

JEROM MURCH AND BATH POLITICS 1833-1879

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Sir Jerom Murch, JP, DL was knighted belatedly in May 1894, the year before his death, in recognition of his achievements in Bath. The significance of his contribution to the political, legal, cultural, philanthropic and social life of the city led to the following observation in his funeral oration:

The history of sixty years in this place is the history of his service. With uncooled ardour he battled again and again for instruction, for literature, for the prosperity of the people, for their recreation and their health. For righteous laws and expanding liberties he stood as champion.¹

Apart from undertaking a prodigious number of non-political voluntary duties for the benefit of the city, for example in connection with the Mechanics' Institute/Athenaeum, the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, the Mineral Water Hospital, the Poor Law Board of Guardians, the Bath and West of England Society, the committee of the Royal Victoria Park, schools' governing bodies and the county and city judiciary, during the years 1833-79 he also became leader of Bath's Liberals and subsequently entered local government. He completed the first four of his seven mayoralties for the city, set a new agenda for municipal activism and in 1873, between bouts of mayoral service, he was persuaded to stand for one of the city's parliamentary seats. More than any other individual, Murch represented the new breed of civic reformer whose municipal mission characterized the last four decades of the nineteenth century.

In municipal politics Murch's name was a byword for courteous urbanity and he was renowned for his skills in negotiating every treacherous 'shoal and quicksand' of council committee meetings.² His broad range of interests and duties enabled him to operate within all the key elite structures of the city and form an unrivalled personal network of influence. However, this well-connected, scrupulous negotiator, the 'safeguard and antiseptic' of municipal life,³ was no



1. Sir Jerom Murch: bronze bust by Sir Thomas Brock, RA, presented by the citizens of Bath to the corporation in 1895. (*Reproduced by courtesy of the Victoria Art Gallery, Bath & North East Somerset Council*)

moderate but held extreme political views, forged through his commitment to Unitarianism, that cerebral 'Frigid Zone' of Dissent.⁴ During the 1830s and 40s in Bath, extreme Evangelicals, in particular members of the Trinitarian Bible Society who had quit the British and Foreign Bible Society parent group in protest at the continued presence of Unitarians, believed that to encounter Unitarian beliefs not only compromised the Lord's honour but threatened the eternal safety of their souls.⁵

Murch was born in Devonshire in 1807 and arrived in Bath in 1833 as the impecunious new pastor for the Trim Street Unitarian Chapel. His early campaigning activities, during which he became spokesman for the Dissenting community, laid the foundations of his civic career.⁶ It was observed that to be a member of any of the denominations of 'Old Dissent', whether Baptist, Independent, Presbyterian or Quaker, was to be politicized as 'a radical of the first water and so far as the Church is concerned a revolutionist, yea a destructive'.⁷ This was axiomatic purely on legal grounds because of their opposition to church rates which were removed only in 1868, and to the restrictions on higher education and burial, fully remedied only by 1871 and 1880 respectively. To be a Unitarian was to be on the margins of Dissent itself and to espouse an ultra-radical commitment to individual liberty. Apart from these generic politicizing factors, Bath was a bastion of Evangelicalism whose impassioned dogmatism was diametrically opposed to Murch's philosophy, and served to intensify religious conflicts which were of paramount importance at that time.⁸ Also, the city was notably religious even at a time of religious obsession and scored a formidable 79.1 on Inglis's index of attendance, calculated from data collected in the religious census of 1851.⁹

A case of 'clergyman's throat' caused Murch to retire from the chapel by 1846, and an inheritance from his wife's family enabled and obliged him to become involved in municipal politics. In the spirit of the civic gospel which was to be articulated so powerfully from the Birmingham pulpits of the Reverends Dawson and Dale, and made a reality during the mayoralties of Joseph Chamberlain between 1873 and 1876, Murch recognized political service as part of his religious witness. In an age when those classes which regarded themselves as respectable identified closely with religion, as an ex-pastor bringing his sense of mission to his political duties he was the epitome of this *leitmotif* of the age: the identification of the secular with the sacred.

Bath was a centre of radicalism when Murch arrived in the 1830s. During the Chartist agitations for political reform Henry Vincent, the 'Young Demosthenes' of the movement, remarked after a meeting at the Guildhall, 'radicalism was never so honoured in any town or city in the nation'.¹⁰ The Reform Act of 1832 had made Bath one of the most democratic boroughs in the country by enfranchising one in three adult males as opposed to the one in five typical for the average borough. Bath's new electorate had not only returned Major-General Palmer, a reforming Whig, but also John Arthur 'Tear 'em' Roebuck, the ultra-Radical and 'master of invective'.¹¹ Joseph Hume, the Radical MP, had recommended him to the city and

Roebuck was to collaborate with Hume and Francis Place as advisors to the London Working Men's Association when the Charter was devised.

Together, Roebuck and Palmer were described by their Tory opponents as representative only of the 'lanes and alleys of Bath'.¹² However, in the absence of any optimism concerning the outcome of the 1832 election, even the reactionary amongst the local Tories supported the third candidate, William Hobhouse, who was a traditional Whig. The reformers lost their seats to the Tories Viscount Powerscourt and William Ludlow Bruges in the 'Drunken Election' of 1837, but Roebuck and Lord Duncan, who had replaced Palmer as Radical candidate, regained them in 1841 against the tide of Peelite popularity, and caused Bath to be described as a 'hot bed of all that is wild, reckless and revolutionary in politics'.¹³ Although Roebuck lost his seat in 1847 and the Conservatives gained their first majority on the council since municipal reform in 1835, the hegemony of radical reforming politics was re-established quickly and can be traced up to the disintegration of Liberalism in 1886.¹⁴ The Conservative revival was confined to the years 1847-51, and by the 1860s the majority of the inhabitants were described as being 'arrayed in political fanaticism' and 'ultramontane republicanism'.¹⁵ In the thirteen parliamentary elections between 1847 and 1880 there was always at least one Liberal MP and on six occasions the party held both seats.

Three phases of Murch's interaction with local politics will be examined, to provide evidence of his identification with the radical tradition of the city and to shed light on his influence and importance: firstly, his years as pastor; secondly, his civic and party activities of the 1860s; and finally, his involvement in the parliamentary elections of 1873-4. A critical consideration of the style and significance of his municipal improvement policies and the political changes which took place within the council necessarily lie outside the scope of this article.

Shortly after his arrival in the city the Reverend Murch cut his political teeth by speaking alongside local radicals like Mayor William Blair, Councillor William Hunt and Colonel William Napier – upper-class reformer, veteran and historian of the Peninsular War. For instance, early in 1836 Murch spoke at Todd's Riding School, a popular Radical venue, in support of state powers over the property of the Irish Church. Murch was the only clergyman on the platform and although overshadowed by Napier's rhetoric, his contribution was described as a 'bold declaration of war against tithe property'.¹⁶ In open letters to the inhabitants of Bath he campaigned against the concept of an established church, the imposition of church rates, and the threat to discontinue the grant to the Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth in Ireland.¹⁷ Although Unitarians were at

the opposing extreme of the religious spectrum from Roman Catholics, Murch's commitment to tolerance demanded that he champion their rights, which he did primarily by making public speeches on their behalf. He was also involved in petitioning parliament in support of Unitarian policies such as opposition to the education clauses in Graham's Factory Bill, which favoured Anglican instruction, and the campaign for the Dissenting Chapels Act. Although Unitarianism had been legal since blasphemy laws concerning the Holy Trinity were repealed in 1813, it was only the passage of the Dissenting Chapels Act in 1844 which affirmed their rights to endowments granted before the congregations abandoned orthodox Christology.¹⁸

Like other Unitarians, the most illustrious of which were James Martineau and William Johnson Fox, who has been cited as the most effective orator of the free trade movement,¹⁹ Murch was a dedicated supporter of the Anti-Corn Law League. On 4 December 1845 he achieved something of a coup in being able to announce to Cobden and Bright, on the platform of Bath railway station, that Peel was to relinquish the Corn Laws. He was in charge of the reception of the campaigners, whom he described as 'illustrious and successful champions of a noble cause', and later spoke alongside them at a free trade rally in the city.²⁰ It was partly because of Roebuck's neglect of the Anti-Corn Law League that in the 1847 election campaign, which followed the repeal of the Corn Laws and the collapse of the Tory party, Murch decided to withdraw his support from this controversial representative. He also denounced Roebuck's 'ungovernable temper' and his lack of support for Palmerston and O'Connell, and concluded that he was unfit to serve.²¹ Unitarian rectitude prevented Murch from identifying with the raw passion of such a political pugilist whose 'captious testiness' and 'peevish temper' were notorious.²² Taking their cue from Murch, other Bath moderates repudiated Roebuck and although he believed that he had regained their support by the close of the selection meeting there is no collaborative evidence that Murch reversed his decision.

The 1847 campaign was unusually savage as Roebuck broke the habit of a lifetime and undertook personal canvassing which involved rousing nightly mobs on the streets. The 'ward meetings' were referred to by the hostile Conservative press as collections of the 'veriest scum of the city', the 'hooting and howling' causing 'annoyance and terror'.²³ Some Conservatives took umbrage because the mob appeared to be largely composed of non-voters and because cash from the Rothschild family financed the events. Also, some local Dissenters withdrew support from Roebuck as he had voted against Sabbath observance. To add to his difficulties, Roebuck had a formidable opponent in the person of Lord

Ashley, soon to become the Earl of Shaftesbury, who was a figure of national repute, commanded Whig support, and was leader of the Conservative Evangelical/Humanitarian reform lobby. He had led the movement for factory reform since 1832 and had been a prime mover in the struggle for the Mines Act of 1842. In Bath his campaign was supported by the arrival of delegates from the Manchester movement for 'short-time' work at a local meeting of the National Charter Association, and sufficient numbers of moderate voters were won over.

After his defeat, Roebuck claimed that he had been beaten, not by Tory superiority or even bribery, but by bigotry: the 'pitiful, shameful, wretched, miserable humbug' of the local Dissenters.²⁴ He declared on the hustings, 'I cannot forget the renegade Murch'.²⁵ Although ill health kept Murch from Bath at intervals immediately after the election, he was swift to reply to Roebuck's attack and observed: 'No risk of popular odium will ever deter me from doing what I conscientiously believe to be right'.²⁶ There was odium in plenty and a charge of dishonourable desertion, but despite this Murch was proved to be at one with the spirit of the times in his verdict on Roebuck. Radicalism had lost favour, Britain was poised to reject the Chartists' third and final charter, and was approaching that plateau of political complacency which distinguished the mid-century.

In accordance with Roebuck's warnings, the election of Ashley in tandem with Duncan presaged a Tory majority on the council the following November, and an end of the Radical mayors who had monopolized the role for all but one of the years since municipal reform. However, it was a fleeting victory. By 1852 the radical Liberals had regained a majority and there were no more Conservative mayors until 1869, and then only by invitation from the Liberal majority. In terms of the parliamentary seats, Ashley succeeded his father as the Earl of Shaftesbury in 1851 and his replacement was George T. Scobell, a Liberal landowner. When Duncan deserted in 1852, his replacement was the Liberal Thomas Phinn, son of a reforming Bath councillor of the pre-1835 civic regime. After acceptance of a minor government post in 1855, Phinn was in turn replaced by the Liberal William Tite who held the seat until his death in 1873.

The second stage of Murch's political career was characterized by the circumstances of his introduction to council in 1862. By this time he was regarded by all parties as the archetypal, contemporary version of the eighteenth-century master of ceremonies: an *arbiter elegantiarum* for the age of progress. He had become a monied member of the local gentry with numerous business interests, and such was his local prestige that he was invited to become mayor even before he stood for a seat on the council.

This was offered in order that he might orchestrate proceedings at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which was to be held in the city for the first time in 1864. The meeting was a success, attracting the third largest attendance in the history of the Association, and Murch was dubbed the 'type' or 'model' mayor at the conclusion of the event.²⁷ But he was not happy to interpret his role purely as ceremonial facilitator, and during the remainder of his first mayoralty he formulated a comprehensive reform programme for the city which incorporated: street improvements; the demolition of the ruinous *White Hart* coaching inn and the building of a modern municipal hotel with a new suite of treatment baths; an extension of the water supply; a solution for drainage and river pollution problems; and, to reinforce a clause of the 1851 Bath Act, the removal of the freemen's privileges and the instigation of public control of the commons. A comprehensive improvement bill was devised to empower the council for the regeneration of the city.

In 1865, during the planning of the improvements, an election was called and the second Liberal candidate withdrew at short notice. Murch was requested to stand and challenge the Conservative, Lieut-Colonel Sir James Hogg, who would win by default if no challenger emerged. The Liberals were determined to contest the second seat as the Conservative Arthur Way had won it in 1859, and they were anxious to re-establish the Liberal monopoly exercised in 1852, 1855 and 1857. The opposition had been boosted in 1857 after Way's first defeat by the formation of the Conservative Registration Society, which provided a potent challenge to the powerful Bath Liberal Association, reformed in 1847 after the defeat of Roebuck. However, Mayor Murch refused to accept the invitation as he was embroiled in municipal reform and therefore committed to neutrality. This played a part in Murch's temporary unpopularity and the short-term failure of his municipal programme, despite his publication of a pamphlet outlining part of his scheme in an effort to convert the public.²⁸

The programme failed for a variety of reasons which included its novel scope, escalating costs, the unpopularity of recent activities of the council, and the attitudes of working men in the years immediately before the passing of the 1867 Reform Act, who resented the imposition of improvement programmes by civic grandees like Murch who in common with the Liberal leaders at Westminster seemed to be ignoring their political needs. In addition to local obstacles, there was opposition from central government because of the novelty of the speculative aspects of the hotel plan. In this, Bath was ahead of its time, for by the turn of the century municipalization had overtaken operations as diverse as theatre management, rabbit breeding

and oyster production. As was observed in *The Times* in 1902: 'there is nothing too homely and nothing too enterprising for a local government body of the progressive type to take under its charge'.²⁹

By the time of the general election of 1868 male urban householders had secured the vote; the majority welcomed further reform; and Murch was freed from the restraints of his civic position to re-emerge as Liberal partizan. Tite's personal prestige was such that his election was secure, so Murch assisted the second candidate, a Dr Donald Dalrymple from Norwich. As a Gladstonian, Dalrymple appealed to the radical roots of the Bath electorate, augmented by over 1,700 new voters, which healed the rift between erstwhile Chartists and their heirs who had joined the new Bath Working Men's Reform Association, and the middle-class Liberal Association. Despite this accord, the excesses of the formidable Liberal mob dominated the 1868 election campaign. For example, a riot occurred in the Guildhall when Sir James Hogg attempted to hold a meeting. A cacophony of farmyard noises made it impossible for his speech to be heard and the people's spokesman, Councillor Richard Edwards, was first 'tossed like a shuttlecock', then propelled towards the stage from the shoulders of the crowd.³⁰ This signalled a general brawl that police seemed unable, and according to Conservative opinion, unwilling to prevent.

Murch, the 'Radical Oracle', refused to condemn his followers for the affray, blamed Conservative provocation, and aggravated his opponents further by staging a torch-lit Liberal procession enlivened by 'Chinese lanthorns' and a band, whilst his opponents were limited to offering free private dinners out of reach of the populace. Murch was criticised for 'conduct unworthy of a gentleman or magistrate' and was accused of operating a closed borough of 'concentrated rottenness' from his library.³¹ The result of the turbulent campaign was a double Liberal victory, buoyed up by the national mood of support for Gladstone and the anticipation of brisk reform.

The city experienced an unusual run of four elections between May 1873 and February 1874, which form a third significant phase in shaping and limiting Murch's career as local politician. In the words of George Goschen MP, Bath became a 'great electoral battlefield'³² on which Murch appeared as a candidate and then as a party worker helping to secure a Liberal victory. By 1872 Gladstone's first ministry was at the 'exhausted volcano' stage in the image so aptly invoked by Disraeli,³³ as the major reform programme petered out and public irritation over incidents such as the Alabama arbitration reached a crescendo in response to the unpopular Licensing Act of 1872. Dalrymple's support for this and his championship of a rehabilitation bill for habitual drunkards alienated

those who objected to controls on drinking and those who disliked the threat of increased taxes. His dismissal of a scheme for permissive legislation which sought local licensing regulations also sacrificed the support of local temperance men. Passions were so inflamed that the absence of the popular William Tite caused the annual public address from the members to be abandoned and Dalrymple had a closed session for ticket-holding supporters, as Hogg had been obliged to do in 1868.

Despite the national unpopularity of Liberalism and therefore the importance of maintaining municipal control, Murch refused the mayoralty in 1872 and promoted the election of a Conservative, Robert Stickney Blaine, who had settled in Bath in the late 1860s after amassing a fortune as a colonial merchant. He had purchased 'Summerhill' close to Murch's home on the slopes of Lansdown, replaced the late John Shum as councillor in the spring of 1872, and was later to become the leader of the local Conservatives. He became a member of both the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution and the Mineral Water Hospital committees by 1874 and the Bath and County Club committee by 1875 when he also became a JP. In 1886, when the Liberal vote fragmented, he became MP for the city. Murch encouraged Blaine to take office as he believed this would not damage the Liberal cause, and it would be advantageous for members of Bath's economic elite of the upper-town to involve themselves in civic affairs.

However, this non-party initiative was eclipsed by the elections which started in May 1873 after the death of William Tite. Murch was prevailed upon to stand but his support for disestablishment and all aspects of Gladstonianism, apart from the generally popular Education Act of 1870, rendered him unlikely to succeed. He was local chairman of the Birmingham National Education League, a body pledged to remove the vexed Clause 25 of the Education Act which permitted the financial support of poor children at denominational schools. Ideally, the campaigners aimed to remove the Act in its entirety and replace the School Board plan of filling gaps left by denominational provision with a purely secular system. Also, Murch was supported in his campaign by individuals who were reviled in elite Conservative circles, for example the ultra-Radical Councillor Richard Edwards, the cheese-factor; Councillor James Clark, the solicitor; and also Handel Cossham, the Bristol-based temperance campaigner and colliery owner who had been involved in a recent scandal concerning misappropriation of funds. Cossham was described by the Conservative press as a 'hack demagogue ... virulent assailant of the Church' and Murch's political 'godfather'.³⁴

ELECTORS OF BATH.

Two Candidates are each soliciting from you the highest honours you can confer upon them. Let us then examine well the claims of each, so that we may "render honour to whom honour is due."

I respectfully invite you then, to

Look on this Picture.

Mr. MURCH is an old and highly-esteemed Citizen of Bath, and has long identified himself with all its social and public life.

Mr. MURCH is a man of whom Bath may well be proud for his many literary attainments.

Mr. MURCH, as your Representative in Parliament, has the matured wisdom acquired by a large and varied experience of more than forty years of an active public life.

Mr. MURCH, by his zeal and munificence in the restoration of our noble and beautiful Abbey, has proved that his Christian charity is higher and greater than his sectarianism.

Mr. MURCH has either initiated and liberally supported, or both, many public movements in Bath, all tending to increase its interest or renown.

Mr. MURCH has, for a long series of years, not only been a liberal subscriber to, but an active worker for, all our great Public Benevolent Institutions.

Mr. MURCH, from his long useful and active life amongst us, knows our wants, and can therefore truly represent our varied interests.

Fellow Electors, can you then for a moment doubt which to choose? If you will, you can now *do yourselves the honour of being represented* by one of *yourselves*, by one who has lived and moved amongst us all his life; whom, therefore we *thoroughly know*, and can therefore *thoroughly trust*.

Hesitate then not for an instant between one who is only a Titled Lord, and—**Nothing more**, and one whose life-long work has been to realize amongst us the Poet's idea of "The noblest work of God."

And on this.

Lord CHELSEA is a recent importation amongst us—is simply a political partizan, and—

Nothing more.

Lord CHELSEA (if report speaks truly) has his political speeches made for him. These he has to learn, repeat, and—

Nothing more.

Lord CHELSEA, as your Representative in Parliament has all his experience to acquire. He has only the "Shibboleth" of his party. This he can pronounce, and—

Nothing more.

Lord CHELSEA is a Churchman, and—

Nothing more.

Lord CHELSEA can only *promise* to do this, and—

Nothing more.

Lord CHELSEA, if elected, (?) *may* do this, and—

Nothing more.

Lord CHELSEA, ignorant of these, can represent *his party only*. This, and—

Nothing more.

AN ELECTOR.

C. T. CULLIFORD. PRINTER, PARSONAGE LANE, WESTGATE STREET, BATH.

ELECTORS OF BATH!

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

The supporter of a Ministry who deprived Bath of its Free Grammar School, and are destroying other similar Institutions endowed by the piety and beneficence of our Forefathers.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

The supporter of a Ministry who turned out the Woolwich Dock Yard Men to starve.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

The supporter of a Ministry who sought to deprive the toiling working classes of the east end of London of the use and enjoyment of the people's Forest at Epping.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

The supporter of a Ministry who involved us in the muddle and disgrace of the Alabama Arbitration, with the consequent penalty of £3,000,000 to £4,000,000.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

The supporter of a Ministry who opposed Professor Fawcett's Bill, for extending the benefits of Trinity College, Dublin, and were beaten.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

Who supports the Birmingham League in attempting to deprive the poor of the most valuable portion of the Education Act, viz.: the Religious Denominational Teaching.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

Who helped to turn out Roebuck from Bath.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

Who, if Mayor this year, would have required £300 additional salary from the Borough Rates, a sum saved by the appointment of a Conservative Mayor.

VOTE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

Who, as a Unitarian, cannot but be in favour of the disestablishment of the Church.

VOTE THEREFORE AGAINST JEROM MURCH:

As, surely, it is too much that Bath should be MISREPRESENTED by a NORWICH DOCTOR AND A UNITARIAN.

ELECTORS!

VOTE FOR LORD CHELSEA!

Who, by his age and energy, by his talent, by his industry, by his straightforward independence, by his refusal to trim, either on the Permissive Bill or any other question, and by his Constitutional and at the same time really Liberal Politics, shows his fitness to take a position of high standing in the House of Parliament, and will be such a Representative as Bath may be proud of, who has always opposed and will oppose the Income Tax.

Murch's candidacy was an early victim in the 'torrent of gin and beer' of which Gladstone complained in 1874 at the collapse of his first ministry.³⁵ Murch's successful opponent Viscount Chelsea, followed the traditional Conservative line of supporting both the opposition of the licensed victuallers to restrictions on the sale of alcohol and also Forster's Education Act, and was thus neatly representative of liberty on the one hand and moderation on the other. Murch's adherence to the policies of an unpopular government, his political extremism and his Unitarianism, which still alienated the Evangelical majority, eroded his chances of success. He contested the seat at the nadir of Liberal fortunes when Bath already had a second unpopular Liberal MP, and at a time when his personal credentials were unappealing to voters. Liberalism was unpopular for its censorious attitude towards the drinking habits of the working classes and its libertarian reform policies. A hostile local correspondent later summed up Liberal campaigns as offering 'free church, free school, free land, free labour ... free love and free quarters to follow'.³⁶

Murch's localist platform, developed as part of his municipal strategy, was inappropriate for Bath's conception of parliamentary politics. Black graffiti daubed on walls by his supporters claimed 'Bath needs no stranger' and 'Murch the man for Bath'; sentiments tellingly countered by the slogan 'Chelsea the man for parliament'.³⁷ It was cogently argued by one of Murch's supporters that Bath should not seek a representative 'whose interest in Bath begins and ends with his carpet bag in the York House',³⁸ though this was not qualified by an explanation of earlier support for Lord Duncan. Interestingly, the bruising contest did not destroy Murch's local credit for when the Liberals presented him with a commemorative *épergne* to thank him for his parliamentary efforts and his continuing public services, some leading Conservatives were annoyed to be excluded from the subscription list. As Murch was the personification of high culture and the civic ideal, their absence from the award ceremony was deemed a slur on their intellectual sensibility and municipal loyalty.

Chelsea's victory was popularly attributed to the support of the Conservative working man, and certainly Conservative election expenses were double those of the Liberals, and may have fuelled and refreshed the working-class protest vote. However, he represented Bath for only five weeks before the death of his father elevated him to the upper house as the 5th Earl of Cadogan and another election was required. Captain Arthur Hayter, a churchman, squire and son of the Liberal whip Sir William Hayter, had equivocal views, referred to by Handel Cossham as 'milk and water policy with the milk taken out',³⁹ and because of them

was chosen by the Liberals to placate opposition. Ironically, polling at the June election was dominated by a power struggle within the Liberal camp. This was caused by a member of the National Education League, J. Charles Cox, standing in opposition to Hayter because of the latter's studious avoidance of a public endorsement of the views of the League on secular education.

Bath's Liberal mob resented this attempt to split the ranks and Cox's entourage was attacked on arriving at the Guildhall for a rally. The incident, summarized floridly in the Conservative press as 'Calumny, cajolery and cayenne!',⁴⁰ brought unwelcome national attention to the city. After a failed attempt to throw Cox out of the window, a group described as well-dressed tradesmen, wearing Liberal colours and blowing penny whistles, had showered the group with snuff and cayenne pepper which temporarily blinded Cox and injured both his agent and Francis Adams, Secretary of the Education League. Hayter promptly switched his allegiance to the League and Cox withdrew from the election, his original objective attained. After the incident, Hayter and Murch were reported to have rallied the crowds from a carriage, with Murch orchestrating the cheering as 'fugleman'. Joseph Chamberlain interpreted the incident as the start of a Nonconformist revolt which would be repeated at other elections as a warning to recalcitrant Liberals, but action was limited and that at Bath was the most significant gesture. The incident caused a question to be raised in parliament by George Dixon, MP for Birmingham and ally of Chamberlain. Henry Bruce, as Secretary of State for the Home Department, communicated with Bath on the subject, and Bath Council had a special meeting to consider the 'dastardly outrage' but no arrests were made.⁴¹

The weak Liberal cause was damaged further by this scandal which provided rich pickings for the opposition. For example, a contemporary squib billed Hayter to perform 'If at first you don't succeed' and speak on the subject of the 'shameful adulteration of Pepper and Snuff'; Murch was to offer 'Overboard he went'; and Mrs Hayter 'When I go bobbing around' accompanied by a juvenile chorus from Avon Street (a notorious slum area); with Richard Edwards on the tin whistle and the Express Band featuring 'Vagabond' Cossham.⁴² Mrs Hayter's 'bobbing around' referred to a persistent canvassing campaign undertaken in the poorest streets of the city. Described as 'zealous and imprudent' by the Conservative press,⁴³ her activities were later claimed at a woman's suffrage rally to have played a significant role in the furthering of Hayter's campaign, and they endeared her to working-class Liberals who presented her with a gold necklace and diamond pendant as a token of their esteem.⁴⁴

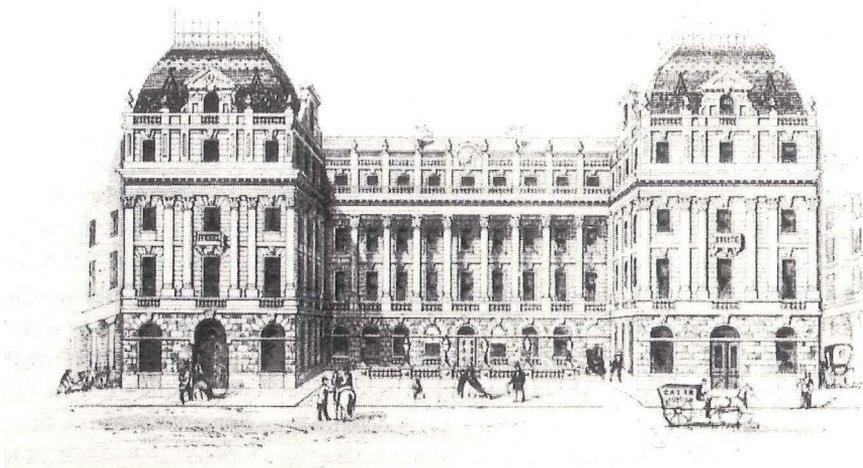
However, it appeared that the composition of Hayter's party or 'Happy Family' was, as suggested in the press, 'made up of creatures whose natural instinct is to bite and devour each other'.⁴⁵ The result of the election was a victory for Lord Grey de Wilton although the Conservative majority was reduced. In response the Liberals decided to reintroduce noble stock in the shape of Lord John Hervey, nephew of the Bishop of Bath and Wells and brother of the Marquis of Bristol, who was chosen to partner Hayter at the next general election. Before this, an early by-election was caused by Dalrymple's death in September and Hayter won his seat the following month. He was also returned at the head of the poll in the general election of February 1874. In response to the growing popularity of Disraelian Conservatism and, according to Liberal propagandists, 'the mere dangling of his filthy lucre',⁴⁶ Major Nathaniel Bousfield, the new Conservative candidate, took the second seat. Interestingly, Bousfield's 'lucre' had been generated by his family's cotton interests in Lancashire which made him an unusual nominee amongst the landowners and legal men who usually represented Conservatism in the city. His career was short, as effective local campaigning in which Murch took a leading role, coupled with the national swing back to Liberalism, caused the next general election of April 1880 to result in the return of two Liberal MPs for the brief period of Liberal unity which remained. Captain Hayter was partnered by Edmund Wodehouse, whose penchant for imperialism led him to join the Unionists when the Liberal party was wrecked on the reefs of Home Rule.

Murch continued to support Gladstonianism after his electoral defeat, and within the council chamber betrayed a partizan zeal which offended even staunch Liberals. In 1874 he engineered the election of an inexperienced Liberal protégé to the mayoralty, despite the fact that a Conservative candidate with sixteen years' experience of local government was willing to stand. To signal displeasure, the Liberal Councillor Dr Richard Gore seconded the Conservative nomination and attacked Murch's manoeuvre as being excessively partial and injudicious. Murch's nominee, Admiral James Aylmer Paynter, was a bluff naval commander whose declaration 'I'm for clean streets, Liberal principles and turning out Tories'⁴⁷ negated any neutral appeal generated by his social standing. It was stated in the Conservative press that the candidate was contemptible, and that 'political like all other scum will rise to the top'.⁴⁸ However, through his efforts on behalf of the city, Paynter became a popular mayor with all parties by the end of his two-year stint. Murch was elected to the next two mayoralties and after him the radical grocer

James Chaffin sat for three consecutive terms. Within local government Liberal hegemony appeared unassailable in the late 1870s, despite the parliamentary reversals. An average of thirty-five Liberals were returned in the council of fifty-six and all but two of the aldermen were Liberals, these two having been voted in as an unusual gesture of Liberal goodwill. Thomas Washbourne Gibbs, who became a Conservative alderman in March 1875, commented that under normal circumstances he was as likely to be chosen alderman in Bath as was the 'Grand Llama of Tibet' (sic).⁴⁹ Protests at the 'un-English and unfair ... exclusive dealing'⁵⁰ by the clique led by Murch and Thomas Jolly, his co-religionist and political ally, were common and it was observed that 'In no place in the kingdom ... is the spirit of Liberal partizanship narrower or more intolerant than in Bath'.⁵¹

In response to this criticism, it should be noted that Murch regarded the advancement of Liberalism as a sacred duty. He was loyal to Gladstone and Home Rule and opposed to imperialism, although his profound localism and enthusiasm for more statutory involvement in social improvement were more reminiscent of Chamberlain's brand of Radical-Liberalism. In 1878, at the conclusion of his fourth mayoralty, he was presented with a testimonial in recognition of his efforts for the city. Gifts included a marble bust of himself sculpted by Sir Thomas Brock, to be exhibited in the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, a Grecian-style silver salver and a bronze vase. In Murch's acceptance speech he observed that he had a liking for work but also felt a powerful moral obligation to labour for the public good, as for those with the leisure and aptitude it was 'hardly excusable to keep aloof from official life'.⁵² This was representative of the *zeitgeist* of the age when municipal initiative became recognized as a major force in improvement politics. In Bath a gentleman who avoided civic service yet presumed to criticize the actions of the council was condemned by the outspoken Councillor Lewis as 'a mere slug, a worm'.⁵³

It was observed at a banquet in Murch's honour in December 1864 that he had been instrumental in awakening a strong desire for improvement, and he saw himself as reviving the enterprise of his eighteenth-century predecessors on the council. It is apparent in retrospect that his work to capitalize on the assets of the city for the general good was not simply a revival of eighteenth-century-style municipal corporatism, but a mission reinforced with the moral armour of the nineteenth century which created a new form of social conscience and a determination to impose social improvement. Murch's vision for reform in Bath was partially realized by 1879. The Bath Act of 1870, subsequent Provisional Orders of 1875 and



4. Bathforum House: the original design for the Grand Pump Room Hotel by Wilson and Willcox, 1865. (Reproduced by courtesy of Bath Reference Library)

1876, and the continuing acquisition of private water companies, had improved water supplies. The Grand Pump Room Hotel, built on the site of the *White Hart* and functioning as a private concern with Murch as chairman of the board of directors, was regarded as one of the best provincial hotels.⁵⁴ The city operated the adjoining suite of baths and had gained total control of the hot spring outlets in the city by purchasing the Kingston Baths in 1878. Also, the Bath Act of 1879 extinguished the rights of the freemen, the remaining oligarchical structure within the civic administration. Although a solution for the drainage and flooding problems remained elusive, a new concept of municipal provision and service had begun to emerge which was to reach full efflorescence in the 1890s and the Edwardian period.

Murch's career in local government continued until his last illness in 1895. His definition of the duty of good citizens involved 'doing all the good they could on the widest possible basis and promoting the happiness of the greatest number',⁵⁵ which extended Benthamite utilitarianism by the suggestion of a broader altruism. His definition required concern for national politics and active municipal service, which mirrored Chamberlain's view of municipal duty as a noble and sacred obligation for the elite.⁵⁶ Although Murch and Chamberlain shared a Unitarian outlook and faith in democracy, and the same municipal idealism and rhetoric, Murch lacked the ruthlessness and industrially-based fortune

of Chamberlain, and he failed to transfer to national politics after his initial disappointment. As Murch lost Bath in 1873, so Chamberlain lost Sheffield in 1874, but the latter's personal misery after the death of his second wife and parents in 1875, destroyed his religious faith and determined him to pursue politics on the national stage. Meanwhile the uxorious Murch, a dedicated localist and family man, remained content in Bath and continued his civic career which centred on furthering the cause of Liberalism and developing the scope of local government. His work was concluded fittingly with the successful completion of the new municipal buildings, a scheme devised and negotiated by himself, of whom it was said at the laying of the foundation stone in 1893: 'To no living person are the citizens of Bath more indebted than to yourself for the true development of her municipal institutions'.⁵⁷ Jerom Murch thus has a potent claim to be recognized as the most influential citizen and local politician in the city of Bath during most of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Notes

- 1 *The Inquirer*, 25 May 1895.
- 2 *Bath Chronicle* (BC), 16 May 1895.
- 3 *Bath Herald* (BH), 25 May 1895.
- 4 *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* (BCG), 12 January 1836.
- 5 Bath Library (BL), 'Proceedings of the Trinitarian Bible Society at Bath', Somerset Pamphlets, Vol. 6.
- 6 A. Kolaczowski, 'Jerom Murch and Unitarianism in Bath 1833-45', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1995), pp.15-29.
- 7 D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (Leicester, 1976), p.270.
- 8 C. Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, 1940), p.203. This refers to the importance of Bath in the purchase of advowsons by the Simeon Trust; see also B. Stone, *Bath Millennium* (Bath, 1973), pp.90-1.
- 9 K. Inglis, 'Patterns of religious worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (April 1960), pp.74-86, especially p.80.
- 10 R.A. Challinor, *A Radical Lawyer in Victorian England. W.P. Roberts and the Struggle for Workers' Rights* (1990), p.12. For detail on Vincent, see M. Vincent, *The Vincent Printers* (New South Wales, 1980).
- 11 BC, 16 May 1895.
- 12 BC, 5 November 1835.
- 13 BC, 8 July 1841.
- 14 G. Davis, 'Image and reality in a Victorian provincial city: a working class area of Bath 1830-1900', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bath (1981). This work moves beyond the contention that the upper-town of Bath and changing economy of the city extinguished radical politics, as argued by

- R.S. Neale, 'Economic conditions and working class movements in the City of Bath, 1800-50', unpublished MA thesis, University of Bristol (1963). For an analysis of the composition of the council and strength of radical politics between 1835 and 1879, see A. Kolaczkowski, 'The politics of civic improvement: Bath 1835-79 with special reference to the career of Sir Jerom Murch', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bath (1995).
- 15 BC, 18 May 1865, correspondence entitled 'Bath Redivivus'.
- 16 BC, 18 February 1836.
- 17 BL, *Bath Tracts*, Vol. 1.
- 18 J. Murch, *History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England* (1835). This publication was a significant piece of propaganda for the Unitarian cause. For another example of his efforts, see BL, J. Murch, 'Dissenting Chapels Bill – A letter', *Theological Pamphlets*, Vol. 1.
- 19 R. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent* (New York, 1956), p.135.
- 20 BL, Sir Jerom Murch, *Scrapbooks Collection*, Vol. 1.
- 21 BC, 27 May 1847 and *Bath Journal (BJ)*, 29 May 1847.
- 22 BCG, 2 June 1847, quoting *The Times*.
- 23 BCG, 28 July 1847.
- 24 R. Leader, *The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. John Arthur Roebuck* (1897), p.187.
- 25 BCG, 4 August 1847.
- 26 BH, 31 July 1847; BCG, 4 August 1847.
- 27 BC, *The British Association for the Advancement of Science* (Bath, 1864), p.249.
- 28 BL, J. Murch, 'Reasons for Bathforum House with remarks on other municipal objects, 1865', *Bath Tracts*, Vol. 6.
- 29 *The Times*, 23 August 1902.
- 30 BCG, 19 August 1868; BC, 20 August 1868; Bath Record Office (BRO), Bath Council Minute Book, 5 September 1868, for reference to the damage caused.
- 31 BC, 29 October 1868; BCG 4 November 1868.
- 32 BC, 13 August 1874. Goschen was MP for the City of London and First Lord of the Admiralty, 1871-4. He was a friend of Arthur Hayter, the Liberal politician, and spoke at a rally at 'Cranwells', Murch's home.
- 33 M. Bentley, *Politics without Democracy 1815-1914* (1984), p.219, for reference to the importance of Disraeli's speech at Manchester in reforming the Conservative image. The specific reference was made at a speech in the Free Trade Hall, 3 April 1872.
- 34 BC, 1 May 1873. See also BCG, 5 June 1867; C. Press, *Liberal Leaders of Somerset* (1890), pp.25-35; BC, 11 May & 1 June 1907.
- 35 P. Magnus, *Gladstone: a Biography*, (1954, this edition 1968), p.228, quoting a letter from Gladstone to his brother, 6 February 1874.
- 36 BC, 29 October 1874.
- 37 BC, 1 May 1873.
- 38 BC, 8 May 1873.
- 39 BC, 3 July 1873.
- 40 BC, 3, 17 & 31 July 1873 for further details of the attack on Cox.
- 41 *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 93rd Series, Vol. 216 (HMSO, 1873), col.1553. See also BRO, Bath Council Minute Book, 5 August 1873.

- 42 BL, Poster Collection No. 62.
43 BC, 14 August 1873.
44 BC, 10 May 1877; BC, 28 August 1873.
45 BC, 3 July 1873.
46 *Bath Election News*, 29 January 1874.
47 BC, 29 October 1874.
48 BC, 5 November 1874.
49 BC, 11 March 1875.
50 BRO, Newscuttings Collection, 'Resignation of Edmund White—communication to the burgesses', 16 November 1874.
51 BC, 11 November 1880.
52 BC, 7 November 1878.
53 BC, 10 November 1870.
54 BL, 'Bath Redivivus, St Stephen's Review', 5 November 1887; *Bath Pamphlets* – Page Collection, Vol. 22.
55 *Bristol Mercury*, 26 November 1891.
56 C. Boyd ed., *Mr Chamberlain's Speeches* (1914), pp.41 & 73.
57 BC, 8 June 1893; BJ, 10 June 1893.

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