Robson has identified this in the Black Country where large numbers began to attend church during cholera epidemics only to drift away after the danger had passed.[88] Evidence of this effect is difficult to substantiate in Oldbury, however. The primary source for Robson's research into the 1848/9 cholera outbreak is *G. Graham's Registrar General's Report on the Mortality of Cholera in England 1848 – 1849,* which records that Oldbury had only 16 deaths from the disease, and references to cholera have not been located in any of the surviving chapel minutes for the various Nonconformist churches.[89] People were very concerned about the disease, however, since a report of a meeting in the Wesleyan Chapel appeared in *Berrow's Worcester Journal* on Thursday 2 November 1848. It described a meeting of 800 – 900 people where T.R. Cooper, surgeon, gave a review of the history of the disease and practical advice as to the best mode of treatment, but whether such meetings had any effect on church attendance is impossible to quantify.[90] Membership figures which exist for the different denominations in Oldbury are those for the 1880s when attendance appears to have been stable.[91]

The Wesleyan school room was one of the largest venues in Oldbury at the time, making it suitable for such a meeting, and shows a willingness on the part of the membership to be

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[87] Cohen, A. P., *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester, 1985), pp. 109 – 10.
[88] Robson, *Dark Satanic Mills?: Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country*, p. 123.
[89] Graham, *Report on the Mortality of Cholera in England, 1848-49*.
[90] *Berrows Worcester Journal,* 'Oldbury, 2nd November', 1848.
[91] CHAS 6363, Quarterly Minutes 1879 - 1890 (1879).

involved in matters that were of concern to the townspeople. This established a perception of the church as being at the heart of the community.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, a great deal of attention was focussed on the number of seats available for the congregation. The report of the Midland Mining Commission stated that, in 1841, the population of Oldbury (6,572 people) had only been supplied with church accommodation for 254 people in the Anglican Chapel of Ease until the new parish church was consecrated to hold 1,508. It also stated that until recently there had been no resident clergyman and no parsonage, and the endowment supported a single clergyman for the pastoral superintendence of between 6,000 and 7,000 persons. It concluded that 'the established religion of the country may be said to have become nearly extinct here'. Had not the incumbent then gone on to state that 'nineteen out of twenty are dissenters here', the large number of Nonconformist churches and their pastors would have gone unmentioned and a completely different picture of the town emerged.[92] In many places, the Anglican Church saw Nonconformity as a threat. In 1843, a curate in Birmingham expressed the difficulties he found working in an overgrown parish and 'standing against' the Wesleyans.[93] It appears that this was not the feeling of all members of the élite in the Black Country. William Chance, a director of the firm of Chance Brothers, and himself an Anglican, showed appreciation and recognition of the work done by the Nonconformists. When talking about the low moral character of the people in South Staffordshire, he stated that 'the Methodists have done a great deal of good'. He decried the fact that those who had wealth would not

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[92] 1843 (508) Midland Mining Commission. First Report. South Staffordshire, pp. clii – cliii.
[93] Ibid. Appendix p. 3.

give it to build churches and testified to the 'striking instances of the voluntary efforts of various sects who are the greatest blessing to us'.[94]

The number of seats available to the population was one of the questions in the 1851 religious census, used by a number of historians to investigate the religious state of the population at this date. These are outlined in Table 28.

Table 28 Total seats for each church in 1851 Oldbury Religious Census

Date built	Chapel name	Denomination	Total seats
1708	Meeting House, Oldbury	Unitarian	300
1798	Zion Independent Chapel, Langley	Independent	250
1803	Wesleyan Methodist Chapel	Methodist	668
1816	Oldbury Particular Baptist Chapel	Particular Baptist	250
1835	Methodist Tabernacle, Oldbury	Methodist New Connexion	800
1836	Oldbury Green Primitive Methodist Chapel	Primitive Methodist	290
1841	Christ Church, Oldbury	Anglican	1,509
1838	Union Independent or Congregational Chapel	Congregational	350
1849	Primitive Methodist Chapel Rounds Green	Primitive Methodist	194
1849	Brades Chapel	Wesleyan Methodist	250
1852	Holy Trinity, Langley	Anglican	73
1843	Christian Brethren, Oldbury	Brethren	150
1840	Wesley Chapel, Park Street	Wesleyan Methodist	145
1850	Ebenezer Chapel, Tat Bank	Methodist New Connexion	168
		Total	**5,397**

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[94] Ibid. Appendix p. 4.

The population for the area of Oldbury with Langley was given as 12,978. 5,531 were children under fifteen years of age: 2,266 under five years and 3,265 six-to fourteen-year-olds. If church provision is considered for the population as a whole, then there would have been seats for 45% of the population. However, children were often catered for in separate Sunday School accommodation, and Sunday Schools did not take place at every service, which would take the proportion of seats for adult members of the population (7,447) up to 79%.[95]

Attendance in Oldbury on the day of the census is difficult to quantify. Out of the fourteen churches which were enumerated, nine had three services during the day, and it is highly likely that members attended more than one service and would have been counted two or three times. There was also the problem, recorded by the Vicar of Christ Church and the Congregational Minister, that the day of the census fell on mid-lent Sunday, a day spent 'in this neighbourhood in holiday making and paying visits', and the attendance was therefore lower than normal. In a detailed study of Black Country churches, Robson has given an index attendance score of 47.4 to Oldbury and 28.78 without Sunday School scholars. This placed it fifteenth out of eighteen Black Country towns, recorded in descending order.[96] Mark Smith comes to a similar conclusion in his examination of attendance in the districts of Oldham and Saddleworth where 45% of the eligible population were regular church attenders.[97]

Interestingly, the church which records the highest attendance figures in the census is the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Oldbury Green. This chapel was in a working-class district and had a high number of lower-class members. 180 of its 290 seats were free, a

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[95] 1851 (1691-I) Census of Great Britain, Population Tables. ii. Ages, Civil Condition, Occupations, and Birth-Place of the People: With the Numbers and Ages of the Blind, the Deaf-and-Dumb, and the Inmates of Workhouses, Prisons, Lunatic Asylums, and Hospitals. Vol. I, p. 432.
[96] Robson, *Dark Satanic Mills?: Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country*, p. 259.
[97] Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth, 1740-1865*, p. 253.

proportionally higher number of free seats than other churches. This was also the chapel which was attracting the highest number of Sunday School children and had classes in the morning, afternoon and evening.[98] In 1928, when a collection was being made to put electricity into this chapel, many letters were received with monetary gifts stating how much the chapel had meant to the writers and their family. The chapel minutes show that members were valued, with every group in the church being involved in decisions, even the Sunday School children.[99]

Stephen Hughes in his study of the metal-working towns around Swansea shows that chapels such as this were important to the people as much for what they did as what they were.[100] The buildings became a focus in their lives, a place for socialising and meeting others outside the home or workplace other than inside the public house. The worship of the different chapels was expressed in different ways, depending on the denomination and this also gave the members a sense of identity with 'their' chapel. Chapels provided order and emotional security in an often chaotic existence, as well as satisfying the need for spiritual assurance.[101] Hempton describes the sense of community and reassurance that Nonconformity, particularly Methodist or Primitive Methodist versions, created for people in the mining villages of South Wales, which became a stronghold of Nonconformity. As with the Black Country, it was an area where people were experiencing profound social change and life was lived under the threat of job insecurity and disaster.[102]

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[98] Aitken, J. and Worcestershire Historical Society, *Census of Religious Worship, 1851: The Returns for Worcestershire* (Worcester, 2000), p. 4.
[99] CHAS, 5988, Oldbury Green Primitive Methodist Chapel Correspondence (1928).
[100] Hughes, *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea*, p. 284.
[101] Gilbert, *Religion and society in industrial England : church, chapel and social change, 1740-1914*, p. 70.
[102] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, p. 58.

Alongside providing spiritual worship and dealing with the 'rites of passage', baptism, marriage and burial, the churches also had a social impact on the life of the town through the setting up of voluntary activities, such as clubs and Sunday Schools.[103] Archives of the various Nonconformist chapels indicate the way in which they were seeking to reach the local population through bible classes, love feasts and, in the case of the Primitive Methodists, camp meetings.[104] Love feasts were not, as E.P. Thompson surmises, an expression of sexual repression.[105] They were simple fellowship meals, resembling the communion service, and usually consisted of bread and water, and followed a pattern of hymn singing, prayer, personal testimony and preaching.[106] Normally catering for church members, love feasts were also held after evangelistic camp meetings when they were open to non-members and were often crowded occasions. Hempton notes that these events were 'not imposed on people from above, but appropriated from below', providing a 'lively alternative to local tavern culture'.[107] The Wesleyan Chapel at the Brades, Oldbury, regularly records love feasts and the fact that the collection taken at the meeting was put into a poor fund, which was then distributed to members of the congregation who were in need.[108]

Church attendance as recorded in the 1851 census has been used as an indication of the irreligious state of the working classes. It is not appropriate, however, to gauge the religious experience of the working classes by Victorian middle-class standards. For the middle and upper classes, commitment was based on performance, church attendance, class leadership, sitting on organisational committees and doing good works. Paul Thompson in his reflections

[103] Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*, p. 91.
[104] *The Primitive Methodist Movement* [Online] (2009), http://www.mowcop.info/htm/church/primitive2.htm, (Accessed: 16/04/2012).
[105] Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 368.
[106] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, pp. 32- 3.
[107] Ibid., p. 58.
[108] CHAS, Oldbury Wesleyan Circuit 6376, Brades Society Accounts 1882 - 1913 (1882).

upon late nineteenth-century urban life finds working-class families praying at home, singing hymns, keeping Sunday 'special' by dressing up and not playing games.[109] They had an allegiance to ritual religious activities linked with rites of passage, birth, churching, marriage and death, but may, for a number of reasons, not have attended church.[110] As Hempton states, 'a single life consists of various phases of faith and doubt and the common division between the religious and the irreligious is far too rigid'.[111]

In addition to organising the religious life of the church, the various Nonconformist groups were involved in social activities. This involved practical action, stepping in to provide support when the neighbourhood network and ties were not enough, when a whole industry saw people laid off work due to bad weather or depression in trade and many of the working classes had no means to provide for the basics of life.[112] On these occasions, middle-class church members formed working groups to provide relief; soup kitchens, tickets to obtain basic groceries and blanket loans, for example. Although not directly involved in these activities, the industrial élite also contributed financially when requested to do so. Membership of one or more of the committees, such as the Board of Health, which were set up to improve the life of the town was a role frequently taken by middle-class church members. They subscribed to a Christian ethos which was expressed in concern for those around them.

The churches and chapels were also involved in setting up charitable institutions aimed at improving the lives of the working classes, or attacking what they saw to be the root of the

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[109] Thompson, P., 'Voices from within ', in: Dyos and Wolff (eds), *The Victorian city: images and realities Vol.1* (London, 1973), pp. 60-73.
[110] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, pp. 66 – 68.
[111] Ibid., p. 57.
[112] *Birmingham Daily Post, '*The Distress at Oldbury', Friday 21 January 1881; *Birmingham Daily Post, '*Severe distress at Oldbury', Saturday 9 January 1886; *Birmingham Daily Post, '*Distress Among the Unemployed', Thursday 16 December 1886.

problems, one of which was the amount of money squandered by the working class in the pubs and ale houses.[113] The drunkenness and disorder associated with these places was frowned upon by the upper classes of society who, whilst serving as local JPs, often came into contact with the offenders. Working Men's clubs and temperance societies were set up to provide an alternative meeting place and to encourage sobriety.[114] Such institutions were encouraged by the local élite with both Lord Lyttelton and Lord Lichfield attending a meeting in 1866 to organise the running of the Working Men's Club in Oldbury, along with representatives from various churches and chapels in the town.[115] Although slow to get off the ground, the Oldbury Working Men's Club is recorded as reaching a membership of over 200.[116] The clubs provided a platform where newcomers could integrate into town life and thus brought coherence to the emerging society. The members tended to take what they wanted from such philanthropic ventures, however, and over time the aims of the temperance movement disappeared and the traditional pastimes of beer, music and entertainment took their place.[117] The key to the success of these ventures seemed to be whether or not the working-class population identified with them. A case in point is that of education.

Set up initially to deal with the problem of poor children running wild in the streets, the Sunday School movement, proved popular from the outset.[118] The Sunday Schools were accepted as an intrinsic part of working-class life, rather than something that was being imposed upon them, and many parents were in favour of educational opportunities for their

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Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 112; May, T., *An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760-1990* (Harlow, 1995), p. 154.

[114] Clark, P., 'Culture and Leisure 1700 - 1840', in: Clark (ed) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume II 1540 - 1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 612.

[115] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury Working Men's Club', 8 November 1866.

[116] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 116.

[117] *London Daily News,* 'Working Men's Clubs', Saturday 6 November 1869.

[118] Clark, 'Culture and Leisure 1700 - 1840', p. 607.

children, so that they could better themselves.[119] In Oldbury, almost every chapel started a

day school which grew from 40 places in the free school erected in 1780 and supported by

charitable donations to 4,761 places in 1899.[120] They were not alone in the effort to provide

education for the town's children. The firm of Chance Brothers also provided facilities for

the children of their workers, and for young people whom they themselves employed.[121] The

level of growth can be seen in Figure 62.[122]
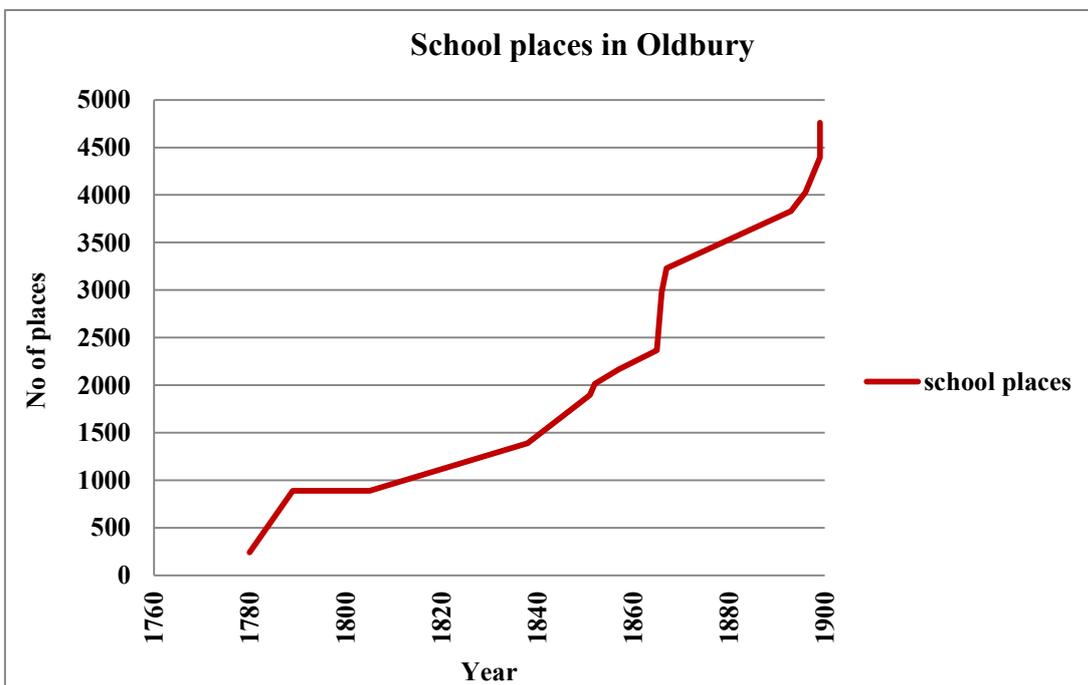
Figure 62 Growth in school places in Oldbury during the nineteenth century (1780-1900)[123]

The day schools appear to have consistently run at a loss, something which was of great

concern to the leadership. Finance came from subscriptions, rent from the Sunday School,

fund raising events and school fees: 2d per week for children under 6 years, 3d for those

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[119] Laqueur, T. W., *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven ; London, 1976), p. 61.
[120] 1816 (511) Abstract of the Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons, Made by the Ministers and Churchwardens of the Several Parishes and Townships in England and Wales, p.1018.
[121] Hackwood, *Oldbury and Round About in the Worcestershire Corner of the Black Country*, p. 97.
[122] Information taken from McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*.
[123] Ibid.

under 8 years and 4d for everyone else in 1848. This was used for the salary for the master and monitors, running costs, books and bibles for the children and the occasional treat.[124] Sunday Schools did not have such high overheads. Teachers were voluntary and a lot more money was spent on treats for the children, bibles and spelling books. Their main running costs were for rent and a cleaner. Money for the Sunday School came from public collections, sales of books, offerings at meetings, gifts and donations and they usually had money in hand.[125] The work of the school and Sunday School was an important feature of Nonconformist life and made an impression in the lives of the children who often expressed good memories of the experience in later life, although few of them went on to become church members. Hempton makes the point, however, that in all probability the efforts of Victorian churches with the younger generation 'bore unquantifiable fruit in the lives of the aged up to half a century later'.[126]

The Nonconformist churches are recognised as offering leading roles to working-class men. Women, whatever the class, tended to work behind the scenes, apart from Sunday School and adult classes, where women took an equal part with the men. Green investigated the role of women in the church in his study of North Yorkshire. He found that although there were no women ministers, and even deaconesses came late in the area, women played an active role. They organised women's meetings, took part in visitation schemes and contributed extensively to fundraising activities.[127] This was also the pattern in Oldbury where women organised events such as the bazaar, provided tea for the many tea meetings, and ran groups

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[124] CHAS, 6361, Oldbury Wesleyan Chapel Day School Treasurers Accounts 1848 - 1903 (1848).
[125] CHAS, 5921, Brades Wesleyan Account Book (1899).
[126] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, p. 58.
[127] Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-192*, p. 197.

such as the Mothers Meeting and the Ladies Sewing Meeting.[128] As in Halifax, Oldbury

women expended a great deal of energy raising money for the school or Sunday School or to

pay off church debts.[129]

Women made up 53.6% of the total Bible-Class membership in 1892.[130] In the larger

churches, the classes were segregated, as far as gender was concerned, with a woman, the

minister or a married man of good standing, leading the women's groups. Mixed classes were

held in the smaller congregations. There was no segregation of social class: women who were

household servants and men who were labourers are registered alongside those from the

middle classes. These classes would have been important to the women, giving the

opportunity to 'have a voice' and participate, which would not have been the case in other

church meetings.[131] There is little evidence of women being involved in leadership meetings

in the Methodist chapels, with the exception of Betsy Nightingale who features in the 1908

list of trustees for Oldbury Green Primitive Chapel.[132] Women did take part in the Guild of

the Good Shepherd, in the Unitarian Chapel, however. The Guild, which was linked to a

national organisation of that name, appears to have been run in the style of a Freemason

lodge, of which the Minister was a member. Its member's aims were to live an exemplary

Christian life with special reference to doing good works. Women were part of the

organisational group and played a full part in decision-making and sharing ideas for helping

the poor of the district, such as distributing second-hand clothing. On one occasion, the

female members of the committee agreed to make a coat for a child who came to the chapel in

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[128] CHAS, 5590; CHAS, 6361; CHAS, 6364, Deaconess Mission Minutes 1903 - 1910 (1903).
[129] CHAS 6363.
[130] Out of 343 class members 184, 53.6% were women. CHAS, 6009.
[131] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, p. 186.
[132] CHAS, 5988.

a poor state of dress.[133] Apart from a few opportunities to adopt leadership roles, therefore, most of the women's activities followed the same pattern as the tasks they performed at home.

By the end of the century, more opportunities began to open up for women in leadership, and in Halifax and Oldbury deaconesses were appointed. This proved to be a wise move as the Oldbury deaconess immediately began to work among the working-class community in a way that had not been done before. She set up groups for women and children, a meeting for mothers, visitation in public houses, lodging houses and brick works, and cottage meetings, all of which led to a huge response from the working classes, necessitating the move from a home to a school building in order to accommodate everybody. This highlighted the need for the kind of outreach that would go into the places where working-class people spent their time, rather than expecting them to come into the church (see Appendix 6).[134]

Such forms of evangelism have been cited as one of the reasons for the competition and division between churches, particularly between the Anglicans and Nonconformists. The tremendous opposition that Wesley received when he visited the Black Country in 1743 and was opposed by a mob incited by the Anglican clergy is a case in point.[135] Apart from the fact that the Anglican Church cited the high level of Nonconformist activity to support their application for a building grant, there is little evidence of such opposition in Oldbury. This could be due to its long history of Nonconformity, the ecumenical nature of the traditional Oldbury Double Lecture, and the fact that the first new Nonconformist group, the Methodists, arrived well after they were accepted and established in other areas of the Black Country. There is some evidence of friction leading to division within the Methodist churches in the first half of the nineteenth century, described by Wearmouth as 'the most turbulent in the

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[133] CHAS, NU/0/1/1, Minutes of the Guild of the Good Shepherd (1886).
[134] CHAS, 6364.
[135] Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, pp. 204 – 11.

history of the Methodist Church',[136] when 'a small group of worshippers left the Oldbury Wesleyan Church to form a new society'.[137] Apart from these isolated incidents, the majority of evidence points to the churches working together, sitting on the same committees and responding jointly in times of need. In the autumn of 1888, the Wesleyans suggested that an ecumenical meeting be held to 'promote and strengthen the spirit of Christian union and brotherliness between the churches'.[138] The proposal came initially from the Wesleyan Circuit meeting and a committee was appointed to open negotiations with other churches in the town. The aim of the meeting was twofold. On one hand, they wished to strengthen the unity of Christians in Oldbury, and on the other, to demonstrate their unity to outsiders. Although there were differences of government in the various Christian communities and the forms of service might vary, they were one in principle, aim and in Christian endeavour. They all acknowledged one Lord and one Master and that they were brethren.[139]

The event duly took place with services being held from the 14th to 20th January 1889. The meeting was reported in the *West Bromwich Weekly News* which heralded it a great success.[140] The newspaper report recorded Rev. Mellor, Wesleyan Minister, saying that 'in his long life he had attended many series of similar services, but had never witnessed such display of unity and Christian oneness as he had during the week at Oldbury'.[141] The event was such a success that a similar event was arranged for the following January.

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[136] Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850*, pp. 1, 2.
[137] CHAS, 5931, Oldbury Methodist New Connexion Miscellaneous Papers (1902).
[138] CHAS 6363.
[139] Ibid.
[140] *West Bromwich Weekly News,* 'Weeks United Service in Oldbury', 19 January 1889; *West Bromwich Weekly News,* 'Week of United Services in Oldbury', 27 January 1889.
[141] *West Bromwich Weekly News,* 'Week of United Services in Oldbury', 27 January 1889.

7.5 Wider influence of Nonconformity

One of the main aims of Nonconformity was to make a difference to the lives of individuals, in a spiritual and practical way, but historians have also recognised the effect of this in the wider world of work and leisure, with different strands emerging. On the one side, Gilbert and McLeod stress the view that the chapel culture made the working man independent and more aware of the world around him.[142] Nonconformity encouraged participation and afforded opportunities to the working man to assume positions of responsibility, while becoming literate enabled him to read tracts and newspapers which led to political awareness.[143] Perkin saw this as enabling the working classes to obtain 'emancipation from the dependency system', providing the 'model for class organisation... by active example' and 'influencing class conflict towards non-violence'.[144] This, it was suggested, enabled them to take part in a constructive way in groups, such as trade unions, which were coming into being.

The other side viewed this new political awareness and independence in a negative light, however, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction in the working classes, and revolts against authority, shown in Chartism, riots, and strike action. Thomas Arnold (1832) expressed the fears of the time, believing the manufacturing population of Great Britain to be 'dangerous to the society in which it existed.'[145] Many such fears were linked to the experience of revolution in France and the concern that something similar would happen in England.

The Nonconformist chapel and its links with liberal politics provided the working class with training and experience in public speaking, a factor which led some to take a leadership role

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[142]Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*, p. 85; McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe 1848-1914*

[143] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, p. 166.

[144] Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*, p. 196.

[145] Arnold, T., *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold, Collected and Republished* (London, 1845), pp. 453- 67.

in organisations which made a stand against authority, such as Chartism. Wearmouth found

that Methodist preachers became Chartist leaders in Durham and used Methodist ideas of

classes, camp meetings and love feasts to reach the working classes.[146] He also identified

members of the Primitive Methodists taking leadership roles in trade unions, friendly

societies and adult education in Durham, but he was not been able to substantiate this from

other regions due to lack of references. A study of the archives left by the different

denominations in Oldbury shows that participation by all classes was encouraged, both in

attending unsegregated bible classes and taking on responsibility in the church.[147] Such

involvement was not limited to the religious communities. The firm of Albright and Wilson,

whose directors were Quakers, promoted participation in the workplace. They encouraged

men to take up leadership roles within the company. The firm's Accident and Insurance

Society and its corresponding sick club, for example, were each managed by committees of

foremen and workmen.[148] There is also evidence of men taking 'religion' into the pit on their

own initiative and holding prayer meetings before work and during the lunch hour.[149]

Involvement in trade unions is more difficult to substantiate. Few unions are recorded in

connection with Oldbury and the archives of the few that are, mainly consist of lists of

regulations which do not necessarily mention names that can be linked to people in the town.

The influence of Methodism in the rise of radical groups, in particular Chartism, is also

difficult to identify as references to named individuals are few. The main evidence for the

progression of Chartism is to be found in newspapers and Parliamentary reports, which

indicate a Chartist presence in Oldbury, although its size is not known. The main supporter

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[146] Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850*, pp. 184, 191.
[147] CHAS, 6009.
[148] 1899 (C.9188) Use of Phosphorus in the Manufacture of Lucifer Matches. Reports to the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the Use of Phosphorus in the Manufacture of Lucifer Matches; by Professor T. E. Thorpe, Ll.D., F.R.S., Principal Chemist of the Government Laboratory; Professor Thomas Oliver, M.D., F.R.C.P., Physician to the Royal Infirmary Newcastle-Upon-Tyne; Dr. George Cunningham, M.A., D.M.D., Senior Dental Surgeon to the London Hospital
[149] 1843 (508) Midland Mining Commission. First Report. South Staffordshire, p. cxxxvi.

was Charles Vaughan, landlord of the Spread Eagle public house, Rounds Green. A meeting is reported as taking place there on Monday, 19 December 1842, the chair of which was John Jefferies, a New Connexion preacher, indicating that some Nonconformists were at least involved.[150] There are several reports of delegate meetings taking place in Oldbury where there was a Chartist room linked to the Christian Brethren Chapel in Low Town.[151] No records of Chartist class meetings or love feasts have been found, however, and only one report of a camp meeting connected with Oldbury.[152] Oldbury people were involved in the Chartist National Land Company for the whole of its duration, and one of the group, James Oatey, was selected for a house with four acres of land, but no records have been found to confirm whether he took up the offer or where it is located.[153]

The strength of Black Country Chartism was to be found to the north of Oldbury in Dudley and Bilston where large numbers were reported.[154] Arthur O'Neill, who had set up a Chartist Church in Birmingham, was one of the leading proponents of the organisation in the area and is recorded as preaching in many of the villages, including Oldbury during 1842.[155] Chartists certainly took a leading role in the strike which took place in the neighbourhood in August of that year over wage cuts, when they organised the strikers, held meetings and directed proceedings. Many believed that the strikers were identifying with the Chartist cause, and *The Northern Star* slips in the phrase 'don't be discouraged if after trying the strike as a means for achieving the Charter, you find it to fail of accomplishing that object', in its report of the proceedings.[156] The report of the Midland Mining Commission comes to a different

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[150] *The Northern Star,* 'Oldbury, ' Saturday 24 December 1842, p. 9.
[151] Aitken and Worcestershire Historical Society, *Census of Religious Worship, 1851: The Returns for Worcestershire*, p. 3.
[152] *The Northern Star,* 'Chartist Intelligence, Staffordshire', Saturday 17 July 1847, p. 16.
[153] *The Northern Star,* 'Result of the Ballot', Saturday 3 June 1848, p. 12.
[154] Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, pp. 2, 3.
[155] Ibid., p. 29.
[156] *The Northern Star,* 'Progress of the Strike', Saturday 20 August 1842, p. 12.

conclusion about the involvement of the Chartists, however, stating that the strike was totally about wage cuts and conditions and the Chartists merely took advantage of the situation to step into a leading role. They felt that the men would not have stood out so long if it had not been for the Chartists inciting them to action.[157] The vicar of Wednesbury speaking as a magistrate summed up the situation:

> The miners were never the least imbued with the principles of the charter; indeed at one meeting here they were asked to hold up their hands for the charter and they refused, saying that they wanted no such thing, it was altogether a question between workmen and masters.

This was a point which was made by a number of employers, clergymen, and the men themselves.[158]

A further opinion of the role of Nonconformity in the lives of the working classes was stated by E.P. Thompson who believed that bringing order to their lives created a submissive workforce, accepting of their place in society and avoiding militant confrontation.[159] This builds upon the argument of Andrew Ure (1835) who felt that the concept of using religion to control the working classes was a good one.[160] Acts of control and manipulation were explored by Hughes in his study of Swansea, but no evidence was found to support the suggestion. The industrialists there did not obstruct the desire for a chapel and often provided a piece of land, but the finance for the building was raised by the people themselves.[161] The situation in Oldbury was very similar. The desire to build a chapel seems to have originated

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[157] 1843 Parliamentary Papers: 1843, Vol. xiii (508), Midland Mining Commission, First Report, South Staffordshire, p. cix.
[158] Ibid., pp. cx – cxi.
[159] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* , pp. 361, 380; Marx, K*., et al.*, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right', Translated from the German by Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Joseph O'Malley* (London, 1970), p.131.
[160] Ure, A., *The Philosophy of Manufactures: Or, an Exposition of the Scientific, Moral and Commercial Economy of the Factory System of Great Britain* (1835), pp. 417- 18.
[161] Hughes, *Copperopolis: Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea*, p. 292.

with the people who put the effort into raising finance and, in some instances, even extended to building the chapels with their own hands, the Wesleyan Methodist in Causeway Green and the Skip Chapel in Langley, for example.[162]

7.6. Conclusion

In a region which featured an early tradition of Nonconformity, Oldbury's experience was both an early and a strong one. Oldbury Nonconformists were not afraid to stand against the law of the land in order to worship, and meetings attracting huge crowds were hosted in the chapel. Although it was a small village, reports of its obstinate adherence to Nonconformity reached the ears of King Charles II. Nonconformists in the town took the lead in organising an event for ministers who had left Anglicanism and their congregations and managed to keep this as an ecumenical occasion when all around them was division and conflict. They dominated the Anglican presence in the period before industrialisation, gaining for themselves a standing in the village. This was built upon when industrialisation came, bringing with it a surge in population which overwhelmed traditional Anglican administration systems, and a large number of Nonconformist churches were welcomed and appreciated in the growing town. Their efforts to assist the population, in what was a town in crisis, saw important cultural changes being made. This was especially evident in the area of education.

Nonconformist chapels were an important component in helping migrant people to adjust and become part of the community. They gave a sense of value and pride to their members who had raised the money for them to be built and in some instances taken part in the building themselves. The chapels were at the heart of the community, allowing their buildings to be used for religious and non-religious meetings. They provided recreational and social groups

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[162] McKean, *Picturesque Oldbury Past and Present*, pp. 32, 36.

as alternatives to the public house culture and were involved in practical action. In this, they were part of what was taking place in the Black Country as a whole. It would appear that the respect earned through the pre-industrial years enabled Nonconformist churches in the Black Country to take a formative lead in the nineteenth century, both through their practical involvement in the lives of the people and through the influence of individual members on local boards and improvement committees.

From the evidence available for Oldbury, it is difficult to substantiate the view that Nonconformity led to the training of working-class leaders who were involved in political protest and took a stand against authority. There is evidence that people from the working class participated in bible classes and took on leadership responsibilities in the church and the workplace, but the leadership of Chartist groups in the town was taken by those from the middle class. The evidence points rather to the way in which the different churches sought to build on connections and similarities as is evidenced by the ecumenical event in 1889. In a region where people were described as 'savage', this unity is remarkable.[163] The debate highlights the point, however, that dissent was influential and wide-reaching in its impact.

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[163] Sidney, *Rides On Railways*, p 192.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated the way that local industrialisation developed and its impact on the fabric and lives of the people of a Black Country town during the nineteenth century, an area of research that has received very little academic attention. The subject of this research was the southern Black Country town of Oldbury, a town which has been neglected in historical research. This is the first time that a micro-study of a Black Country town has been undertaken which examines both the development of industry and its effects on the lives of the people. In this respect, this thesis has contributed to the historiography of Oldbury, the Black Country and the nineteenth-century English industrial town.

The industrial history of a number of the Black Country villages has been recorded; this is especially so for the villages in the north of the region.[1] The villages in the south, however, have received less attention and a village which stands out in this respect is Oldbury. Little has been written about its history prior to the nineteenth century and even that for the industrial period is fragmented. It is a town which deserves a study in its own right, however, as it reveals something new about the way in which the Black Country towns developed. Its name indicates a place of antiquity, and early maps record the topography of the area prior to industrialisation, facilitating a reconstruction of the ancient landscape. It illustrates the way in which Black Country towns evolved: how a subtle series of judgements led to the development of strong individual communities which are resistant to change. It reveals how industrialisation affected a community providing a social history of the district's industrial past. Oldbury's industrial experience differed from that of the other Black Country towns: it

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[1] Ede, *History of Wednesbury*; Johnson and Wise, 'The Black Country 1800 - 1950'; Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*; Davies and Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country 1760 – 1860, Borough of Dudley*; Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*.

developed late and attracted different industries into the district. This case study extends our understanding of the complexity of the history of the Black Country and has lessons for the wider characteristics of industrialisation: not all industrial towns followed a set pattern.

The study seeks to be significant in a number of ways. First, by addressing three research questions aimed to draw out the industrial experience of Oldbury. This in turn throws light on wider issues relative to the Black Country and other industrial towns. Second, it offers an insight into a useful methodology for studying the development of industrial towns, and towns in general. Third, it indicates where further research might be undertaken to take the exploration further and deepen the perspective of the study.

Gaps in the historiography, and its silence on many issues, led to the formulation of the aims and objectives of the study in Chapter One. Eyewitness accounts described the visible effects of industrial pollution: people living in a state of perpetual twilight, houses, interspersed with blazing furnaces, forges and engine chimneys, the pall of smoke hanging over the region,[2] but nothing has been written about the way in which industrialisation affected the lives and the health of the people of the Black Country.

Existing studies often omit Oldbury altogether or merely allude to it in passing. Trainor's comprehensive analysis of Black Country élites, for example, has become the established work on this subject, but Oldbury is rarely mentioned. The experience of the town's élite shows distinct differences compared to two of the towns studied by Trainor: Dudley and West Bromwich had aristocratic involvement and a strong élite. Oldbury had more in common with Bilston whose leading élite were from the middle classes.[3] This emphasises again the

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[2] Sidney, *Rides On Railways*, p. 165; Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* , pp. 2, 143.
[3] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900*.

disparateness of the individual Black Country towns which were, however, physically close to one another and seemed to share the same industrial experiences. This emerges as a strong Black Country characteristic.

Nonconformity has been recognised as having a powerful influence in industrial communities.[4] Oldbury's townscape contained a large number of Nonconformist churches and the vicar stated in 1843 that nineteen out of every twenty in the town were Nonconformists.[5] However, little was known about their input and influence, whether they worked together or were in competition with one another or the local Anglican Church, or how they fitted into the general Black Country pattern of Nonconformity.

The aim of the study, therefore, is to try to fill some of these gaps in the historiography by gathering a body of evidence relative to Oldbury's industrial experience. The first of the three research questions seeks to discover the factors which held Oldbury back from participating in the industrialisation that was taking place in the north of the region until the nineteenth century and the way in which it developed from this point into an industrial town. The second assesses the effect of industrialisation on the lives of the people in the areas of pollution and health, and considers the level of impact of the measures put in place to address issues that had arisen. The third examines the roles of the town's governing élite and Nonconformity, their impact and influence on the town and the lives of the people. The conclusion indicates the extent to which the thesis has answered these questions.

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[4] Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*.
[5] 1843 Parliamentary Papers: 1843, Vol. xiii (508), Midland Mining Commission, First Report, South Staffordshire

8.1 Research question one

Little has been recorded about Oldbury between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when it was part of the ancient manor of Halesowen, and when it emerged in the nineteenth century as a developing industrial town. Is it possible to discover how the village developed industrially during this period, what were the influences which shaped it and how did it fit into the pattern of growth of the Staffordshire Black Country during the nineteenth century?

Research into the missing periods of Oldbury's past in Chapter 2 has revealed a number of features which affected its industrial development. The two primary factors were the geology of the area and the influence of its landed élite. Further contributory factors are to be found in its position in another county, and linked to a different parish from the other Black Country towns. Oldbury was an island of Shropshire or Worcestershire in the middle of Staffordshire with political and justice systems linked to towns outside the area and was part of the parish of Halesowen until 1840. This led to different contacts and directional pulls as far as the administration and law and order was concerned, since the inhabitants were answerable to authorities outside the Black Country.

The study of industrialisation in the area has shown that the geology and the influence of its landed élite determined the pattern of growth in the Black Country villages. Oldbury shared the same geology as other villages; where it differed was in the timing and use of these materials. Those in the north, where coal outcropped and was easily accessible, also had members of the landed élite who were interested in developing the industrial potential of their land. Raybould identifies that the Earl of Dudley, the major landholder in the north of the

area, was particularly influential in this respect.[6] Coal mining is recorded in the area from the thirteenth century, followed during the fourteenth century by iron working, as ironstone was extracted with the coal. The villages in the south of the area, where the coal seam hit a fault and dipped, were unable to access their resources until a means to mine safely at a greater depth was engineered during the eighteenth century. This in itself was not necessarily a cause to delay industrial involvement, however, since Chitham records the first sign of an iron industry appearing in West Bromwich in the sixteenth century.[7] This suggests that it was the landholders, rather than the lack of resources, which retarded Oldbury's development until the nineteenth century.

The result of the investigation into landholding in Oldbury over the course of time confirms this proposition. Apart from a three-hundred-year period from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, when the monks of Halesowen Abbey held the manor, Oldbury had landlords who were either absent or disinterested in industrial development. In the majority of cases Oldbury was just one village among many that they owned and they were happy to make money from land dealing without putting anything back into the village.

During the time that the monks held the manor, the land was developed for the benefit of the Abbey. Two important events occurred during this time which influenced the industrial future of the village: the Black Death and the relocation of the village alongside the major road in the area. Following the Black Death, land became available in the village and, since the monks were unable to find people to work it, it was decided to lease it to existing villagers. This had two consequences: a number of wealthy villagers obtained large swathes of land, and those who inherited these holdings in the nineteenth century found themselves in

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[6] Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*.
[7] Chitham, *West Bromwich, A History*, p. 33.

a lucrative position when industrialisation began. They were able to access its mineral resources and set themselves up as industrialists or rent out the minerals below ground for others to exploit. Either choice would give them a swift and available means of entering the industrial arena. A second consequence, noted by Razi, was that it made a group of men even wealthier, leading to a growing disparity between the rich and poor of the village which laid the foundation for the class structure of the nineteenth century.[8]

The move of the village to a new location alongside the major road has been identified in this thesis through a regression of the landscape using GIS. Through a combination of maps, toponymy, archaeological and eighteenth-century reports relating to Oldbury, a move was identified prior to the dissolution of the monasteries. There are a number of possibilities for deciding to move the village, but it would be in keeping with the industriousness of the monks to relocate it alongside the major road in the area. This would have enabled them to take advantage of the industrial development of the region and broaden their economic base. Any progress in this direction was halted at the dissolution of the monasteries when, with the loss of input from the monks, Oldbury experienced a change in the social and economic control of the village community.

Once again, Oldbury had a landlord who was not interested in developing the village industrially and the villagers concentrated their efforts on stock farming and, along with others in the region, added metal working, in the form of nail making, as a secondary economy.[9] Nail making went on to become the proto-industrial base for the region. Dilworth records the advance of industry across the Black Country through change in the use of water

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[8] Razi 'The Peasants of Halesowen 1270 – 1400 A Social, Economic and Demographic Study', p. 249.
[9] Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720', pp.29-41.

mills from flour grinding to metal work, which highlights the growing disparity between Oldbury's farming community and the busy industrial north.[10]

Building on the proto-industry of nail making, iron working took off in the north of the region. Under the influence of the area's governing élite, an export in coal and iron was organised to supply large towns such as Birmingham, Walsall and Wolverhampton which demanded the resources. They were joined in this venture by local men who went on to become masters and merchants in their own right; setting up iron works, converting mills, distributing iron rod to nailers, and gaining contracts in national and overseas markets. By comparison only one Oldbury landholder, William Turton, appears to have been interested in accessing minerals and working in iron and he had his base in West Bromwich, owning a converted mill on the border of the two villages.[11] During the eighteenth century, a number of key events changed the face of the Black Country and magnified industrial progress in the north of the region. Innovations to improve metal-working practices were adopted, a means of accessing the deeper coal and ironstone was discovered and implemented, and a transport network of roads and canals was extended across the region to alleviate the problem of moving heavy goods. Even though Oldbury was on a turnpike road and a branch of the canal network looped around the village, the people of Oldbury did not appear to have been involved, concentrating their efforts on making improvements to their farming practices.

The effects of the lack of industrialisation on the landscape of Oldbury would, however, be the factor which determined the village's rapid transformation from a farming village to an industrial town during the first half of the nineteenth century. When a group of industrialists arrived in the area during the latter part of the eighteenth century seeking to establish their

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[10] Dilworth, *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire*.
[11] Ibid., p. 163.

businesses, Oldbury had one big factor in its favour: the availability of land with canal-side sites. Many of the early industries were those traditionally found in the Black Country: brick making, coal mining and metal working. Others were recent arrivals to the area, however: the manufacture of edge tools, chemicals and rolling stock, which needed sizeable plots of land to set up factories. These works provided employment for large numbers of people and led to a different industrial specialisation based on large units of production developing in Oldbury, a deviation from the pattern of small workshops found in the other Black Country towns.

The proto-industry of nail making spread rapidly through the area, taking place alongside stock farming but was threatened from the early years of the nineteenth century by loss of contracts with America and the introduction of machine-made nails. Factory-produced nails should have been the final stage of proto-industrialisation, and at least one business was set up in Oldbury,[12] but this did not automatically take place across the region. The main factories for machine-made nails were to be found in nearby Birmingham and Wolverhampton, a factor which brought a great deal of unemployment and distress to the Black Country.[13] Metal working skills acquired in nail making gave the population an option of diversifying, however. When industries producing items such as metal tubes, small engineering parts and bicycles began to be introduced into the region during the latter part of the nineteenth century, there was a ready-made workforce.

The route that Oldbury took differed from the outset from the villages in the north of the Black Country. The main reason for this was not so much the difficulty of accessing its resources, although this had a part to play, but the lack of interest and direction from its mostly absent élite. Although holding the town back during the early industrial period the

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[12] BCLM, 1978/105/001

[13] Greenslade, *A History of the County of Stafford Volume 2*, p. 240. PhD Research into the cut-nail trade in the West Midlands is currently being conducted (2013) by Guy Siögren at the University of Birmingham.

town caught up rapidly at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the industries that were attracted to the town were not those that underwent a decline when the region's coal and ironstone became inaccessible. This meant that Oldbury had a stable economy from the 1860s when many of the iron and coal-working towns in the district were in a state of crisis.

8.2 Research question two

What was the impact of industrialisation on the landscape of the town and the lives of the people and how did this compare with the other Black Country and national industrial towns?

In the early years of the nineteenth century, the newly emerging towns were unpleasant and dangerous places in which to live as far as the health of the population was concerned. Due to lack of basic amenities people were at risk of contracting waterborne, bacterial and parasitic diseases. Epidemics of cholera and smallpox contributed to a high mortality rate. This was the situation throughout the Black Country and in many of the rapidly emerging industrial towns across the country.

The rapid increase in population and the spread of industrialisation led to poor living conditions among the poorest of society, of which Oldbury is a prime example, as Chapter 3 has shown. Houses were built rapidly in a haphazard fashion with no thought given to provision of a sewerage system or clean water.[14] The poor level of domestic hygiene and lack of ventilation provided an ideal environment for the spread of infectious diseases.[15] When it became evident that this was leading to a high death rate, it was much more difficult to install sanitary systems. The canal, which surrounded the town, provided a problem for the planners,

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[14] 1856 Report to the Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry to the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Township of Oldbury, in the Parish of Halesowen, in the County of Worcester, p. 6.
[15] Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Diseases and the Rise of Preventive Medicine 1856 -1900*, p. 191.

as there was no clear access route to take waste out of the town or pipe water in. The

ratepayers opposed any action that would need funding, by an increase in the rates throughout

the century.

In addition to the pollution from human sources, industrial towns also had to contend with

smoke and industrial waste, pollutants which contaminated the environment. When the

situation was being addressed in the 1850s, the population was divided about the benefits of

taking action. On the one hand, they did not wish to live in a polluted atmosphere; on the

other, they feared the loss of job security which would follow the closure or removal of the

industrial works.

The standard of living and the high death rates in the industrial towns were brought to the

attention of the government authorities who recognised the need for action. Since a number

of towns across the country were experiencing the same problems, it was decided to tackle the

problem at ground level by acts of Parliament to enable the towns to help themselves.[16] Many

of these had loopholes, however, especially the ones relating to industry, which allowed

industrialists to evade the law, and undermined the acts' effectiveness. In the same way that

the people in the towns were divided about the need to curb pollution, the government was

divided between the need to address the problems to improve the health of the population, and

concern that if such a move damaged industry, the country's economy would be affected. The

acts tended to err on the side of constraint. The larger industrialists sought to work with the

government, but trying to find a solution to the problem was difficult.[17]

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[16] 1842 (007) Sanitary Inquiry: England. Local Reports on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of England, in Consequence of an Inquiry Directed to Be Made by the Poor Law Commissioners; Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783-1870*, p. 297.
[17] 1865 (3460) Alkali Act, 1863. First Annual Report by the Inspector of His Proceedings During the Year 1864, pp. 22, 30.

Towns with chemical industries had the further problem of waste material. Oldbury had a large mound of chemical waste from the alkali industry which local people called 'Blue Billy'. This polluted the water sources, was unstable, in a state of combustion and the fumes from it made people ill.[18] The positive side of such industries was the stability and employment they offered to a large number of people in the town; however, the pollution was experienced by everyone, workers in the industry and the general population alike. Towns with chemical manufactories across the country were experiencing similar problems.[19] A further pollutant, largely unrecognised in the nineteenth century, was that of noise. Working alongside the heavy steam hammers in the iron works led to hearing loss, which affected the lives of the workers, socially, as well as in the workplace.[20] In small towns, such as Oldbury, heavy industry, homes and schools were built side by side, making it difficult for children to concentrate on school lessons, and for everyone to get a good night's sleep.[21] As with other types of industrial pollution, the problem was difficult to address.

In addition to health risks from a polluted environment, Chapter 4 has shown that people working in the different industries were at risk of developing occupational illnesses. This was a feature of industrial towns in general and the range of trades in each town dictated the type of illnesses experienced. The sense of fatalism which accompanied such illnesses, however, was common. People in Oldbury suffered from bronchial complaints, asthma and silicosis linked to the dust-producing industries, Phossy Jaw in the phosphorus industry and a green pallor and hair colour from working in the copper works. In addition to this, the number of industrial accidents increased along with the spread of industry leading to appalling injuries,

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[18] TNA, BT 328/133
[19] Ibid.
[20] Barr, 'Enquiry into the Effects of Loud Sounds upon the Hearing of Boiler Makers and Others Who Work Amid Noisy Surroundings', p. 228
[21] 1843 (503) Reports of the Inspectors of Factories to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department. For the Half-Year Ending 30th June, 1843, p. 22; Daniels, *Making and Moving in Langley*, p. 142

invalidity and death.[22] Large scale industrial accidents following a mine disaster, or a boiler

explosion, brought forth a response from public, press and politicians. Many individual

accidents occurred on a day to day basis in the workplace, however, as has been observed

through the records of Chance and Sons. In a similar way to occupational illnesses they

carried a lower profile and did not appear in national statistics until the final years of the

nineteenth century.[23]

Chapter 5 has discussed how, as the nineteenth century progressed, measures began to be put

in place to address the problems which were surfacing. On a political level, the government

introduced a Board of Health in London, to give directives, in the form of Acts of Parliament,

and local Boards of Health to put them into practice. A key person in ensuring that the Acts

functioned, and the link between the local board and the government, was the Medical Officer

of Health.   The annual reports produced by the MOH give an indication of the medical

problems that Oldbury was battling with. Along with other developing towns across the

country, one of the major concerns was to improve the sanitary systems in order to lower the

death rate, especially for children. During the second half of the eighteenth century, many

towns across the country saw these systems established, although Oldbury was not one of

these. Held back by the ratepayers association, it was the last quarter of the nineteenth

century before the town saw any improvement in service provision. The breakthrough came

when the Board of Health recognised that they could apply for government loans to

implement the much needed improvements, without increasing the rates.

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[22] *Berrows Worcester Journal '*The Late Mine Explosion Near Oldbury', Thursday 3 December 1846;
*Manchester Times, '*Fatal Boiler Explosion at Oldbury', Saturday 4 August 1860; *Birmingham Daily Post, '*The
Explosion at the Oldbury Tar works, Two More Deaths', 1869.
[23] Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and
Edwardian Britain*, p. 11.

In addition to the improvements to the structure of the town, from the 1860s, medical facilities were established in West Bromwich, the lead town for the Poor Law Union, of which Oldbury was a part. These included a hospital, dispensary and specific wards attached to the workhouse infirmary. The government introduced regulations for the notification of infectious diseases, and the provision of an isolation facility in each town. Vaccination programmes were also rolled out, leading to a decrease in epidemics, such as smallpox, across the country.

The second half of the century saw a rise in self-help groups, and works and private sickness clubs, instigated to provide finance when members could not work. These provided a further safety net for the working classes in times of illness. By the end of the century, a number of government aims had been achieved: adult death rates were down, smallpox was largely eradicated and the general health and living standards of the population had improved. There was still a long way to go, however. The medical reports produced in the 1890s reveal that child death rates were high, and a number of infectious diseases were prevalent. The health of women was still low on the national agenda, and stronger legislation was needed to limit the causes of industrial accidents and illnesses.[24]

The impact on the landscape of the Black Country was visible for all to see. Industry and housing jostled for position among the pit mounds, furnaces, and industrial waste. At the start of the nineteenth century Oldbury had been a farming village, by the end it was a spreading industrial town surrounded by extractive industry and factory sites. The main evidence for the impact on the lives of the people is seen through the high death rate, a factor that was typical

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[24] Woods and Shelton, *An atlas of Victorian mortality*, p. 51; Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, pp. 278, 279.

of the Black Country and other industrial towns. Where Oldbury differed, was in the length of time that it took to find solutions to its problems.

8.3 Research question three

Local élites and Nonconformist churches have been highlighted as two of the primary influences in industrial towns. To what extent did the roles of these two groups contribute to the progress of Oldbury from village to industrial town in the nineteenth century? What was their impact on the lives of the people and the growth of the community?

The roles of the local élite and Nonconformity were key factors in Oldbury's industrial experience as demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7. The influence of the local élite both held back industrialisation in the village from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, and was the means by which it was enabled to experience rapid industrial growth during a thirty-year period in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nonconformity had an equally influential effect through its social impact on the life of the town and the provision of many of its urban amenities such as schools, community venues and leisure facilities.

Although the Black Country élite were drawn from a diverse group and a number of towns had representatives from aristocratic and landed gentry, upper-middle class entrepreneurs, middling and lower class industrialists and tradespeople, Oldbury's governing élite base was more restricted. In the absence of input from the landowning classes, the upper-middle classes took on the roles of the higher élite. In Oldbury, these were the large industrialists who had their businesses in the town but lived outside it. Their roles were both supportive and influential. They gave financial support to middle-class endeavours, such as providing relief when men were laid off work, or donating finance to set up a library. They also

engaged in pursuits which interested them: a number joined together to set up a volunteer force for the town, for example, a group which was open to all and brought together men from different classes.[25] As the century went on, their status as heads of large firms and their philanthropic acts led to a growing prestige. They acted as figureheads for the town, taking pride of place at public events, much as the aristocrats did in Dudley and West Bromwich. Their names and position lent influence to government applications, such as that for a Board of Health, and their presence at meetings reinforced the message that other members of the middle classes were trying to communicate: the benefits of thrift and joining a savings scheme, for example.[26] They were involved with other members of the Black Country élite on a regional basis, sitting on the county bench and committees to deal with issues such as changes to the Poor Law. Their regional and national networks were a means of acquiring information which could be disseminated in the town, in the realm of education, for example. The finance they provided did much to take the town forward, as many of the institutions that were set up could not have been realised without extra financial support. Although willing to give such support, this group of the élite distanced themselves from many of the town affairs. They were more involved in their town of residence, only visiting Oldbury to go to their own factories or attend functions and events by invitation. Although supportive of the middling and lower-middle class ventures and generous in their provision of parks and a school for the town, they took no authoritative position in town government.[27] This was the responsibility of the middle middle classes who stepped forward to take the lead, sit on the committees and head up decision-making boards

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[25] Daniels, *A History of Oldbury, Langley and Warley* [Online], article 4, p. 1; *Berrows Worcester Journal* 'Testemonial to Captain Bennitt', Thursday 19 November 1846.
[26] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury, A Penny Bank', Monday 18 October 1858, p. 4.
[27] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Welch, C., Mc Connell, A., 'Chance, Sir James Timmins, First baronet (1814-1902), Glass Manufacturer and Lighthouse Engineer'
http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32359/37274; Threlfall, *The Story of 100 Years of Phosphorus Making, 1851-1951*, p. 82.

Although the middle middle classes did not share the prestige of the higher élite, they were of equal importance to the progress of the town. They were the group who had always taken the lead in Oldbury, attending Vestry meetings, organising the Poor Law and enforcing law and order. During the early years of the nineteenth century, they continued in this role, joined over time by incoming industrialists, retailers and professional men. When the problems of the town became too great for them to handle, they were the ones who asked the government to appoint first commissioners and then a Board of Health. They were the group who attended numerous meetings, sat on committees and boards, giving their time and energy to get things done.

Although they were drawn from the body of the townspeople and were closely involved in the life and economy of the town, they lacked the finance to put their ideas into practice. They also lacked the direction that came with an authoritative élite, and government by committee had a number of drawbacks. Many of the committee meetings were overtaken by squabbles between individual members and the group of ratepayers managed to prevent developments in the town by refusing to accept a rise in the rates to fund the projects. The town only began to experience civic progress in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the Board of Health discovered that it was possible to loan money from the government directly for building projects without having to put up the rates. Oldbury was not alone in experiencing this problem; many of the Black Country towns were in a similar position. The towns of Dudley and West Bromwich stand out from the rest as having a functioning élite that were able to implement ideas, mainly due to their position in society; the remainder of the towns did not see improvement to basic facilities until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The impact of this vacillation has been noted in Chapters 3 and 4 by exploring the health problems and high death rate the people experienced.

Towards the end of the century, without the opposition of the ratepayers the Oldbury élite were able to make plans, loan the finance and begin to emulate the civic advances of towns such as West Bromwich and Dudley and, by the end of the century, the townscape of Oldbury resembled that of the other Black Country towns.

The provision of basic facilities was attributable to a number of voluntary groups which provided the social infrastructures which the community lacked, and foremost among these providers were the Nonconformist churches. Gilbert notes that chapels were 'foci' of recreational provision.[28]

Oldbury had an early experience of Nonconformity. Well before the religious expansion of the nineteenth century, the town had proved to be a magnet for meetings of dissenters in the area. Nonconformity was not only tolerated in the town, it was welcomed. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that from the early nineteenth century, Nonconformity had a strong presence in the town completely outnumbering that of the Anglicans. The first group to arrive at the end of the eighteenth century were the Methodists and they became the strongest Nonconformist group in the town which also included Baptist, Brethren, Catholic, Independent, Salvation Army and Unitarian congregations.

On arrival in Oldbury at the end of the eighteenth century, the Methodists began to be involved in a variety of social acts: commencing a programme of education through the Sunday School scheme and taking part in running the town through attending the Vestry.[29] Over time, church members sat on the various decision-making committees and regulatory boards, such as the Board of Health. Their churches were erected in a number of locations

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[28] Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*, p. 91.
[29] Keyworth, 'The Black Country Circuit. The Story of Oldbury Methodism ', p. 9.

across the town, including the working-class districts which brought them into close contact with the people they were aiming to reach. Their first meetings were in homes, moving to a simple building when they could afford to do so. As the congregation was involved in raising money for the buildings and even erecting them themselves in some instances, they identified closely with them, a factor which Strachan also identifies for the South West woollen industry.[30] The larger buildings which came later in the century were at the heart of the community. In addition to dealing with the 'rites of passage', each church had its own school, ran various clubs and organisations and gave support at times of poverty: soup kitchens and blanket loans when people were out of work and had nothing to live on, for example. Nonconformist churches had an influence which paralleled that of the élite in some of these areas.

In the area of education, for example, the Nonconformist churches took a decisive lead. Each church had its own Sunday School and a number had day schools. This provision obviously worked for the town and they were determined that it should not change following the introduction of the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which called for the introduction of Board Schools.[31] All members of the élite and the local people worked together to raise the finance to increase school places and ensure that their system of voluntary education continued.[32]

The Nonconformist presence in Oldbury played a part in providing community facilities, both through using their buildings as a place where the community could meet other than the public house and through their involvement in community life. All classes of society could

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[30] Strachan 'Congregation and Community: Religious Observance and Identity in the South West Woollen Industry, c.1760 to 1860', p. 43.
[31] 1870 (33) Elementary Education. A Bill to Provide for Public Elementary Education in England and Wales.
[32] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Oldbury: School Accomodation', Monday 15 December 1884.

take up positions within the organisations of the Nonconformist churches, and this went some way to breaking down the barriers of class. One group which did this particularly well were the Primitive Methodists. This was the group with the highest working-class membership, perhaps due to the fact that members felt valued and had a sense of identity with a church which included everyone in decision-making processes.[33] The work of the churches was accepted as part of the local community with people able to choose themselves whether to join a group or take what was offered. For a community whose lives were dictated by the decisions of others, this was very important. The churches were one organisation in the town which offered roles to women, even though this was often linked to their experience in domestic tasks. They organised events, such as bazaars, arranged tea meetings and ran groups for women. Some also took a leadership role in class meetings; groups where women could have a voice. Hempton notes that the classes allowed women to express their feelings and opinions with those outside their normal domestic circle.[34]

It was feared at the time that the new political awareness of the working classes would lead to dissatisfaction and revolts against society.[35] On the one hand, the training they received in Nonconformist churches gave the working men the confidence to take up leadership roles in the work place and trade unions; on the other, it led to members joining more militant organisations, such as the Chartist movement, and making a stand against authority.[36] Although this took place in a number of the Black Country towns, there is little evidence of it from the working classes in Oldbury.

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[33] CHAS, 5988.
[34] Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900*, p. 186.
[35] Arnold, *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold, Collected and Republished*, pp. 453- 67.
[36] Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850*, pp. 184, 191.

Both the élite and the Nonconformist churches played a part in enabling Oldbury to progress from a village to a town and for a strong community to develop. While the élite worked towards putting the physical infrastructure into place, the Nonconformists provided the social infrastructure for the town. For much of the century, the élite struggled with their responsibilities to provide basic facilities to ensure the health of the people improved. During this time, the Nonconformists took practical action, providing support, education, social and leisure activities and sought to make relationships with the population and establish their position in the community. This thesis reveals the way that Nonconformists in Oldbury had a positive effect upon social life.

8.4 The development of the industrial Black Country

In addition to throwing light on Oldbury, this thesis has also illuminated the history of the Black Country. In many ways its experience was typical of what was happening across the region: the amount of pollution the towns encountered and the high death rates, especially among children. In other areas, Oldbury's experience differed from the recognised Black Country pattern. Industry spread across the region from the thirteenth century, but Oldbury remained a farming community until the nineteenth century. The élite in the majority of towns encouraged industrialisation, but in Oldbury they held it back. The industrialisation of the area was based on coal mining and iron manufacture, whereas Oldbury had more factory-based industries, many of which were centred on the production of chemicals. Its history reveals both the town's distinctiveness and the complexity of the Black Country economy. Given its antiquity and its position on a major road in the district, it is surprising that Oldbury did not join Dudley as a major town in the region as did nearby West Bromwich. The expectation that the village was going to develop in this way appears have been there during

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the first half of the nineteenth century when a Court of Requests and then a County Court was located in the town, as revealed in Chapter 6. A number of suggestions have been put forward as to why this did not happen, including the lack of interest of the landed élite in comparison with that of Dudley and West Bromwich, the relocation of the main road through West Bromwich, and the amount of pollution from which the town suffered. It is evident from the battle which took place during the 1850s when West Bromwich wanted to have the County Court transferred there, that the townspeople of Oldbury saw their town as an important one. The large number of signatures which were collected on a petition and sent to London helped them retain the Court in the town until the late 1880s.[37] It was then transferred to West Bromwich which had become one of the leading towns in the district. The large industrial concerns developing in Oldbury set it apart from towns with a similar governing élite, such as Bilston, which, like the majority of Black Country towns majored in the extractive industries and small manufactories. Although often seen as one huge conurbation, differences such as these make each of the Black Country towns distinctive.

This thesis has also illuminated the following dimensions of Black Country history: landscape, religion, community, the élite, networks, and public health.

Due to the destruction of the environment by industrialisation, little is known about the landscape of the Black Country prior to the nineteenth century apart from details identified by Frost from wills and probate records.[38] Research into the early history of Oldbury along with evidence from the eighteenth-century Beighton map and the nineteenth-century tithe map has highlighted the village's stock-farming base.[39] Features such as the extent of the open fields

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[37] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 'Proposed Removal of Oldbury County Court', Friday 13 July 1888.
[38] Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560 – 1720'.
[39] Beighton, *Oldbury in the County of Salop*; Houghton, *Tithe Map of the Townships of Oldbury and Langley in the Parish of Halesowen in the County of Salop*.

have been revealed along with elements of the wood-pasture farming system retained in field

names. All of these give a picture of the area prior to industrialisation. In a similar way, the

investigation into the early history of Nonconformity in the region has provided an

explanation for why it became so effective during the nineteenth century. In each of the

towns, Nonconformity was a strong feature, with the various churches becoming substantial

resource providers for their inhabitants. This was one area where the town boundaries were

flexible, with denominational ties stretching across the region.

The thesis has thrown light on the insular nature of the Black Country communities; a

widespread perception that this is a local trait is held by those who live within and outside the

area.[40] The foundation for this localism was laid in the industrial era when each village

developed into a self-governing town. Although described as an 'interminable village' during

the nineteenth century,[41] the Black Country did not develop into a conurbation, as did

Manchester. Birmingham was the nearest large manufacturing town, but it was never linked

in a governmental capacity to the Black Country. The fact that the towns were independent

led to a number of problems which might have been solved if they had combined their

resources: the need for basic facilities, such as a piped water system, for example. The insular

nature of the towns has left behind a legacy in the way in which the inhabitants perceive

themselves today. They take pride in their particular town and the Black Country dialect,

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[40] This is difficult to quantify as it is an attitude shown through speech and behaviour. It is highlighted in numerous reports about the area, for example in a recent document relating to housing renewal it was mentioned eleven times: ECOTEC Research & Consulting Limited, *Black Country Telford Housing Market Renewal Area - Phase One* [Online] http://www.the-blackcountry.com/Upload/Black%20Country%20Study/Housing/Black%20Country%20Report-Black%20Country%20Telford%20Housing%20Market%20Renewal%20Area%20-%20Phase%20One.pdf, (Accessed: 29/7/2014).
[41] 1843 (508) Midland Mining Commission. First Report. South Staffordshire.

which is one of the last examples of early modern English spoken today, pronouncing words and using word patterns that can be seen in the writing of Chaucer.[42]

The thesis has revealed the differential geographical industrial development of the Black Country. The reason for the lack of early industrialisation in the southern villages has been linked to the depth and inaccessibility of the coal. This study of the town of Oldbury has shown that the influence of a town's landed élite had an equal part to play in a town's industrial growth. Raybould and Trainor have highlighted this in relation to the aristocratic élite,[43] and Trainor has broadened this category to include the upper- and middle-class élite during the nineteenth century.[44] For Oldbury, however, its élite played a crucial part long before industrialisation began. The actions of its monastic land owners in moving the village to a key location and leasing large swathes of land to individual families, unwittingly paved the way for its eventual industrialisation, but it had to continue as a farming community for three hundred years before this was realised. The availability of land in the early nineteenth century attracted a specific type of industry to the town, a factor which strengthened its economy and provided a way forward when traditional industry went into decline and there was high unemployment across the region. The élite who led Oldbury through this difficult period fitted the pattern of Black Country élites laid out by Trainor. In Dudley and West Bromwich, the higher élite were professionals and major industrialists, involved in philanthropic activities along with the aristocracy, while the middle middle classes took on

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[42] Conduit, E., *Black Country Dialect* [Online] (01/08/2008),
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blackcountry/content/articles/2006/11/29/black_country_dialect_academic_feature.shtml,
(Accessed: 18/11/2011).
[43] Raybould, 'Lord Dudley and the Making of the Black Country'; Trainor, 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier: The Earls of Dartmouth and of Dudley c1810 to 1914'.
[44] Trainor, *Black Country Elites, The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830 – 1900.*

the key roles in town government. Oldbury had more in common with Bilston, which also

had a middle-class élite who were 'vulnerable to economic problems'.[45]

A further important feature of industrial development was the making of networks. The way

in which this operated is seen through a study of the Darby family. Originating from Dudley,

the family moved to Coalbrookdale in Shropshire, where they set up large iron works. These

acted as a training ground and support network for family members who moved back into

Black Country towns such as Oldbury, Cradley and Tipton and other industrial areas to set up

their own concerns.[46] Members of the family intermarried with those from other iron-

manufacturing families such as the Lloyds, Parkers and Dearmans, strengthening the

industry's economic base. Ashton gives details of a web of such links in the West Midlands,

continuing through a number of generations.[47] This was happening across the region in the

iron industry with familial links spreading to London and further afield, making contacts and

setting up networks for trade.

One of the main ways that this thesis has added to the historiography of both the Black

Country and industrialisation is through the recognition of how industry affected the health of

the people, both in relation to industrial pollution and to occupational illnesses and accidents.

This is a largely uncharted area in the study of individual industrial towns.

8.5 Methodologies

The major method of research in this thesis has been the construction of a micro-history of

Oldbury's development over time, with particular reference to the effects of the spread of

industry on the town and people's lives. Micro-history has proved to be a very effective

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[45] Ibid., p.107.
[46] Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 214 – 16.
[47] Ibid., p. 125.

means of research as it narrows the historical focus upon particular events or experiences which in turn illuminate larger issues. Through an investigation of a wide range of primary sources, many of which have not been used before in published work, it has been possible to trace the town's development over time, identify the key players whose decisions shaped its history, and uncover the details which made up its industrial experience. Primary sources have been accessed in record offices in Birmingham, Chester, Dudley, London, Manchester, Sandwell, Sheffield, Stafford, Warwick and Worcester, and through on-line databases. They have provided insights into company, church and town history through account and minute books, registers, reports, photographs and correspondence. Changes to the local landscape have been observed through a study of maps, plans, leases and land documents. Data from quarter session rolls, hearth tax records and census documents have provided the resources to map population growth and change. The medical records, registers and minute books of the district workhouse and asylums have facilitated an investigation into the treatment of those with mental health issues. Online access to Parliamentary papers, local and personal Acts, Bills, abstracts of returns, journals and reports has provided the government perspective in the changes which were taking place, while newspapers, books, directories and journal articles produced at the time brought the people of the town into the focus. These documents have provided clues to the issues and forces which influenced the life and experience of the population over time.

Given the possibilities for analysing much of the source material, it was necessary to apply distinctive methodologies to make sense of the data. Two research tools in particular were chosen: GIS mapping and prosopography.

GIS mapping provided a means of charting the complexity of landscape changes during the industrial process, whilst also affording a way to display key elements of the town's industrial experience. Historians, as opposed to geographers and archaeologists, have not used this method very widely and in many ways this was breaking new ground. The ability to combine data and cartography has facilitated analysis in this thesis and the visual representation has elucidated the results. Although these techniques could have been employed manually, to incorporate such a wide range of data would have been a time consuming process, with the possibility of human error. Once the data are entered into GIS, the results are produced in seconds. Use of the layering features has led to the identification of previously unrecognised factors such as a former location for the village and its relocation among the open fields, alongside a major road, both key factors for Oldbury's industrial future. Several chapters reveal how productive GIS mapping has been in revealing changes in the landscape.

The second method chosen to investigate the micro-history of the town was prosopography, for identifying different élite networks, but the approach did not totally come up to expectations. On the positive side, it identified the links between members of both the Nonconformist churches and the governing boards, and revealed how sons followed their fathers in taking up leading positions in the town. It has also pinpointed important family links such as that between Anthony Parker, a person of importance in the town, and the Darby family of Coalbrookdale. Anthony was the great-grandson of Esther Darby, sister of Abraham Darby. This in turn led to links with other family members, enabling the networks between ironworking families and their influence in the region to be identified. The main drawback of prosopography for a town like Oldbury, with a middle-class élite, is the difficulty in locating data. Gaps in knowledge inevitably arise, making analysis difficult. Although the database was constructed according to Trainor's model, the categories used were too wide for

a town without an upper-class élite. The heading 'education', for example, could only be

completed for the few members of the highest level of the élite. On another occasion, it

would be better to limit the number of categories to ones where full records could be achieved

in a majority of cases.

The methodologies used in this thesis would facilitate understanding change in other Black

Country towns and towns in general. Micro-history puts the history of the village or town

under a microscope, allowing the reconstruction of individual factors which contradict or

confirm recognised patterns. This extends the level of comparison from the national or

regional to the village level, bringing the community of the village into the focus. GIS is a

significant tool for researching the history of a town and producing the results of research in

an easily understood format, and prosopography provides an effective way of identifying élite

and family links and networks.

8.6 Future research

This thesis has given an overview of the industrial development of a town and the problems

that this imposed on the landscape and the people. Each of the chapters could provide a basis

for deeper research into Oldbury and comparative research with other Black Country and

industrial towns. Stobart points to the fact that industrialisation and urban growth were

deeply rooted in the past and highlights the necessity, therefore, of exploring industrial

processes in the early eighteenth century.[48] One of the perspectives that emerged from this

thesis is the need to take the investigation back in time to before the eighteenth century.

Oldbury appears to emerge out of nothing in the nineteenth century and it was only when an

investigation into its history from the twelfth to the sixteenth century was undertaken in

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[48] Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c.1700-60*, p. 4.

Chapter 2 that the reason for its particular path into industrialisation was revealed. A deeper

investigation into the industrial and social landscape of Oldbury and the other Black Country

towns during the medieval, and early modern period would enable a fuller picture of the

region as a whole to be built up, so that a comparison can be made and conclusions drawn

about the shaping of the area's industrial experience.

Examination of pollution and the health of the population has highlighted a number of topics

which call for further investigation in their own right: the place of groups such as trade

unions, saving schemes, co-operatives and self-help groups in the industrial town, their

organisation and leadership, their effectiveness and the involvement of the working classes.

The development of health provision in the region and its effectiveness merits further

examination: the establishment of official and unofficial levels of assistance, involvement of

employers, medical insurance companies, and self-help organisations, what schemes were

available and what was their take-up in the industrial towns. Mental health has been touched

upon in this thesis and was obviously a real cause for concern in the industrial town; a fuller

investigation into the records of Powick hospital should shed light on the backgrounds of the

people from Oldbury who were sent to the institution, the treatment they received and

possible links with life in the industrial town. Work done by Sarah York on the subject of

suicide has included research into Powick hospital, and a broader study into other areas of

mental health would add to this knowledge base.[49]

There is a legacy from the pollution experienced in the Black Country, such as phosphorus

buried in lagoons and its effect on wildlife. Research into this problem would bring the

consequences of industrialisation on the Black Country landscape and the lives of the people

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[49] York, S. H. 'Suicide, Lunacy and the Asylum in Nineteenth-Century England' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Birmingham, 2009).

up to date. A further way forward is to strengthen the comparative dimension of the research with other specific towns to point out similarities and differences. This thesis has attempted to provide a substantial micro-history of a rapidly developing Black Country town and the author hopes that it adds substantially to knowledge of Oldbury, the Black Country and the experience of industrialisation.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Mills on the River Tame.[1]

Name	Location	Earliest mention	Used for	Known change of use	Used for ** Dual use	Date of other change	Use
Hamstead Mill	Hamstead	Pre 1086	Corn	1533	Iron mill/hammer and corn **	1686	Also used for pumping water to hall
Perry Hall Mill	Perry Barr	1086	Corn	1632	Cutler		
Rushall Mill	Rushall	1086	Corn	1600 ?	Iron mill		
Wystie Mill	Wednesbury	1086	Corn	1423	Fulling		
Walsall Town Mill	Walsall	1159	Corn/ malt				
Sandwell Mill (Priory)	West Bromwich	1180	Corn	1775	Slitting mill	1851	Saw mill
Sheepwash (Greet) Mill	Great Bridge	1180	Corn	1713	Blade mill	1819	Bar and round iron
Friar Park Forge	Bescot (Abbey of Hales)	1224	Corn	1553	Bloomsmithy	1770	Blade and corn mill Rolling mill
Bentley Mill	Darlaston	1239	Corn	1781	Blade		
Walsall New Mills	Walsall	1247	Corn				
Castle Mill	Dudley	1272	Corn				

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[1] Dilworth, D., *The Tame Mills of Staffordshire* (London, Phillimore, 1976)

Name	Location	Earliest mention	Used for	Known change of use	Used for ** dual use	Date of other change	Use
Priory Mill	Dudley	1272	Corn				
Bromford Mill (Oldbury Mill)	West Bromwich/ Oldbury	1272	Corn	1693	Blade mill	1780	Wire mill
Oldbury Green (Hills) Mill	Oldbury	1275	Corn				
Tipton	Bloomfield Tipton	1279	Bloomsmithy				
Hollbrook	Perry Barr	1287	Bloomsmithy	1591	Blade mill	1788	Wire
Abbeyley Mill	Oldbury	1294	Corn				
Oldbury (Blakely) Mill, Shenstons Mill	Oldbury	1297	Corn/malt				
The Mill (Abney's) Turzons, Izons or Greet Mill	West Bromwich/ Oldbury	1301	Corn	1621	Corn/blade two mills under one roof	1782	Foundry (Izons)
New Mill	Oldbury	1302	Corn				
Walsall	Bescot	1306	Bloomsmithy	1600?	Iron mill		
Wednesbury Forge?	Wednesbury	1315	Bloomsmithy	1590	Forge		
Mores Mill	Tipton Forge	1327	Corn	1798	Slitting mill		
Holford Mill	Handsworth	1358	Fulling	1533	Hammer mill	1654	Blade and corn

Name	Location	Earliest mention	Used for	Known change of use	Used for ** dual use	Date of other change	Use
Bilston Mill	Bilston	1378	Corn				
Hateley Mill	West Bromwich Hall	1379	Corn	1690?	Rolling mill		
Jone Mill	West Bromwich	1526	Corn				
Wednesbury Bridge Mill	Wednesbury	1538	Corn	1600?	Iron		
Hollbrook	Perry Barr	1560	Corn				
Hollbrook	Perry Barr	1560	Blade	1648	Paper	1843	Wire
Hollbrook	Perry Barr	1560	Blade	1654	Paper	1843	Wire
Old Forge	West Bromwich	1567	Iron Forge/ hammer mill	1836	Corn	1890	Grist mill
Dunkirk Mill	West Bromwich	1573	Corn	1836	Iron rod		
Goscote Mill	Pelsall/Rushall	1576	Not known				
Clock Mill	Pelsall/Rushall	1576	Not known				
Peck Mill	Walsall	1576	Not known				
Bustleholme Mill	West Bromwich	1594	Corn	1625	Blade mill /slitting mill and corn**	1823	Rolling mill

Name	Location	Earliest mention	Used for	Known change of use	Used for ** dual use	Date of other change	Use
Willingsworth Mill	Wednesbury	1598	Corn	1781	Blade mill		
Parks (Persehouse's) Hall Mill	Sedgley	1614	Corn	1780	Kier's Soap Factory	1842	Forge (Bloomfield)
Partridge's Horseley Mill	Tipton	1702	Blade mill	1812	Furnace and iron works		
Sparrows Forge	Wednesbury	1730	Forge	1812	Edge mill		
Cole Pool Mill	Pelsall/Rushall	1775	Not known				
Great Barr Mill (Barr Mill)	Great Barr	1775	Corn/saw?				
Fishers Mill	Tipton	1775	Forge mill				
Coseley Blade Mill	Sedgley	1792	Blade mill				
Lord Dudley's Blade Mill	Sedgley	1792	Blade mill				
Golds Mill	Tipton	1816	Iron works				
Lea Brook Mill	Tipton	1834	Iron works				
Eagle Foundry							
Langley Mill	Langley		Corn				

Appendix 2. Genealogy of Anthony Parker. [2]

John Darby m Margaret

John Darby m Ann Baylies

Abraham Darby 1678
m Mary Seargent

**Esther Darby 1680
m Anthony Parker**

Esther Parker 1707
m
Richard Phillips
Ironmaster of Welshpool

**Anthony Parker 1709
m Hannah**

Ann Parker 1715
m
? Cranage of Bridgenorth
Forge

Abraham Parker 1717

Mary Parker 1720

| Mary 1736 | George 1740 | Richard 1742 | Ann 1745 | John 1748 | Ann 1750 | Esther 1752 | Abraham 1755 | Sarah 1759 | **Benjamin 1762** |

Levi
1787

**Anthony
Parker
1797**

Hannah

[2] *The Dudley Herald,* 'The Old Parker Family of Madeley (Salop), Dudley and Tipton. The Great Iron and Coal Masters.', Saturday 19 July,1919, p. 10; Gale, *The Coneygre Story*

Appendix 3. Abstract of deaths in the County of Staffordshire, in sub districts[3]

Staffordshire	Area in statute acres	Acres per head of population	Population 1851	Deaths 1857	Deaths per 1000	Population 1861	Estimated population 1857	Estimated deaths per 1000
Stafford	17,581	1.28	13,785	384	28	14,730	14,352	27
Castle Church	19,073	4.65	4,103	74	18	5,413	4,889	15
Colwich	21,370	4.92	4,340	80	18	4,322	4,329	18
Stone	36,637	4.57	8,023	197	25	9,528	8,926	22
Eccleshall	32,810	5.44	6,027	98	16	6,139	6,094	16
Trentham	9,037	2.09	4,323	82	19	6,259	5,485	15
Newcastle under Lyme	8,867	0.67	13,177	500	38	15,640	14,655	34
Whitmore	6,280	4.92	1,276	10	8	1,302	1,292	8
Audley	11,171	1.76	6,361	135	21	7,625	7,119	19
Wolstanton	10,739	0.48	5,142	196	38	9,563	7,795	25
Tunstall	0		17,049	541	32	22,466	20,299	27
Burslem	2,940	0.15	19,725	450	23	22,327	21,286	21
Stoke on Trent	10,490	0.19	9,619	233	24	14,390	12,482	19
Hanley	0		12,468	317	25	16,848	15,096	21
Shelton	0		14,796	428	29	18,331	16,917	25
Fenton	0		5,767	158	27	7,882	7,036	22
Longton	0		13,262	358	27	16,857	15,419	23
Leek	43,174	2.48	11,154	300	27	12,341	11,866	25
Norton	0		4,321	118	27	5,634	5,109	23
Leek Frith)	0		1,920	31	16	1,790	1,842	17
Longnor	29,719	8.64	3,438	85	25	5,041	4,400	19
Cheadle	12,341	1.80	6,860	110	16	7,107	7,008	16
Alton	9,467	3.46	2,740	51	19	2,693	2,712	19
Ipstones	20,077	4.16	4,828	100	21	6,118	5,602	18
Dilhorne	19,108	3.34	5,716	77	13	5,070	5,328	14
Uttoxeter	24,807	2.99	8,291	153	18	8,008	8,121	19
Abbots Bromley	17,355	5.71	3,038	53	17	2,976	3,001	18
Sudbury	20,728	5.44	3,811	63	17	3,803	3,806	17
Burton upon Trent	17,138	1.42	12,098	373	31	18,745	16,086	23
Tutbury	27,211	4.11	6,616	134	20	6,797	6,725	20

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[3] 1859 (2559) Twentieth Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, p. xviii

Staffordshire	Area in statute acres	Acres per head of population	Population 1851	Deaths 1857	Deaths per 1000	Population 1861	Estimated population 1857	Estimated deaths per 1000
Repton	27,430	4.48	6,126	100	16	6,481	6,339	16
Gresley	18,873	2.69	7,003	130	19	9,039	8,225	16
Tamworth	26,176	3.19	8,203	142	17	8,647	8,469	17
Fazeley	20,564	3.54	5,803	103	18	6,857	6,435	16
Lichfield	37,688	2.85	13,237	321	24	15,628	14,672	22
Yoxall	20,417	4.05	5,040	85	17	4,765	4,875	17
Rugley	13,508	1.93	7,002	150	21	7,148	7,090	21
Penkridge	27,434	6.15	4,461	77	17	4,260	4,340	18
Brewood	20,782	3.55	5,855	101	17	5,629	5,719	18
Cannock	22,583	3.46	6,531	161	25	8,773	7,876	20
Wolverhampton Eastern	3,098	0.06	32,335	500	15	86,346	64,742	8
Wolverhampton Western	0	0.00	17,652	1274	72	24,514	21,769	59
Tettenhall	14,222	2.53	5,621	87	15	6,046	5,876	15
Kinfare	16,391	3.49	4,699	67	14	4,832	4,779	14
Wombourne	12,961	3.14	4,131	79	19	4,991	4,647	17
Willenhall	5,588	0.33	16,789	808	48	25,809	22,201	36
Bilston	1,730	0.07	23,527	796	34	24,301	23,991	33
Walsall	19,052	0.59	21,203	800	38	30,415	26,730	30
Bloxwich	0	0.00	5,609	242	43	9,327	7,840	31
Aldridge	0	0.00	5,282	157	30	7,026	6,328	25
Darlaston	2,551	0.23	10,970	572	52	13,230	12,326	46
West Bromwich South West	1,500	0.08	17,885	574	32	21,588	20,107	29
West Bromwich North East	4,210	0.25	16,706	576	34	20,207	18,807	31
Handsworth	7,080	0.90	7,879	189	24	11,459	10,027	19
Oldbury	8,709	0.67	12,978	475	37	17,238	15,534	31
Wednesbury	2,175	0.15	14,281	587	41	21,968	18,893	31
Dudley	8,930	0.24	37,962	1416	37	44,975	42,170	34
Rowley Regis	8,670	0.61	14,219	503	35	19,785	17,559	29
Tipton	3,020	0.10	29,417	833	28	28,870	29,089	29
Sedgley	7,864	0.27	29,447	871	30	36,637	33,761	26

Appendix 4. Descent of the Manor of Oldbury[4]

Date	Lord of the Manor of Hales	Information
	Olwin	Held the manor in the time of Edward the Confessor. Oldbury part of Hales Owen Manor
1066	Roger de Montgomeri Earl of Shrewsbury	Caused Halesowen to be annexed to Salop where it remained until 1844
1094	Hugh de Montgomeri Earl of Shrewsbury	Second son inherits and dies in 1098, slain in Anglesey by Magnus King of Norway. (Older son has his father's possessions in Normandy)
1098	William Rufus	Purchases the manor and sells it to elder brother Robert de Bellême
1102	Robert de Bellême	Headed the great baronial revolt crushed by Henry 1st
1102	Henry I	Confiscated the manor which remained a royal demesne manor for 75 years.
1177	Emma sister of Henry II	Henry II granted it to Emma. She married David ap Owen Prince of Wales. At this time called Hales Owen
1204	David ap Owen died	At Owen's death it was escheated to King John
1215	Abbot of Halesowen	King John gives the manor to a house of Premonstratensian Cannons to build an abbey.
1539	Sir John Dudley	Manor granted to Sir John Dudley at the dissolution of the monastery
1553	Manor reverted back to the crown	Confiscated following John Dudley's execution
1553	Jane Dudley	Following an appeal the manor was returned to John's wife Jane. Jane dies in 1555 and the Manor passes to Robert 5th son of John Dudley
1557	**Lord of the Manor of Oldbury**	Robert sells Halesowen Manor but retains, Oldbury, Langley and Walloxhall which he settles on his wife Amy the daughter of Sir John Robsart of Siderstern in Norfolk.
1560	Amy Dudley	Amy dies from a fall without issue. Manor goes to Arthur Robsart, son of Sir John Robsart.
1560	Arthur Robsart	Exercising manorial rights including frankpledge. Settles the Manor on his son Robert who died in his father's lifetime. It passed to his son George Robsart
1573	George Robsart	George sells the reversion of Oldbury to William Turton.

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[4] Oxford DNB, *V.C.H. Worcs*. ii pp. 162- 66; *V.C.H. Worcs*. iii pp. 136 – 46, Nash p. 510, supported by information from various court barons, wills and admons. Dr T. Daniels clarifies information about Christopher Wright the younger in an article on the Oldbury and Langley website.

Date	Lord of the Manor of Oldbury	Information
1610	William Turton	After his grandfather's death George repented of the sale and it was agreed that certain messuages should become the property of Turton while the manor was settled upon George, his wife Anne and their son Arthur
1610	George Robsart	At his death Manor passed to son Arthur
1633	Arthur Robsart	Sold Oldbury to Charles Cornwallis of Broome Hall Suffolk who then became Lord of Oldbury
1633	Charles Cornwallis and Elizabeth his wife	Resided at Blakely Hall 1635 – 1640. Had two daughters Frances and Anne. Anne Cornwallis married to Anthony Mingey esq, (died without issue)
1726	William and Frances Fetherstone (or Featherstone)	Frances Cornwallis m William Fethersone who in the right of his wife became Lord of the manor. Produced two daughters Elizabeth and Anne. Elizabeth Fetherstone married …………Paston - died without issue
	William and Anne Addington	Anne Fetherstone married William Addington, Gent. Produced two daughters Frances and Anne
1742	Richard Grimshaw and Anne his wife	Anne married Richard Grimshaw, Gent - Grimshaw had one son who died unmarried
1752	Anne Grimshaw, widow Christopher and Frances Wright	Frances married Christopher Wright, Coventry, Gent (1796 deed mentions Lord and Lady of the Manor) and Christopher Wright purchased moiety of the manor.
1773	Christopher and Frances Wright	Christopher and Frances produced a son also called Christopher.
1788	Mary Wright	Christopher the younger married Mary Parrott the widow of Richard Parrott Esq of Hawkesbury Hall near Coventry
1801	Francis Parrott	Passed from Mary Wright to a relation from her first marriage
1843	Elizabeth Fraser	Francis' sister Elizabeth married John Fraser of Arbroath. Husband had already died when she inherited
1851	Patrick Allan-Fraser and Elizabeth	Daughter Elizabeth married Patrick Allan who in 1851 assumed the additional surname and arms of Fraser.
1898	Edward Caddick Esq Robert Whyte James Muir	Trustees of the estate which now owned the manor

Appendix 5. Oldbury Improvement [5]

(*Appointment of Commissioners for cleansing, sewering, lighting, watching, repairing roads, and establishing markets, at Oldbury, Walloxall, otherwise Langley Walloxall, otherwise Langley and Walloxall, in the County of Worcester.*)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that application is intended to be made to Parliament in the ensuing Session for leave to bring in a Bill for the following, or some of the following, purposes (that is to say):-

1st. To appoint Commissioners for better cleansing, watching, repairing roads, establishing markets and otherwise generally improving a district comprised within the following limits:- The Township of Oldbury, Walloxall, otherwise Langley Walloxall, otherwise Langley and Walloxall, in the County of Worcester.

2nd. To grant powers to the said Commissioners for the appointment and removal of Committees from their own body, and of officers for the purposes of the said Bill, and powers for more effectually paving, lighting, watching, cleansing, regulating, extinguishing fires, regulating hackney coaches, cabs, and other public vehicles, and for removing and preventing ruinous or dangerous buildings, and all obstructions, projections, and encroachments in, and otherwise regulating the streets, lanes, passages, streams, drains, watercourses, and other public and private ways and places within the said district, and for providing reception houses for the dead, and for prohibiting interments in burial grounds dangerous to health, and otherwise for improving the sanitary condition of the said district, and for preventing nuisances and obstructions and annoyances therein, and for providing public waterclosets and urinals within such limits, and for regulating the carrying on of newly-established offensive trades, and for the prevention of smoke therein, and for supplying the said district with water.

3rd. To place under the control and management of the said Commissioners all the present and future streets, squares, roads, lanes, foot-paths, and public passages and places within the district and the materials thereof, and all the present sewers or drains in or under the same, and to empower the said Commissioners to repair, alter, widen, and improve the same respectively, and to make and construct other and additional proper sewers and drains therein respectively, and also to make any contract or agreement with any person or company for the sale of the sewage or to collect such sewage, and to disinfect, manufacture, and sell the same, and to construct any works necessary for such purposes, and also to compel the effectual drainage of houses and buildings within the said district, and to set out and regulate the directions, width, and level of such streets and the constructions of houses and buildings.

4th. To enable the said Commissioners to establish, erect, and maintain in the said district, a market place, with proper stalls, sheds, booths, shambles, and conveniences within the said

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[5] *Berrows Worcester Journal,* 'Oldbury Improvement', Saturday 12 November 1853

district, for the sale of butcher's meat, poultry, fish, butter, eggs, cheese, vegetables, fruit, provisions, corn, hay, and other marketable commodities, and also from time to time to make and establish bye-laws and orders for the proper regulation and management of a market or fair therein, and to enable the said commissioners to levy demand , and take tolls, rates, and duties in respect of the said market and fair, and the stalls, sheds, booths, shambles, and conveniences therein, and to confer, vary, or extinguish exemptions, from the payment of tolls, rates, and duties, and other rights and privileges.

5th. To enable the said Commissioners to purchase and acquire, compulsorily or by agreement lands, houses and tenements for the purposes aforesaid.

6th. To empower the said Commissioners to levy tolls, assessments, rates, and duties upon the owners and occupiers of property within the district aforesaid, and to confer, vary and extinguish exemptions from the payment of tolls, rates and duties, and other rights and privileges, and also to exempt the inhabitants within the said limits from the payment of any highway rates, or other rates, tolls and duties which may be levied, and from the jurisdiction and control which may be exercised by any Board, or Surveyors, or Commissioners, or Trustees, in respect of any matter which by the proposed bill will be undertaken by the said Commissioners, and to restrain the collection of tolls and expenditure of money by the Trustees of Turnpike Roads within the said district.

7th. To enable the said Commissioners to obtain powers for raising money on mortgage of all or any of the aforesaid tolls, rates, duties, and assessments.

8th. To enable the said Commissioners to supply and light, or to contract to supply and light, with gas or otherwise, the various streets, roads, lanes and other public passages and places within the said district, and also to supply individuals with gas within the same, and to erect any gasometers or other works for making and supplying gas, and to provide and lay down, under, or through, any streets, roads, ways, courts, thoroughfares, and private lands within the said district, all necessary mines, pipes, and other works and apparatus for the purposes of the supply of gas within the same.

9th. To incorporate with the said Bill the several powers, privileges, and authorities contained in "The Lands Clauses Consolidation Act 1845." "The Towns Police Clause Consolidation Act 1847." "The Towns Improvement Clauses Consolidation Act 1847." "The Markets and Fairs Clauses Consolidation Act 1847." "The Gas Works Clauses Act 1847," and "The Commissioners Clauses Act 1847."

Printed Copies of the said Bill will be deposited in the Private Bill Office on or before the 31st day of December Next.
Dated the 11th day of November, 1853. Hayes and Son, Halesowen, Solicitors for the Bill.

Appendix 6. Report of the Oldbury Wesley Deaconess Committee [6]

Report of the Oldbury Wesley Deaconess Committee.

TWELVE months will soon have elapsed since Sister Eleanor Hayward came to labour amongst us. The year has brought burdens and difficulties for the Church which have been borne cheerfully, and great blessings have been the result. With full hearts we praise God, humbly and thankfully, for a success which has gone beyond all our anticipations.

RETROSPECT.

As the year 1903 drew to a close, it came to be realised that the Church ought to make some practical effort to reach the people who did not belong to any religious denomination whatever, and seek their conversion and transformation into godly men and women. At the close of several Sunday evening services the congregation was asked to remain, and after earnest prayer and serious consideration, it was resolved to secure the services of a Wesley deaconess, and the necessary funds were promised. Application was made to Dr. Stephenson, Warden of the Deaconess College at Ilkey, and, in response to our request, Sister Eleanor was sent, and commenced work on February 1st, 1904.

THE WORK.

A Mothers' Meeting has been inaugurated, of which there are now 170 members enrolled. The meetings are held in the Chapel on Monday afternoons, at 2-45, and are well attended. Addresses are given by various friends, and the hymns are selected by the mothers themselves.

In connection with this meeting there is a Clothing Club, of which a fair number of the members have joined, and appreciate the privilege.

SOCIETY CLASSES.

Two Society Classes have been formed—a Mixed Class, meeting on Monday night, and a Ladies' Class on Wednesday night. These two classes have a membership of forty.

YOUNG WOMEN'S BIBLE CLASS.

A Young Women's Bible Class meets on Sunday afternoons in one of the Class Rooms of the School, with an average attendance of fifteen.

LODGING HOUSE MEETINGS.

Meetings have been held every Sunday in one or other of the lodging houses of the town, and from time to time there is evidence that this work is much appreciated.

COTTAGE MEETINGS.

Meetings have been held in a cottage in Canal Street. Usually every available seat is occupied, and very often people are standing outside the open door. Such blessings have resulted from these meetings that several men, women and children have been converted, and many of them have become members of our Church. Some of the men are now taking part in active Christian work.

OPEN-AIR SERVICES

Have been held during the summer months on Sunday and Tuesday evenings. Many have thus had the opportunity of hearing the Gospel preached, who would never have been reached by ordinary methods, and definite good has resulted.

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[6] CHAS, 6364, Deaconess Mission Minutes 1903 - 1910 (1903)

P. M. S.

During the winter months Mission Services are held in the School on Sunday evenings, commencing at 8 o'clock. These services are intended only for those who do not attend any religious service. In connection with this work, Sister Eleanor visits many of the public houses and some of the brickyards, and many of the people respond to her invitation. A gratifying feature of this service is that it is largely attended by men. This service is much appreciated. There is a growing interest and conversions have already taken place.

TEMPERANCE WORK.

To inculcate the principles of Temperance is part of Sister Eleanor's Work, and both in the P. M. S. and in the Cottage Meetings a number have come forward voluntarily to sign the Temperance pledge.

VISITATION.

To secure these results, much visiting has been necessary, and is not confined to any one class of society. Needs—not only temporal and physical—but spiritual, are sought out and met.

It is impossible in this brief report to give a full account of the good work Sister Eleanor has been enabled to accomplish. Her work is essentially labour of which the sum total can never be assessed until the Lord of the Harvest Himself takes the final reckoning.

The thanks of the Committee are due to all those who, by their contributions and active co-operation, have assisted in the good work.

We earnestly pray that God may continue to bless Sister Eleanor, and that the coming year may witness yet richer results than those already attained.

OLDBURY
Wesleyan Deaconess Mission.

⚜

A SPECIAL SERVICE

WILL BE HELD IN

WESLEY CHAPEL,

ON

Sunday Evening, January 1st, 1905,

AT 6-30, WHEN

A Sermon will be Preached

BY THE

REV. J. W. KEYWORTH.

Special Music will be rendered by the Choir.

COLLECTION ON BEHALF OF THE DEACONESS FUND.

MIDLAND PRINTING CO., LTD., OLDBURY.

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